

## ABSTRACT

### Kierkegaard's Dialectic of the One and the Many: A Platonic Quest for Existential Unity

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The dissertation argues that Kierkegaard's major philosophical works overall offer faith in Christ as the only genuine solution to 'the problem of the one and the many.' The problem lies with the apparently contradictory properties of 'being' (e.g., universal/particular, infinite/finite, etc.), that—speaking most generally—everything has the same *being* insofar as it exists and yet each thing has a different *being*, its own being, from every other. The solution then must be one of 'dialectical unity,' the kind of unity that validates both contradictories equally. Kierkegaard argues that the one/many problem is really the problem of *freedom*, for the very consciousness of the contradiction arises from sinning against God, our self-conscious misrelation of 'being' by loving the finite infinitely. Therefore, unity cannot be obtained at the theoretical—metaphysical-epistemological—level, but rather, must be practically realized by becoming a dialectically unified self, achieving 'existential unity.'

To explain the thesis, I conceptually reconstruct Kierkegaard's stages of existence theory in terms of this dialectical problem: the contradiction between the aesthetic (capable of affirming particularity only) and the ethical (universality) gets resolved in

a higher dialectical unity, the religious. Kierkegaard describes faith in Christ as the self's final *telos*, the highest form of existential unity, explaining the final religious stage by comparing and contrasting Christian categories of existence with the corresponding philosophical categories in Plato's works, specifically meant to address the one/many problem. Three Christian/Platonic counterparts are explained here: (1) the general characteristic of faith as 'repetition' vs. the philosophical existence characterized by recollection; (2) the ontological 'moment' of the God/man and the epistemological 'moment' of faith in Christ vs. Plato's idea of 'the instant' in the *Parmenides* in addressing the problem of universals; (3) love of the neighbor vs. Platonic Eros. I shall analyze the one/many dialectic in these Platonic and Christian categories so as to clarify Kierkegaard's claim that only the fully lived life of faith, characterized by a dynamic love relation between God and the self and the resulting progressive revelation of divine love in and from the self, can reconcile the one and the many.

Kierkegaard's Dialectic of the One and the Many:  
A Platonic Quest for Existential Unity

by

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A Dissertation

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The idea for my dissertation was first conceived in a very inchoate form in Professor Stephen Evans' Kierkegaard seminar in the spring semester of 2005. It was and remains the most electrifying seminar in all of my philosophical training; Evans' reading of Kierkegaard's works brought daylight to what had remained for me a mere enigma, the kind of enigma that nonetheless drew me with an irresistible force. He said more than once in the seminar that someone needed to do a dissertation on Kierkegaard and Plato, as we noticed time and time again Kierkegaard's reference to the Greek philosopher in his pseudonymous works. Since I was becoming more and more Platonic in my philosophical orientation at that time, my ears perked up, and in some sense, I knew this was my task. So it is Dr. Evans who first gave the initial incentive for this project and then saw it through with me to the end, and therefore, I owe him the most in terms of its philosophical content. In particular, his sharp analytical eyes provided much needed criticisms for the work of a rather speculative mind that likes to revel in big metaphysical pictures, but often loses sight of necessary details. There really could not have been a better supervisor for this project. I am truly grateful to Dr. Evans for tirelessly lending not only his Kierkegaard expertise but time and philosophical energy.

My project first took a more definite shape when I brought the prospectus research to the Howard and Edna Hong Kierkegaard Library at St. Olaf College in the summer of 2006. Gordon Marino, the director of the library then, and Cynthia Lund kindly accepted me as a summer Kierkegaard fellow, providing me with a pleasant living space and a fantastic library. There I met and had numerous constructive conversations

with several fine Kierkegaard scholars. Especially two come to mind. First, I had the privilege of meeting M. Jamie Ferreira, a seasoned Kierkegaard scholar, who has since then become a good scholarly friend and a source of upbuilding at a few important stages of this project. Second, a brief—almost an accidental—encounter with Noel Adams, wherein he shared his dream about my project, has become an occasion for encouragement to me in persisting through it at times when I could not see the end; knowing that writing on the problem of the one and the many was my calling, however often the subject matter eluded my grasp, really made the difference. These individuals I met at St. Olaf thus deserve my acknowledgment of debt.

The next phase of my project was carried out at the Søren Kierkegaard Research Center in Copenhagen, Denmark. The dissertation would have suffered a serious loss in its quality (as well as quantity), had I not had the opportunity to take off the whole academic year 2008-2009 to work on it. Such was made possible by a generous gift from the American Scandinavian Foundation. I am deeply thankful for this fine organization and its support of even such narrowly philosophical projects as mine. Moreover, various people I met at the Center made contributions to my work. I thank the director, Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, for inviting me to the Center and providing me with a perfect spot in the library. My supervisor there, Jon Stewart, graciously read and commented on most of the early drafts. Lastly, it was the most fortunate coincidence for me that Bruce Kirmmse, one of today's most able English translators of Kierkegaard's Danish, was at the Center at the same time, for he selflessly gave himself to proofreading much of my own translation.

Next I wish to thank the other members of the dissertation committee at Baylor University, Drs. Baird, Bowery, Roberts, and Nichols. I am grateful for their willingness to help with this project; their insightful comments and questions have improved the quality of the final product.

While most of the above individuals contributed to my project's content in one way or another, my family members—my parents, John and Hannah, my brother Joe, and my sisters, Sarah and Anna—have taken considerable part in offering the *spiritual* substance to my work by their examples of faith, constant prayers, and periodic prophetic encouragements. (They also willingly subjected themselves to my Kierkegaard rambling.) In particular, my little sister Anna has been an astute conversation partner with her brother, showing her own insightful reading of the author she herself loves so deeply. She also traveled to Copenhagen to encourage me when the whole of Scandinavia plunged itself into bitter coldness and oppressive darkness. Above all, however, I cannot thank my parents enough for their persistent and powerful prayers—and indeed do I sense their efficacy—for they have first won the battle in the heavenly on my behalf. Unlike the poor Silentio, I have had the distinct blessedness to witness the actual living knight of faith, precisely as described in *Fear and Trembling*, in reference to the man who “looks just like a tax collector”; my father is the most delightfully paradoxical man I know.

Lastly, my grappling with and understanding of Kierkegaard's ideas about human existence ironically coincided with a profound personal loss in my life. My family faithfully shared in my grief, but also hoped—and is still hoping—with me. It was, however, the perfect plan of Providence to subject me to such a deep spiritual anguish

and trial, while writing on the works of Kierkegaard, the one who also experienced a similar trial. My own pain thrust me into the world of his pain, but also led me to the depths of his thought, the hidden places into which, without such a spiritual awakening, I could have never been able to venture out. Many parts of this work have been written with tears of my own infinite resignation (especially the second section of Chapters III, IV, and VII), though sometimes with tears of faith, awestruck by the unimpeachable logic of God's infinite love (the third section of Chapters IV and VII); only time will reveal the true substance of my faith and His grace. Therefore, it is fitting that this work—my own *kærlighedens gerninger* ('works of love')—is dedicated to her, the one who is still being *recollected* (that is, in the Kierkegaardian religious sense) and will, by faith, undergo *repetition*.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Note: While I have consulted the existing English translations of Kierkegaard's works, I provide my own translations throughout the dissertation. However, when quoting his published works (or those intended to be published at some point), I will cite page numbers corresponding to the *Kierkegaard's Writings* series of the Princeton University Press, edited by Howard and Edna Hong; e.g. 'CA, 55.' Concerning the reference to Kierkegaard's journal entries, I will cite the volume number followed by the journal entry number of *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, published by Indiana University Press, also edited by the Hongs; e.g., 'JP1: 123.'

- CA    *The Concept of Anxiety*
- CI    *The Concept of Irony*
- CUP   *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*
- EO1   *Either/Or, Part I*
- EO2   *Either/Or, Part II*
- EUD   *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*
- FT    *Fear and Trembling*
- JC    *Johannes Climacus*
- JP    *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*
- PF    *Philosophical Fragments*
- R     *Repetition*
- SLW   *Stages on Life's Way*
- SUD   *The Sickness unto Death*
- WL    *Works of Love*

*My Isaac*

the weaker vessel divinely broken for my guilt but also for my inward deepening

Genesis 21:6

וְהָיָה יְהוָה לְמֶלֶךְ עַל-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ  
בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יְהִי יְהוָה אֶחָד וְשֵׁמוֹ אֶחָד

Zechariah 14:9

אַחַת שְׁאַלְתִּי מֵאֵת־יְהוָה אֹתָהּ אֲבַקֵּשׁ  
שְׁבֹתִי בְּבֵית־יְהוָה כְּלַיְמֵי תַיִי  
לְחַזוֹת בְּנַעַם־יְהוָה וּלְבַקֵּר בְּהִיכָלוֹ

Psalm 27:4

ένος δέ έστιν χρεία·

Μαριάμ γάρ τήν άγαθήν μερίδα έξελέξατο

ήτις ούκ άφαιρεθήσεται αύτης.

Luke 10:42

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction: Kierkegaard and the Problem of the One and the Many

“One who sees the unity of things is dialectical.”

Plato, the *Republic*

“I myself have come, by long brooding over it, to consider the problem of the one and the many the most central of all philosophic problems, central because so pregnant.”

William James

Kierkegaard single-mindedly occupied himself with questions concerning the self. He famously described the self in terms of three stages or spheres, the aesthetic, ethical, and religious, and this so called theory of the stages of existence has provided his readers with a powerful synoptic view of human life. The present work is intended to aid our understanding of Kierkegaard’s most enduring legacy by systematically treating several of his most well known works from the vantage point of *unity*: unity of the self. I shall refer to that unity as ‘unity of existence’ or ‘existential unity’ throughout the dissertation. That Kierkegaard conceived the central task of the self as one of achieving unity over against the threat of its dissolution in despair or that the existential spheres are various conceptions of unity has been steadily recognized by his commentators.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> To cite a few examples of works published in the English language, Mark C. Taylor constructs Kierkegaard’s view of selfhood in conversation with Hegelian dialectic and thought. *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). George Connell systematically treats the theme of what he calls ‘personal unity’ in Kierkegaard’s authorship, delineating various forms of selfhood in their corresponding paradigms in the stages of existence. *To Be One Thing: Personal Unity in Kierkegaard’s Thought* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985). More recently, Rick Furtak explains Kierkegaard’s moral psychology of emotions in conversation with the Stoic view, highlighting the former’s view of passion as an integrative principle in human life in *Wisdom in Love: Kierkegaard and the Ancient Quest for Emotional Integrity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

The theme of unity, however, has been treated almost exclusively as an existential problem, independently of the broader philosophical concerns, e.g., metaphysics and epistemology. On the contrary, Kierkegaard sees the existential problem of the self in disunity as the most essential philosophical problem that in fact gave rise to the activity of philosophy in the first place. The present work will substantiate this claim generally by showing that the existential problem has the same logical structure as these other major problems in philosophy and specifically by explaining Kierkegaard's view that sin constitutes the self's disunity and hence the origin of our philosophical quest. Just as the philosophical quest begins with the existential problem of disunity, it then must find its final resolution, unity, in the self *qua* existing self. According to Kierkegaard, faith in Christ constitutes this unity in the most qualitatively perfect way.

### *1. The Dialectical Problem of Unity in the Self*

The dissertation as a whole characterizes the central philosophical problem, whether theoretical or practical, in terms of 'the dialectical problem of the one and the many.' Let me begin this introductory chapter by roughly describing what the problem of the one and the many is and what 'dialectic' means, for these are likely unfamiliar terms to many contemporary readers of philosophy. But the reader should not expect to have a clear understanding of them by this initial drawing since they are rather rich concepts; clarity will come progressively as we seriously engage Kierkegaard's texts.

#### *1.1. The Problem of the One and the Many*

Upon hearing this problem mentioned, students of the history of philosophy will recall something about Greek speculative metaphysics. However, even without a survey

of Hellenistic philosophy, the problem can be quite simply articulated and understood, as a contemporary metaphysician has deftly formulated in the following way:

As soon as I attempt to take a synoptic view of all beings as beings, to compare all beings together under the aspect of their actual existence, I discover that I am obliged to affirm two apparently opposing propositions about each one of these beings. I am compelled to affirm that every single real being, compared to every other, is at once *similar* to every other, because each one is, exists, is real; and yet *dissimilar* to every other, because each one is precisely *this* being and not *that* one. In a word, A is; B is, etc., but A is not B, etc.<sup>2</sup>

It is simply remarkable that we use the same word 'being' both to refer to the fact that one thing is like all other existing things on the one hand and on the other that each being is different from every other existing thing. It seems obviously true of our experience and reflection that both qualities, sameness and difference, must be affirmed of being. But how is it that we use the same word to connote two contradictory properties? Since the most general concept in our natural language, 'being,' has this contradictory feature, the contradiction trickles down to all spheres or dimensions of existence. This puzzle has forced two main questions on philosophers throughout history:

(1) *One of fact*: must we take seriously both the multiplicity and the oneness of beings, or can we affirm only one aspect and deny the other as mere appearance, illusion, or projection of our minds? Some philosophers have attempted the latter, drastic "solution." (2) *One of explanation*: If we take both aspects seriously, how can they both be reconciled, fitted together, without contradiction? What kind of unity is involved? How can both the unity and the diversity be harmonized within each being?<sup>3</sup>

Plato was the first major philosopher who became profoundly aware of this contradiction and its presence in virtually all spheres of existence, and also the first to have put forth a considerable effort at a reconciliatory explanation, unlike most of his predecessors who

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<sup>2</sup> W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 2001), 73.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

one-sidedly affirmed either ‘the one’ or ‘the many,’ reducing reality to either the Parmenidean world of changelessness or the Heraclitean world of flux. Most often portrayed as a ‘dualist,’ Plato was acutely conscious of two seemingly irreconcilable worlds, the intelligible world of transcendent eternal ideas and the ever changing world of the senses. Metaphysically Plato addresses the one/many problem in the question, how do abstract universals come to be instantiated in concrete particulars? Or epistemically, how does the mind perceive particular things, which are infinitely varied and divisible, as coherent units? Ethically, what does the good life consist in, a life of pleasures or one in compliance with some fixed moral law? These problems all seek *unity*, the kind of unity that upholds both contradictory features of reality equally. Hence, I call Kierkegaard’s philosophy a *Platonic quest*; like Plato, Kierkegaard seeks after *the One thing*.

### *1.2. The Dialectic of the One and the Many*

The obvious reason one would think that Kierkegaard, the so called ‘father of existentialism,’ also concerned himself with this overarching problem in philosophy contained in the Platonic dialogues is his constant use of what may be called the *dialectic* of the one and the many. Kierkegaard constantly draws the reader’s attention to a number of pairs of contraries: universal/particular, infinite/finite, eternal/temporal, abstract/concrete, public/individual, and so on. A notable example is his definition of the self as “a synthesis of infinity and finitude, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity” (SUD, 13). The copious use of the one/many dialectic in Kierkegaard should not be surprising since the one/many problem was not something peculiar to the Greek mind, but perennially engaged philosophers, including the nineteenth century German idealist tradition, the very intellectual context of Kierkegaard’s works. In

particular, Hegel's ambitious undertaking of a systematic philosophy that purported to have reconciled the one and the many in basically all spheres of existence is constantly in the background of Kierkegaard's own articulation of this perennial philosophical quest.

What does 'dialectic' mean? Or rather, what does Kierkegaard mean by it?

While the term has enjoyed a wide range of meanings throughout history, it means in the general sense some method of reasoning in seeking truth, but more particularly, the method that dynamically incorporates some set of contraries to explain the truth.<sup>4</sup> In Kierkegaard's writings, the term can have the general meaning, which usually comes in two forms: (1) 'x dialectic' where *x* is some adjectivally qualifying word, e.g., 'Socratic dialectic,' (i.e., the way Socrates typically goes about making destructive conceptual movements to arrive at an aporetic point with his interlocutor<sup>5</sup>); and (2) 'the dialectic of *x*,' where *x* refers to some particular *object* of thought, e.g., 'the dialectic of despair.'<sup>6</sup> Kierkegaard's use of the dialectic, of course, goes much deeper than this.

### 1.3. *Quantitative vs. Qualitative Dialectic*

Kierkegaard's self-understanding as a dialectician, someone who uses the one/many dialectic to explain truth, is more fully shown in the following important journal entry:

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<sup>4</sup> Apparently, the term 'dialectic' has been treated by many of today's philosophers as "a relic of nineteenth century metaphysics." For the contemporary defense of the term's relevance, see George J. Stack's "The Concept of Dialectic," *Diálogos* 65 (1995): 75-109.

<sup>5</sup> Kierkegaard characterizes Socrates' dialectic as purely negative, destructive of "all the concrete qualifications of the good at the expense of the good itself as the empty, contentless universal" (CI, 152).

<sup>6</sup> To the question 'Is despair an excellence or a defect?' Anti-Climacus answers that "Purely dialectically, it is both" because, on the one hand, from the vantage point of the abstract idea of despair (i.e., without considering the concrete state of an actually existing person in despair), the very fact that the human self has the spiritual capacity to experience despair, unlike brutes, indicates an excellence, while on the other hand, from another vantage point of a person's actually being in despair, it is "the worst misfortune and misery" (SUD, 14-5). For Kierkegaard, therefore, dialectic in this sense is a dynamic way of seeking truth about an object of thought observed from two contrary conceptual perspectives.

Everything turns upon making the distinction absolute between quantitative dialectic and qualitative dialectic. All logic is quantitative dialectic or modal dialectic, for everything is and the whole is one and the same. Qualitative dialectic belongs in existence. (JP1: 759)

The essence of this claim, I believe, lies at the heart of his persistent polemic against Hegel and the Danish Hegelians, whose failure to maintain the distinction between the two types of dialectic by collapsing all dialectic to the logical and quantitative, badly distorted the truth about human existence according to Kierkegaard. ‘Dialectical’ can refer to a method of reasoning about truth because of an intrinsic quality of the self, namely the *unitive* aptitude of our consciousness. Quantitative dialectic operates in the sphere of logic governed by the law of identity and its corollaries, primarily used to achieve deductive arguments capable of producing conclusions that immediately follow from their premises, and secondarily, inductive arguments limited to generating conclusions of varying degrees of probability.

Hegel, however, took consciousness’ natural aptitude for unity to the next level when he claimed to have gone beyond the law of identity by introducing a *dialectical* form of identity, ‘identity-in-difference.’ Seeing that philosophy ruled by Aristotle’s abstract notion of identity only results in a dualistic stalemate (e.g., metaphysical monism vs. pluralism, rationalism vs. empiricism, ethical objectivism vs. subjectivism, etc.), Hegel argued that consciousness can overcome this duality only by adopting the stance of dialectical logic. There are three moments in the overall triadic movement of reason according to Hegel: (1) abstraction or understanding, (2) dialectical or negative rationality, and (3) speculative or positive rationality.<sup>7</sup> In the first two moments where

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<sup>7</sup> *Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusatz*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 125.

reason operates under the commonsense view of identity, the ‘*self*-sublation’ of a concept becomes the final result at the end of the second (‘negative’) moment, wherein the concept’s finite determinations “pass into their opposites”; this is where Kant’s critical philosophy ends, as evident in his deduction of antinomies and his separation of *noumena* from *phenomena*. But since, for Hegel, the self-identity of a concept makes sense only when viewed in its dialectical relation to other concepts,<sup>8</sup> reason seeks unity where the contradiction is resolved without annulling the contrary elements in their essentiality. In this way, contradictory concepts (e.g., ‘being’ and ‘nonbeing’) are ‘sublated’ (*aufgehoben*) under the new, higher principle of identity-in-difference, thus achieving a higher unity (‘determinate being’ or ‘becoming’) in the final moment of reason’s movement; we shall examine Hegelian dialectic in greater detail in Chapter V. Having described this triadic, dialectical logic, which permeates all spheres of existence, Hegel infamously pronounced the end of philosophy, that is, the final reconciliation of the one and the many.

#### *1.4. Logic of Subjectivity*

While Kierkegaard’s critique of Hegel is reserved for the later chapters, we may still want to note his fundamental disagreement with the German philosopher. According to Kierkegaard, what Hegel describes is not logic *proper*, the purely objective sphere of knowledge, but the logic of *subjective existence*, that is, human existence. Strictly formally speaking, Hegelian dialectical logic is perfectly accurate, but it is totally

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Inwood explains that Hegel “has difficulty seeing how a thing can have a relation to itself without thereby reduplicating itself,” for something that is abstractly self-identical would be wholly self-enclosed and involve no inner self-differentiation, and such a thing “would be wholly empty and indeterminate,” and “it is only by actively relating itself to, and differentiating itself from, other things, and in the process differentiating itself from itself, that an entity acquires a determinate nature.” *A Hegel Dictionary* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), 132-3.

misapplied. That is, Hegel conflates logic and existence by applying what is true of existence, namely its dialectical nature, to the sphere of logic, and what is true of logic, namely its necessary movement, to the sphere of existence. While it is true that our consciousness seeks to overcome the duality of its existence in some such higher unity, the movement itself is not logical, as though it were a necessary movement. The reconciliatory movement distinctly belongs rather to the practical sphere of human action, constituting *qualitative* dialectic. For this reason, the overall structure of Kierkegaard's existential stages has the same *form* of Hegel's dialectical logic without the entailment of necessity; the seemingly irreconcilable opposition between the aesthetic and the ethical finds its resolution in a higher unity, the religious sphere.<sup>9</sup>

What then is qualitative dialectic? When contradiction arises in the sphere of human existence, it results in what Kierkegaard calls "qualitative disjunction," which can be said to have two senses, particular and general. The former sense pertains to two mutually exclusive choices that an agent must overcome by choosing one (e.g., marry Regine or not marry her) and the latter describes the general contradictory characteristic of human existence, as noted in Kierkegaard's definition of self above. The two senses are related in an organic part/whole relation, for life as a whole consists of and is determined by our particular choices. Quantitative dialectic, operant under the law of logic, cannot finally resolve the conflict at this level (though its work is valuable in the process of making choices) because the logic of subjectivity, i.e., qualitative dialectic, is rooted in *passion*, another synthetic principle that in fact runs deeper in our consciousness

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<sup>9</sup> Other readers have recognized this thought. Mark C. Taylor's work *Journeys to Selfhood* as a whole describes such a Hegelian movement in Kierkegaard's stages of existence. Merold Westphal also claims that Kierkegaard agrees with the form of Hegel's dialectic but not the content. *Becoming a Self: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1996), 26.

than the purely objective activity of reason. Passion is the most essential feature of our consciousness because it unifies the contradictory elements of our existence.

The two forms of qualitative disjunction both find their resolution in passion. When the contrary relation is about two mutually exclusive choices in life, the proper resolution lies in simply choosing one over the other. For Kierkegaard, choice or action, that which actualizes a mere possibility, always presupposes passion, a deep underlying interest or care about some of those possibilities, which exists in the self prior to the act and even the deliberation about the act. In other words, passion is related to the qualitative disjunction, *qua* an either/or choice, as an antecedent *generative* principle. Since choice actualizes in the finite realm some possibility—which belongs to the infinite-eternal sphere because it has not yet become a definitely concretized actuality<sup>10</sup>—it is a unitive activity, uniting the infinite and the finite. And since passion generates choice, passion itself constitutes the proper principle of unity for the self in general. Kierkegaard writes, “The difficulty just is to hold fast to the qualitative dialectic of the absolute paradox [i.e., the God/man paradox] and resist the illusions. In relation to what can and shall and will be the absolute paradox, the absurd, the incomprehensible, it is a matter of passion to hold fast dialectically the distinction of incomprehensibility” (CUP, 561). In other words, reason cannot hold fast to and preserve the paradoxical nature of existence, the one and the many; it is passion that must hold, *in existence*, to the two contradictory elements of the dialectic. And faith in Christ is, for Kierkegaard, the passion that unifies the self’s paradoxical aspects in the highest form.

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<sup>10</sup> C. Stephen Evans argues that among the various meanings of “the eternal” is “abstract logical possibilities.” *Kierkegaard’s Fragments and Postscript: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1983), 59. They are said to be eternal for not being realized in the temporal sphere.

### 1.5. Subjective Thinker

Given the fact that Kierkegaard wishes to draw sharp boundaries around the two spheres of dialectic, a concern might be raised about the very nature of this project which attempts to *explain* the dialectic of faith (in the sense of the logical structure of faith); it betrays an appearance of objectifying and ‘quantifying’ faith. Kierkegaard, I believe, voices and addresses a similar worry concerning the difficulty of objectively talking about subjective reality when he considers the question of whether one can be a subjective *thinker* and what intellectual and passional qualities such a thinker might possess. Like the objective thinker, the subjective thinker thinks abstractly about life contradictions, but unlike the former, the latter does not *abstract* from his own existence and let the content of his abstract thought be the substance of his life, as though resolving contradictions in the abstract sphere meant the same in life. Thus, Kierkegaard writes, “In a certain sense, the subjective thinker talks just as abstractly as the abstract thinker, because the latter talks about pure [*rene*] humanity [i.e., humanity in general], pure subjectivity, the other about the one [*ene*] human being” (CUP, 353).

However, affirming the compatibility of subjectivity and abstract thinking, Kierkegaard writes, “the subjective thinker is an existing person, and yet he is a thinking person; he does not abstract from existence and from the contradiction, but he is in it, and yet he is supposed to think. In all his thinking, he has then to include the thought that he himself is an existing person” (CUP, 351). It is perfectly consistent to think abstractly about subjective existence, including the most profound form of subjectivity, faith, so long as one does not confuse abstract thought about the logic of faith with true living faith which can only be obtained in existence through the subjective thinker’s choices.

Kierkegaard even goes so far as to say that the subjective thinker could be an idealist of a sort, one who exists *in* and *for* the ideal:

To be an idealist in imagination is not at all difficult, but to have to *exist* as an idealist is an utmost strained life-task, because existing is precisely the objection to it. Existing to express what one has understood about oneself, and in this way to understand oneself, is not totally comical, but existing to understand everything—only not oneself—is very comical. (353)

Not only is abstract thinking about faith compatible with the actual life of faith, but an ideal understanding of faith has the potential to enhance the subjective thinker's existence by making it truly rigorous. In other words, the subjective thinker's knowledge of faith's dialectic can deepen his/her appreciation of just how difficult it is to bring the present life up to the ideal, that is, to bring about the true correspondence between the actual life and the ideal of faith-existence. Therefore, abstract thinking about the dialectic of faith, to be undertaken in the present work, seems justified, as long as we consciously heed Kierkegaard's solemn admonition not to conflate the achievement of dialectic in one sphere, namely the theoretical, with that belonging to the other, the sphere of life.

## *2. The One/Many Dialectic in the Spheres of Existence*

Having thus delineated the project's overall thesis and framework, what specific content can the reader expect to see in the following chapters? A concise way to describe the content is that the chapters individually highlight Kierkegaard's use of the one/many dialectic in various works and as a whole explain the conceptual connection therein toward a synoptic view of his overall thought. And I do this by moving through Kierkegaard's spheres of existence, for each sphere in relation to another exhibits a dialectical conflict.

## 2.1. *The Aesthetic and Ethical Stages of Existence*

Chapters II and III respectively describe the conflicting dialectic between the aesthetic and the ethical self, most powerfully portrayed in Kierkegaard's first major publication, *Either/Or*. We can achieve a bird's eye view of these two spheres by abstracting their respective one/many dialectic, as the aesthetic sphere will be seen as capable of only realizing particularity and the ethical empty universality (despite the ethicist's conscious striving toward dialectical unity). For the aesthete, human existence is likened to the Heraclitean flux, a mere series of unconnected moments of pleasure, pain, and everything in-between, while the ethicist portrays an ideal life by prioritizing universal human nature through realizing the moral law concretely in marriage. I shall show that the dialectical conflict remains irresolvable within the purview of *Either/Or* alone, which then anticipates its higher unity in the religious sphere through faith. After this initial stage setting work in Chapters II and III, the remainder of the dissertation purports to show how faith's dialectic explains the desired unity of existence in its various dimensions, ethical as well as metaphysical-epistemological.

## 2.2. *Faith Categories*

Given the wide ranging characteristic of Kierkegaard's writing—not only volume-wise but also pertaining to its subject matters—and the rather comprehensive approach taken by the present study, to explain his concept of faith in an informative and clear way requires a methodology that strikes a careful balance between focused and broad discussions and viewpoints. I have chosen to analyze faith in terms of three unique Kierkegaardian categories: repetition, the moment, and neighbor-love. These concepts can be understood as different dimensions of faith or different ways of describing faith-

existence. The rationale behind the choice of these categories is primarily that they show Kierkegaard's one/many dialectic of the religious sphere in the most illuminating way and secondarily that Kierkegaard contrasts them against the philosophical dialectic, or more specifically, Platonic dialectic, that attempts to achieve the same unity. For this reason, each of the chapters that respectively analyze those three Kierkegaardian concepts will include a parallel—comparative as well as contrastive—discussion of the one/many dialectic in Plato's ideas that correspond to the three: 'repetition' vis-à-vis 'recollection,' 'the moment' (*Øieblikket*) vis-à-vis 'the moment' (τὸ 'εξάίφνης, which is commonly translated in English as 'the instant' or 'the sudden'), and 'neighbor-love' vis-à-vis 'Platonic Eros.'

### *2.3. Platonic Counterparts.*

Those chapters will demonstrate how Kierkegaard's faith categories and their Platonic counterparts are related textually as well as conceptually. Before giving a summary account of the remaining chapters, answering a methodological question seems to be in order: why did Kierkegaard employ such a parallel method in the first place? The answer indicates one of the most important aims of his authorship, namely to show clearly the difference between philosophy and Christian faith, the distinction dangerously blurred in Hegel's all subsuming reconciliatory system. Since Plato most prominently set the philosophical program for his posterity—the idea poignantly conveyed in A. N. Whitehead's famous comment that all western philosophy is but a series of footnotes to Plato—it is natural for Kierkegaard to compare and contrast faith with Platonism. That is, to show faith's difference from Plato's categories is to show difference from philosophy as a whole. One of the most notable places in which Kierkegaard assumes

this methodology is *Philosophical Fragments*. Niels Thulstrup argues that Kierkegaard not only distinguishes the Christian view from the Platonic but also the Hegelian view, and in fact, every possible form of idealistic philosophy.<sup>11</sup> A more recent commentator essentially agrees with Thulstrup when he argues that the ‘Socratic’ view of truth, presented as contrary to Christianity in *Fragments*, really is the view of most philosophers, for they assume some variation of Platonic recollection as describing how we come to know the truth, the truth whose acquisition makes our existence meaningful and worthwhile.<sup>12</sup>

It is safe to say then that Plato’s philosophy represents the paradigm—and possibly the most excellent—case of reason’s pursuit of truth apart from the divine revelation. However, the relationship between Platonic philosophy and Christianity is not one of pure contrast, but rather, of relevant similarity and difference. While Kierkegaard clearly sees the conflict between the two as real and serious, conceptually as well as practically, we will also observe some striking similarities, precisely because faith is viewed as a *higher* unity—not a simple contrary—that completes the philosophical quest. Consequently, the parallel study of the Kierkegaardian notions of faith and the Platonic philosophical categories will show that Kierkegaard was a sympathetic and yet critical proponent of Platonism; the present work as a whole should thus tell a more nuanced and interesting story of Kierkegaard’s view of the relation between faith and reason than is typically told in philosophy textbooks.

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<sup>11</sup> *Philosophical Fragments*, with an introduction and commentary by Niels Thulstrup, trans. Howard V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 170.

<sup>12</sup> C. Stephen Evans, *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard’s Philosophical Fragments* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 14.

#### 2.4. *Faith as Repetition*

Now that the methodological question has been addressed, let me return to the summary account of the dissertation. Having described the situation of a perennial conflict in *Either/Or* in Chapters II and III, Chapter IV will examine the one/many dialectic of faith under the description of repetition in two works, *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition*. The dialectical conflict in *Fear and Trembling* is now between the ethical, the universal, and the religious, the particular—or rather, what *appears* to the ethical as pure particularity, similar to the essence of aesthetic existence. Kierkegaard brings the conflict to the fore vividly through his reflection on the famous biblical story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, describing the dialectical conflict in terms of two incommensurable duties, Abraham's universal ethical duty to love his son in contrast to his particular religious duty to God to sacrifice him. The conflict cannot be resolved conceptually, for reason cannot but perceive such a particular duty as evil or madness. We are told that Abraham, through faith, instantiates two contradictory psychological stances, the courage to resign the most beloved finite object of his happiness, Isaac, and the desire for the fulfillment of his happiness in him nonetheless. Further, because of his faith, Abraham receives Isaac back—a *repetition*.

I shall explain the logic of subjectivity in Kierkegaard's recounting of Abraham's faith in terms of the repetition of the ethical in the religious. That is, the essential error of the ethical sphere, characterized by the autonomous effort to realize universal moral duty, is its blindness to the reality of sin and its globally damaging effect on our moral will. Consequently, the reality of faith, one's absolute trusting devotion to God—which involves the paradoxical stance of resignation and faith, sacrificing our sinful trust in the

finite world for our eternal happiness and yet still believing that God will fulfill our eternal happiness in the finite realm—restores our ethical will to its proper function of pure good will by reversing the effect of sin. However, *Fear and Trembling* also describes the highest existential stance achievable by the self unaided by the divine revelation: “infinite resignation.” I will demonstrate how Kierkegaard’s juxtaposition of repetition and recollection in *Repetition* relates to the categories in *Fear and Trembling* by explaining that infinite resignation constitutes the proper *existential* appropriation of the Platonic thesis of recollection.

### 2.5. *Two Senses of the Moment*

Chapter IV’s discussion of repetition establishes the overall Christian vision of the highest human existence primarily in its existential-ethical dimension. However, Chapters V and VI will engage Kierkegaard’s metaphysics and epistemology respectively, not as an independent enterprise but in relation to and for the sake of illuminating his ethics, for Kierkegaard firmly believed that wrong metaphysical-epistemological views inevitably lead to wrong practices. Chapter V discusses the category of the moment in terms of the metaphysical union of the infinite and the finite. *The Concept of Anxiety* contains a long discussion (in a footnote) concerning the problem of universals in Plato’s *Parmenides*, addressing the question, how do abstract universals at the infinite sphere get instantiated or united with concrete particulars at the finite realm? Kierkegaard contrasts Hegel’s supposed reconciliation of this dialectical knot against Plato’s honest self-critical admission of ignorance, evident in the aporetic way in which the dialogue ends.

It seems odd that such a metaphysical problem should appear in the middle of a work devoted to explaining the concept of anxiety, defined by Kierkegaard as the psychological condition necessary for human freedom. The point of such a discussion, as it turns out, is that freedom is a philosophically inexplicable category; it is the free act of God, a personal Being, that effects the transition from the infinite to the finite in His creation and conservation of the world, and analogously, our freedom constitutes the moment of intersection between the infinite and the finite, that is, the finite realization of the infinite idea of good/evil in and through our act of freedom. Since freedom is a subjective reality and it underlies being at its most basic level, if God acts freely in creating and sustaining the world and we also act freely, no objective treatment of the problem of the one and the many, whether the metaphysical (the problem of universals) or ethical problem, can lead to a sufficient explanation. The chapter ends with an exegesis of Kierkegaard's account of the Fall, the first human act of freedom that resulted in sin, and the doctrine of original sin, the hereditary implication of Adam's sin, which permanently prevents the ethical ideal from being realized, that is, until the exact opposite kind of freedom is willed: faith.

Moving onto epistemology, Chapter VI outlines the structure of belief formation by closely examining Kierkegaard's so called 'doxastic voluntarism' (the claim that every belief we hold is an act of freedom) in *Philosophical Fragments*, and demonstrates that this epistemological view consistently follows from his metaphysical view that affirms, with Plato but against Hegel, the incommensurability of the infinite and the finite. After describing the basic structure of belief as an act of freedom, we take a look at *Fragments'* analysis of sin under the aspect of human pride, which prepares us to

understand why faith in Jesus the God/man is a necessary remedy for sin, namely that Christ is the highest expression of humility and selfless love.

## 2.6. Neighbor-love

The dissertation will end with one last look at Kierkegaard's one/many dialectic, particularly located in his discourse on love, *Works of Love*. With the concept of neighbor-love, Kierkegaard describes what the life of faith ought to look like in the practical, day-to-day existence. The contraries contained in the dialectic of love are, on the one hand, the particularistic way of loving where one *preferentially* loves only those that bear a certain external similarity relation to oneself (e.g., family and friends), and on the other hand, like Platonic Eros described in the *Symposium*, the purely abstract love of transcendent Beauty and Good in contrast to loving particular individuals who are mere images or copies of Perfection. The Christian vision of love rectifies both extreme forms of love by placing God as "the middle term" between the lover and the beloved. Transforming preferential love requires us to have faith, a genuine relationship to God, to love God above all else, for the right relation to God is to see the infinite chasm between oneself and God and consequently be stripped of all external differences with which we draw boundaries to keep some in and others out.

Kierkegaard's deconstruction of preferential love has invited a steady stream of criticism from such well known twentieth century Continental philosophers as Theodor Adorno and Martin Buber, who claimed that such an abstract, distinction-denying love is an abolition of love itself. This criticism strikingly resembles the late twentieth century criticism of Plato's view of love by some prominent American analytic philosophers: how can someone, having such a profound and unrelenting love of the infinite Ideal—the

True, the Good, and the Beautiful—as the *Symposium*'s Socrates, at once fully love the finite, transient, and imperfect objects of love, such as people around us? If Plato's critics are right, the Christian vision of love, which also requires an absolute love of the divine, seems reducible to the same plight of Platonic love. The decisive difference is Christ according to Kierkegaard. Based on his description of Christ's love in *Works of Love*, I shall argue that Jesus' very nature as the God/man and his life reveal the essence of love that human reason cannot discover on its own, namely the intrinsic goodness of love's *needfulness*. That is, despite the fact that love implies some lack in the lover (since love's genus is desire), love is constitutive of the self's final perfect state. To put it more concretely, since Christian love of the neighbor first presupposes a relationship with Christ, where God's infinite love and the believer's unconditional love for God are dynamically exchanged in an intimate, individual relationship, the believer learns the true way of love, namely that love is infinite and unconditional, not knowing any preference, but at once, intimate and distinctive.

### 3. Kierkegaard's Indirect Communication

No substantive work on Kierkegaard's writings can avoid the hermeneutical issue concerning his 'indirect communication.' Whether coincidence or not, the present work not only takes on Kierkegaard but also Plato, another philosopher who has ascribed unusually high significance to the *form* (the 'how') of philosophy, and not just the content (the 'what'). Plato wrote dialogues, not systematic treatises like Aristotle, and Kierkegaard speaks through the voice of made-up pseudonyms in some of the most important philosophical works of his, and consequently, various characters with different philosophical and existential outlooks provide the substantive content. What is more, the

overall systematic nature of the present work, which inevitably renders a ‘doctrinal’ reading of various pseudonymous works and Platonic dialogues, seems to exacerbate the hermeneutical problem. Given their conscious choice to communicate indirectly, are we justified in talking about, for instance, Plato’s *doctrine* of recollection and Kierkegaard’s *theory* of repetition?

### 3.1. Kierkegaard the Perpetual Ironist?

The late Kierkegaard scholar, Roger Poole, is a paragon critic of the kind of reading to be undertaken here, which is in accordance with the tradition of Kierkegaard scholarship he calls “blunt reading.”<sup>13</sup> Interestingly enough—and quite ironically as I shall show below—Poole invokes what he takes to be *the* proper reading of Plato’s dialogues as a model for the same in interpreting Kierkegaard’s writings. For this reason, I quote him at length:

Plato used the dialogue form, so as to achieve a certain degree of “indirect communication” in his dialogues, that precluded the reader from deciding, once and for all, what his, Plato’s, “own view” was. ... Above all, it has been necessary to distinguish, in Plato’s work, the “written” and the “unwritten” doctrines.

In spite of the dramatic and dialectical structure of Kierkegaard’s texts, though, the tradition of “blunt reading” insists on interpreting him as a “serious” writer who is didactic, soluble and at bottom, “edifying.” ... Thus the tradition of scholarship represented by C. Stephen Evans, for instance, attempts to “solve” the mystery of *Philosophical Fragments*, ... in *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard’s Philosophical Fragments*. It is this determined effort to “make sense” of something that is taken as being in a state of disarray, or confusion, from which it has to be rescued by the efforts of the academic philosopher, that provides the risible side of the tradition of “blunt reading.” Would it be possible to entitle a book *Making Sense of Plato’s Theaetetus*?<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> “The Unknown Kierkegaard: Twentieth-century receptions” in *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 61.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

Poole's searing criticism, however, is not convincing for several simple reasons. First, his characterization of how Plato's dialogues are to be read is a highly misleading representation of the long tradition of Platonic scholarship, beginning with Aristotle<sup>15</sup> and continuing in contemporary Plato scholarship, which by and large exemplifies the "blunt reading" approach. For anyone with a modicum of familiarity with Plato scholarship, whether today's or the past, would have to admit *at least* that the question of how to read the dialogues is and has been very much a live issue among Plato scholars. What is more, he fails to notice that it is perfectly consistent for the readers of Plato to read the dialogues in terms of what Plato thought, what his characteristic ideas might be—indeed, how can we avoid this?—*and* to believe that their "blunt" reading of the dialogues is not the final or one true reading.<sup>16</sup> Since virtually all commentaries on the dialogues tries to make sense of Plato's ideas shrouded in the conversations, it seems baffling to me why it would be so implausible to title a book "Making Sense of Plato's *Theaetetus*."

### 3.2. Irony of Poole's Perennial Irony

Perhaps Poole would be happy to do away with such a long and established tradition of Plato interpretation as well. Fair enough. But what will he do with

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<sup>15</sup> Terence Irwin has convincingly argued, in my opinion, that "we ought to take very seriously the fact that [Aristotle's] approach to the dialogues is firmly doctrinal: he regularly treats the dialogues as evidence for Plato's views, and regularly attributes some of the views of the Platonic Socrates to Plato, without seeing any need to explain or defend the attribution." *Plato's Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 5.

<sup>16</sup> It might be psychologically impossible for readers of Platonic dialogues, who look for not just the humor and irony in them but substantial philosophical content, to read them without having Plato's intended meaning in mind as the point of reference. If this claim is too strong, that is, we have reason to think that it is indeed psychologically possible to read without considering the author's intention, then we can modify the claim by saying that such reading is still problematic because it is, to borrow Kierkegaard's own language, entirely too abstract, as it does not recognize the concrete element (the author's intention in this case) in the work itself. Any sound reading must incorporate both the abstract and concrete element of the literature.

Kierkegaard's own practice of reading Plato, which seems quite at home with the traditional doctrinal approach, unapologetically attributing to Plato certain Platonic ideas? What is more, Kierkegaard maintains the distinction between Socrates and a Platonized Socrates, a view similar to what the majority of Plato scholars today recognize as the break in the Platonic corpus, the so called early 'Socratic' dialogues on the one hand and the more 'Platonic' dialogues characteristic of the middle and late period of his writing on the other (CUP, 205). Especially evident in his dissertation work is Kierkegaard's unquestioning adoption of the traditional hermeneutical approach to Plato, shaped by Hegel's lectures on the history of philosophy as well as other standard histories of philosophy at that time (e.g., Tennemann, Ritter, Preller).<sup>17</sup> All of this clearly shows that, much to Poole's dismay, Kierkegaard himself was a *flamboyant blunt reader*. Poole's criterion for evaluating which type of reading constitutes a blunt reading is so general and vacuous that it includes just about any author who wrote any meaningful critique of anyone else's work. There is no evidence of constant deconstruction of his own reading of Plato anywhere to be found in Kierkegaard's writings.

It is possible that Poole would reject Kierkegaard's own hermeneutical practice exemplified in his reading of Plato, but that would simply go to show the implausibility of Poole's own preferred interpretive method vis-à-vis Kierkegaard's works. Contrary to Poole's overall thesis, I believe Kierkegaard would not intend for his readers to be in a constant state of disarray or confusion about his works, but rather, to make sense of his texts for moral-spiritual edification, which, contrary to Poole's dismissal tone above, is in

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<sup>17</sup> Thulstrup lists all the secondary works on Plato which Kierkegaard read and/or owned, and ranks them in accordance with significance for Kierkegaard's use of them. In regards to Hegel's influence, he writes, "He [Kierkegaard] made much greater use of Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*." See his commentary on *Philosophical Fragments*, 165-6. Kierkegaard's dissertation work shows forth his familiarity with Hegel's work to a greater extent.

fact repeatedly stated by the thinker as the true intention and purpose for his writings. Edification, as the very word suggests, is by nature a synthesizing, unifying activity, which would be rendered impossible by Poole's methodology of perpetual deconstruction. However, an interpretive method contrary to Poole's does not necessarily oppose the ideal epistemic attitude of his readers, the kind Kierkegaard himself hoped his readers would exhibit, namely our humble recognition of the awesome nature of the subject matter of his works, our existence and our relationship to God. Moreover, humility is required from the readers' perspective as well, for the seemingly inexhaustible literary depth and nuances of Kierkegaard's works calls for a number of different perspectives and levels of understanding, and thus continual re-reading of them.

### *3.3. Dialectical Hermeneutic*

In short, there is no *either/or* in our hermeneutical suggestion but a dialectical *both/and*: it is equally true that on the one hand there is a fundamental unity underlying his works—or what is the same, there really exists the truth of the matter—in such a way that constructing a systematic view of them makes good sense, and on the other hand, their profundity requires a humble and self-critical attitude toward utilizing abstract and static categories, as inevitable as they may be for an intellectual understanding. I suspect such a dialectical hermeneutical view must be adopted because, as Kierkegaard is often fond of mentioning, existence as such is dialectical and hence Christianity's description of it is as well. Throughout history Christian thinkers have consistently treated Christianity as containing a coherent intellectual viewpoint but at the same time a deep mystery, and Kierkegaard is no exception here.

All in all, the indirect communicative feature of Kierkegaard's writings seems to impose at least two demands on their rather philosophically tempered commentators: first, to take his pseudonymity seriously, which is to say that one must recognize in good faith that, for the pedagogical reasons that are similar to Plato's, Kierkegaard employs multiple pseudonyms that have diverse purposes and functions from one another and therefore *may* have philosophical or existential outlooks quite different from each other and even his own; and second, to acknowledge earnestly that this "blunt" reading is not the final or the only 'true' reading of Kierkegaard's texts, but that it is specifically meant to show forth the logical coherence and thus the potential philosophical beauty and power embedded in his otherwise intentionally unsystematic writing.

Just as Kierkegaard took for granted certain Platonic ideas that have been abstracted from the dialogues, where Plato never plays the main character, nor even Socrates sometimes, we may similarly expect a certain set of distinctly Kierkegaardian ideas to emerge from his works, which are no less complicated by their pseudonymity. So we adopt the golden rule in our hermeneutical approach: *Do ye unto Kierkegaard as he has done to Plato*. The foregoing argument, I believe, sufficiently justifies our broadly doctrinal approach to both Plato and Kierkegaard in the present work—but this not without an honest recognition of the unfortunate limitations of such an approach, namely its inability to explore the literary and dramatic dimensions that were consciously wrought by the authors to enhance their readers' understanding of the content.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Unity of Existence and the One/Many Dialectic in *Either/Or I*

“I said in my heart, ‘Come now, I will test you  
with *pleasure* to find out *what is good*.’  
But surely, this too was *vanity*.”

Ecclesiastes 2:1

“*Vainly* have I sought an anchorage  
in the bottomless sea of pleasure.  
I have felt the nearly irresistible power  
with which one pleasure holds out its hand to another,  
and its *hollow enthusiasm*...  
but also the *dullness*,  
the *laceration*, which ensues.”<sup>1</sup>

The central theme of this dissertation, denoted by the term ‘unity of existence’ is in essence what philosophy has always been about: the truth. Philosophers have long held, especially those belonging to the tradition influenced by Plato, that truth and unity are in fact one and the same, for truth is universal; it is *the same* everywhere and for everyone. As our investigation will show as a whole, Kierkegaard firmly belongs to the Platonic tradition with respect to the unity of truth. In this chapter, I set out to give the term ‘existential unity’ some initial content by approximating a concise definition and subsequently describing the sense of unity implied in the first stage of existence, the aesthetic. In the second section, I will argue that the aesthetic self desires unity, despite the appearance to the contrary, by closely examining Kierkegaard’s essay on Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*. The final section will provide a critical assessment of the aesthetic view of unity.

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<sup>1</sup> JP5: 5100.

## *1. Defining Existential Unity*

One finds several terms of equivalence to existential unity in contemporary philosophical literature, which includes both the Kierkegaard and non-Kierkegaard circle of scholarship: ‘authenticity,’ ‘wholeness,’ ‘personal unity,’ ‘personal or emotional integrity,’ etc.<sup>2</sup> While existential unity and its cousin terms generally refer to some state of an individual’s moral existence that can be said to be *truthful*, we shall define the term more precisely in this way:

Existential unity is the necessary and sufficient condition for the self’s perfection. Generally speaking, it is a moral task to be achieved throughout life. Specifically, it is a desirable existential-psychological state in which the self, despite its basic incongruous constitution and thus its experience of ‘life contradictions,’ forms a coherent and harmonious unity, which in turn sufficiently cancels despair, the self’s disunity.

Let us unpack the distinctions and terms contained in this definition.

### *1.1. Unity and Happiness.*

To begin with, existential unity is a morally necessary condition for happiness in the general sense but in a narrower sense the sufficient condition for it. By happiness I mean what philosophers usually mean, the highest and full realization of human potentiality; Kierkegaard often calls it, the “eternal happiness.”<sup>3</sup> We will see that all

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<sup>2</sup> I prefer *existential* unity because the term, predicating ‘existence,’ has not only the intended ethical connotation like these other terms, but unlike them, the metaphysical connotation as well, referring to being as such, which is inextricably related to the former sense, as we will see in the later chapters.

<sup>3</sup> The foregoing assumption that views happiness as the end of morality, i.e., eudaimonism, is surely to arouse suspicion in some readers’ mind, and what is worse, to link such a view with Kierkegaard’s ethics is especially problematic for those who see deep resemblance between Kierkegaard’s ethics and Kant’s, when the latter has been typically seen as diametrically opposed to ‘happiness-based’ ethics. Ronald Green, for instance, refers to Kierkegaard’s own published and unpublished works (CUP, 342-3; JP3: 2349) that explicitly reject eudaimonism, attempting to show that “as in Kant’s conception of the ‘highest good,’ duty and reward come together only eschatologically, and to put them together in the world, whether in crassly materialistic terms or in the elevated refinements of various Greek philosophical schools, misconceives the nature of the ethical demand.” *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 101. Of course, all depends on what one means by happiness and

three spheres of existence in Kierkegaard's writings respectively possess, and the proponents thereof make a case for, their own principle of unity. This shows that some type of unified state in the existing self is at least necessary for happiness, the good life.<sup>4</sup> But because one of those principles of existential unity constitutes the highest and truest principle according to Kierkegaard, namely faith, existential unity *qua* faith is the sufficient condition for happiness.

Happiness has both subjective and objective elements. Thus the term can refer to either the phenomenological-psychological state of feeling pleasure or contentment or, as teleologically viewed, the overall dispositional state of 'self-sufficiency' obtained by actively acquiring and exemplifying the necessary ethical-religious qualities.<sup>5</sup> Of course,

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eudaimonism. I believe Green's account of these concepts tends to be too lop-sided, thereby leaving out some important aspects of them. The following statement illustrates the point: "the Greco-Roman tradition of ethics had connected morality with each individual's personal search for happiness and fulfillment (*eudaimonia*)." Ibid., 42. His basic identification of eudaimonism with an empiricist—and possibly egoist—understanding of ethics seems to place into the non-eudaimonist camp virtually all important figures and movements in Greco-Roman philosophy, which are normally seen as eudaimonist: Socrates, Plato, Stoic, Neoplatonic schools, and even Aristotle as well. While his work on the relationship between Kant and Kierkegaard in general offers many interesting parallels, I believe Green becomes uncritical with respect to the question of eudaimonism in Kierkegaard. In spite of the resemblance to Kant, Kierkegaard does not deny the correspondence between the good and its reward as strictly as the former does, for an essential feature of faith is to reconcile the finite and the infinite so as to result in happiness here and now, i.e., finite happiness, as well as in the eschatological *fullness of time*; this claim will be the central focus of Chapter IV. Furthermore, Kierkegaard's apparently negative view toward happiness, in the Climacian literature for example, must be understood as critiquing a prudential consequentialist thinking, i.e., willing the good only for its beneficial outcome—"sagacious eudaimonist" [*klog Eudaimonist*]<sup>5</sup>—and not eudaimonism proper (CUP, 342).

<sup>4</sup> This relation between existential unity and happiness basically amounts to Merold Westphal's general view of Kierkegaard's theory of stages, namely, each sphere of existence is an answer to the most fundamental question in ethics: What is the good life? *Becoming a Self* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1996), 22. In fact, the two questions 'What is the good life?' and 'How is the self properly unified?' are more or less one and the same question with simply different emphases. George Connell too argues for this in *To Be One Thing: Personal Unity in Kierkegaard's Thought* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985). The book as a whole surveys various principles of unity in the spheres of existence.

<sup>5</sup> In order to avoid the narrow classical identification of happiness with the fulfillment of human nature, paradigmatically exemplified in Aristotle's naturalistic virtue ethics, and to include Kierkegaard's ethics as essentialist and teleological in its basic foundation, the definition of happiness has to be sufficiently general, and to that extent, vague. For instance, the term 'actively' means something different for Aristotle and Kierkegaard, as the two show deep differences in their understanding of volition, e.g., how

the two are intimately related and the question of just how the two should relate has been one of the most perplexing questions in philosophy since antiquity. While this question cannot be addressed in any direct and satisfactory manner here, though the present study as a whole investigates the troublesome relation by exploring Kierkegaard's own view, the definition of existential unity as a morally necessary state, we might say, means minimally that it is the *conditio sine qua non* for the good life. But in the more specific sense of the term, that is, referring to the life of faith, existential unity is not just one of the several necessary conditions for happiness, but rather, it constitutes happiness itself, when fully exemplified in an individual's actual existence. In any sense of the term, however, existential unity is not a static property that one has, but a task to be achieved through a dynamic process that involves all aspects of the self's psychological faculty, thinking, feeling, and willing, and its relations to the outer world.

That unity is a task seems to imply that one lacks the possession of it. If I set myself a task to become a university professor, for instance, it means that I have not achieved it. However, whereas professorship is an extrinsic feature of my existence, existential unity is not, for it is an inward state. The more fitting example would be my task to become a good philosopher. There is a sense of 'already' and 'not yet'; I already have some qualities of a good philosopher, but my vision includes more excellent

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reason relates to will concerning choice and action. Furthermore, the understanding of the term 'necessary qualities' is, for Aristotle, limited by human nature, the given set of universal human potentialities, the proper actualization of which constitutes happiness, namely virtues. For Kierkegaard, however, what is necessary further extends to *supernatural* virtues like faith and the transcendently originated divine commands, which include those that pertain only to specific individuals and not any other. Lastly, the term 'ethical-religious' makes it more inclusive as to encompass Kierkegaard's ethics which sees the religious aspect of human life as much more central than does Aristotle. In short, we might say that Aristotle and Kierkegaard's ethics have the same general form, namely teleology, but different contents. This line of thought is also expressed in C. Stephen Evans' recent claim that while Kierkegaard's ethic views divine commands as the ground of moral obligation, it is still within the broader ethical tradition that sees happiness as fulfillment of human nature. *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 9.

qualities. In other words, for such inward reality of human existence as unity, there is no contradiction that it is a task to be achieved (hence, 'not yet') and at once a property presently possessed to some extent ('already'). So then, existential unity can also refer to the existential-psychological state, the 'existential' denoting the *objective* state of a person's existence, that is, a synoptic view of a particular individual's existence, taken from a third-person and narrative perspective, and the 'psychological' the *subjective* state, experienced at the phenomenologically concrete level by the individual self. However, saying that existential unity refers to the existential-psychological state does not necessarily entail that an individual who exemplifies unity *qua* faith never faces psychological conflicts in the discreet, momentary sense. Rather, it means only that the *final* psychological outcome of such conflicts is not one of disunity, i.e., despair, but of coherence based on and arising from the individual's existential state that is properly unified through faith.

### *1.2. Self as a Synthesis*

Another aspect of the definition worth noting is the distinction contained in the phrase the self's "basic incongruous constitution and thus the individual's experience of 'life contradictions'": the *ontological* vs. *phenomenological* (experiential) reality of incongruity. To explain the former, we turn to Anti-Climacus' definition of self: a self is "a relation that relates itself to itself, or it is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation, but the relation's relating itself to itself" (SUD, 13). Contrary to such an abstract and static conception of self as 'substance,' prominent in the western philosophical tradition, Anti-Climacus espouses a relational view of self. But he embraces the relational view in an extremely careful manner, as we see him consciously

avoid designating even the term ‘the relation’ (*Forholdet*) as the determinate genus in his definition, for it is still too abstract. Rather, the self is a concrete dynamic self-relating (*forholder sig til sig selv*) of the relation between two dialectical opposites, and thus, Anti-Climacus qualifies the definition yet further in this way: the self is “a synthesis of infinity and finitude, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity.”

According to Kierkegaard, however, the idea of the self as a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, etc. has actually been around since antiquity, for it is Plato who first seriously noticed, articulated, and attempted to suggest a solution to the oppositional relations found in the world and the self, e.g., body and soul, sensation and knowledge, passion and reason, the finite world of particulars and the transcendent world of the universal Forms—in short, *the one and the many*.<sup>6</sup> In his dissertation work, Kierkegaard criticizes Plato’s argument for the preexistence and immortality of the soul, presumed to have been demonstrated by his theory of the Forms and recollection in the dialogue *Phaedo*, for it amounts to pure abstraction and universality, thereby failing to provide any *real* solution to the one/many problem:

The speculatively unexplained synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, like indeed anything speculative which is at first glance paradoxical, is here poetically and religiously set at ease... The *punctum saliens* in the argumentation is really this, that just as the ideas exist before the sensible things, so the soul exists before the body. This does sound in and of itself rather acceptable, but as long as there is no explanation as to how and in what sense the ideas exist before things, one sees that the “just as” around which everything turns becomes the abstract equal sign between two unknown quantities... [T]his point is not the nothing from which one starts but the nothing to which one comes through the strenuousness of reflection. (CI, 70-1)

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<sup>6</sup> Kierkegaard admits to this idea not having any novelty about it, as he *qua* Vigilius Haufniensis writes, “Man, then, is a synthesis of psyche and body, but he is also a *synthesis of the temporal and the eternal*. That this often has been stated, I do not object to at all, for it is not my wish to discover something new, but rather it is my joy and dearest occupation to ponder over that which is quite simple” (CA, 85).

This reference to Plato indicates that it is the ontological reality of incongruity in the human self (i.e., infinite/finite, eternal/temporal, freedom/necessity) that gives rise to and perennially motivates the philosophical quest for truth—and by the same token truth’s transcendental equal: unity. What is more, Kierkegaard’s above criticism of Plato foreshadows one of the most important claims of his later works, especially ones by the pseudonym Johannes Climacus. For his conscientious juxtaposition of philosophy to Christianity concerning the question of truth shows that it is faith and not philosophy that can achieve the desired unity.

Concerning the second part of the ontological/phenomenological incongruity distinction, there are two types of *experienced* incongruity based on how the self relates itself to the given ontological incongruity. The first type of phenomenological incongruity *naturally* arises from the basic bipolar constitution of the self and thus the self’s relation to itself as such, and consequently, it does not directly result from the self’s active willing—although certain actions can intensify it. Anxiety paradigmatically belongs to this category of experienced incongruity. According to Vigilius Haufniensis, anxiety is “the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold of finiteness to support itself” (CA, 61). The term ‘synthesis’ in this passage, however, technically and originally refers to the relation between “the psychical and the physical,” namely the spirit (43). But Haufniensis soon affirms that the synthesis of the eternal and the temporal is an *expression* of the self *qua* relation between body and soul (88). In other words, the eternal/temporal and freedom/necessity synthesis, as stated in *Sickness*, are the different aspects and manifestations of the fundamental duality inherent in the human

ontological condition. Anxiety in its basic form is a conscious or subconscious awareness of the incongruity of one's dichotomous nature in making a choice that determines good or evil. It is thus the very reality of having to make a *definite* choice—note the word 'finite' in 'definite'—from a set of possibilities which interest the agent—the infinite side of human nature—that constitutes the human experience of anxiety in its basic form. If either finitude or infinitude were negated in this mixture, anxiety as understood by Haufniensis would not be possible; if we conceptually take away the former, the result is angels, while if the latter is removed, a purely animal-like existence results, and anxiety is excluded in both.<sup>7</sup>

Contrary to the first type, the second type of experienced incongruity does not naturally stem from the self's basic bipolar constitution. It becomes an actuality only as a result of one's self-conscious choice, and despair constitutes a definitive example of this kind. Holding to the foregoing distinction, Anti-Climacus himself contrasts despair with anxiety, when he says:

If someone in despair is, as he believes, aware of his despair, does not speak meaninglessly of it, as if it were something that happened to him (almost as when

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<sup>7</sup> Although one might think that animals experience anxiety to some degree, Haufniensis' definition makes the animal anxiety only a vague resemblance to the properly human emotion of anxiety. Because anxiety essentially has to do with one's conscious relation to the future, or more specifically, the realm of *uncertain* possibilities, hence relating to freedom, animals do not experience anxiety in the proper sense (CA, 91). Take the example of a dog that has just peed on the carpet and thus could be said to feel some form of anxiety about the foreseen punishment, as it has previously experienced its owner's strong disapproval and an unpleasant whack on the head. Its central emotion, however, is more properly fear than anxiety since it perceives the punishment as a *certain* outcome. If some harmful future event is an absolute or near certainty, the proper emotion is fear, even if the object of fear happens to be some future event (e.g., Jews waiting in line to enter the gas chamber during WWII). In both examples of the Holocaust and the dog, the harm perceived is so certain that the object of the emotion in question, despite being a future event, becomes *present* to the perceiver in the subjective sense; the subjective feeling of certainty 'obliterates' the objective futurity in the perceiver's mind, namely the alternate possibility. On the contrary, the proper object of anxiety is much more vague and distant to the subject, thus capable of maintaining the ambiguity about the possible outcome. Imagine two men on the plane, one with the phobia about flying and the other a mere anxiety. The difference between them is precisely that the object of the former's emotion becomes present to him while that of the latter's emotion remains an uncertain and ambiguous possibility. Fear and anxiety therefore have an inverted relation with respect to the degree of certainty about some bad future outcome.

one suffering from *dizziness*...) and now makes every effort by himself and alone by himself, wants to lift the despair: then he is still in despair. (SUD, 14; my emphasis)

Unlike anxiety, which is implied in the term ‘dizziness,’ despair is not something we experience by virtue of merely being a human self that is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite. Rather, it is a *misrelation* within the self caused by the self’s defiant ways of relating the finite and the infinite, by loving the finite infinitely, and this is the proper definition of sin.

### *1.3. Disunity of Despair*

The discussion of despair appropriately segues into the last component of the definition of existential unity to be considered, namely that existential unity exemplified in an individual ensures the self against its disunity, despair. How is despair the self’s disunity? Purely formally speaking, if (1) despair is a psychological-existential state directly resulting from sin, (2) sin is the opposite of faith, and (3) faith is the true principle of existential unity, then it logically follows that despair is the opposite of unity of the self. But considering the matter more concretely, we experience despair when there some *ideal* we desired to realize did not get *realized*: it is disunity between ideality and reality. So understood, despair has its own one/many dialectic, and thus, Anti-Climacus explicitly explains various types of despair in terms of different kinds of dialectical misrelations between infinitude and finitude, possibility and necessity: for instance, “infinitude’s despair is to lack finitude” and “possibility’s despair is to lack necessity.” Because “the dialectic inherent in the self as a synthesis” requires both dialectical elements to be realized equally, the self’s disunity in despair amounts to affirming one element one-sidedly (30).

In order to avoid despair—a universal phenomenon according to Anti-Climacus (because sin is universal, though contingent)—we must seek to exemplify some sort of unity in our existence, but more specifically, the kind of unity in which the dialectical contraries that make up our being are reconciled in a way that does not accentuate one at the expense of the other, for the human self is paradoxically but properly both. Furthermore, not only do the various models of self on life's way constitute attempts to achieve unity, but also, by the same token, they are attempts to eradicate the self of its ever present force toward dissolution, despair. We shall now turn our attention to the most basic, primitive kind of unity the self can experience, the aesthetic version of unity.

## 2. *An Aesthetic Attempt at Unity: the Essay on Don Giovanni*

Among the various selves Kierkegaard portrays, the aesthetic self, which is most ideally embodied in the worldview of 'A' (the author of various essays in the first part of *Either/Or*), seems on the surface to be a notable exception to the view that any authentic human existence exemplifies some form of unity; a quick glance at the opening essay, *Diapsalmata* (meaning 'musical interludes'), is sufficient to affirm this view. If we look more deeply into these essays, however, the appearance of complete disunity will prove to be false, for it is more accurate to see them as an attempt—an *aesthetic* attempt—at unity. Carefully examining A's essay on Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in particular will provide us with an adequate understanding of an aesthetic version of unity and its shortcomings. Contrary to the dominant theme of flux in the *Diapsalmata* and the rest of *Either/Or I*, it shall be argued that the essay on *Don Giovanni* shows A's implicit admission that he too seeks some kind of unity and tries to achieve it by aesthetic experiences. However, such aestheticism provides only a momentary experience of

unity, thereby amounting to a mere mimicry of the genuine unity, namely faith, the only life principle that can withstand the ever-streaming river of time—or rather, *redeem* it. We shall see that even in A's nonreligious discourse, i.e., an aesthetic analysis of music, the one/many dialectic, specifically couched in terms of 'abstract' and 'concrete,' plays a crucial role in offering an insight into the logical structure of unity and the essential desideratum in existential unity, namely that it must be a *paradoxical unity of the one and the many*.

### 2.1. *Either/Or I and Romanticism*

To begin, let us investigate the meaning of aesthetic unity by situating it in its historical-intellectual background. It is probably true that the first part of *Either/Or* intentionally reflects the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century European intellectual movement responsible for an enormous output of artistic, literary, theological, and philosophical works: Romanticism, or more specifically relevant to Kierkegaard, German Romanticism. While Romanticism by its very nature defies any systematic or definitional understanding, we might still affirm its origin with some measure of confidence, namely that it was a reactionary intellectual and artistic movement against what was thought to be modernity's or the Enlightenment's mechanistic and scientific view of the world and the self, the practical outcome of which was the fragmentation of the self, manifested in one's sense of alienation from oneself, one's community, and the nature. Romanticism attempted *literally* to reverse the ill effect of modernity by turning it on its own head. That is, seeing that to begin with a systematic and theoretical unity, as did modernity, which inevitably requires some artificial imposition of a system or category on to the world (like Descartes' mechanistic view or some rationalistic ethical

system like that of Kant), is surely to end with its opposite, fragmentation and confusion, the Romantics instead began by embracing the latter, the given reality of *confusion*, and worked toward the end goal of unity and harmony—as the word, ‘con-fusion,’ literally means ‘bringing together.’<sup>8</sup>

One of the central means of achieving this paradoxical unity, or the bringing together of fragmented elements, was ‘Romantic irony,’ yet another term often employed in the scholarly discussion of Romanticism that affords no single unifying conception. In short, certain Romantics (e.g., Friedrich Schlegel) thought that by ironically negating the imperfect finite world (of customs and social morality, for instance) and aesthetically reconceptualizing the finite as the realm of infinite possibility, the self can achieve the much desired unity.<sup>9</sup> For this reason, it would be a mistake to see Romanticism’s ready appearance of fragmentation and lawlessness as an *intended* end in itself, although the question as to whether the *final* outcome in fact corresponds to its intended end should be seriously considered in assessing Romanticism and Kierkegaard’s portrayal of it in the aesthete’s lifeview. In this way, the first part of *Either/Or* accurately captures the Romantic spirit of fragmentation as the point of departure in the quest for unity, for even in the preface, this Romantic element shows up in the supposed editor Victor Eremita’s confession of the difficulty in determining a sensible order to the various pieces of writing and the scraps of paper containing loosely connected aphorisms, and consequently, his decision to let chance (i.e., the way he found the papers) be the

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<sup>8</sup> K. Brian Soderquist, *The Isolated Self: Truth and Untruth in Søren Kierkegaard’s On the Concept of Irony* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 2007), 123.

<sup>9</sup> Kierkegaard himself recognizes this pseudo-unifying element in irony by pointing to its superficial resemblance to the concept of mediation (CI, 257).

organizing principle (EO1, 7). The important question now becomes for us: is there any deeper sense of unity in the aesthetic view of life after all?

## 2.2. *A's Apparent Denial of Unity*

Contrary to Victor Eremita's inability to discern any sensible order of A's essays, we might at least intimate their true author's—that is, Kierkegaard's—intention in placing *Diapsalmata* first: to introduce a strong impression of flux (e.g., a random set of aphoristic sayings being its basic literary structure) as a prelude to the aesthetic view of life.<sup>10</sup> In terms of content as well, the essay as a whole betrays an absolute sense of incoherence and disconnectedness, as the author suddenly shifts the focus of discourse from one subject (e.g., perfection of human nature) to another completely unrelated subject (corn) in the same paragraph (EO1, 28). For that reason, it is hardly a challenging task to convince the reader of the basic *Heraclitean* nature of aesthetic existence. What is more, examples of a thoroughgoing nihilism and pessimism abound in these pages: “My life achievement remains nothing at all, a feeling, a single color” (28); “How empty and meaningless life is” (29); “My life is altogether meaningless” (36). His life as a whole appears to be nothing but a sequence of trivial moments, as even moments of apparent significance (e.g., courting a woman) get eventually emptied of their significance. The beauty of young girls, something that ought to interest a young male aesthete such as A, also “passes away like a dream and like yesterday when it is past” (29). Virtually in every writing in *Either/Or I*, the dominant theme of constant restlessness and aimless change characterizes the aesthete's ideal life: from the essay describing A's fascination

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<sup>10</sup> To relate to German Romanticism yet once more, the aphoristic feature of the *Diapsalmata* should bring to the reader's mind Friedrich Schlegel's *Athenaeum* and *Lyceum*, which are written in fragments in an aphoristic style.

with the mythical figure Don Juan, who, unlike the reflective aesthete, is able to avail himself to having pleasure with women indefinitely; to the essay about the concept of reflective sorrow, shown in his modern version of *Antigone*, and of perpetual doubt, exemplified in *Faust*, for their constant psychological restlessness exceedingly interests the author; to *Rotation of Crops* which delineates A's own method of emulating Don Juan's life.<sup>11</sup>

Yet this life of constant chaos and fluctuation is consistently described in the *Diapsalmata* as instantiating its opposite quality, one of extreme boredom and stasis:

Yet how dreadful boredom is—how dreadfully boring; I know no stronger expression, no truer one, for like is recognized only by like. Would that there were a higher expression, a stronger; then there would still be one movement. I lie prostrate, inert; the only thing I see is emptiness, the only thing I feed on is emptiness, the only thing I move in is emptiness. Even pain I do not suffer. (EO1, 37)

George Connell poignantly remarks that A's life "alternates between two widely disparate antitheses of discontinuity and unity."<sup>12</sup> Discontinuity is what the aesthete wants to exemplify in his life constantly, but he cannot escape the ironic end of his existence. In other words, while exclusively seeking particularity and multiplicity, the properties essential to the fundamental category of aesthetic existence, namely the interesting, the aesthetic life nevertheless leads to the paradoxical result that the life of chaotic flux is at once the life of dead quietude.

### 2.3. *Dialectical Flip-flop*

The underlying principle behind this dialectical overturning of one concept into its opposite is first intimated in Kant's deduction of 'antinomies' and further articulated

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<sup>11</sup> For a fuller and illuminating discussion, see George Connell's *To Be One Thing*, 62-78.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

by Hegel in his overall description of the movement of reason. This feature of dialectical flip-flopping in reason's movement shows, according to Hegel, that "instead of being fixed, everything finite is alterable and perishable," thereby pointing beyond itself toward a stable—though not an abstractly simple—unity, obtained through speculative reasoning.<sup>13</sup> While his polemic throughout the pseudonymous works shows a strong disagreement with Hegel's view of *the content* of this dialectical movement, namely his speculative logic and its practical outcome, Kierkegaard voices his agreement with its *form*: "the world around us is inconstant and at any moment can be changed into the opposite, and there cannot be found one person who, by his own might or by the conjuring of his wish, can force this change" (EUD, 314). This principle of dialectical reasoning will play an important role in our understanding of the one/many dialectic in A's essay on Mozart as well as that in Kierkegaard's works overall, for it applies to human existence paradigmatically, not speculative logic, and it is in the sphere of existence that the reconciliation is to be achieved according to Kierkegaard.

Even in these moments of profound despair over his motionless life, however, A manages to recognize the cure, something that can unify his fragmented self, when he asks himself the question "What could divert me?" As if anticipating the very thesis of Kierkegaard's later work *Fear and Trembling*, he writes: "Yes, if I managed to see a faithfulness that withstood every test, an enthusiasm that endured everything, a faith that moved mountains; if I perceived *an idea that joined the finite and the infinite*" (EO1, 37; my italics). Despite this somewhat surprising admission, A quickly returns to his despairing, melancholic self, for his "poisonous doubt" consumes any real possibility of

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<sup>13</sup> *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1991), 130.

faith for him. These words, vaguely looking forward to the later works of Kierkegaard, directly support the central idea established in the definition of existential unity above, namely unity must be of two dialectical opposites, the finite and the infinite, which further shows that this theme of unity, particularly faith as the genuine principle of unity, occupies Kierkegaard's thought even as early as *Either/Or*. As is made much more manifest by a later Johannes, faith is the proper domain where the two contraries reconcile; it is passion that unifies the finite and the infinite in the self.

#### *2.4. Aesthetic Experience of Unity through Music*

However, there are other *attempts* at this unity; other domains of human experience resemble the genuine unitive reality of faith because they are all instances of *passion* and faith is the highest passion. Music, or more correctly, the aesthetic appreciation of it, can provide an analogous experience of wholeness according to A. Immediately following the *Diapsalmata* is an essay about A's exaltation of music in general and his utmost admiration of Mozart's music in particular. In the introduction to "The Immediate Erotic Stages or the Musical-Erotic," he makes a rather curious remark about the significance of Mozart's music in his life: "Indeed, if [Mozart] were taken away, if his name were blotted out, that would destroy the one pillar, which until now has prevented everything about me from collapsing into a boundless chaos, into a dreadful nothing" (EO1, 49). A typical reader would have gotten the general impression from reading the previous essay that his life already is a boundless chaos and a dreadful nothing. Admittedly, the general tone of these paragraphs is so highly eulogistic toward Mozart that the reader needs to exercise some caution when taking sentences like this literally. But the claim about the *existential* significance of Mozart's music for the

aesthete in these sentences is difficult to ignore. What then is it about the experience of Mozart's music, *Don Giovanni* in particular, that has, at least to some degree, this existentially binding power for A?

To analyze the aesthete's experience of unity through music, we must first get clear on why music is a distinguished medium of art in comparison to other media and why such an unusual accolade is attributed to *Don Giovanni* in particular. A sets out on a somewhat peculiar project of providing a classification of classic works of art, such as Homer's epic poems, Raphael's paintings, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, and so on, and what seems downright ridiculous, *philosophically proving* that Mozart's immortal opera ranks the highest among them. Classification requires genus and differentium, but could any illuminating ones—something other than such highly uninteresting ones like 'art' and 'media'—be found? A believes he has come up with a sensible criterion to classify these works of art that are seemingly incommensurable mutually: unrepeatability. That is, the taxonomy's genus is unrepeatability and its specific difference the degree to which various works of art are unrepeatable. We might concede some *prima facie* validity to this criterion since we certainly attribute high worth to great works of art and want to preserve them for that reason. A further argues that the degree of unrepeatability is determined by the relation between the subject matter and the form, the idea and the medium. That is, the more abstract the idea and medium are, the more unrepeatable the work as a whole is. If, as A believes, "the sensuous in its elemental originality" (EO1, 56) were the most abstract idea conceivable for art, and music the most abstract medium suited to express the idea, then Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*, whose subject matter is precisely the sensuous-erotic and medium music, would exemplify a perfect unity of the

abstract idea and its corresponding form, and therefore, would be the most unrepeatable work of art, firmly placing itself at the highest place in the taxonomy.<sup>14</sup>

### 2.5. *Abstract and Concrete*

In order to understand the claim that the most abstract idea and medium are joined together in *Don Giovanni*, and its dual abstractness makes it the most unrepeatable art production, we must first be acquainted with the proper meaning of the specific instance of the one/many dialectic in this essay, namely ‘abstract’ and ‘concrete,’ because their connotation, stemming from the German idealist tradition, differs from that of contemporary English usage. In explaining these terms, Michael Inwood refers to three different uses of abstract/concrete found in Hegel.<sup>15</sup> The first use comes from the 16<sup>th</sup> century Latin meaning of the terms, which corresponds more or less to today’s common usage, where ‘abstract’ means ‘to draw away or remove something’ and ‘concrete’ means ‘grown together or condense.’ The word ‘abstract’ is therefore used in a transitive sense as in ‘S abstracts x from y, where x is F-ness (e.g., redness) and y a concrete F-object (e.g., apple).’ The second use is closely related to the first with the only difference being its intransitive sense. Hegel adopted Kant’s use of the terms in which some concept is

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<sup>14</sup> The reader might find some of A’s statements to contradict this point: “All classic productions stand, as was previously noted, equally high, because each one stands infinitely high” (EO1, 51) and later, “As I now place all the various classic works side by side and, without wanting to rank them, am just amazed over the fact that all stand equally high” (54-5). But he explicitly states that he intends to demonstrate that “with *Don Giovanni* [Mozart] stands at the top among [the classics]” (51). A few pages later, he again says that “Mozart with his *Don Giovanni* stands at the top among those immortals” (57) and concludes the entire essay with the same thought: “Now if what has been developed here is correct, then I return to my favorite theme—that among all the classic works, Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* ought to rank the highest” (135). I think the most sensible interpretation is to construe the idea of equality among the classics as only apparently true. In other words, he sets up what seems apparently true only to show its incompleteness. I thank Ettore Rocca for pointing out some of these passages and an illuminating discussion.

<sup>15</sup> *A Hegel Dictionary* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), 29. For a similar explanation of Hegel’s use of the terms, see Josiah Royce’s entry on ‘Hegel’s terminology’ in *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, vol. I, ed. J. M. Baldwin (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901), 459.

said to abstract (itself) from something, namely the inessential, contingent features of the concrete. For example, Hegel claims that when choosing the good, the will abstracts from its concrete desires, needs, and drives: “the will contains the element of pure indeterminacy or of the ‘I’s pure reflection into itself... this is the limitless infinity of absolute *abstraction* or universality, the pure thinking of oneself.”<sup>16</sup>

Finally, the third use, distinctly original with Hegel, essentially derives from the first two senses, although in the end the original meaning of abstract/concrete is suspended, or rather flip-flopped, in such a way that what is commonly considered a concrete particular is now seen as abstract. A sensory item is said to be abstract in this sense, insofar as it is cut off from any cognitive conceptual content of it or its relation to other sensory items. In *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, Hegel critiques an epistemological view that sees ‘sense certainty’ or immediate perception as true knowledge by arguing that contrary to the superficial appearance of sense certainty’s concrete content as the richest and truest kind of knowledge, it shows itself to be “the most abstract and poorest truth,” for this type of certainty is purchased at the expense of a host of distinct qualities and a rich complex of connections and relations to other concepts and things.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the concreteness of sense data seems to give us the rich and true knowledge of the world at first glance, and this in contrast to their *idealized* counterpart, abstract universals, which have been conceptually separated and isolated from the *real* concrete particulars. Hegel recognizes some truth in commonsense realism in that a mere thought or universal is so abstract, inasmuch as it is considered only in and of itself apart from its

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<sup>16</sup> *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet and ed. Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 37; my emphasis.

<sup>17</sup> *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 58-9.

relation to its sensory item (and other universals), such that true knowledge is not obtained through pure abstraction; this explains in turn Hegel's distinction between 'abstract universal' and 'concrete universal,' in which the former (i.e., the Platonic universal) refers to some universal concept (like squareness) purely considered in itself, whereas the latter (the Aristotelian universal) refers to some universal considered *as it inheres in the real thing*.<sup>18</sup> But on a closer look, the pure particularity of sense certainty produces the kind of knowledge that turns out to be just as abstract, i.e., poor and isolated. This paradoxical finding again affirms the aforementioned principle of Hegelian dialectic that finite opposites are so relative and volatile that one overturns into its opposite in its extreme dialectical moment; extreme concreteness is extremely abstract.

What is important in the foregoing discussion of Hegel's use of abstract/concrete for our purpose of analyzing the essay on Mozart is that A's use of the terms assumes the distinctly Hegelian sense by and large, although, as will be pointed out below, he suddenly reverts to the commonsense understanding of them (i.e., the first two senses) when he uses their noun form, 'abstraction' and 'concretion.' In sum, therefore, 'abstract' denotes, for the most part in A's essay, *something purely isolated in itself*, and by contrast, 'concrete' *something in relation to other things*. 'Abstract' thus predicates things belonging to the category of immediacy, such as sensuousness, while 'concrete' mediation, such as language and thought.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Frederick Beiser, *Hegel* (London: Routledge, 2005), 67.

<sup>19</sup> It is important, however, to see that Hegel's special connotation of these terms are essentially derived from the more common meaning, thereby retaining some truth in it while canceling the untruth—a characteristic Hegelian *Aufhebung*. The preserved element of the original meaning of abstract is the barrenness and isolatedness of the abstracted (i.e., an abstract universal lacks any concrete determination that gives it a reality for our consciousness), while the canceled element is the abstracted universality since, as Hegel affirms, a concrete particular has just the same kind of barrenness and isolatedness after all.

## 2.6. *Abstractness of Don Giovanni*

Given the above understanding of abstract/concrete, we can now make sense of A's seemingly odd claim that "the sensuous in its elemental originality" is the most abstract idea conceivable for an art production, one of the two necessary claims to demonstrate the highest degree of unrepeatability of Mozart's opera. Even though the very word 'sensuous' immediately conjures up concreteness in our mind, pure sensuousness *as such* turns out to be extremely abstract, likened to sense certainty which has undergone a Hegelian *Aufhebung*. And it is precisely the extreme concrete particularity of sensuousness that makes it so abstract, i.e., poor and isolated in itself, that it is impossible to describe adequately in language—hence, the high degree of unrepeatability of any art that captures it. A bolsters this claim with an argument that also may appear strange at first, namely that Christianity brought sensuality<sup>20</sup> into the world (EO1, 61). It would not be, however, controversial to affirm that Christianity brought the *spiritual* into the world. According to A, the sensuous is truly posited in and of itself, that is, in its elemental originality, only when or after its extreme dialectical opposite, the spiritual, is posited; in A's language, for something (i.e., spirituality) to negate its opposite (sensuousness), the latter has to be first posited clearly. In this way, the abstractness of sensuousness, i.e., pure sensuousness in itself, is maximally realized in the Christian context, and paradoxically not Greek culture, which openly practiced almost

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<sup>20</sup> The Hongs use both 'sensuous' and 'sensual' and their substantive forms in translating Kierkegaard's word, *Sandselig*, and its substantive form, *Sandselighed*, even though 'sensual' has a moral connotation that 'sensuous' does not. This is justified, however, because the Danish word has both the neutral sense of referring to the five senses and the more specific sense of referring to the erotic, and the textual context usually determines which English word is to be preferred, although it is not always clear. In this essay, nevertheless, I use the neutral term 'sensuous' throughout this section except only in cases where the erotic connotation is obviously intended.

limitlessly all types of sexual activities (e.g., homosexuality and pedophilia).<sup>21</sup> The Greek culture's idea of the sensuous remained only a vague presentiment to the Christian one, A observes, because it lacked the clear positing of the idea of spirit, for it was merely qualified *psychically* (62). The cumulative result of A's discussion thus far comes to this: since (1) the sensuous is abstract in the sense of its pure in-itself-ness and (2) the sensuous-erotic, as posited by Christian spirituality and not any other, is the most abstract, *Don Giovanni's* subject matter, *sensuality as qualified by Christianity*, turns out to be the most abstract idea possible for an art production.

With respect to the other claim that music is the most abstract medium, A asserts that language is the most concrete medium, and therefore, the further removed from language a medium is, the more abstract it is (EO1, 56). Since 'concrete' here means 'differentiated,' 'mediated,' or 'considered in relation'—the opposite of abstractness in the Hegelian sense (i.e., in-itself-ness)—any medium of art that employs language as its basic element to engender reflection can no longer compete properly for unrepeatability: thus something like a fiction is excluded. A then examines visible media like sculpture and painting, which seem just as removed from language as music. Rather than evaluating the abstractness of these media independently on their own terms, A argues that the degree of abstractness of media must be determined by the idea expressible through them; or to put it into a question, 'To what extent can they express an abstract idea?' All visual media fail to express the most abstract idea of pure sensuousness for sensuousness is "the determination of inwardness in itself" and "cannot be understood in

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<sup>21</sup> Some interesting illustration that links Christian spirituality with sensuality comes from the mystical writings of the Middle Ages, inspired by *the Song of Solomon* in the Bible—the book that single-handedly produced the most number of commentaries above any other book in the Bible during the period. *The Song* describes our spiritual journey and profound spiritual encounters with God along the way in terms of a love affair between King Solomon and a lowly maiden, replete with sensual imageries.

determined outlines,” and the medium capable of expressing it must be a simple “power, a breath, impatience, passion in all its lyricism” and “in a succession of moments,” and not a single static moment (56). In other words, the necessary *outward, spatialized* determinateness of all visual media makes them less abstract than music. By the process of elimination, music can now be seen as the most abstract medium of art. With this result, A adds a final touch by providing a detailed analysis of contrast between language and music. We might summarize the argument in this way: whereas language involves some reflection and is thus only capable of expressing the mediate, music expresses “the immediate in its immediacy” (70), and since the immediate is the indeterminate and language cannot express the indeterminate, the medium capable of expressing the indeterminate is the furthest removed from language; music therefore can take off where language must leave off.

If the two arguments are sound, that is, if A has shown that (1) the sensuous-erotic is the most abstract idea and (2) music is the most abstract medium in the sense that it is the most abstract medium that can adequately express the idea of the sensuous-erotic, then A has proved *Don Giovanni* to be the most unrepeatable artistic production among all the classic works of art.<sup>22</sup> Highlighting a further distinctive feature in Mozart’s opera based on the already proven point about the abstractness of its form and content, A draws attention to two types of immediacy based on its relation to the realm of spirit: first, immediacy qualified by spirit *within* the realm of spirit—presumably faith belongs to this category as an exemplar—and second, immediacy qualified by spirit *outside* of the realm

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<sup>22</sup> This argument, of course, assumes that *Don Giovanni* is a classic work of art in the first place. A in fact tries to show it in a series of analyses of the opera’s actual content (e.g., character and plot development, arias, etc.), which makes up the bulk of the essay. I thank C. Stephen Evans for making this point.

of spirit, i.e., the “sensuous immediacy” (EO1, 70-71). With the last conceptual move of identifying the subject matter of *Don Giovanni* (i.e., the sensuous-erotic) with the second type of immediacy, which in turn cannot be expressed in any other medium than music, A demonstrates the perfect union of form and content in *Don Giovanni*.

### 2.7. Concrete Universal

Now I think we are sufficiently primed to see just what it is that A sees in *Don Giovanni* and thus why his experience of it has such a deep existential import for him. The reason is that it constitutes a *concrete universal*. As briefly noted above, the concept of a concrete universal is the paradoxical notion that a universal exists concretely in a particular existing thing. This concept must be contrasted with that of an abstract universal (i.e., Plato’s universal), which is conceptually separated from concrete particulars. Where does universality lie in the concrete experience of *Don Giovanni*? A argues that the mythical character Don Juan is essentially an embodiment of pure sensuousness and immediacy, which therefore cannot be adequately captured by being a *particular* individual, as though he could be linguistically and thus concretely described in detail; he is something between an idea and an individual like a force of life itself (EO1, 92). Moreover, Don Juan, the idea of pure sensuousness, resists being understood in terms of particularity in another way. A argues that since psychical love, in contrast to sensuous love, contains an internal dialectic that necessarily includes the object of love as a *particular* individual, as in ‘*This woman is my beloved*’—and therein lies the richness and significance of psychical love—the idea of Don Juan’s having seduced 1,003 women in Spain becomes comical and ridiculous if he is determined psychically in any way and

not purely sensuously (94-5). For Don Juan does not exist for the sake of a particular beautiful woman but only for universal, *abstract beauty*:

Psychical love moves precisely in the rich manifoldness of the individual life, where the nuances are really the significant. Sensuous love, however, can lump everything together. For [sensuous love], the essential is *completely abstract femininity* and at most the more sensuous difference. Psychical love is continuance in time; sensuous love is disappearance in time, but the medium that expresses this is precisely music. (95)

How then does the universality of the sensuous-erotic get concretized?

To recall the steps of the argument previously established, we may affirm that because Don Juan embodies the pure sensuous and the sheer force of immediacy, and pure sensuousness is the most abstract idea to be put into an art form, the universal idea of sensuousness can be properly communicated and appropriated only through the abstract—i.e., non-linguistic—medium of music through its forceful vibration and melodic disturbances in the air. However, music allows the listener to grasp the universal not by a mediate means of reflection but immediately, producing the most *concrete*—i.e., in the original, non-Hegelian sense of the term—effect in the listener, as he or she is gripped, stirred, and moved inwardly by the unknown, inexpressible something in the music. A intimates the notion of concrete universal in the following passage, and this is where he suddenly reverts to the commonsense meaning of abstract/concrete:

Music is superbly fit to perform this [expressing the universality of sensuous love], since it is far more abstract than language and therefore articulates not the particular but the universal in all its universality, and yet articulates this universality not in the *abstraction* of reflection but in the *concretion* of immediacy. (EO1, 95; my emphasis)

The effect of music on its listener, namely the profound inducing and rousing of passion, is potentially more inwardly concrete than any other medium. A thus describes the musical experience of *Don Giovanni* as a meeting place of two dialectical contradictories,

the abstract universal and the concrete particular, in such a way that it becomes an instance of the concrete universal. Musical experience therefore belongs to the category of *paradoxical union of the one and the many*, the special domain of human experience wherein two dialectical opposites can be held together at once during the moment, and this is the proper definition of passion.

### 3. *Assessment of the Aesthetic Attempt at Unity*

Now we see that musical experience, as analyzed by A, bears a logical structural similarity to faith described by Johannes de Silentio, since they are both unitive experiences, unifying and reconciling two dialectical opposites: the abstract universal (sensuousness) and the concrete (immediacy of passion) in music; the finite and the infinite in faith.<sup>23</sup> This in a way must follow if both are instances of passion. Moreover, the two phenomena contain such richness and profundity that they both demonstrate language's inadequacy in its descriptive capacity. Yet the difference between purely aesthetic experience through music and faith is that the latter is the highest passion, the archetypal and normative principle for existential unity, which can successfully resist the disunity of self, despair. Music, or any other purely aesthetic unitive experience, therefore can only be a *momentary* escape and thus ultimately a false substitute, because the aesthete's underlying state of despair is not changed, as A openly admits in the *Diapsalmata* and Judge William, the author of *Either/Or*, II, constantly reminds him.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> One might say that the abstract/concrete distinction relates to the infinite/finite distinction and vice versa in such a way that one is an expression of the other. For example, something abstract has the property of not being limited by, say, material constitution, and something concrete, like my concrete experience of eating a banana, is limited to only one subject, namely me, and it is distinguished from other concrete things.

<sup>24</sup> It is true that A seems to embrace his own despair as another object of his aesthetic enjoyment, constituting an attempt to abstract from this discomfiture. However, there is a fundamental incoherence or

### 3.1. Repetition Unrealized

The only way to avoid despair within the aesthetic sphere of existence is a constant repetition of these finite moments of paradoxical union, as Don Juan is imagined to be capable of doing. Using the language of the one/many dialectic then, we can describe the aesthetic mode of existence in two ways respectively under the categories of *infinetizing the finite* and *finiteizing the infinite*. Under the first category, we observe particular aesthetic moments of paradoxical union like A's musical experience through *Don Giovanni* or erotic love (EO2, 45), in which a finite moment provides the subject with a limited entrance into the infinite, or in other words, the subject gets a small taste or glimpse of the infinite through the aesthetic experience of passion. However, since a particular aesthetic experience is not of infinite duration—after all, it is but a finite moment—the aesthete tries to repeat these finite moments of paradoxical union again and again. Therefore, aesthetic existence on the whole amounts to the second category of *finiteizing the infinite*, namely one of trying to reach the infinite by perpetual finite motion, by adding one finite moment of aesthetic pleasure at a time, which nevertheless must be qualitatively different from the previous time to avoid dull repetition; it is equivalent to trying to reach infinity through a successive addition of finite numbers, which obviously cannot be completed. In short, it results in “bad infinity.”<sup>25</sup>

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irony in aestheticizing despair, for the basic result is this: A embraces despair in order to get rid of despair. But one must fight disunity with unity. As we have seen so far, even A knows that unity is the only cure for his despair. This therefore shows the basic incoherence and inconsistency in A's approach to eradicating despair.

<sup>25</sup> Hegel first introduced the term (*Schlecht-Unendliche*). It is a view of infinity produced at the level of the understanding (*Verstand*), which, as in Kant's dualism, separates the infinite and the finite in such a way that the former can only be described in terms of the latter. *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), 139-42. This discussion of the infinite and the finite, stemming from the German idealist tradition, basically constitutes the logic of Kierkegaard's existential spheres in general and the aesthetic sphere in particular. Like the understanding's attempt to grasp the infinite, the

However, we know from A's own confession that aesthetic existence cannot realize true repetition, for boredom saturates his life (EO1, 37). In other words, unity cannot be obtained and sustained by a mere string of 'paradoxical unitive moments.' Because the aesthetic existential mode is essentially and exclusively characterized by particularity without any substantial relation to humanity's universality, the ethical, that provides coherence and continuity, due to an active refusal of the relation, A's life therefore fails to exemplify any existentially meaningful form of unity. In other words, the Romantic point of departure in the quest for unity, namely fragmentation and particularity, does not offer genuine unity in the end since the dialectic can never seriously venture out into its other, that is, universality; it thus remains purely one-sided. The aesthetic lifeview has no resource internal to itself that can successfully affirm the other side of the dialectic without thereby annulling its own essential element of particularity.

### 3.2. *Final Disunity of Aesthetic Existence*

Kierkegaard himself had already made the same critical assessment of the aesthetic sphere by the time he wrote his dissertation, when he criticized Romantic irony for its lack of continuity, the indispensable quality of unity.<sup>26</sup> He argues that an ironist

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aesthete vainly tries to reach the infinite existentially through the finite means within the aesthetic sphere, but only ends up producing 'bad infinity' since his life ends up being a mere series of one moment after another. The result is likewise dualism; the aesthete only lives in the infinite abstraction of these moments. In the ethical too, dualism cannot be avoided, as the ideal ethicist eventually becomes the knight of infinite resignation, who, upon coming to realize the failure of his or her attempt to unify the infinite and the finite within the ethical means of autonomous reason and will, lets go of finite happiness in repentance for the sake of the infinite. This shows that like the category of the understanding having undergone Hegel's *Aufhebung*, both aesthetic and ethical attempts at unity of the infinite and the finite are reduced to an irreconciled form of dualism—Kierkegaard's own *Aufhebung* of all human attempts at achieving true happiness.

<sup>26</sup> Kierkegaard's criticism of the Romantic ironist in *The Concept of Irony* is also voiced by Anti-Climacus in his characterization of aesthetic despair as *infinitude's lack of finitude* (SUD, 30-33). Through

loses all continuity in life because he “sinks completely to feeling [*Stemming*]” and his life is thus “nothing but feelings” (CI, 284). In this passage, Kierkegaard intimates his view of feeling and its relation to authentic human existence, namely the life of faith, in the following way: (1) feeling is a genuine aspect of human life, “an intensification that normally stirs and moves within a person,” (2) it involves some type of life contradiction,<sup>27</sup> and (3) Christian life includes certain moments of profound feeling, although it maintains its identity even when they are absent (284). In other words, Christian life may be essentially characterized as an ongoing moral striving toward *holiness*—or existential unity, to use our philosophical term—in which the dynamic tension between sin and grace must be upheld continually through faith. Based on this dialectical structure of Christian life, a Christian may at times experience a profound feeling of God’s mercy and grace despite his or her sinful acts, something that often manifests itself in passionate outcries, consisting of both the sorrow over and repentance of the sin and the joy and gratitude of knowing and receiving God’s grace. Yet this moving experience is not the whole substance of Christian life but an accentuation of its logical basis; there is an essential continuity in these Christian emotions, though mutually contradictory, since they stem from the basic ethical-religious structure of Christian life, established by one’s self-conscious choice to *believe* in Christ, which constitutes an intensification or more concrete experience of the underlying *passion* (*Lidenskab*). And this underlying passion, which Kierkegaard identifies with faith, can provide a stable

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the medium of imagination, the aesthetic self loses itself in imaginary feeling, knowing, and willing, thereby unrealizing the concrete and finite element of the self.

<sup>27</sup> It is a curious comment that all feelings involve some type of incongruity. However, some of the paradigmatic emotions do seem to contain such an element. For example, anger arises from disparity between an act of injustice thought to be incurred on the angered person and his/her expectation of justice from others. Additionally, grief too arises from an incongruity between one’s desire for the continuation of union with the beloved and the opposite reality of its loss.

basis for the self's unity because it is directed toward God, the Good. Lacking such a deep passion, the aesthete by contrast swings from one feeling to another, potentially its exact opposite, without any sense of continuity stemming from a coherent foundation.

The aesthete lives only for such momentary feelings, the moments of paradoxical union of contraries like A's musical experience of *Don Giovanni*. But when the feelings fade away, the dreadfulness of boredom and consequently despair takes over his consciousness. If aesthetic existence ultimately lacks existential unity, then what would it amount to in the end? The answer is aptly captured in Judge William's rhetorical question:

Can you think of anything more terrible than to have it all end with your essence dissolved into a multiplicity, such that you actually became many, just as that unhappy demoniac became a legion, and thus you would have lost the most inward, holiest in a human being, the personality's binding power? (EO2, 160)

In short, the aesthete has had so many diverse moments of pleasure, yet possessing none of them, that no single self remains in the end. The self dissolves in despair.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Judge William's Dialectic of Unity in *Either/Or II*

“For if a law had been given which could impart life,  
*δικαιοσύνη* surely could have come by the law.”

Galatians 3:21

“The Law captures totally, not by thundering against this one or that one of a man's actual sin; no, it makes him a rebel—in *despair*—against the Law, from which he nevertheless cannot tear himself loose. And then he's captured.”<sup>1</sup>

Johannes the Seducer, the presumed author of “The Seducer's Diary,” tells his readers that aesthetic existence concerns itself only with the beautiful, the essential element of which is its “infinite manifoldness” (EO1, 428). He poeticizes his exceeding delight in feminine beauty's richness that radiates like the sun in an infinite number of ways, gracing each woman with her own unique beauty to be enjoyed. Given this description of beauty, it would prove to be a seemingly impossible task for anyone to convince a young aesthete that marriage of all things can realize happiness for him. Judge William courageously—if not all too self-confidently—takes on the challenge by setting out to demonstrate that, first, romantic love can be, or rather must be, united with marital love and, second, his marriage in particular provides a living example of such unity (EO2, 31); it is the latter proposal that makes him rather presumptuous and, as will be shown below, Kierkegaard subtly exposes the self-deception. The Judge's overall vision of life identifies marriage as the proper existential context in which to realize the moral perfection, i.e., existential unity, because its essence, the intention to love the

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<sup>1</sup> JP2: 1857.

beloved eternally (i.e., unconditionally), expresses our highest task. To put it briefly, his ethical program amounts to the following piece of advice to the young man: Commit yourself to someone with whom you come to fall in love as the absolute object of your love and continually uphold that commitment through strict adherence to duty against your aesthetic inclinations; then, the happiness you're looking for will be within your grasp. Toward the end of our analysis, we will see that while the ethical program correctly identifies existential unity as essentially involving the fulfillment of the ethical task, it fails to realize the moral end sufficiently in the end; the ethicist cannot obtain unity in the practical-existential sphere of life for reasons that go beyond the purview of *Either/Or*.

### *1. Marital Love and Duty as the Ethical Principle of Unity*

Since the Judge has to convince the aesthete that a successful marriage provides the highest state of happiness, or that in marriage both universal and particular elements of existence are dialectically united, he employs the one/many dialectic much more explicitly and copiously than A, who exclusively emphasizes the particular. For this reason, while it seemed more fruitful to conduct a narrowly focused discussion of *Either/Or I*, drawing out the subtle aesthetic attempt at unity, the more general discussion of Judge William's conception of unity would better serve our purpose here.

We begin with a simple question: why marriage? Merold Westphal makes a helpful observation that Judge William is both Aristotelian and Hegelian.<sup>2</sup> Like Aristotle, William believes knowing the good depends on right reasoning and the right reason is defined in terms of *practical* reason, identifying the good with something

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<sup>2</sup> *Becoming a Self: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1996), 24.

concretely real in life, as opposed to the Platonic Good-in-itself abstracted from the concrete content of life. His Hegelianism adds to this mixture an even more concrete specification, namely that the ethical is to be defined in terms of *Sittlichkeit* (commonly translated as ‘ethical life’ or ‘social morality,’ which roughly means the concrete social and cultural embodiment of the abstract moral principles). In the typical Hegelian fashion, *Sittlichkeit* has three moments, family, civil society, and the state. Marriage constitutes the very foundation of the first moment, and as such, of the entire realm<sup>3</sup>; the well-being of the whole state therefore depends on that of the marriages within it. But of course, the intended reader of these letters is no respecter of the whole, as William readily anticipates A’s possible ironic response to the notion of universal duty to others: “I am not so haughty as to fancy myself to be one who can act for the whole—that I leave up to the distinguished; if I can act just for something entirely particular, I am satisfied” (EO2, 15). In other words, the case for marriage must first and foremost address how marriage provides the highest happiness to the young man as a particular individual.

### *1.1. Dialectic of First Love*

With this task at hand, Judge William first turns to A’s favorite subject, erotic love, “the most beautiful aspect of purely human existence” (EO2, 30), and the best instantiation of it, *first love*, which is “the highest earthly good” (42). While A knows all too well the power and beauty of first love, he lacks the wider and higher perspective of it, according to the Judge, since he is “trapped in it [the aesthetic sphere]”; only the one who stands on a higher level can describe the fuller view (178). William begins with the one/many dialectic under the aspect of ‘eternal’ and ‘temporal’ by contrasting the two

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<sup>3</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, ed. Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 199ff.

spheres in respect to it. The purely aesthetic version of eternity is merely “abstract *an sich*,” that is, abstract in more than one sense (46): on the one hand, it is an abstraction from the self’s concrete historical situation into the realm of mere possibilities which the self will not really choose for itself; on the other hand, the eroticism of love itself is abstract phenomenologically, i.e., in the Hegelian sense of being wholly absorbed in itself and unrelated to any other realities of life (ii.2.5). The ethical view of eternity, on the contrary, fully acknowledges the temporal existence of the self, that its present identity is inextricably related to the past and the future, its historical origin and destiny. While the aesthetic dimension of love becomes its sole and absolute substance in the aesthetic sphere, under the ethical sphere, it by contrast finds its rightful place as the secondary and the relative; that is, it is seen as the initial moment that ushers the self into the whole reality of love, motivating the awakened lover to *work* toward unity. To borrow Hegelian terms, we might call the former ‘abstract eternity’ and the latter ‘concrete eternity.’

The ethical conception of love emphasizes another aspect of the concrete eternity, namely that it is the only proper *infinity* for the temporally existing self. As previously shown (ii.3.1), the aesthetic attempt at unity results in ‘bad infinity’ because it treats love as a series of one finite erotic encounter after another, resulting in an undialectical reduction of life to the purely temporal qualification of momentariness and transiency. According to William, the significance of ‘first’ is that “In the first, the whole is *implicite* and is present *κατὰ κρύψιν* [cryptically]” (EO2, 41). His idea of first love must be understood in relation to the concept of infinity *proper*. God is infinite and eternal in the absolute sense since no beginning or end can be predicated of His being; He is pure and complete actuality in and of Himself. On the contrary, our temporal mode of existence

makes our eternity (i.e., the “eternal happiness”) a future goal to be achieved through a historical process.

Accordingly, the function of the aesthetic in love is accidental in the sense that it merely provides, as it were, a foretaste of the whole reality, by means of which the lovers are naturally drawn into the essence of love: the eternal commitment to love the beloved, unconditionally willing the good of the other. That is the true infinity for the self existing in time: to be capable of showing *unlimited* love toward the other. Therefore, love’s proper end can be best realized in the context of an exclusive and mutually committed relationship between two equals; only in and through marriage can first love thus become “also the second, the third, the last” (EO2, 41). By repeating the first love time and time again in the existential sphere of continuity we call marriage, the ethically qualified love becomes the “synthesis of the temporal and the eternal,” and for this reason, only those who consciously make the marital pledge beyond the first taste of love come to place themselves properly and securely on the path toward the full actualization of the infinite.

However, William’s continuing ethical treatment of the dialectic of first love in no way undermines—at least in theory—the aesthetic dimension of love; in fact he validates and explains the synthesizing nature of the aesthetic in first love better than A can. First love unites such opposites as *freedom* and *necessity* on the one hand, and on the other, the *universal* and the *particular*, thereby manifesting itself phenomenologically as a *paradoxical union* of these dialectical opposites. It can be said to be necessary, as “the individual feels drawn with an irresistible power to another individual” (EO2, 45), while at the same time the lovers come to have the liberating sensation of feeling wholly

uninhibited in their love expression to each other; nothing seems impossible during these ecstatic romantic moments.

William then goes on to add a rather cryptic reference concerning the universal/particular dialectic: first love “has the universal as the particular, even to the verge of [becoming] the accidental” (EO2, 45). In other words, as universal a phenomenon as falling in love might be, first love viewed subjectively is extremely particularistic, for the couple, precisely during the passionate moments, perceives their love relationship as ‘one of a kind,’ something no one else but they themselves can appreciate, something incomparable to any other romantic relationship out there. The ethicist thus unequivocally shows his spirit of agreement with the aesthete concerning the *concrete universality* of love in its aesthetic glory, emphatically affirming the significance of its immediacy: “But all this [i.e., freedom/necessity, etc.] it [first love] has, not by virtue of reflection; it has it immediately. The more definite in this respect first love is, the healthier, the greater the likelihood that it really is a first love.” Seeing that the very DNA of love is to unite opposites dialectically in these ways, it should be evident to us that both the Judge and A implicitly agree that it is through love that the self is to achieve its unity.<sup>4</sup>

### *1.2. Dialectic of Marriage: Freedom and Necessity*

Even so, first love must not remain solely in its aesthetic determination, but ought to move to the higher sphere of marriage, for the infinite-eternal, first encountered in the

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<sup>4</sup> Frederick Beiser argues that it is the unitive principle of love, i.e., its ability to maintain the paradoxical ‘unity-in-difference,’ that inspired Hegel’s notion of dialectic in the first place. *Hegel* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 115. That is, love itself is dialectical and a paradoxical union of contraries, as it involves unification of two unequals in such a way that preserves their individual identity while cancelling out the differences. But the dialectic of reason replaces love in his later writings, for he came to reject love in two ways: by abandoning his early enthusiasm for Romanticism and the Christian notion of love as too sectarian and escapist. For Kierkegaard, however, love remains the first and highest principle of unity.

aesthetic moments of erotic union, is but “the fantasy’s and idea’s illusory eternity,” i.e., abstract eternity (EO2, 58). By means of self-conscious commitment to love the beloved unconditionally, love becomes transformed into a concrete eternity. Insofar as the ethical view of unity goes, the Judge’s analysis culminates with the idea that marriage constitutes the highest type of a paradoxical union of dialectical opposites, one that supersedes the dialectic of first love. He states that marriage “is a unity of contradictions, even more than the first love, for it has one more contradiction, the spiritual, and thereby the sensuous in an even more profound contradiction; but the further away from the sensuous one is, the more aesthetic significance it obtains” (61). What does he mean by the “spiritual” and what is it about marriage, but not first love, that can generate the spiritual?

William identifies the spiritual with the *volitional* aspect of consciousness in a manner consistent with Kierkegaard’s overall thought.<sup>5</sup> The choice characterizing marriage contains a more perfect dialectic than the freedom/necessity dialectic of first love because it involves the true sense of freedom: standing before a witness, the lover freely and solemnly chooses the beloved as the absolute object of love. This element of volitional freedom is lacking in first love in its pure aesthetic determination, as the Judge writes: “[Marriage] is freedom and necessity, but also more; for freedom employed in the first love is nonetheless really the more psychical freedom, where the individuality still has not cleared itself of natural necessity” (EO2, 61). While the *sentiment* of freedom is surely present in first love (i.e., “psychical freedom”), it is not freedom *proper* (spiritual freedom), since it does not necessarily entail the *act* of choosing, the kind of act that

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<sup>5</sup> In fact, Johannes Climacus identifies consciousness, or more correctly self-consciousness, with the will: “Consciousness is spirit” (JC, 169-70). Both the limited space and central concern here do not permit a detailed look at Kierkegaard’s complex and somewhat controversial epistemic-psychological account of consciousness. We shall instead take it up in Chapter VI.

involves the lover's conscious choice to make the good of the beloved his or her own good. The mutual romantic sense between the lovers that some inexplicable force brought them together, readily expresses the idea of necessity on the one hand; that is, the full explanation of their falling in love cannot be exhausted in terms of their own reason and agency. On the other hand, love requires the opposite determination, the freedom of choosing to will one's beloved's good as one's own. Therefore, only in and through the marital vow do I really choose the beloved to whom I am helplessly drawn by that unknown power, and in this sense, marriage dialectically unifies necessity and freedom.

### *1.3. The Intentional Self*

Due to the paramount significance of choice and freedom in Kierkegaard's thought, further reflection on his special notion of volition seems necessary. While there are many terms that refer to the idea of volition with various nuances, e.g., will (*Villie*), decision (*Beslutning*), or choice (*Valg*), the word 'intention' (*Forsæt*) seems best fit etymologically to convey the Judge's special sense, and I think it provides a basis for understanding all the other volitional terms. Both the Danish word composed of two words (*sætte* meaning 'to set' or 'posit' and the intensifier *for*) and the English word (if 'in' is taken as an intensifier for 'tend') naturally convey the idea of 'choosing oneself' that features so prominently in *Either/Or II*, which, for good or ill, gave rise to its simulacra in the later tradition of existentialism. So the Judge writes, "the *I* chooses itself, or more correctly, receives itself" (EO2, 177). The idea expressed etymologically is that the self establishes itself as a true self by consciously identifying itself with, that is, committing itself to—and thereby intensifying—the passion or inclination with which the self naturally (i.e., immediately) finds itself. While this thought was already intimated in

the dialectic of freedom in marriage above (i.e., in the act of *choosing*, and not just passively feeling, the passion of love by resolving to love the beloved unconditionally), it can be still further qualified. That is, the object of my ethical choice is not some external object (not even my wife), but rather, it is *myself*, because the object of my love is a particular expression of my *immediately given* personality; that is why I don't fall in love with just anyone but someone whose personality expresses some mysterious yet perfect combination of similarity and dissimilarity to my own personality. So understood, in choosing to love my beloved, I am essentially choosing myself, affirming my own self in the choice, precisely because she is an *image* of my own self in an important way.

Therefore, intention is a much more rich and contentful concept of freedom than the abstract type which has been traditionally known as *liberum arbitrium*. Whereas the abstract conception of freedom is centrally concerned with the mere question whether the agent could have chosen the alternative, the significance of Kierkegaard's existential notion of intention lies in the agent's choice to *identify* him or herself with some passion with an intense degree of personal interest and moral earnestness; or to use the Judge's language directly, it is the choosing of oneself *in* the passion. Like other conscious states, intention admits of a wide range of what might be termed 'phenomenological strength,' depending on the nature of its object and one's subjective relation to it. My intention to eat a tuna sandwich for lunch, for example, will have a much smaller degree of phenomenological strength than my intention to marry the woman with whom I have fallen in love. Because the marital intention involves an object which arguably possesses an eternal worth in and of itself, thereby signifying the most important moral commitment one has to make in life, it emits and is sustained by the greatest

phenomenological energy for one's consciousness. Judge William has several terms denoting this idea:

Now if you want to understand me correctly, I can very well say that what matters in choosing is not so much to choose the right thing, as the *energy*, the *earnestness*, and *pathos*, with which one chooses. Personality therein proclaims itself in its inner infinity, and thereby personality is in turn consolidated. ... That is, since choice is made with the whole personality's inwardness, his being is purified, and he is himself brought to an immediate relation to the eternal power, which omnipresently permeates all existence. (EO2, 167; my emphasis)

Intention, so concretely and existentially determined, therefore constitutes the true meaning of freedom and choice for Kierkegaard.

#### *1.4. Passionate Moral Perception*

An important corollary of Judge William's view of the ethical intention is that this type of choice is a pre-requisite for humans to enter into the moral universe in the fuller sense. Explaining the choice between the ethical and the aesthetic, he makes a seemingly startling claim that the very category of good and evil emerges with such an ethical choice for the chooser, thereby implying that without making the choice, good and evil do not really exist for the non-choosers:

My Either/Or denotes not about the choice between good and evil; it denotes the choice by which one chooses good and evil or rules them out. The question here is, under which qualifications one will view the whole existence and live. ... The point is therefore not so much about choosing between willing the good or the evil as about choosing the willing, but with this, the good and the evil is again posited. (EO2, 169)

The ethical intention, characteristic of marriage, qualitatively deepens one's moral perception, for one is made aware of the morally serious nature of good and evil and thus that of moral responsibility, only after making such a deeply personal commitment to will the good.

Without such an intentional commitment to the good, every choice remains aesthetically qualified, and therefore, the individual's moral life gets tossed about by the whims of contradictory passions. Contrary to the aesthete's life of passion, the Judge's ethical passion makes morality practically intelligible for the ethicist in the first place because, first, by drawing us to its object, it makes us well aware of that object as the very object to be chosen ethically, and second, the ethical choice in question cannot be made genuinely without choosing the passion as well. The passion so chosen becomes a concrete embodiment of the good and subsequently the central passion from and around which the self can coherently order all other passions. By means of the ethical intention in choosing the passion, the rest of our passions gets properly anchored to the steadfast ethical will toward forming the unified self.

### *1.5. The Absolute and the Relative: The Social Self*

A distinctive idea in Judge William's moral philosophy is that one cannot make an ethical intention in an empty vacuum; it requires a concrete life condition where one naturally finds the object worthy of such intention. This takes us back to the dialectic of marriage. Besides being the union of freedom and necessity, marriage is also a dialectical unity of the *absolute* and the *relative*:

Earthly love begins by loving several—these are the preliminary anticipations—and ends by loving one; spiritual love continually opens itself more and more, loves more and more people, has its truth in loving all. Thus marriage is sensuous but also spiritual, free and also necessary, absolute in itself and also points beyond itself within itself. (EO2, 62)

A rather simple observation of life may validate these recondite words. When someone falls madly in love, the overflow of loving affection spills over into every aspect of his or her life. This 'flooding effect' of love reveals the intrinsic property of love to enable a

lover to share the excess of love, which overflows from loving the one beloved, with all the others. Looking at the more universal side of things, we can abstract from the flooding effect of love the principle concerning the *social* nature of morality. That is, love is the normative grounding and governing basis of morality; all types of social relationship are in their essence various expressions of love with their highest and most consummate type being marital relationship.

How exactly does love explain the nature of our sociality? We find the notion of intention at work again:

Intention is resignation in the richest form, where the concern is not for what is to be lost but what is to be won by being held fast. In the intention, *an other is established*, and in the intention, *love is established to that [other]*, though not in the external sense. But the intention here is not the fruit wrought by doubt, but the overflowing of the promise. So beautiful is marriage, and the sensuous is in no way negated, but ennobled. (EO2, 61; my italics)

Marital intention is absolute in several respects. First, the intention entails “resignation” because the act of choosing to love only one beloved means forsaking all other possible objects of love. Yet it is also the “richest form” of resignation because the loss resulting from the choice is at least potentially infinite. However, the focal point of the marital intention is not the loss, but the gain of (1) ‘the other’ and (2) love for and from that other. What lies implicit in the Judge’s argument is the idea that the self’s relation to others as a whole, i.e., social reality, remains only external and abstract to the self, and hence incomplete, until the inward passionate act of marital intention is consciously made. Making an eternal commitment to love *this other* is only possible if, prior to the commitment, I recognize the worth of my beloved as eternal and unconditional (first implicitly and partially in first love), and in turn, as the same recognition and

commitment are reciprocated by her, I begin to have the same perspective of eternal worth *of and for myself* in a concretely experiential way.

### *1.6. Reciprocal Recognitivity of Love*

In short, love in its essence is *reciprocally recognitive*. It is recognitive because it involves a dynamic exchange of recognizing, both in thought, emotion, and action equally, the intrinsic worth of the object of love and subjectively receiving the same recognition by another. Love's reciprocal nature includes interdependence in the obvious sense with respect to sociality, that love cannot be fully realized if my love is not reciprocated by the other, that is, if the other refuses my love. But love is also reciprocal with respect to the individual lover as such, for my capacity to recognize another's intrinsic worth is dependent on and therefore equally commensurate with the degree to which I have received another's recognition of my intrinsic worth. If love is understood this way, we can see why marriage really is the best example of love, the highest instantiation of mutual recognition of each other's eternal dignity, at the purely immanent, natural domain of human existence. And I infer that this is the way the Judge envisions the principle of justice, what is foundational to morality as such, to be properly realized, that is, at the personal level concretely receiving and giving such eternal love and validity with each other through faithfully carrying out the marital vow. Conversely, if I have not consciously entered into such an eternal covenant with anyone, it would seem difficult, if not impossible, for me to recognize any other's eternal worth concretely, precisely because I myself lack the recognition of my own eternal worth—something I cannot obtain abstractly in and by myself.

However, this recognition of one's own eternal worth is not a one time epiphany, as would be the case in the solely aesthetic moment of love. It is a task of eternity, a *historical self-development of personality*. Judge William writes:

Therein lies precisely a human being's eternal worth, that he can acquire history; therein lies the divine in him, that he himself, if he wills, can give this history continuity; for it [continuity] acquires the first [history], when it [history] is not the sum of what has taken place or happened to me, but my own work in such a way that even what has happened to me is by me transformed and transferred from necessity to freedom. (EO2, 250)

William's view of love is therefore as dialectical and as historical as Hegel's account of spirit or consciousness: just as consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* discovers itself in truth through its *intentional* engagement with the objective other, one's eternal moral consciousness must be gained by the mutual activity of love with an equal other throughout one's temporal existence.<sup>6</sup> In this way, the historical realization and fulfillment of love becomes the dialectical union and dynamic relation of *self-love* and

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<sup>6</sup> Some readers may question the validity of this account on two grounds: whether (1) it finds immediate textual support and (2) it can be reconciled with Kierkegaard's later religious view of love. There is admittedly little explicit textual evidence for this claim. However, the Judge's claim to the universality of his ethic warrants this account, for otherwise, his central focus on the love of marriage for his ethic would obscure how the universality claim can be predicated of it. On the one hand, the duty to choose oneself and develop a concrete personality denotes universality in the sense that it is a universal task given to every human person, but on the other hand, as it has been made clear, personality cannot be formed apart from realizing love. Therefore, I am simply drawing out the implication of universality from the nature of love, something that is not totally in purview of the Judge's immediate purpose, which is to win over a young friend to the ethical life, not to construct a philosophical system of ethics; the young man could care less about the universal aspect of William's account. The second issue raises a concern about the consistency of the ethical view of love over the whole spectrum of Kierkegaard's thought. According to *Works of Love*, the Judge's view of love as I have delineated would be characterized as a purely particularistic selfish love that lacks God as a "middle term" between lovers. I admit that Judge William's account is more sophisticated than the object of Kierkegaard's criticism there. He in fact shows at times some version of the religious view of love, though in a highly attenuated and inchoate form: "by being able to thank God, she places just enough distance between herself and her beloved so that she can, as it were, breathe" (EO2, 57-8). I have purposely left out the role God plays in the Judge's view of love for the sake of clarity, that is, to highlight the core working principle of the ethical sphere so as to be able to distinguish it clearly from the proper religious view in the later chapters. In spite of his pervasive religious talk, William's God is not the transcendent and holy God of Abraham. The following statement well captures his fundamental adherence to the religion of immanence: "The religious is not so alien to human nature that there must first be a break in order to awaken it" (89). Therefore, his view of love will ultimately lead to a form of idolatry, selfish love. See the final chapter for a more detailed view.

*love of another*, and with love's progressive revelation in one's life, no real conflict—i.e., irreconcilable ones—should hold between the two.

### 1.7. *The Eternal Law of Morality*

What is more, Judge William asserts in the passage above that what grounds our social existence, namely marital intention, does not originate from doubt, as if our suspicion against each other forces us to commit to being good for the sake of mutual survival and benefit; contracts are in fact made that way. Rather, the intention is originally based on the *promise* to love one another faithfully. This idea, I believe, provides a simple yet provocative socio-political commentary: contrary to the idea of social contract, to which many modern political theories appeal, human society is *normatively* based on the promises of faithful love, that is, *covenantal relationships*—and not suspicion-motivated promises—precisely because its basic constituent is marriage; it is the covenanted love relationship that begets marriage, and marriage family, and family society. Therefore, it is the same love that must sustain community, which conversely means that it is the unfaithfulness to the same promise, namely the *broken covenants*, that fundamentally undermine and destroy our society.

It should be clear by now why the Judge takes marriage as a point of departure for his moral philosophy: it is the most natural human condition in which the ethical intention to will the good can be realized and therefore it truly constitutes the logical foundation for the entire realm of *Sittlichkeit*. This point of clarification puts his pervasive romantic-idealistic language about marriage in a somewhat different light, for it is not an accidental poetic-aesthetic adornment or a clever rhetorical device to soften the hardened heart of a young aesthete, but rather, a sober account of human existence in its

very essence—that faithful love must motivate all moral activities. In short, the eternal law of morality, whether expressed as the ‘golden rule’ or the ‘categorical imperative,’ is none other than love itself, for only love, and not some positivistic laws, can both establish and actualize justice (i.e., the principle of equality) *concretely* among us. The ethical person thus “sees in love a revelation of the universal-human” (EO2, 256). While philosophers may go on claiming that the egalitarian principle can be known by reason, it nonetheless owes its *ontological* reality not to some abstract law but to the intrinsic human constitution to love (and marry), to desire a harmonious union with the beloved and to will faithfully his or her good as the object of unconditional worth.

#### *1.8. Dialectic of Duty.*

Suppose now that the intended recipient of William’s letters is convinced by these arguments that marriage is the most perfect union of dialectical opposites, the very blessedness he has been seeking all this time, though vainly in all types of aesthetic flings. Then how does he go about realizing a successful marriage? The Judge must go on to provide a realistic way to actualize a good and lasting marriage that can effectively counter the despair occasioned by various life challenges, even after the euphoria of engagement, wedding, and honeymoon have long faded. To revisit the earlier dialectic, he describes this challenge in terms of the contradictory relation between time and eternity: how can a husband or wife preserve the union of love—the eternal—against time, or rather *in* time, realizing it again and again? For the aesthetic view which exclusively attributes meaning to the particularity of love, William argues that repetition is not possible, since the first, namely first love, is forever lost in the temporal past (EO2, 141). However, the ethical sphere can preserve the eternal in the temporal because its

essential category is *duty*, that is, the ethical duty which we place upon ourselves by appropriating internally the eternal-universal law of love through our self-conscious autonomous choice to will the good for the beloved. In short, the idea of duty itself constitutes and expresses the dialectical unity: it is both the universal and the particular.

Judge William shows the dialectical nature of duty most compellingly when he addresses two “skepticisms” that are typically lodged against moral realism, the idea that moral laws are true irrespective of any individual’s or society’s opinion about it. The first objection is that “duty itself is unstable, that laws could be changed,” and the second “I on the whole cannot at all fulfill [*gjøre*] the duty” (EO2, 263). Whereas the former raises doubts about the existence of the absolute *beginning* of morality, given the obvious fact of moral diversity throughout cultures and history, the latter doubts that there is the absolute *end* for morality, namely that if morality consists of universal duty, an individual can never fulfill it. While the first objection sounds familiar enough, as is commonly heard in the debate between moral objectivism and relativism, appreciating the second one may require additional reflection. The Judge goes on to note that according to the skeptic, moral duty on the one hand “is the universal, what is required of me is the universal,” but on the other hand, “what I can do is the particular” (263). That is, if moral duty is the universal, no perfect fulfillment of it through any single moral agent’s act or its total sum is possible. See how this objection highlights Platonic realism and the acute problem engendered thereby: the incommensurability problem between the infinite and the finite. If Plato’s idealism is true, which in its basic tenet holds that abstract universals are real independently of their concrete particulars, there is then no perfect instantiation of such universals in the material world at all anywhere. For example, no material

spherical object can ever be perfectly spherical or as perfect as the sphere in Plato's heaven. Just consider the definition of a sphere: a three-dimensional figure wherein all distances between its center and any given point of its outermost limit are the same.<sup>7</sup>

Analogously, if moral duty is the universal, and thus it is real independently of whether or not it is fulfilled by any moral agent at any time in history, no particular fulfillment by anyone can complete the moral task (e.g., the moral duty not to covet my neighbor's possession is not fulfilled by my observing it once or twice, or even 1,000 times). The bad news for Platonic realism about morality is that it entails moral absolutism and such absolutism requires a *perfect* unity between the universal and the particular. Perhaps better than any other philosopher in history, Nietzsche grasped this conundrum and expressed it in his famous claim that Christianity—arguably the most rigorous and clear articulation of Platonic realism about morality—brought with it *nihilism*.<sup>8</sup> For nihilism eventually results from the realization through our moral failure that there is just no way to complete the task entailed by moral realism and absolutism.

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<sup>7</sup> This problem in fact is the one single goad for Plato's thought as a whole. Contemporary Plato scholar, R. E. Allen, calls it the 'dilemma of participation.' The central question is how exactly the universals and the particulars relate to each other; on the one hand, if we affirm that the universals are transcendent, then we have no way of knowing whether the particulars exemplify them at all; but on the other hand, if we affirm that the universals somehow exist immanently in the particulars, then the very idea of the universal gets cancelled. We shall shortly learn from Plato that this dilemma is a major expression of the problem of the one and the many that afflicts basically all levels of existence (v.2.3).

<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche writes in his famous work, "All this [i.e., transcendental idealism in Plato and Christianity] is ascetic to a high degree; but to an even higher degree it is *nihilistic*." *On the Genealogy of the Morals*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 123. Nietzsche's critique more specifically consists of the fact that Platonisms deny the validity and importance of the finite goods including the bodily activities of human existence. It will be made clearer toward the end of this chapter that Nietzsche's nihilism and critiques of Platonism are exactly the opposite response to this apparent irreconcilability of the infinite and the finite; he grasps the finite at the expense of the infinite, whereas Platonists grasp the infinite at the expense of the finite. For this reason, he is just as dualistic as the Platonist after all. However, the next chapter will show that Nietzsche's critique of Christianity was based on his mistaken notion that Christianity and Platonism are basically the same; despite all the apparent similarities, we shall see how Christianity differs from Platonism in such a way that it reconciles the one and the many while the latter cannot.

Both skepticisms, though different in their content, univocally articulate the problem of the one and the many in that they both admit the basic irreconcilability; the first reduces morality to historical particulars, whereas the latter, by its very affirmation of the transcendent-universal, makes morality into an ideal that allows no foothold in reality. In a manner reminiscent of Hegelian dialectic, Judge William first acknowledges the partial truth in these antithetical claims and then shows how they implicitly point to the more complete truth: “personality itself is the absolute” (EO2, 263). That is, each ethical individual (i.e., the one who has self-consciously made the ethical intention) is the absolute starting and end point of morality, the very “Archimedean point” from which the individual becomes *both* the universal *and* the particular (265). While agreeing with the second skeptic that duty is the universal, William argues that our very linguistic use shows that moral duty, though the universal, is also the particular: “I never say about a person: he is doing the duty or the duties; but I say: he is doing *his* duty; I say: I am doing *my* duty, you are doing *yours*” (263). Contrary to the ‘either/or’ mode of thinking implicit in the foregoing skepticism, i.e., the universal as something abstract from and external to the particular moral agent, the universal in fact resides *potentially* within his or her consciousness as an ethical *ideal* to be realized: “As a particular individual, I am not the universal, and if one demanded it of me, it would be unreasonable; if I am to be able to fulfill [*gjøre*] the universal, I must be the universal at the same time as I am the particular. But if so, duty’s dialectic lies in myself” (264). The union of the universal and the particular in the moral agent is only an ideal at first (not something given immediately), a *task* to be chosen self-consciously and worked on for *future* perfection: “Thus he who lives ethically has himself as his task. His self in its immediacy is defined

by accidental characteristics; the task is to work the accidental and the universal together into a whole” (256).

### *1.9. The Ethical Concrete Universal*

According to the Judge’s view on the whole, the very act of doing our moral duty with the inward passion of intention consistently throughout one’s life completes the moral task, finally resulting in the unified self. Since infinity lies with that ethical passion, my temporal existence *per se* does not necessarily entail the incompleteness of the moral task, contrary to the plain form of Platonism. The ethical remains feasible as long as the same passion continually determines my life’s essence, that is, insofar as duty *qua* universal becomes *my* duty (*qua* particular) through intention, when I self-consciously relate myself to the universal moral law with the inward passion of resolution, willing the good unconditionally in every act. Contrary to the commonly held view about the relation between the moral law and a moral agent (i.e., an abstract and one-way relation), the reality of the moral law always resides within each individual *potentially*, but gets *actualized* subjectively through the infinite passion of intention. The Judge’s argument overall can be characterized as an indirect or negative proof in the form of *reductio*: (1) If this dialectical view of moral duty is not true, the entire moral enterprise either remains abstract and external to the moral subject or becomes reduced to historical particulars; (2) in the former case, moral absolutism and realism, while abstractly affirmed—and precisely thereby—becomes utterly irrelevant in the actual moral life, whereas in the latter, it is outrightly denied; (3) neither of the consequences is practically acceptable; (4) therefore, moral duty must be both the universal and the particular.

Consequently, both the *what* of the ethical sphere's teleological end, namely the marital love, and the *how*, duty, equally express the dialectical unity. Summing up the Judge's view in this analytically straightforward mode, however, lends the appearance, and thus risks the danger, of separating the content and the form, the end and the means of morality. While our analysis has shown each category to be dialectical on its own, we must always keep in mind that the kind of duty Judge William has in mind qualitatively differs from our commonsense notion of duty as some necessity externally imposed on us, for duty properly viewed is something that naturally and originally arises from the very substance of marriage, namely the promise to love the beloved unconditionally. Precisely because I love my beloved, I naturally and joyously make the promise that I will love her faithfully as in the marriage vow and thereby put on the duty to will her good in my self-conscious intention. In this way, according to the Judge, the moral duty acquires the qualification of autonomy.

In every way, Judge William's ethic speaks the language of dialectical unity. And just as A's analysis of his aesthetic experience of *Don Giovanni* culminates with the notion of 'concrete universal' (ii.2.7), so also does the Judge's one/many dialectic arrive at the same idea: "the task the ethical individual sets for himself is to transform himself into the *universal individual*" (EO2, 261; my emphasis). Although the two dialectics share the common structure, the ethical notion of the concrete universal is capable of preserving the eternal in the historical realm, contrary to the momentariness of a mere aesthetic union. For this reason, the former is far more unique and noble than the latter:

The one who lives esthetically is the accidental human being; he believes himself to be the perfect human being by being the unique human being. ... Therefore, when the ethical individual has completed his task, has fought the good fight, he has then come to the point where he has become the unique human being—that is,

there is no other human being such as he—and also, he has become the universal human being. To be the unique human being is not, in and of itself, something so great, for every human being has this in common with every product of nature, but to be such that he is thereby also the universal—that is the true art of living. (256)

The difference between the aesthetic and the ethical should be clear by now, and so should the choice, as far as the Judge (and Kierkegaard<sup>9</sup>) is concerned. If one chooses the ethical, striving to become the universal individual through marriage and by faithfully (i.e., time after time) fulfilling the eternal law of morality (unconditional love), one will come to reconcile the one and the many, the eternal and the temporal, the universal and the particular, the beautiful and the good—and at last, *unity*.

## *2. Assessment of the Ethical Attempt at Unity*

The ethical sphere indeed promises all that we desire in life, “beauty, truth, meaning, and continuance,” for “only when one lives ethically oneself, one’s life acquires beauty, truth, meaning, security” (EO2, 271). However, the greatness of the reward is equally matched by that of the challenge. I suspect that the readers’ overall response to the Judge’s letters, if they truly understood them, will be one of two: while some readers will find his bold vision and passion for the ethical ideal convincing and even inspiring, others will be put off by the same ideal as though a mere ‘pie in the sky’ and will see the same zeal as but an expression of his prideful self-confidence. After all, the ideal he has set for himself, namely fulfilling that ‘forever clause’ in the marriage vow, is no small

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<sup>9</sup> Kierkegaard writes in his journals: “In *Either/Or* the aesthetic moment was a presence, battling with the ethical, and the ethical choice was [a way] out thereof. Therefore, there were only two moments and the judge absolutely triumphant, even though it ended with the sermon and with the comment that only the truth that upbuilds is truth for me (the inwardness—therefrom the point of departure for my upbuilding discourses)” (JP5: 5277).

task for anyone. With this critical eye, we shall now examine whether Judge William's edifice can remain intact in *real life*.

### 2.1. Kantianism of the Ethical

Several key ideas in the mouth of a self-proclaimed non-philosopher (e.g., morality's universality, autonomy, and self-imposed duty) find a close proximity to the ideas belonging to one of history's greatest thinkers: Immanuel Kant. If we momentarily assume the parallel is sufficiently sound, as many readers of Kant and Kierkegaard have steadily recognized,<sup>10</sup> there seems to be at least one good reason to review Kant's moral system for the purpose of evaluating the Judge's: it is easier to evaluate a theory in its purely logical form than narrative form. Due to the *formal*—as opposed to content-wise—presence of Kant in *Either/Or II*, critically examining the Judge's moral philosophy, mirrored by Kant's ethical system with its own weakness, will help sharpen the focus on the former's weakness as well.<sup>11</sup>

Kant's *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* alone supplies the nearly identical list of the essential ingredients of morality with the Judge's: universal law, duty,

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<sup>10</sup> George Schrader argues that the overall view expressed through the Judge constitute “one of the most interesting and important revisions of Kant's ethical theory.” “Kant and Kierkegaard on Duty and Inclination” in *Kierkegaard: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Josiah Thompson (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), 326. Alasdair MacIntyre states, “it is equally Kant's moral philosophy which is the essential background for Kierkegaard's treatment of the ethical.” *After Virtue*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 43. Ronald M. Green has done the most to articulate the conceptual relationship between the two thinkers. He argues that once one overcomes the apparent difference between Kant's almost purely formalist ethics and the Judge's existential—personal self-choice—approach, deep points of contact emerge. *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), Chapters 3 and 4. More recently, Ulrich Knappe attempted a more focused analysis of the two thinkers. *Theory and Practice in Kant and Kierkegaard*, Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series 9 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Readers are bound to express a worry—a legitimate worry—about the potential to unduly ignore their interesting and important differences, which is inherent in such approach. To allay the worry, I emphasize that all I am claiming in the following section is that their similarities are purely at the formal level and their differences, as I shall also show in part, reside in their content.

and autonomy. Kant attempts to ground morality on an unshakeable foundation, namely the ‘categorical imperative,’ against egoistic and sentiment-based ethics. So the notion of duty becomes the essential ground for both morality itself and its proper motivation; in this way, the end and the means of morality are made one and the same. Contrary to all too easily changeable moral sentiments (e.g., sympathy—Hume’s favorite), moral duty can be universally and absolutely established, as it originates from the rational *a priori* understanding of the categorical imperative, expressed in three formulas: the formula of (1) universal law (“*act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a **universal law of nature***”); (2) humanity (“*So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means*”); (3) the kingdom of ends (act in such a way that politically actualizes “a systematic union of various rational beings through common laws”).<sup>12</sup>

After establishing the point that only the good will constitutes an absolute, unqualified good—something strikingly similar to the Judge’s view of intention as discussed earlier—Kant basically subjects the entire content of morality to duty: (1) only duty-based actions (and not inclination-based ones) have moral worth, (2) duty-based actions have their moral worth by virtue of the maxim (and not in accomplishing the intended purpose), and (3) duty is the necessity of an action done from respect for the moral law.<sup>13</sup> However, what is distinctive about Kant’s notion of duty is the idea of *autonomy* intrinsic to it; entirely contrary to the commonsense view, it is a *self*-imposed duty. For Kant, each moral agent just by virtue of his or her rationality *enacts* the law in

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<sup>12</sup> *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. and ed. by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 31, 38, 41.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-3.

both senses, i.e., both the sovereign that decrees and the subject that performs the law, and consequently, freedom is willing an act that is in accordance with the universal law of morality (i.e., the categorical imperative), which we impose on ourselves through correct reasoning.

## 2.2. *Kantian Rigorism*

Kant's moral system has often been deemed cold and inhuman for its apparent total rejection of any ethical motivation that lies outside of the purely formal *a priori* principle, such as personal interests. An example of such a stark view can be seen here:

For, the will stands between its *a priori* principle, which is formal, and its *a posteriori* incentive, which is material, as at a crossroads; and since it must still be determined by something, it must be determined by the formal principle of volition as such when an action is done from duty, where every material principle has been withdrawn from it.<sup>14</sup>

Kant apparently leaves no room for any mediating position that would be palatable to his readers' sensibility, when he deliberately employs such strict dichotomous terms and distinctions as "crossroads," formal vs. material, *a priori* vs. *a posteriori*, absolutely affirming one over against the other, as in the clause "every material principle has been withdrawn from it." Duty-based action has moral worth if and only if the agent chooses the good in any given act with every consideration of consequences self-consciously excluded (other than duty as the end). The only subjective motivation for this rigorous ideal Kant can suggest to his dismayed audience is purely rationally grounded: the *respect* for the moral law that apparently arises in us when we truly grasp the universally and necessarily binding *a priori* principle of morality on our existence.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 13.

No matter how deeply our respect for the moral law runs, we know fully well that it cannot sufficiently and continually motivate the agent to choose the good on its own. Kant himself recognized the apparent disconnect between the rational understanding of the moral law and its corresponding response of the will: “For, how a law can be of itself and immediately a determining ground of the will (though this is what is essential in all morality) is for human reason an insoluble problem and identical with that of how a free will is possible.”<sup>15</sup> More specifically, Kant’s duty-based system may at best motivate the agent indirectly and negatively by “infringing” on the naturally given motives that run contrary to the moral duty, those motivated by self-love.<sup>16</sup> The practical difficulty does not mean, however, that Kant’s basic outline of morality, its objective-universal and autonomous character, is wrong, but only that it does not fully explain how it can sufficiently motivate the agent to fulfill the lofty demands of the moral law.

After this brief encounter with Kantian rigorism in *Groundwork*, readers with any modicum of familiarity with *Either/Or II* may now seriously question the assumed parallel between the two works: whatever inadequacy Kant’s ethic may suffer from, it should not be conflated with that of Judge William’s, since the philosopher’s system after all ends up looking more like the second skepticism the Judge criticizes and supersedes, namely Platonic realism that posits moral ideals as an altogether transcendent reality, thereby implying the inaccessibility of the universal by the particular. Kant’s rigorism,

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<sup>15</sup> *Critique of Practical Reason in Practical Philosophy*, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 198.

<sup>16</sup> While Kant, however obscurely, does speak of the positive effect of the moral law on feeling, i.e., “with respect to the restricting ground of pure practical reason,” it is clear that the negative effect is the dominant role of the law. *Ibid.*, 199.

whose fulfillment seems squarely impossible, entails the same logical consequence of the irreconcilability of the one and the many.<sup>17</sup>

T. K. Seung expresses a similar worry among Kant scholars in terms of the epistemological question, “How can Kant retain Platonic Ideas after renouncing the possibility of knowing the world of noumena?” and skillfully responds this way: “The question of representation affects the theoretical Ideas of perfection but not the practical Ideas, because the latter do not relate to any objects. Hence Kant’s critique of theoretical or cognitive reason does not disqualify the normative function of practical reason.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, Seung’s prescription for removing Kant’s apparent inconsistency is the same as Judge William’s response to his own skeptic: to view morality as a *purely subjective* matter, that is, subjective in the sense of being non-objective. The practical Ideas (i.e., the universal moral law) do not relate to any objects because they are ‘known,’ not by the mind’s objective representation of empirically sensible objects, but through the autonomous exercise of will in accordance with the categorical imperative—William’s equivalent term: the ethical intention. So long as morality is determined by, not some abstract universals external to the moral agent, but the agent’s own autonomous willing of the good, which can transcend any material *a posteriori* principle thrown against it, both the rigorous ideality of ethics and its actualizability are maintained—at least

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<sup>17</sup> Though not widely known, Kant himself claims Platonic realism as the proper ground of morality as such in his first *Critique*: “Even though this [Platonic republic] may never come to pass, the idea of this maximum is nevertheless wholly correct when it is set forth as an archetype, in order to bring the legislative constitution of human beings ever nearer to a possible greatest perfection.” *Critique of Pure Reason*, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, trans. and eds. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 397. It is no wonder then that the same problem entailed by Platonic realism afflicts Kant’s ethical system, which is, I believe, arguably one of the most illuminating reformulations of Platonic ethics.

<sup>18</sup> *Kant’s Platonic Revolution in Moral and Political Philosophy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 60.

theoretically. While the difference between the two moral systems appears to be wide on the surface, perhaps due to their difference in style of presentation, their essential building blocks are unmistakably the same: both affirm the universally and necessarily binding nature of morality; both argue for the absolute equality among persons and their eternal dignity; and both locate the whole substance of morality in freedom and duty. In short, the two are *formally* identical.

#### 2.4. *Autonomy or Theonomy?*

The foregoing explanation can also allay another possible worry about the assumed correspondence between Kant and Judge William's ethical view. George Connell has poignantly argued, seemingly contrary to my view, that the Judge's concept of duty and autonomy cannot be reduced to Kant's in a simplistic way. First, concerning duty, according to Connell, God is the source of duty for the Judge: "Judge William invokes God's presence as the mediating third in the relationship who simultaneously holds the two together (by making love a duty) and holds them apart (by either humbling or encouraging)."<sup>19</sup> With respect to autonomy, Connell also aptly argues that William's notion involves choosing the *given* condition of life (*Gave*) as one's own task (*Opgave*), which seems to differ widely from Kant's notion that involves grasping and acting in accordance with the universal law of the categorical imperative. Accordingly for Judge William, both the marital duty and autonomy are grounded in our relationship to God.

A peculiar difficulty emerges, however, when Connell sets out to articulate precisely how the Judge's "theonomous" view avoids being heteronomous at the same

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<sup>19</sup> "Judge William's Theonomous Ethics" in *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community: Religion, Ethics, and Politics in Kierkegaard*, ed. George Connell and C. Stephen Evans (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1992), 63.

time, for the commentator rightly affirms that autonomy forms an element *sine qua non* in the Judge's ethical sphere just as in Kantian morality. But how can a view that sees God as a 'third' be anything but heteronomous? Again Connell hits the target precisely when he appeals to the *dialectical* nature of the Judge's view: it takes a dialectical relation between God and the self to effect the true sense of autonomy, that is, both God providentially giving me the external material condition (i.e., my beloved) and my act of choosing myself in it (loving her faithfully in the marriage covenant).<sup>20</sup>

It should be clear by now that Connell's thesis does not really undermine my claim all along that Kant's ethic is present in the Judge's *formally*. Kant's pure formalism does not admit being dialectical due to its pure abstract form of morality without the proper consideration of the concrete content; this depiction is at least true in the *Groundwork*. William on the other hand tries to combine the form and the content in his ethic, unifying the abstract law with the concrete content of human existence. The simple fact of having to be so dialectical inevitably requires his moral philosophy to render the appearance of being paradoxical, as shown in the claim that both the willing of God and that of the self together consist of autonomy. While the Judge sees God as providing the material content for the ethical existence, Kant allows no room for God's material role; in his early ethical works in general, God is nothing more than a placeholder for the realm of transcendence and the abstract law, much like Plato's

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<sup>20</sup> Kierkegaard responds to Kant's idea of autonomy critically, though humorously, in his journal: "Kant was of the opinion that man is his own law (autonomy)—that is, he binds himself under the law which he himself gives himself. Actually, in a profounder sense, this is how lawlessness or experimentation is established. This is not being rigorously earnest any more than Sancho Panza's self-administered blows to his own bottom were vigorous" (JP1: 188). Kierkegaard's own dialectical view of the relationship between the self and God avoids Kant's problem, while at once giving autonomy its due, albeit in a qualified way, that is, God giving the law, not in an external way, but internally by "residing" in our moral consciousness.

Forms.<sup>21</sup> Consequently the formal affinity between Kant and William's ethic cannot be denied by their apparent difference.

### 2.5. Kierkegaardian Rigorism

What is more, beneath the veil of their seemingly wide differences, we can detect some trace of rigorism in the Judge's view, though his rigorism is admittedly different from that of Kant's, since—to note again—it is of the content, not the form, of morality. His oft asserted statement that one loves only once in life and thus there is no repetition of first love is a view that not many of us are willing to accept—possibly except for the truly faithful romantics among us. However, the position does not seem to arise from some fanciful romanticism, but rather, is backed up by a serious argument. According to our Judge, first love's unrepeatability is in fact a good and proper thing, wholly consistent with the highest good it is supposed to be: “If it [the first in question] were now even an eternal thing, then all probability of its being repeated vanishes. Therefore, when one, with a certain melancholic seriousness, has talked about the first love, as though it can never be repeated, this is no minimizing of love, but the most profound praise of it as the eternal power” (EO2, 40).<sup>22</sup> As explained above (1.1), if the idea of first in ‘first love’ is to denote eternity in the sense of infinity—while simultaneously avoiding ‘bad infinity,’ where the first is simply a finite beginning point that leads to the next finite point, and so

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<sup>21</sup> For this reason, T. K. Seung is basically right in claiming that at least in the earlier works of Kant, “There is no need for such a perfect moral order to depend on the existence of a personal deity. It may be achieved by some impersonal force, such as the *karma* of Buddhism or the *T'ien* (Heaven) of Confucianism.” *Kant's Platonic Revolution*, 76.

<sup>22</sup> In another reference, the Judge condemns the very idea of second marriage, arguing that consistency requires such harsh denial: “Sure enough, certain people say one loves only one time, but marries two or three times. Here the spheres are united again, for aesthetics says ‘No’ and the Church and Church ethics look suspiciously upon the second marriage. This is of utmost importance to me, for if it were true that one loved several times, then marriage would become a dubious matter” (EO2, 60).

on and on—then it must squarely deny the possibility of the highest good in the second, the third, etc. To relate to the textual context, it means that for the Judge to concede to first love’s repeatability would imply a subtle compromise with the aesthetic view of life which is, as shown in the last chapter, reduced to a series of one finite moment of aesthetic pleasure after another without an end. Precisely because love is of the eternal substance, it is *all or nothing*.

However, another sense would have us conclude that Judge William’s idealism is, well, just too idealistic, simply out of touch with reality. Even if I have tried my best to fulfill the marital duty, faithfully resisting my aesthetic inclinations, I cannot guarantee the same on behalf of my wife, who has her own freedom, nor can I prevent any other uncontrollable catastrophes that may severely cripple or even prematurely terminate the marriage (e.g., the death of a spouse due to illness or war). How am I to accept the idea that my moral perfection depends on my self-conscious autonomous willing of duty, and at once, the contradictory fact that my wife’s unfaithfulness or the many vagaries of this life can just as easily abolish any prospect of the complete unity of my being? Otherwise a keen observer of human life, the Judge is remarkably silent about the certain—yet uncertain—reality of such misfortunes in life that screams out against his perfect idealistic system. Is this simply a careless oversight by the real author or could this be a subtle form of self-deception and denial intentionally placed in the character?

If we recall the earlier criticism of Kant, another striking parallel between Kant and William seems to emerge: just as Kant’s formally consistent worldview in *Groundwork* flounders in the presence of our fragmented moral will, so does William’s idealism, shown in his unrepeatability claim, find itself incommensurate with the same

broken ethical universe. For this reason, William's moral system manifests basically the same moral perfectionism and rigorism as Kant's. However, the difference the Judge's ethic bears from Kant's, that is, its having to be dialectical in unifying the form and the content of the moral life, makes the former susceptible to the 'volatility of the particular' in the way that the latter, a purely abstract formalistic ethic, is not.

## 2.6. *Existential Implications of Kierkegaardian Rigorism*

It would be a mistake to conclude that the ethicist's 'unreasonable' rigorism and perfectionism somehow renders his view false at the wholesale level. Rather, the ethical sphere constitutes a pivotal point in the whole of life's spheres, which pushes the earnestly striving ethicist in one of two directions: either, to anticipate *Fear and Trembling*, the ethicist acquires a deeper religious consciousness, becoming a "knight of infinite resignation" who gives up any hope of fulfillment of his first love in this life, looking to the eternal realm; or, despairing from the seemingly incompletable moral task, becomes a nihilist and returns to the aesthetic.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the distinction characterizes two forms of 'repentance,' the ethical-religious and the aesthetic, to which Kierkegaard makes reference in his earlier days of writing. In the context of critiquing an aesthetic form of irony, he writes: "He [the ironist] repents himself, but he repents aesthetically, not morally. He is, in the aesthetic moment of repentance, outside and beyond his repentance, testing whether it is poetically right, whether it could pass as a line in a poetic person's mouth" (CI, 284).

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<sup>23</sup> Kierkegaard has witnessed an imposition of this disjunction in his own life in the wake of his breaking of the engagement with Regine Olsen. Walter Lowrie quotes Kierkegaard's journal entry making note of the disjunction: "When the tie was broken my feeling was this: Either you throw yourself into wild dissipations, or into religiousness absolute, of a different sort from that of the parsons." *A Short Life of Kierkegaard* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 142.

While the term ‘repentance’ is commonly used in the religious sense, Kierkegaard here analyzes it in a philosophically neutral sense. Repentance in its basic definition consists of two qualities describable in terms of cause and effect: (1) recognition of the incommensurate disparity between the infinite and the finite in the actuality (the cause), and (2) resigning the finite for the sake of the infinite (the effect). In repentance characteristic of the aesthetic sphere, which embodies the Romantic ideal of aesthetic flight or experimentation, one realizes that this finite world does not measure up to the perfect world imaginable in infinite possibilities, and consequently, turns one’s actual life into a kind of poetic creation. By contrast, in the ethical case, one realizes through the ethical emotion of guilt the shortcomings of one’s own moral striving against the entrenched circumstances of the finite world (i.e., *Fortuna*), unable to fulfill the demands of the infinite-eternal moral law, and consequently resigns from trying to find perfection in the finite world, hoping for it in another world.<sup>24</sup>

While the modes of repentance are vastly different between the two spheres, they contain essentially the same structure, thereby affirming the same *logical* outcome: an irreconcilable form of dualism between the finite and the infinite. Their dualism in a way makes them strange bed fellows, for they both have ultimately realized that first love is unrepeatable; that is precisely why the aesthete, having realized it (R, 170), simply goes on abstracting into the fantasy world. In neither form of repentance is the infinite ideality

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<sup>24</sup> Judge William also identifies various types of repentance himself, though using seemingly different categories. Critiquing mysticism, he writes: “The mystic also repents, but he repents himself out of himself, not into himself; he repents metaphysically, not ethically. To repent aesthetically is detestable because it is sissiness; to repent metaphysically is a misplaced superfluity because the individual indeed has not created the world and thus does not need to become so upset, if the world actually should turn out to be vanity. The mystic chooses himself abstractly, and therefore, he must also repent himself abstractly. . . . The mystic namely teaches that this [actuality] is vanity, sin; but every such judgment is a metaphysical judgment, and does not determine my relation ethically to it” (EO2, 248). His notion of metaphysical repentance seems identical with the ethical-religious kind, the repentance characteristic of Religiousness A, which is to be discussed at some length in the next chapter (iv.2.4).

of human existence denied, for each finds its own mode of ‘repentant’ existence that best copes with the seemingly unbridgeable chasm between the one and the many. Even though, as far as we know, Judge William never becomes a knight of infinite resignation, readers can sense his vague recognition of the ethical sphere’s limitation in the much more sober and less self-confident tone of voice in “Ultimatum,” the last piece of writing in *Either/Or II*, which includes a sermon titled “The Upbuilding that lies in the Thought that in relation to God we are always in the Wrong.” He writes: “If I were to write to you now, I would perhaps express myself differently... Concerning the thought, however, it is and remains [the same]” (EO2, 337).

The foregoing critical look at the inner logic—Kantianism—of the ethical sphere therefore shows that the *what* and the *how* of the ethical sphere’s solution to the problem of existential unity, that is, marriage and the self-conscious willing of moral duty, cannot be the whole truth concerning the existential dimension of the one/many problem. The limitation of the ethical sphere thus causes us to anticipate Kierkegaard’s later writings that supply the missing pieces to complete the picture of our presently fragmented moral existence.

### 2.7. *The Judge’s Hidden Despair*

Even though Kierkegaard never has Judge William explicitly admit to these failings of his existential view, we get a rare glimpse of his actual married life from a third person perspective that suggests all is not well with the ethical self—at least not as well as he so confidently claims in *Either/Or*. Toward the very end of the first part of *Stages on Life’s Way*, we encounter a brief interaction between Judge William and his wife just before he gives yet another treatise on marriage. She intends to initiate a serious

dialogue with him by saying, “It is certain and true that had you not married, you would have become much greater in the world” (SLW, 84). To this simple innocent comment, he replies in an unnecessarily demeaning and highly evasive manner: “Do you really believe that, my girl? ... I will forgive you for your earlier folly since you yourself have forgotten it so quickly, for your talk is like that of foolish women—just what sort of great person was I supposed to be in the world?” (84). He further avoids responding to her in a straightforward manner by making a sarcastic joke about how the Danish law permits a husband to beat his wife. When William’s wife implores him to take her seriously, he firmly declares his intention not to engage in a sincere dialogue about it: “No, you are not going to get me to be serious, and a serious answer you will not get; I must either laugh at you or make you forget it, as before, or beat you, or you must stop talking about it, or in some other way I must make you be quiet. You see, it’s a joke” (85). The conversation abruptly ends with the Judge taking his wife to the woods for a walk.

If readers are not thoroughly befuddled by this peculiar scene in *Stages*, they would first note that the Judge’s inability to give a straightforward yes or no reveals his intention to hide his overall sense of happiness. Contrary to his own argument against secretiveness (EO2, 104) and praise of the ethical self’s capacity for transparency to the other (116), the incident reveals William’s failure to exemplify these principles in real life. According to his own lifeview that sees marriage as the highest category of happiness, the correct answer should have been a resounding ‘No!’ Yet why such a strange and evasive response? Contrast it with the more conviction-filled assertion in *Either/Or*: “I do not fancy myself into having had a great task in life; I have not rejected what was assigned to me, and even if it was lowly, it has also been my task to be happy in

it—although it was lowly” (87). Why could he not repeat the same phrase back to his wife? Something in his outlook surely has changed.

The difference between the Judge’s attitude in *Either/Or* and in *Stages* is a telling commentary on the viability of the ethical program in real life, for Kierkegaard implicitly shows that the ethical self cannot ultimately avoid despair and thus it is not a fully unified self. While Judge William presents a cogent theory of the dialectical nature of ethical existence, his actual life somehow does not exemplify such perfect unity. He no longer seems to believe that a happy marriage leads to the perfection of his selfhood, or maybe, his marriage is just not a fully happy one, thereby revealing the presumptuousness of the second objective of his letters, to show that his marriage is an example of the perfect union of the aesthetic and the ethical. What gets lost eventually in the ethical, according to one of Kierkegaard’s aesthetes, is *particularity*, namely one’s sense of individual identity; when marriage loses its substance, the very passion that motioned it into existence, it inevitably heads toward a kind of oblivion in the universal: “instead of living for each other they begin living for the human race” (SLW, 43).<sup>25</sup> For reasons that are not so clear within *Either/Or* alone, the dialectical unity of the one and the many remains beyond the grasp of not only the aesthete but also the ethicist.

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<sup>25</sup> Sadly we see this happen all too often in real life marriages. When passion grows cold in a marriage, the couple occupy themselves with some politics or other, or put their unfulfilled hopes and dreams in their children’s success. Kierkegaard describes such phenomenon as “despairing reductionism, narrowness.” (Judge William of *Stages* is not the direct object of criticism, since he still seems to maintain himself in the ethical sphere in a consistent manner, though not perfectly as we have observed.) Anti-Climacus echoes the aesthete’s sentiment (while at once acknowledging the aesthete’s own despair): “But while one type of despair steers wildly in the infinite and loses itself, another type of despair likewise lets itself be tricked out of its self by ‘the others.’ In seeing the crowd of people around himself, by getting busy with all the blend of secular matters, in becoming clever about how it goes on in the world, such a person forgets himself, his divinely called name, does not dare to believe in himself, finds it too risky to be himself, far easier and safer to be like the others, to become a copy, to become a number, along with the crowd” (SUD, 33-4).

### 3. *The Choice of Either/Or as a Perennial Moral Problem*

In *Either/Or*, readers are presented with two major opposing movements in ethics in the nineteenth century philosophical milieu, masterfully portrayed with vivid images of life experiences and concrete personalities: on the one hand, the rationalistic and systematic approach stemming from Kant down to Hegel, and on the other, the fragmented approach of Romanticism. As the inadequacies of both parts of *Either/Or* suggest, the two sides of the debate retain, respectively, different pieces of truth about our moral existence without having the higher and complete truth. And thus the debate rages on. In *Fear and Trembling* and other religious works, Kierkegaard intends to offer the whole truth about morality based on Christian revelation, which claims to abolish the enmity between the two spheres of life and reconcile them.

Before exploring this religious alternative, we shall briefly review some current in today's moral philosophy in the Anglo-American analytic tradition, for it in fact precisely reflects the fundamental problem of morality presented in *Either/Or*, namely the seeming deadlock between the two moral outlooks without a third reconciliatory option in sight. The discussion will serve to strengthen our understanding of just how perennial and intractable the problem remains, how hopeless our moral debates are without recognizing that third position, and finally, how pressing it is for us to carefully consider Kierkegaard's insight into the truth of the matter.

#### 3.1. *Recent Developments in Ethics.*

The recent trend in the English speaking community of moral philosophers reveals the very heart of *Either/Or*. A growing number of philosophers have begun to voice their dislike of modernity's purely systematic approach to ethics, mainly against

Kantian and utilitarian forms. Thomas Nagel observes that because we are complex creatures capable of multiple perspectives (i.e., being able to think individualistically, relationally, impersonally, ideally, etc.), there is what he calls a “fragmentation of value.”<sup>26</sup> There is not one single source of moral value that seems to be capable of dictating one’s moral action, since various facets of ethical existence such as moral obligations, rights, utility, perfectionist ends, private commitments, etc. often come in conflict with one another. This diverse ethical reality therefore creates incommensurate dichotomies in our moral thinking: personal vs. impersonal; agent-centered vs. outcome-centered; subjective vs. objective, etc.<sup>27</sup> If either of the poles in each of the dichotomies is pushed too hard, the result is either “romantic defeatism” (like the aesthetic sphere) or “exclusionary overrationalization” (the ethical).<sup>28</sup> Nagel ultimately finds purely formalistic approaches to ethics to be limited and thus dissatisfying because they exclude the more personal and subjective side of our moral life. His recommendation to his readers is some kind of a mixed strategy combining systematic results where they are applicable with less systematic judgment to fill in the gaps which moral systems inevitably leave out.

While there is insight in Nagel’s assessment of the complex nature of morality, one might argue that his suggestion seems too vague to help his readers make right choices. Given our infinitely varied circumstances of life, Nagel’s suggestion can do little to solve the moral dilemma without clearly articulating which system should be

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<sup>26</sup> “The Fragmentation of Value” in *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 134.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

applied under which circumstances and why, and which circumstances call for non-systematic moral judgments and why. At worst, his offered strategy is perfectly compatible with all sorts of contradictory moral actions, outlooks, and lifestyles.

Another contemporary analytic philosopher provides more or less the same type of vague recommendation. In her much discussed article “Moral Saints,” Susan Wolf calls into question the moral ideal set by both the Kantian and utilitarian ethical system, whose fundamental understanding of what is moral entails (virtually) exclusive other-centeredness.<sup>29</sup> The deepest problem she sees in these moral theories is that their ideal, the moral end, is unreasonable for most of us and their moral exemplar, the “moral saint,” highly unattractive; her essay constitutes one of the many voices against Kantian rigorism.<sup>30</sup> Rather than claiming these theories to be false and arguing for a different theory, Wolf insists on supplementing our ethical discourse with an additional perspective called “the point of view of individual perfection,” which considers the question of what kind of interests it would be good for a person to have, the question that solely concerns the good of the individual.<sup>31</sup> But by simply wishing to *supplement* an extra viewpoint, Wolf all too casually glosses over the real point of conflict, namely the contradiction between willing the other’s good vs. one’s own good. All that Wolf has to offer by way of solution is “a healthy form of intuitionism.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Journal of Philosophy* 79, no. 8: 419-39.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 433. Moral rigorousness does not solely belong to the domain of Kantianism. Utilitarianism has its high demands as well, though in different ways. See Peter Singer’s famous essay, “Famine, Affluence and Morality,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1 (Spring 1972): 229-243, and for a more recent and philosophically rigorous account, see Peter Unger’s *Living High, Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>31</sup> “Moral Saints,” 437.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 439.

However, if “a healthy form of intuitionism” is the best Wolf can recommend to us, our moral life is in grave trouble indeed, for the problem is precisely that there are vastly different intuitions about morals. Without knowing what constitutes a ‘healthy’ form of intuition and how one can acquire it, we are, practically speaking, on a slippery slope to an emotivist form of intuitionism that denies the objectivity and universality of morality altogether; the situation would be quickly reduced to Nagel’s “romantic defeatism.”

### *3.2. The Gauguin Problem*

None of the so called anti-theoretical philosophers then offers us any substantive practical wisdom concerning what one must do when a serious conflict arises between one’s duty and interest. Let us now briefly consider a striking illustration of such a conflict which has generated much discussion lately. In particular, Michael Slote’s extended discussion of Bernard Williams’ famous thought experiment about the French artist Paul Gauguin is especially instructive for us, because it provides a clearer case for the subjective perspective of ‘personal interest.’ The financially struggling painter has to choose between sacrificing his potentially great artistic career in order to support his family or abandoning his family altogether for a free and unfettered pursuit of his passion for art. On the one hand, he has a moral obligation to his family for sure, but on the other hand, such an enormous talent should not go to waste; after all, the world would have been a much more impoverished place without being able to enjoy his genius works, which, based on the assumption of the story, he could not have produced without deserting his family. Apparently he chose the latter and became remorseful about it, but without repenting, he took his artistic passion to its fruition. Slote wants to explain our

commonsense intuition that ambiguously finds Gauguin's single-minded passion admirable but his choice to abandon the family shameful. Our admiration is explained by the fact that the choice of Slote's Gauguin is "directed towards great goods beyond the confines of [his] narrowly conceived self-interest," thereby justifying the exceptional cases to the normally overriding nature of moral duty.<sup>33</sup> Slote further thinks that our admiration is not based on a consequentialist ground, that he happened to succeed in producing great art (and was not killed on his way to the South Seas), but rather, a virtue, his artistic single-mindedness. Thus, there is such a thing as "admirable immorality."<sup>34</sup>

However, we would not, Slote argues, feel the same way about someone whose object of passion is a "*less valuable* impersonal end, e.g., the founding of an art collection rather than the creation of art," such that "an art collector who abandons his family to pursue *that* passion seems monstrous or risible."<sup>35</sup> While I do not see the qualitatively salient difference in the worth of these two objects of passion, let us grant that creating art is objectively better than simply collecting art, sufficiently better to justify abandoning one's own family. While Slote has articulated more clearly than Nagel or Wolf the criterion by which to judge the praise/blameworthiness of someone's act intending to be an exception to one's general moral duty, his analysis does not satisfactorily ease the tension between the subjective vs. objective moral perspective, because he is confused

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<sup>33</sup> *Goods and Virtues* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 103.

<sup>34</sup> Slote interestingly brings up Kierkegaard's discussion of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac in *Fear and Trembling*, for indeed, the event would appear to be a paradigmatic case of "admirable immorality." Slote, however, cannot avail himself to its conceptual resources because for him "it may be impossible to consider Abraham's case with the sympathy and appreciation that actuated *Fear and Trembling* without presupposing a more extensive religious framework than most readers are likely to accept." *Ibid.*, 94. Unfortunately, this unwillingness to consider Kierkegaard's religious explanation seriously leaves him without a genuine solution, resulting in a conceptual confusion, as I shall demonstrate below.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

about the very nature of these two contradictory perspectives. What justifies our admiration for Gauguin's choice, according to Slote, is the aim, the object of his choice. Slote simply takes it for granted that the artist, in choosing to pursue his passion, aimed at a great "impersonal end," the creation of art (that would presumably benefit the whole of humanity), and what is more, this aim goes beyond his "narrowly conceived self-interest." This is a striking assumption. For why assume that Gauguin's aim was an *impersonal* end? Isn't our moral indignation toward him precisely due to his aim being a selfish one? How can we be the proper judge of what his aim, his *intention*, really was? Who is then the proper judge of such an inward reality?

The essential problem is that Slote mistakenly conceives intention as an objective category. While intention has a definite object, the salient point in morally assessing one's intention is not its object *per se*, but its personal, subjective dimension concerning the *how*-question, e.g., in what manner does Gauguin will his choice, for the sake of his own good to the exclusion of others' good or vice versa? The goodness of great works of art can surely be considered an impersonal aim, an 'objective' good, but it does not follow from this that the *real* motive of someone apparently aiming at such a good, the very object of our moral assessment, is thereby free of "narrowly conceived self-interest." It is perfectly consistent that while we may think, and even Gauguin himself may have thought, that the intended aim of his choice was such an objective good—"for the sake of Beauty itself!"—he was really motivated by personal glory, his selfish desire for fame, for example. Self-deception, which is rooted in the 'divided heart,' i.e., conflicting loves, is an all too common part of our moral life; indeed, his remorseful response after the choice intimates that his motive wasn't such a pure impersonal type. For someone with

an absolute, unconditional passion for art, as Slote imagines Gauguin to be, would have never freely ventured into a family life in the first place. After all, Gauguin looks much like Judge William in *Stages*, being confronted with his hidden despair over the uneasy tension between his desire for personal greatness and familial duty, though unlike him in that the latter continues to subject himself to his duty. Within the range of his own moral vision, Gauguin cannot see anything higher than the glaring mutual exclusivity between these two loves, and unfortunately, chooses self-love over against love of others. That is precisely why we feel the moral indignation toward him—and quite rightly so.

### 3.3. *Doing Ethics All Over Again*

Now where does this critical discussion of the recent dissenters of modern moral theories leave us? For our overall purpose, the discussion is instructive for two reasons. First, the current trend in moral philosophy appears to be an exact mirror image of what goes on in *Either/Or* as described in the previous and present chapter: the perfectionism and rigorism of Judge William's ethic, like that of Kant's system, flounders in the presence of what looks to be an irretrievably broken moral universe, while yet anything less than a strict fulfillment of the moral duty prescribed by such a system seems inevitably to end up on a slippery slope toward a moral abyss, one that is inhabited by aesthetes and nihilists. This picture seems to be all we are left with *if* there is no third way. My overall argument of the dissertation, to be shown explicitly in the next chapter, is that Kierkegaard's conception of Christianity as a comprehensive moral vision precisely constitutes that third reconciliatory way. Without seriously considering this third option, our usual moral debates will remain hopelessly intractable.

Consequently the second payoff of this brief excursion is that the failure of these anti-theoretical philosophers' analyses of morality nicely serves an anticipatory role, causing us to look forward to Kierkegaard's religious works. Their more or less univocal recommendation for us to acquire "a healthy form of intuition" is correct in one sense, for no abstract formal theory can justly explain our infinitely complex moral life. But these philosophers have no substantive and clear argument for how one goes about obtaining such moral intuition because, I believe, they fail to understand the true cause and nature of our *unhealthy* moral intuition: sin. And only faith, described by Kierkegaard as an absolute devotion and single-minded passion for God, can cancel sin and reverse its obscuring effect on our moral consciousness. As shown in my analysis of Slote's Gauguin, informed by the above reading of *Either/Or II*, the real essence of the perennial conflict in ethics lies with *intention*, or more specifically, our divided will—that we cannot will the good purely for its own sake—because we are totally and helplessly imprisoned by our own sin and its self-enslaving effect, riveting our ethical will to selfish desires. Therefore, the conflict is in truth between faith and sin, securely knowing one's own eternal significance in a wholly dependent relationship to God vs. trying to achieve the same eternal validity on one's own apart from God, ultimately leading to one's own nothingness, despair. These are the only two alternatives when it comes to intention, the very fount of human existence.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### Recollection, Repetition, and the Quest for Truth

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son. Trusting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, he *received him back* as a type.”

Hebrews 11:17, 19

“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a *new creature*; the old things passed away; behold, *new things* have come”

2 Corinthians 5:17

“The Lord’s mercies indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are *new every morning*. Great is Your faithfulness.”

Lamentations 3:22-23

Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous works following the publication of *Either/Or* begin to unlock the mystery of moral existence, our persistent inability to grasp the foremost object of our desire, the “eternal happiness,” or what I have argued is the same, unity of existence. His most widely read book, *Fear and Trembling*, revolves around the famous biblical narrative of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac, the historical event that is hailed by many (Jews, Christians, and Muslims) as a paradigmatic act of faith and is also seen by many others as absolutely scandalous. Yet through an ingenious reconstruction of the problematic story, Kierkegaard intends to reveal the “wisdom of God,” the very wisdom that can unravel those vexing questions we were left with at the end of *Either/Or*.

Undertaking a fairly comprehensive account of the religious sphere will require deploying the strategy described in the Introduction, namely the simultaneous look at

Plato's philosophical ideas that form counterparts to Kierkegaard's Christian concepts. The theory of recollection and the concept of repetition make up the first conceptual pair in question, for they both answer the question about the nature of truth. The first section introduces the concept of repetition and then surveys Plato's theory in three of his dialogues, from which I shall respectively extract three crucial ideas that will collectively illuminate Kierkegaard's own claim about truth, the claim that continues to be a major obstacle to many of his readers: "truth is subjectivity." The second section examines Kierkegaard's rather unique religious appropriation of Plato's idea in *Fear and Trembling*, leading to the conclusion that his subjectivity thesis in fact corresponds to what he calls "Socratic recollection." The final section will analyze 'repetition' in *Fear and Trembling*, how faith in the God of Abraham—the truth that is even higher than recollection—is supposed to bring about the renewal of our lost condition to fulfill the moral law and attain the unity of existence.

### *1. Repetition and Plato's Theory of Recollection*

Repetition, as mentioned above, concerns the question about the nature of truth, which is to say from another angle that it is about the vexing question of time and eternity: how can the eternal truth be repeated (or instantiated) in the temporal? The two previous chapters have formulated the question in an existentially forcible way: how can I repeat in finite moments of time (i.e., again and again) such a profound encounter with the infinite as love? The reader might recall that *Either/Or* presents two radically different attempts at solving this problem. The aesthete's erotic affair inevitably gets more and more dull, as he constantly moves from one lover to the next. To rid himself of "the root of all evil," i.e., boredom, A concentrates on the *accidental* features rather than

the essence of the highest aesthetic experience of love; this method is laid out in his essay “The Crop Rotation” and applied with a ‘devilish’ precision in “The Seducer’s Diary.” On the contrary, Judge William resolves to fight the inevitably constant dulling effect of time through faithfully realizing his marital vow. We have seen, however, that both attempts fail to achieve repetition, unable to reconcile the eternal and the temporal, for the aesthete can realize particularity only at the expense of universality, and the ethicist, while consciously trying to synthesize himself into a concrete universal (the “universal individual”), ends up with an empty universality, the universal devoid of the particular. They both wind up in despair, although one experiences it much more obviously than the other.

### *1.1. Repetition in Repetition*

Kierkegaard’s work titled after the concept’s name begins its account with a seemingly inconsequential anecdotal reference to the ancient controversy over the possibility of motion, which gets mentioned again later in the text:

When the Eleatics denied motion, Diogenes, as everyone knows, came forward as an opponent; he really came forward, because he did not say a word but just walked back and forth a few times, which he thought to be a sufficient refutation of them. ... [T]his category [of repetition] precisely explains the relation between the Eleatics and Heraclitus, and that repetition essentially is what has been mistakenly called mediation. (R, 131, 148)

The reference to the dispute between the Eleatics and Heraclitus provides decisive evidence—although further elucidation is clearly needed—that repetition has essentially to do with the uneasy relation between the one and the many, for it is Parmenides and Zeno who denied any change, thereby affirming the pure oneness of being, whereas Heraclitus who, while showing some faint intimation of unity in the notion of *Logos*,

ultimately denied stasis (according to Plato), thereby embracing the world of flux. What is more, Constantin's later remark comparing repetition to Hegel's mediation, which is purported to be a logical synthesis of the two extreme responses to the one/many problem, reveals the function of repetition as a dialectical unity of the one and the many.

After the reference to the pre-socratics, Constantin makes another allusion to the Greeks in describing repetition:

Repetition is a decisive expression for what "recollection" was to the Greeks. Just as they taught that all knowing is a recollecting, the new philosophy will teach that the whole life is a repetition. ... Repetition and recollection are the same movement, just in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward. (R, 131)

Unfortunately, his remark bears an extraordinary degree of obscurity and density again.

Let us first make some general observations about the assertion here. While Constantin notes the apparent distinctness of the two categories, one as an epistemological theory and the other an existential concept, the fact that they are "the same movement" and one can be defined by the other (and vice versa) implies that they share some deep similarities with each other. In what follows, I will try to unpack the meaning of this passage by explaining the twofold similarity between the two concepts: *functional* and *structural*.

On the one hand, they both aim at the same end, the acquisition of truth (and what is the same, the good), and on the other hand, they both structurally constitute the third position that purports to synthesize the one and the many, thereby cancelling the mutual exclusivity between pure monism and radical pluralism.

Kierkegaard's journal entry defines repetition in just that way: "The first expression for the relationship between immediacy and mediacy is *REpetition (sic)*. In immediacy there is no repetition; one might think it lies in the difference in things. Not at

all: if everything in the world were absolutely identical, there still would be no repetition” (JP3: 3792). In other words, the very notion of repetition equally includes the idea of sameness and of difference while simultaneously avoiding both absolute identity and absolute difference. Consider a simple example. The Chicago Bulls repeated their championship title for three consecutive seasons from 1990 to 1993. There could not be such repetition without some sense of identity (i.e., the Bulls as the self-same unit throughout the time period), nor without some sense of difference (the three different NBA seasons). If the circumstances as a whole were either exactly the same or absolutely different, we could not say meaningfully that the Bulls repeated their title three times. The very linguistic use therefore intimates that repetition constitutes the *dialectical synthesis* of the one and the many: it is paradoxically both one and many. What this chapter promises to show is this dialectical unitive character of repetition for our existence, how it reconciles the aesthetic sphere’s sole desire for *the different* (i.e., newness) with the ethical sphere that provides personal *identity* (constancy), while simultaneously avoiding both the radical plurality of the first and the static sameness to which the latter comes eventually.

### *1.2. Recollection in the Meno*

Now, according to Kierkegaard, recollection forms the alternative to repetition, having the same logical structure and existential function. We shall begin our analysis of the Platonic idea by looking at the dialogue *Meno* first. Like Constantin, one thinks of Plato’s theory of recollection mainly as an epistemological explanation of how we come to know the truth about something. In the *Meno*, Socrates presents it as a response to the so called ‘learner’s paradox’ (80d-e). While some readers consider the paradox as a mere

piece of sophistry, Kierkegaard took it as a genuine problem and recollection as a serious response to it. His pseudonym, Johannes Climacus, sums up the dilemma with superb clarity:

How far can the truth be learned? With this question, we shall begin. It was a Socratic question, or it became [so] by the Socratic question, How far can virtue be learned?, for virtue is characterized in turn as insight (cf. *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Meno*, *Euthydemus*). Insofar as the truth is to be learned, it must of course be assumed not to be [in the learner], such that because it is to be learned, it is sought. Here we encounter the difficulty, which Socrates calls attention to in the *Meno* as a “pugnacious proposition,” that it is impossible for a person to seek what he knows, and just as impossible to seek what he does not know, for what he knows he cannot seek, since he knows it, and what he does not know he cannot seek, for he does not even know what he is supposed to seek. (PF, 9)

The theory puts the paradox at ease because, by presenting an epistemic condition that ambiguously lies somewhere between absolute knowledge and absolute ignorance, it can affirm both horns of the dilemma without a contradiction. If recollection is true, each one of us, in seeking the truth, is already knowledgeable to some extent because we once had it completely in the past (81c), but ignorant to some extent simultaneously because we have ‘forgotten’ it. Learning is thus a possibility for us, though not in the way commonly conceived, namely by adding one knowledge at a time that was completely absent in the mind previously. Rather, when we learn something true, we merely *recollect* (‘collect again’) the truth that is already present in the mind, or putting it differently, make what is already in the mind more ‘clear and distinct.’<sup>1</sup>

Plato, however, does not think that the full content of our mind that was somehow present and got lost consists of many particular pieces of truth, but rather, of *only one*:

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<sup>1</sup> The language is, of course, reminiscent of Descartes. Charles Kahn presents two modern appropriations of Plato’s recollection that embody the basic idea here: Descartes’ and Leibniz’s theory of innate ideas and Kant’s idea of the synthetic *a priori*. “Plato on Recollection,” *A Companion to Plato*, ed. Hugh H. Benson (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 119.

As the whole of nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything, nothing prevents a man, after recalling *one thing only*—a process men call learning—discovering everything else for himself, if he is brave and does not tire of the search, for searching and learning are, as a whole, recollection. (81d)<sup>2</sup>

The identity of that one thing, the recollection of which makes all other learning possible, will be more apparent in the next Platonic dialogue we examine. For the sake of our later discussion, we must first be acquainted with an important Platonic idea shown here that intrinsically relates to that one thing: the *kinship of nature*. It is the idea that *the truth is a whole*: despite its numerous parts, reality is essentially one. This idea in part explains why truth is coextensive with the good; epistemology-metaphysics and ethics thus are not two distinct categories for Plato.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the Socratic definition of virtue as knowledge, as Climacus notes above, is one of the most characteristic Platonic theses that flows from Plato's commitment to the holism of truth.<sup>4</sup>

Though it may appear somewhat strange from the commonsense notion of truth, the holism about truth allows us to make better sense of Meno's paradox and Plato's sincerity in offering recollection as a solution, for it is precisely because truth is knowing the whole that the stark claim of the paradox, that either absolute knowledge or absolute ignorance is the only possible outcome, can be posed meaningfully as a philosophical

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<sup>2</sup> All English translations of Plato's dialogues in this chapter will come from *Plato's Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Dominic Scott argues that for Plato, the various spheres of human knowledge, e.g., ethics, religion, epistemology, etc., are not separable from one another. This is why the reader finds in the *Meno*, the dialogue about the nature of virtue, all of those categories discussed side-by-side naturally. For example, Socrates appeals to religious authority and its mythological story for the origin of the theory of recollection (81b3-c4). *Plato's Meno* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 93-4.

<sup>4</sup> Terence Irwin skillfully analyzes Socrates' commitment to this idea about truth in two ways: "Socrates formulates the Unity Thesis (the claim that all the names of the virtues are really names of one and the same thing, so that the virtues are identical) and distinguishes it from the claim that the virtues are similar and from the Reciprocity Thesis (the claim that they imply each other, and are therefore inseparable) (329b5-330b6, 349a8-c5)." *Plato's Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 79-80.

challenge. A noteworthy recent commentator of the dialogue draws a connection between truth's holism and the mind, namely the mind's divine and thus infinite nature; for Plato, the full realization of our *telos* has something to do with the soul's *comprehension* of the whole:

The mythical account of "learning" seems to imply a meaning of "soul" which differs from the commonly accepted one: "soul" appears to be linked to all-comprehensive knowledge as well as to the aspect of the world as a "whole." It is presumably this *all*-comprehending character of the "soul" and its relation to the whole in its wholeness that make it possible to assign the content of the myth to the highest or the divine levels. For "things divine" are the "highest" because they are all-comprehensive.<sup>5</sup>

Readers familiar with Kierkegaard's works may already sense a looming connection between this Platonic idea and the nineteenth century intellectual milieu, i.e., German idealism, in opposition of which Kierkegaard basically staked his whole thought; both traditions seem to equate the truth with some scientific (i.e., comprehensive) system of knowledge —*sub specie aeternitas*.<sup>6</sup> But how does Plato envision the mind to comprehend the whole? Obviously, we cannot comprehend by adding one piece of information at a time.

### 1.3. *Recollection in the Phaedo*

The *Phaedo* reveals the intrinsic relation between the recollection thesis and the theory of Forms more palpably than the *Meno*, as Socrates ardently commits himself to

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<sup>5</sup> Jacob Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 96.

<sup>6</sup> As will be shown explicitly later on, the holism of truth serves as a necessary foundation for any idealist philosophy that can trace its DNA to Platonic idealism. Hegel is of course in the background here. Commentating on the holism of Hegel's idealism, Merold Westphal summarizes Hegel's own analogy concerning his system: "Just as the truth about the plant is neither the bud, nor the blossom, nor even the fruit by itself, but rather the whole process in which each plays its necessary part, thereby retaining its radical difference from the others, so the whole truth about knowledge may turn out to be quite complex." *History and Truth in Hegel's Phenomenology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 59.

the ontologically separate existence of the Forms. The separate existence is entailed by the simple fact that what is recollected, the ‘universals,’ and what occasions the remembering, the ‘concrete particulars,’ are not strictly identical, but they are, like Kierkegaard’s repetition, at once same and different in relation to each other; this initially shows that the two concepts have the same logical structure as a dialectical synthesis. Socrates states: “When a man sees or hears or in some other way perceives one thing and not only knows that thing but also thinks of another thing of which the knowledge is not the same but different, are we not right to say that he recollects the second thing?” (73c)

The object of recollection is the Forms, but there are countless Forms, presumably as many as there are predicates in our language. How does the soul recollect all of these Forms? Terence Irwin deftly analyzes Plato’s Forms into three categories: “A-predicates” (i.e., the Forms of finite objects like bee or bed and their simple properties), “B-predicates” (relative Forms like largeness, strength, health, etc.), and “C-predicates” (the ‘super’ transcendent Forms like the good, the beautiful, justice, etc.).<sup>7</sup> Irwin argues that while it may appear that the senses can sufficiently provide the mind with suitably accurate information about A-predicate objects, grasping B-predicates requires the more discernible activity of reason, since the senses alone can only tell us contradictory things (e.g., an object is both big and small). It is reason that explains the difference (the object is big when seen at a close-up range, but small at a distance), because its essential function is the *quantitative comparison* of one object or property with another based on some common criterion. What is then the criterion? It is the Form of *Equality*, the essential engine that drives the argument for the theory of recollection (74a-75c). And this Form signifies the “one thing” Socrates refers to in the *Meno*, the Form whose

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<sup>7</sup> *Plato’s Moral Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 145-6.

recollection is necessary for that of all other Forms. The Equal, along with its synonyms like 'identical' or 'same,' can provide the basic criterion for the relative Forms because, without first grasping unity or something being one, the very idea of the relative makes no sense; to know that something is big in one sense but small in another presupposes that the thing must be the same object that endures through the many differences.

Plato's explanation of the Equal highlights the essential nature of the soul as a *unit*, that it is simple and self-same.<sup>8</sup> Out of its own unitive nature, the soul perceives unity in extra-mental objects. Notice how B-predicates exhibit the very synthesis of sameness and difference we have been discussing; for example, in the statement 'Circle A is larger than Circle B' (which is a certain way of relating two A-predicate statements, 'A is a circle' and 'B is a circle') presupposes *qualitative* sameness (i.e., circularity) but *quantitative* difference (larger). Reasoning itself would thus be impossible without first seeing unity in a given sensible object, and therefore, its essence lies in such *synthesizing* activity. Plato's point is that the object of perception would be unintelligible without the Form of Equality inherent in the mind: "before we begin to see or hear or otherwise perceive, we must have possessed knowledge of the Equal itself" (75b). This is precisely what it means for the soul to comprehend the whole: to see unity embedded in the apparent reality of particulars *ad infinitum*. So Plato writes: "all that we perceive through [sense perceptions] is striving to reach that which is Equal but falls short of it" (75b).

However, one might wonder how C-predicates, the most significant of all Forms for Plato, actually relate to the other Forms. Without an explanation, it seems rather

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<sup>8</sup> This point about the soul's unitive nature provides an *analogical* argument for the dialogue's apparent purpose, to demonstrate the soul's survival of death; because unity and simplicity is the soul's essential nature, contrary to the inherent multiplicity of the body (i.e., bodies are made of parts), the soul will survive death, the dissolution of the body.

mysterious as to why C-predicates are ‘better’ or ‘more excellent’ than all the others. Here is where Plato’s idealism really shines forth: all the A-predicate items owe their ideal existence (or in other words, our knowledge of them) to the supreme C-predicate item, the Good. Whether the predicate in question concerns natural kinds (e.g., cows) or artifacts made by the human mind (cars), for Plato, all existing finite things are structured *teleologically* toward some particular good and ultimately the overarching Good. Without knowing the purpose each thing serves in itself and in relation to other things and the greater whole, one does not have the full understanding of the world, and hence no true knowledge. This explains Socrates’ disappointment with Anaxagoras’ naturalistic and empirical philosophy that locates the ultimate cause of things in “air and ether and water and many other strange things” (98b-c). Knowledge lies in grasping, not the mere particular causes of things (i.e., efficient causality), but how the Good explains all things and how it holds them as a coherent unity (final causality). Recollection thus consists in transcending what our senses tell us and seeing the inner vision of the cosmic unity of the Good with pure reason.

#### *1.4. Recollection in the Phaedrus*

Many have not, however, shared Plato’s enthusiasm about such a metaphysical grandeur that equates pure intellectual activity with the ideal human existence, because of its seeming negation of the human life in its full dimension. Though the concern is legitimate, this popular judgment of Plato too hastily ignores the *psychic-erotic* dimension of recollection. The *Phaedrus* offers an explicit account of the link between love and recollection. The most obvious reference to recollection in the *Phaedrus*

nevertheless tells the same story as the other dialogues, for it is still cognitive in the way described above, that is, the mind's synthetic activity occasioned by perception:

But a soul that never saw the truth cannot take a human shape, since a human being must understand speech in terms of general forms, proceeding to bring many perceptions together into a reasoned unity. That process is the recollection of the things our soul saw when it was traveling with god, when it disregarded the things we now call real and lifted up its head to what is truly real instead. ... A man who uses reminders of these things correctly is always at the highest, most perfect level of initiation, and he is the only one who is perfect as perfect can be. (249b)

However, what is markedly distinctive about the *Phaedrus* as a whole is the more conciliatory way in which Plato conceives the relationship between the rational and the irrational, reason and passion, than the overt separatist rhetoric of the standard middle dialogues.<sup>9</sup> Plato now seems to grant that, like the poetic or mystical life that draws from *divine madness* (i.e., the state of being “possessed” or “frenzied enthusiasm”), philosophy itself is a form of mania where the soul's erotic longing for transcendent reality guides reason to truth. Such erotic longing is engendered in the context of romantic friendship.

How can it be that erotic madness, something irrational and uncontrollable, can effectively aid the process of recollection? The erotic dimension of human constitution, contrary to the equanimity of rational activity, has a *motivating* capacity that instigates the initial movement of recollection as well as sustains the activity of it.<sup>10</sup> Socrates

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<sup>9</sup> Martha Nussbaum put forth a controversial thesis in arguing that Plato *renounces* his extreme ascetic ideal of a purely rational life in precisely the same way that Socrates of the *Phaedrus* recants his first speech on love, which embodies the middle dialogues' rejection of the irrational and uncontrollable erotic appetite, and replaces it with his second speech, the “Palinode,” which on the contrary affirms the erotic as a necessary condition for the *consummate* activity of philosophy. “Poetry, Goodness, and Understanding in Plato's *Phaedrus*,” *Plato on Beauty, Wisdom, and the Arts*, American Philosophical Quarterly Library of Philosophy, eds. Julius Moravcsik and Philip Temko (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982).

<sup>10</sup> Nussbaum presents two more reasons for the necessity of the erotic in recollection: the irrational (1) has some important epistemic role (e.g., of helping the mind discover what is good) and (2) is just an intrinsic part of the good life. *Ibid.*, 98-104.

continues his exposition with the claim that recollection begins when “[one] sees the beauty we have down here and is reminded of true beauty” (249d). When two like-minded souls meet, “they are startled because they see an image of what they saw up there” (250a). This affirms of the *Symposium*’s well known thesis that one’s quest for truth begins with the recognition of Beauty. Our primitive unrefined recollection initially takes on the form of *falling in love*, since Beauty constitutes “the most clearly visible and the most loved” Form of all, and our visual faculty, “although it does not see wisdom, is the sharpest of our bodily senses” (250d). From Socrates’ implicit analogy of Beauty to light, we may infer that the Beautiful with its intrinsic relation to pleasure serves the function of a *medium* through which the truth seeker is drawn to and eventually beholds the greater Form, the Good, with wisdom and knowledge.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Socrates’ statement, that falling in love with and seeing the beauty of the beloved causes the “longing for the past,” entails that the higher form of recollection, namely the intellectual activity, cannot be properly realized without such initial drawing of Eros. Finally, Plato firmly situates recollection in the concrete existential context of erotic friendship, where love motivates lovers toward the Good: “Now if the victory goes to the better elements in both their minds, which lead them to follow the assigned regimen of philosophy, their life here below is one of bliss and shared understanding” (256a-b).<sup>12</sup>

### *1.5. Reason over Passion*

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<sup>11</sup> This argument is analogous to Judge William’s view that the function of aestheticism in love is to draw the lovers into the journey of becoming a self, to enter into the ethical sphere and realize the good in their existence. The difference is, of course, that the Judge’s view lacks Plato’s intellectualism.

<sup>12</sup> As we have seen in *Either/Or* and shall see more clearly below, all of these ideas about the erotic in Plato correspond to Kierkegaard’s emphasis on love as necessary for the highest existence.

Despite the more congenial view of the relation between reason and passion, a careful reading of the *Phaedrus* will confirm the suspicion that *Plato is Plato after all*, for the dialogue contains basically the same type of ascetic ideal advocated in the middle dialogues. There are several passages which demonstrate that Plato never abandons the thought of a purely disembodied soul's intellectual contemplation as the highest form of life (250b-c). What seems even more in line with his dualistic idealism is the fact that Plato's happy philosophical couple is *never* to consummate their love in a sexual union. Socrates holds up, on the one hand, the philosophical couple that practices celibacy as the absolute best—"there is no greater good than this" (256b)—while on the other hand, describing the less noble couple that engages in sex only "sparingly" in fairly favorable terms: "In death they are wingless when they leave the body, but their wings are bursting to sprout, so the prize they have won from the madness of love is considerable. ... Their lives are bright and happy as they travel together, and thanks to their love they will grow wings together when the time comes" (256d-e).

All in all, Plato recognizes the value of love insofar as it aids and terminates in reason's activity. Irwin rightly suggests reason's priority in Plato's thought:

The Platonic lover knows what he loves in his beloved only when he knows the reasons for his love; and then he may come to love other things as well. Moral knowledge and right choice require the adjustment of desires to beliefs which justify them and are justified by his other beliefs; then he will have reached the goal of recollection.<sup>13</sup>

As Chapter VII will demonstrate more fully, Plato's conception of the relationship between passion and reason is afflicted with a severe problem, precisely because reason is given such priority. For what a lover really loves is the excellent qualities in the beloved, i.e., the Good, and consequently, the beloved becomes a mere imitation of the

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<sup>13</sup> "Recollection and Plato's Moral Theory," *Review of Metaphysics* 27, no. 4: 769.

true Beloved. But such love is no true love, for the Platonic lover cannot love the beloved for his or her own sake; the beloved thereby becomes *replaceable*. Hence, Platonic recollection, however erotically oriented at first, is ultimately bound to lead one to pure contemplation.

Even so, reason's priority nevertheless does not mean that such a contemplative life should appear utterly unattractive to us. Another Plato commentator highlights that "the core of recollection is equally existential and theoretical," and its existential payoff is shown in the "aporia and partiality" that "result from our place in the cosmos."<sup>14</sup> The process of recollection that involves the contemplation of the Ideas embedded in the concrete world leads to greater *self-knowledge* in coming to be aware of one's limits, as best exemplified in Socrates' persistent claim to ignorance, and such self-knowledge results in the existential effect we all desire: freedom from the cares of this world. In sum, there seems to be a clear division of labor between reason and passion for Plato: the *telos* of existence is signified by reason's activity toward the knowledge of reality, the Form of the Good, and the resulting self-knowledge of one's relation to the Good, while passion provides the necessary means, i.e., motivation, for the activity itself.

## 2. *Existential Recollection and the Nature of Truth*

One of Kierkegaard's rare journal entries on Plato's theory of recollection well illustrates his overall sense about it:

It is a thought just as beautiful as profound and correct which Plato pronounces when he says that all knowing is recollecting, for how sad it would be if what should set a human being at rest, that in which he could really find rest lay outside of him and would always lie outside of him, and the only means of consolation were, by the help of this external science (*sit venia verbo*), a busy and noisy

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<sup>14</sup> Charles Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 113.

clatter to drown out the individual—a desire which never got satisfied. This viewpoint reminds one of what in the more modern time has found an expression in the observation that all philosophy is a self-reflection on what is already given in consciousness, only that this viewpoint is more speculative, Plato’s view more pious, and therefore even a little mystical inasmuch as it gives rise to a polemic against the world, which is to subdue the knowledge of the external world in order to establish the stillness, wherein those recollections become audible. But one must not thereby stop there. (JP3: 2274)

Even though the last sentence indicates his awareness of the incompleteness of Plato’s theory—and the final section will show just how he completes that picture—Kierkegaard nevertheless shared deep solidarity with it. In this section, we will explore in some detail that sense of Kierkegaard’s agreement with Plato through a careful analysis of his unique *existential-religious* appropriation of the recollection thesis in *Fear and Trembling*, with the three main ideas from the last section collectively to bear upon the meaning of “truth is subjectivity.” More specifically, I will show that while Kierkegaard accepts the theory’s two basic ideas respectively drawn from the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, i.e., the holism of truth and the Form of Equality as the essence of recollection, he parts company with Plato concerning the relation between reason and passion, because passion, not reason, constitutes the highest truth.

### *2.1. Recollection in Either/Or.*

To aid our understanding of Kierkegaard’s religious version of recollection, a brief survey of the aesthetic and ethical versions is in order. The author of *Either/Or I* defines the aesthetic existence precisely in terms of recollection:

For me nothing is more dangerous than to recollect. As soon as I first recollect a life relationship, the relationship itself is finished. One says that separation helps refresh love. It is entirely true, but it refreshes love in a purely poetic mode. To live in recollection is the most perfect life, which means that recollection satisfies more abundantly than all actuality, and it has a safety, as no actuality possesses.

A recollected life relationship is already gone into eternity and has no more temporal interest. (EO1, 32)

In another essay, A defines unhappiness as that state of existence in which the person has “his Ideal, his life’s substance, the fullness of his consciousness, his essential being, outside himself in one way or another” (222), and this would imply that happiness by contrast is the union of ideality with reality. In other words, the recollecting self’s Ideal is separated from the *present* moment of one’s life. Such a self goes on existing in the memory of the past erotic love, which is marked by an extraordinary encounter with Beauty and the highest happiness, but was never sustained and fulfilled. Time has virtually lost its meaning because the self has no hope for the future consummation of the first love (i.e., the repetition of the same love), and consequently, recollection becomes the primary mode of existence. That is, all the attempts at happiness subsequent to the failed love become mere reminders and shadowy images of the past bliss.<sup>15</sup>

Contrary to recollection being the exclusive existential stance of the aesthetic, Judge William argues for a dialectical synthesis between recollection and *hope* in the ethical life, which forms another way of describing unity of existence: “the healthy individual lives at once in both hope and recollection, and only thereby his life acquires true, substantive continuity” (EO2, 142); “the true present time [is] a unity of hope and recollection” (143). For the Judge, of course, marriage provides that unity due to its constancy, the fact that the past aesthetic moments of first love are not broken off from

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<sup>15</sup> Such ‘aesthetic’ reading of recollection is bound to appear at odds with Plato’s epistemological-metaphysical theory. While the *Phaedrus* provides sufficient evidence for love being an essential aspect of recollection, Plato actually conveys the exact same line of reasoning as the aesthete’s with his analogical argument for recollection: “Well, you know what happens to lovers: whenever they see a lyre, a garment or anything else that their beloved is accustomed to use, they know the lyre, and the image of the boy to whom it belongs comes into their mind” (*Phaedo*, 73d). It would be a mistake to regard the existential relevance of Plato’s theory as just an auxiliary element to be imposed from without; rather, it is internal to the theory. In short, Kierkegaard’s existential appropriation of Plato’s theory should not be seen as something qualitatively foreign to the theory, but rather, a careful application of it.

the present, or to put it more positively, their memory in fact provides meaning for the present—“a sharp on the note” (142)—and also hope for the future perfection of happiness. Whereas aesthetic recollection is an infinite regressive movement, as it were, that perpetually drains out the significance of one’s present existence, the ethical version of recollection—“conscience’s earnest and faithful recollection” (16)—can cause the forward movement of repetition because it is united with hope in the present moment; we see here again that repetition is essentially about the issue of time and eternity.

## 2.2. *Platonism in Fear and Trembling*

The last chapter’s analysis of the ethical sphere’s limitation (iii.2.6), however, has shown that the earnest ethicist is likely to become a “knight of infinite resignation”—one who, like Plato’s ascetic philosopher, comes to deny the truth in the finite world—because he eventually realizes the apparent impossibility to actualize his ideal in this world. From the outset of *Fear and Trembling*, Johannes de silentio, the pseudonymous author who sees himself as one such knight, bemoans the gaping chasm between the infinite, the orderly world of eternal ideas, and the finite, imperfect world apparently ruled by Lady Luck. Describing “the external and visible world,” Silentio writes, “the adage [“only the one who works gets bread”] does not apply to the world, where it is most at home; for the law of imperfection underlies the external world, and here it repeats itself again and again that the one who does not work gets the bread,” whereas “an eternal divine order rules” in “the world of spirit” (FT, 27).

Exhibiting a similar kind of mystical-ascetic zeal as Plato’s Socrates, Johannes describes his own Platonic dualistic worldview in a lyrically captivating fashion. He first speaks of his erotic longing for the divine: “When it [the thought that God is love] is

present, I am unspeakably blissful; when it is absent, I long after it more violently than the lover after the beloved” (FT, 34). Yet in the very next moment, his divine eroticism gets quenched by the bitter cold reality of the partitioned world: “For me, God’s love is incommensurate with the whole of actuality.” Now showing his resignatory and ascetic side, Silentio distinguishes his worldview from that of faith:

I can well endure to live in my way, I am glad and content, but my gladness is not that of faith and is, in comparison with this, still unhappy. I do not trouble God with my little cares; the *particular* does not concern me. I just gaze at my love and hold its *virgin flame* pure and clear. Faith is convinced that God is concerned with the littlest thing. I am satisfied in this life with being wed to the left hand; faith is humble enough to ask for the right—that it is humility, I do not deny and shall never deny. (34; my italics)

Behind these powerful poetic imageries lie a rigorous ideal for the moral life, one that looks very similar to Plato’s highest ideal. Although Silentio’s recollection appears to be more erotic-mystical and less intellectual, both he and Plato conceive some form of erotic union with the transcendent Good as the highest earthly good: *divine madness*. Furthermore, while acknowledging the instrumental value of the finite beloveds as the images of the Good that evoke our desire for the transcendent reality, the two thinkers ultimately deny the truth in them.

### 2.3. Resignation and Recollection

Silentio’s further deliberation shows an even more promising line of engagement, for the movement of “infinite resignation”—the term denoting the beginning of the religious sphere (“Religiousness A”)—is explicitly packaged in terms of recollection: “The knight will then recollect everything; but this recollection is precisely the pain, and yet in infinite resignation, he is reconciled to existence” (FT, 43). In continuity with the two authors of *Either/Or*, Johannes sees erotic love as the highest good (41n), and thus

appropriately begins his analysis of infinite resignation with an imagined love affair between a knight and a princess—two unequals. Beneath the intoxicating narrative of the knight’s passionate affection for the princess lies the same philosophical substance that undergirds the ethical sphere we have seen before, namely that the moral life consists in loving the beloved as the *absolute* object of love (iii.1.5). It is the idea of *intention*—Judge William’s rarified notion of will, the voluntary act of choosing to identify myself, my entire personality, with the infinite passion of love for my beloved (iii.1.3)—that corresponds to the first of the two dimensions of infinite resignation: “In the first place, the knight will then have the power to concentrate the whole content of life and the meaning of actuality into one single desire” (42-3). Just as William warns his aesthete friend of the looming danger of a dissipated personality, Johannes echoes the same thought against those ‘sub-knights’—peasants, merchants and all—who “act shrewdly in life like the financiers who put their capital in all different investments to gain on the one when they lose on the other” (FT, 43). He goes on to write, “If a person lacks this concentration, this resolution, if his soul from the beginning is scattered in the manifold, he never comes to make the movement.” The prerequisite to being inducted into the knighthood is this single-minded passion for the beloved object.

The story has a tragic end, however, as the princess cannot marry the young man. Silentio cryptically describes the second dimension of the infinite movement as “the power to concentrate the result of the whole thought-transaction into one act of consciousness” (FT, 43). These two aspects of infinite resignation, “one single desire” and “one act of consciousness,” together refer to the knight’s single passion for eternity—“the eternal happiness”—expressed outwardly first (i.e., for the princess) and then

inwardly (in the recollection of her); this precisely constitutes the difference between the ethical self *proper* (i.e., the Judge) and the immanent religious self (the knight). As far as the knight can see, the shift from the outward to the inward perspective is caused by some finite inequality that cannot be overcome. After recognizing (with much existential pain) that his infinite desire cannot be fulfilled, the ethicist's happy and innocent desire, as in Judge William's naïve idealism (iii.2.5), comes to take on a "religious character, re-clarifying [*forklarede*<sup>16</sup>] itself into a love for the eternal being"; the desire "is now turned inward." That is, the failure at fulfilling his love for the finite object propels the knight into a greater consciousness of the eternal in him. The eternal consciousness, initially expressed in his single-minded and absolute love for the princess, now becomes *more clear*, as he progressively realizes that what he really desired all along was the infinite, pure and simple, whether he names it God or the Good, and the princess was but a shadowy image of the real object of his desire. So he resigns the actual princess for the eternal Princess that now resides in his inward consciousness; "he in the eternal sense recollects her" (44).

#### 2.4. *Repentance as Recollection*

Kierkegaard's portrayal of infinite resignation on the whole is, I believe, one of the most poetically brilliant and existentially powerful articulations of Platonism. For that reason, it easily lulls the reader into reveling in the sheer glory of Johannes' lyric, never mind the serious argument behind it. In describing the same religious sphere,

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<sup>16</sup> Translators have normally used the word 'transfigure' to translate the Danish 'forklare.' Even though the verb does not mean 'transfigure,' but rather, 'explain,' its noun form, 'forklarelse,' surprisingly does mean 'transfiguration.' Despite its awkwardness, the made-up word I employ 're-clarify' gets closer to the proper meaning of the verb as well as the philosophical meaning behind the language, while the conventional translation obscures it; 'forklare' is a compound verb made up of the intensifier 'for' and the verb 'klare' which means 'to clarify'; that is, it means to make something more clear.

Johannes Climacus states that “guilt-consciousness is the most upbuilding element in Religiousness A,” which stems from “the self-annihilation that finds the relationship with God within itself” (CUP, 560n). In plain language, Climacus’ statement means that the earnestly striving ethicist’s moral failure lies in placing his infinite passion on a finite object, an act that seems incongruous and mismatched at heart. The problem is *idolatry* (though the knight may not be fully aware of his existence as a direct offense against a personal God).<sup>17</sup> While idolatry typically denotes worshipping an artificially made image of God, a more extended and essential definition is: “giving to *anything finite* a worship, a devotion, a trust, or any other response that belongs to God.”<sup>18</sup> Having realized this truth, that he has misdirected his infinite passion to a corruptible object, erroneously entrusting his highest truth, the eternal happiness, to his relation to the transient thing, the knight comes to acquire a profound sense of guilt, and in turn, repentance becomes the central mode of his existence, that is, *the most true* thing about him; thus Silentio refers to “the infinite movement of repentance” as a synonym for infinite resignation (FT, 99). This process of repentance is precisely self-annihilation and self-mortification—that is, death to the idolatrous self.

Guilt and repentant consciousness can furthermore clarify Kierkegaard’s own appropriation of Plato’s recollection in *Fear and Trembling* when the reader identifies the “one act of consciousness,” which defines the second, the inward dimension of infinite resignation, as repentance, and in turn, recollection as a form of repentance. That is, the

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<sup>17</sup> While the knight’s conscious awareness of his wrongness can be, for the purpose of objective description, properly characterized as idolatry, it is not until he acquires a higher consciousness about his existence that he realizes his state as idolatrous, and that is “sin consciousness.” The fuller revelation of sin as idolatry is given at the transcendent religious sphere; it is to be examined in the next section.

<sup>18</sup> Robert M. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 200 (my emphasis).

knight's painful recollection of his failed love provides an enduring occasion—time and time again—for guilt-conscious repentance, “the eternal recollecting of guilt” (CUP, 554), and this process progressively deepens his self-annihilation. While the aesthetic form of recollection immobilizes the self, since it is stuck in the past memory of happiness, the religious form *qua* repentance has an upbuilding effect that endows the self with the passionate acknowledgment of the truth: ‘I am and I have been in the wrong.’ In one sense, both selves are stuck in the past, but the difference is enormous, for the religious self grasps the truth about its existence and (quite literally) re-collects the broken pieces of his past love by turning it into an occasion for inward deepening and greater self-knowledge, whereas the aesthete self-deceptively (or defiantly) refuses to accept the truth about its being untruth, vainly trying to renew the ruined past in the present somehow.

### 2.5. *Freedom in Resignation*

Admittedly, Kierkegaard's religious reading of recollection looks rather different from Plato's theory at first, mostly because the former does not appear to share the latter's intellectualist aspect. However, insofar as Johannes agrees with Plato on the essential existential-practical effects of recollection, i.e., (1) the stoic stance of self-sufficiency from the finite world of change (e.g., the Socrates of the *Phaedo*<sup>19</sup>) and (2) the kind of self-knowledge that negates one's own claim to reality, namely Socratic ignorance, the two thinkers espouse the same vision of reality. Regarding the first, Johannes' stoical cynicism is clearly expressed here: “I do not trouble God with my little

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<sup>19</sup> It is a well known fact that the ascetic features of Socrates' thought and life inspired the Stoic school of philosophy. Socrates states: “True philosophers abstain from all bodily desires, and stand firm without surrendering to them” (82c).

cares; particulars do not concern me” (FT, 34). Moreover, one can hardly miss his acute disdain for “the slaves of the finite, the frogs in the swamp of life” (41) and his explicit endorsement of the stoic ideal of inner freedom and control: “He has grasped the deep secret that also in loving another person, one must be self-sufficient oneself. ... What the princess does cannot disturb him; it is only the lower natures that have the law of action in another person, the premises for their actions outside themselves” (44-5). Regarding Socratic ignorance, Silentio explicitly states that the Greek philosopher’s “ignorance is the infinite resignation” (69), thereby affirming one of the theses of the *Phaedrus* that the deepened awareness of one’s ignorance constitutes the existential payoff of recollection.<sup>20</sup>

The existential payoff of the recollective lifestyle, i.e., freedom from the cares of the finite world, has an enormous implication for our moral life, for Silentio claims that without making the movement of infinite resignation, I as a moral agent “do not feel the significance of the higher dignity each person is allotted, to be his own censor” (FT, 48). In other words, resigning our desire for the finite by denying ourselves its pleasures is a necessary condition for *moral autonomy*, that is, for the principle or source of action to reside wholly within oneself. Many philosophers, such as Plato and Kant, have consistently denied pleasure a legitimate place in their moral philosophy for good reason, even though it is the most basic human desire. When we simply let our desire for pleasure remain the locus of our action, continuing in the aesthetic mode of life, the self lacks self-identity, i.e., existential unity. Consequently, we become passive moral agents,

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<sup>20</sup> In his journal entry, Kierkegaard relates the religiousness of self-annihilation to Socratic ignorance as well: “With ‘nothing’ the system begins, with ‘nothing’ the mystic ends always. The latter is the divine nothing, just as Socrates’ ignorance was fear of God, his ignorance, with which he, [to note] again, did not begin, but ended, or to which he continually came” (JP3: 2797).

wholly susceptible to letting the external factors necessary for pleasure determine our moral allegiance and action: food, shelter, reputation, comfort, prosperity, or those who have control over them. Most Germans lacked the relevant moral courage to stand up to the Nazi regime because their lives were governed by the principle of pleasure/pain and thus the fear of pain and death made them incapable of resisting what was obviously unjust and evil. In short, the moral life, our moral perfection, requires us to deny and die to ourselves, that is, the pleasure-seeking self.

## 2.6. *Recollection in Postscript*

Although recollection takes an exclusively existential-moral outlook in *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard does not fail to consider its intellectualist dimension elsewhere in the context of his polemic against philosophical idealism. In other words, Kierkegaard thinks recollection can take on two distinct modes, first the ethical-existential and the other the metaphysical-intellectual; the former denotes the infinite movement of Religiousness A, while the latter, if it is taken as an existential stance, another aesthetic variety of recollection.<sup>21</sup> In the context of defending what is probably his most famous yet controversial claim, i.e., “truth is subjectivity,” Johannes Climacus discusses and embraces two Socratic theses, i.e., Socratic ignorance and recollection:

Socratically, the eternal essential truth is not at all paradoxical in itself, but only by relating itself to an existing one. This is expressed in another Socratic thesis: that all knowing is a recollection. This thesis is an intimation of the beginning of speculative thought, but for that reason Socrates did not pursue it

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<sup>21</sup> Kierkegaard has the habit of hyphenising ‘aesthetic’ and ‘metaphysical’ as “aesthetic-metaphysical,” because both modes of existence lack inwardness, a serious concern about one’s own existence, and are self-deceived about their ‘eternal’—full and finished—existence. Climacus’ critique offers one such example: “Hegelian philosophy culminates in the thesis that the outer is the inner and the inner the outer. With this Hegel is finished. But this principle is essentially an aesthetic-metaphysical principle; in this way Hegelian philosophy is happy and indeed remains finished, without having anything to do with the ethical and the religious, or it, in a deceitful way, remains finished by lumping everything together (therein also the ethical and the religious) in the aesthetic-metaphysical” (CUP, 296n).

either; essentially it became Platonic. Here is where the road swings off, and Socrates essentially accentuates existing, while Plato, forgetting this, loses himself in speculative thought. (CUP, 205)

Given that Kierkegaard has espoused the same Socratic theses in *Fear and Trembling* and now defends them again in *Postscript*, while trying to establish his subjective view of truth, we might suspect that his subjectivity thesis has some deep affinity with the “Socratic” form of recollection. And with this being true, “Platonic” recollection would be in turn the equivalent of the *objective* view of truth. If our initial intimation is on the right path, a new insight seems to emerge about the tension between reason and passion noted earlier in Plato’s view of recollection: the tension serves a *pivotal point* from which a truth seeker turns to one of two directions concerning how ‘truth’ is to be understood: the seeker will determine the essence of truth as either the activity of reason (i.e., systematic metaphysical knowledge), affirming Platonic recollection and the objective view of truth, or passion (synonymously inwardness or subjectivity), affirming Socratic recollection.

### 2.7. Truth as Objectivity

We first turn to the objective view of truth, i.e., Platonic recollection.<sup>22</sup> Johannes Climacus begins the chapter that makes the Socratic/Platonic distinction (titled “Truth is Subjectivity”) by critically analyzing the two main ways the notion of truth has been understood in the western intellectual history: either “one determines truth more empirically as thought’s agreement with being, or more idealistically as being’s

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<sup>22</sup> Readers must caution against maintaining any strict wooden distinction between Socratic and Platonic recollection, simply because Plato’s dialogues provide the common source for both forms. Kierkegaard clearly saw a great revival of Platonism in German idealism, and thus wanted to preserve Socrates the ethicist (characteristic of the ‘earlier’ dialogues) from being assimilated into the metaphysical-speculative side of Plato. So Kierkegaard does not mean to criticize Plato’s theory as a whole, but only insofar as it denotes an existential stance of metaphysical-epistemological speculation.

agreement with thought” (CUP, 189). While both the empiricist and idealist view of truth assume that truth is a correspondence between thought and being, their difference lies in how ‘being’ is understood. To begin with, when ‘being’ is viewed empirically, “everything is placed in becoming.” Both the subject’s perceptual faculty and the object of perception are in such a constant state of flux that they continuously transition from being to nonbeing and vice versa; every finite object is always in the state of increasing entropy, being slowly disintegrated, and our senses are always subject to change (e.g., by one’s physiological state, the amount of light, the distance and angle from the object, and so on). From such simple observation, Climacus concludes that, empirically construed, “truth is an approximation whose beginning cannot be absolutely established, precisely because there is no conclusion that has retroactive power.”<sup>23</sup> One can never obtain the truth by adding one empirical knowledge at a time, simply because the process can never see the end. To recall our earlier finding, the argument shows Climacus’ agreement with Plato concerning the idea that the truth is *the absolute whole*, or to put it in another way, it must have a closure.<sup>24</sup> Global skepticism therefore threatens every empiricist approach to the truth, as Hume’s epistemology provides a paradigmatic example.

The story sounds much like an echo from Hegel’s *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, where the intractable problem of skepticism precisely motivates the German philosopher

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<sup>23</sup> The implicit principle here, namely that the end constitutes the beginning in such a way that without the former there can be no latter, corresponds to Aristotle’s principle in *Nicomachean Ethics*: it is the *telos* of a human being, the end which every human being strives to achieve ethically, that constitutes the stable beginning ground of morality, thereby providing the proper point of departure for any moral discourse. This ‘convertibility’ of beginning and end is also the reason why Hegel, instead of seeking an absolute *starting* point like Descartes, sought an absolute *end* point, the absolute idealist system. In short, Climacus’ reference to “retroactive power” seems to assume the idealist view that the end makes the beginning possible.

<sup>24</sup> Our natural language suggests this, e.g., ‘conclusion’ and its Danish version, ‘*Slutning*,’ or ‘*absolute*.’

to outline his ‘absolute idealism’ that can supposedly provide the necessary closure to empiricism’s inherent open-endedness. For idealism, the conclusion unavailable to empiricism becomes a genuine possibility because ‘being’ denotes, not the perceived particulars that constantly undergo change, but the essential concepts that inhere in and explain the existence and movement of *all* the sensible beings. After his disparaging report on empiricism, Climacus describes the idealist view, using the Platonic language of Forms: “Being must then be grasped much more abstractly as the abstract representation [*Gjengivelse*] or the abstract prototype [*Forbillede*] of what being *in concreto* is as empirical being” (CUP, 190). Hence, it is the idealist philosophies indebted to Plato’s paternity that fall under the rubric of Platonic recollection; they try to provide an end to the quest for knowledge by constructing a comprehensive system of thought, treating ‘being’ at the most general level.<sup>25</sup> And this is how metaphysics is classically construed and what the holism of truth means, as our earlier discussion of Plato has affirmed already.

While a more detailed treatment of Kierkegaard’s critique of idealism awaits us in the next two chapters, broaching the subject matter here is obviously needed. The central problem with idealism is exactly the opposite of empiricism, namely that “the agreement between thinking and being is always *finished*, since the beginning of becoming precisely lies in concretion, which abstraction abstractly disregards” (CUP, 190; my italics).

Climacus goes on to explain why being finished is so problematic:

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<sup>25</sup> Frederick Beiser argues that the meaning of idealism in ‘absolute idealism’ derives from the Platonic heritage of the early German idealists: “This Platonic heritage means that—in one form or another—the absolute is identified with the *logos* or *telos*, the archetype, idea, or form that governs all things.” *German Idealism: Struggle against Subjectivism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 355.

But if being is understood in such a way, the formula is a tautology; that is, thought and being mean one and the same, and the agreement spoken of is only the abstract identity with itself. None of the formulas therefore says more than that truth is, when this is understood in such a way that the copula is accentuated—truth *is*—that is, truth is a redoubling; truth is the first, but truth's other—that it *is*—is the same as the first; this, its being, is the truth's abstract form. If it is expressed this way, that the truth is not some individual [thing] but altogether an abstract redoubling, it is nevertheless in the same moment annulled. (190)

Climacus makes three importantly related points here. First, if being is understood as Platonic essences abstracted from concrete things, a tautology results, for such 'being' is precisely what 'thought' is. The second point explains why a tautological definition of truth is problematic in the first place: because truth is essentially a *redoubling* [*Fordoblelse*] activity. Our linguistic practice, as in 'This is a true donut' or 'That Socrates had a snubbed nose is true,' points to some ideal or real fact, which is different from, yet similar to, the said example or verbal claim itself. Redoubling is synonymous with repetition, for they have the same logical structure as a *dialectical synthesis*, consisting of both sameness and difference. The same linguistic rule true of repetition applies to redoubling: I cannot speak of something being doubled if the original and its double are either exactly identical or totally different. Finally, precisely because the idealist view entails that "truth is not some individual thing [*noget Enkelt*<sup>26</sup>]"—that is, some abstract universal concretely exemplified, but rather, a purely abstract system of universals—it cannot maintain the dialectical—redoubling or repetitious—nature of truth; idealism's tautology means that it makes being and thought purely, absolutely identical, excluding the element of difference, i.e., the fact that "existing is a becoming" (196).

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<sup>26</sup> The Hongs translate *noget Enkelt* wrongly in my view as 'something simple.' This rendition is both grammatically and philosophically less accurate than the one given here. 'Something simple' would in fact conjure up the opposite of the intended meaning in the text, namely the Platonic affirmation of the soul and its object of cognition, and not concrete individuals.

## 2.8. *Subjectivity as Truth*

Climacus thus writes, “As soon as the truth’s being becomes empirically concrete, the truth itself is in the process of becoming, is indeed again, by vague intimation, the agreement between thought and being, and it is indeed that way actually for God, but it is not that way for any existing spirit, since this existing self is in the process of becoming” (CUP, 190). The *absolute* correspondence between being and thought only lies in God whose spoken words immediately result in creation; by contrast, truth can only be a dialectical reality for us. Our very existence prevents us from acquiring such absolute truth because the essence of existence is *becoming* (i.e., motion) and therefore by definition it implies a *dialectical* relation between being and thought, reality and ideality; truth for us is a continual movement toward the ideal, progressively realizing it in actuality. The fundamental error of the idealist is the solely objective acquisition of truth at the sphere of ideality, i.e., “to explain how the eternal truth is to be understood eternally,” while disregarding one’s *subjective* relation to the truth, “how the eternal truth is to be understood in the category of time by someone who by existing is himself in time” (192).

Climacus seems right when he asserts that “It is an existing spirit that asks about truth, presumably because he wants to exist in it” (CUP, 191). That is, the question of truth only arises for human beings, the paradoxical creatures that, on the one hand, can posit eternal ideas or possibilities in the mind (i.e., ‘thought’), but on the other hand, lack the possession of those ideals as the present reality for themselves (‘being’). Far from denying the existence of any objective ideal, Kierkegaard’s subjectivity thesis thus

*presupposes* it.<sup>27</sup> Subjectivity thus has a two-fold meaning: the eternal ideal first exists within the subject's own consciousness and secondly the self must relate to it subjectively so as to bring it into existence. For Kierkegaard, what goes wrong with much of philosophy, insofar as it bears the stamp of Platonic recollection, is the placement of reason's activity as the highest, when in fact "passion is existence at its very highest" (CUP, 197). Passion is the highest because, given that the purpose of human existence is not the intellectually grasped ideals, but those very ideals realized in one's life, it is passion that, as noted earlier (i.1.4), mediates or connects the ideals with reality. In several places, Climacus explicitly speaks of the unitive—dialectically unitive—nature of passion: "Only momentarily can a particular existing individual be in a unity of infinity and finitude that transcends existing. This instant [*Moment*] is passion's moment [*Øieblik*]... In passion, the existing subject is infinitized in imagination's eternity, and yet precisely is also most definitely himself." He goes on to say: "An existing person cannot be in two places at once, be subject-object. When he is closest to being in two places at once [i.e., the infinite and the finite, etc.], he is in passion, but passion is only momentary, and passion is precisely subjectivity's highest" (199).

Climacus' description of the infinitizing and unifying nature of passion agrees with our previous analysis of *Either/Or*, that it constitutes a *concrete universal*. Passion

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<sup>27</sup> He clearly distinguishes his subjectivity thesis from "a solely subjective definition of truth," i.e., a thoroughgoing form of relativism, "where lunacy and truth are ultimately indistinguishable" (CUP, 194). So it must be stressed that Climacus' or Kierkegaard's critique of abstract idealism is not directed at the activity itself, but philosophers' tendency to believe that grasping some abstract truth through reflection amounts to the whole truth. Because it is tautologous, such a definition of truth only gets one side of the equation, namely 'thought'; so it might be more properly called 'half truth.' C. Stephen Evans aptly qualifies Climacus' criticism of the idealist view of truth: "Climacus by no means denies that human beings possess this power and that it is significant. He himself emphasizes that human existence contains 'the idea.' He claims that the capacity for considering abstract ideals is an essential aspect of existence, which is itself the process of reduplicating these eternal ideals or possibilities in actuality." *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Hamanities Press, 1983), 120.

is our inward capacity for love, denoting in the most general sense our natural proclivity toward 'being.' We are naturally born with many basic desires, for example, for food, locomotive activity, others' care and affection, development of our talent, and so on. But the more refined notion of passion, as is denoted by Judge William's term "intention," indicates the way in which we passionately, i.e., with deep concern and earnestness, relate to all aspects of our moral life. As Plato rightly notes in the *Phaedrus*, passion has a motivating nature, moving us toward realizing the ideals in our choice and action. Issuing the same view about passion's motivational character, Climacus writes: "Only in subjectivity is there decision, whereas to want to become objective is untruth. Infinity's passion is the decisive, not its content, for its content is precisely itself" (203). By denying the objective view of truth, Climacus simply reverses the Platonic ordering of reason over passion. While reason may grasp the ideals, it cannot by itself bring them into reality, for "infinity's content is precisely that itself," but rather, it must be accompanied by passion that can actually cause movement toward concretely realizing the ideal, which would otherwise remain purely abstract to the subject.

We have seen that Plato identifies the soul's rational activity with the proper domain of grasping the truth, i.e., comprehending the infinite, the *whole* reality, through a metaphysical vision of cosmic unity, the Good. However, if Climacus is right, the true acquisition of the infinite lies with our passion that rightly motivates us toward actualizing the truth. Passion infinitizes in several ways. As Judge William has argued (iii.1.7), passion relates ethically to the law of *unconditional* love; it ecstatically removes the usual inhibitions of the closed-up self to open itself up to others, causing the self to will their good freely regardless of its own good. Moreover, it is infinite in the sense of

being inexhaustible in its energy as well as its possible intentional object. Passion is thus a divine quality, as Scripture says, “God is love,” or as Climacus affirms the same thought in different words, “God is a subject and hence only for subjectivity in inwardness” (CUP, 200). Under this view, becoming a passionate—not contemplative—individual is the end, becoming like God, whereby one progressively acquires the ability to relate to the whole of existence with an enduring earnest concern for the good of it and an attitude of loving affection.<sup>28</sup> Passion not only motivates actions of a strictly moral type but also of an aesthetic kind (e.g., poetry and art), stirring up the imagination to inspire new possibilities of beauty and goodness to be brought into existence.

### 2.9. *The Sincere Nazi Problem*

Because passion is a life force, subjectivity has to do with *how* we relate to truth and not so much the objective content, the *what*: “*If only the how of this relation is in truth, the individual is in truth, even if he in this way were to relate himself to untruth*” (CUP, 199).<sup>29</sup> Even though it has been clarified that the subjectivity thesis does not deny the objective truth (but in fact, presupposes it), this statement seems to open itself to the charge of relativism, in particular, the so called ‘sincere Nazi problem.’ The objector questions whether passion has anything to do with truth at all, for if the subjectivity thesis

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<sup>28</sup> This description of passion is best grasped with a concrete life example. One of the best examples is the life of St. Francis of Assisi, famous for his passionate affection for both people and irrational creatures. His extravagant passion for God naturally translated into a profound and tender affection for the whole of God’s created order, giving him the supernatural ability to communicate with animals, wild or domestic, and to draw them to himself. See Bonaventure’s biography of the saint in *Bonaventure: The Soul’s Journey into God, the Tree of Life, and the Life of Saint Francis*, the Classics of Western Spirituality, trans. Ewert Cousins (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978).

<sup>29</sup> This view essentially echoes Judge William’s claim that even if a person ends up choosing the wrong thing, as long as moral earnestness accompanies the choice and is continually maintained by the moral agent thereafter, he or she will eventually come around to seeing the objective truth (EO2, 167). The continuity between Climacus’ and Judge William’s emphasis on subjectivity makes sense since their claims belong to the same category of immanence. For that reason, Climacus uses the hyphenated phrase, ‘ethical-religious’: “Ethically-religiously, the emphasis is again on: *how*” (CUP, 202).

is right, then a Nazi soldier passionately carrying out the order of exterminating Jews is in truth—a clearly implausible inference.

The way to defeat the objection is to show that it assumes a wrong view of what Kierkegaard means by passion. To do this, I prefer to defend the thesis by using an analogous thought experiment, one that is closer to our time. Imagine a young woman who has become pregnant as a result of casual sex and is seriously considering an abortion. The decision is most likely an uneasy one, as her diverse and confused moral ideals come into conflict: the presumed good of continuing her liberal sexual practice, but the supposed evil of having to kill the unborn child vs. the supposed good of preserving the child's life, but the presumed evil of her jeopardized future plan. According to Kierkegaard's subjective definition of truth—“*An objective uncertainty, held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness, is the truth*” (CUP, 203)—the question for the woman in the state of objective uncertainty about the morality of abortion runs as follows. Can I passionately relate myself to the *good* of killing the unborn? Can I really see it as something worth committing myself to, making it *my long term good*? Regardless of the reader's prior sentiment about the morality of abortion, it would be frankly difficult to imagine her being really passionate about the act of killing the unborn; at best, it is a 'necessary evil' for her. On the contrary, it is much easier to envision her passion poured out on to the other possibility: in spite of the future sacrifices and the uncertainty of her life plans, she passionately commits herself to the good of preserving the unborn child's life. What explains the clear intuition here?

The difference points us back to the Form of Equality in Plato's *Phaedo*, and here is where I see a profound conceptual solidarity between Plato and Kierkegaard. Just as

the soul's intrinsic unity (i.e., self-identity) enables the diverse sense data to be synthesized into coherent objects of cognition, the similar kind of imposition of Equality is operative in our moral perception of others when we passionately relate ourselves to them. The golden rule stated in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount captures this thought: "Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12). I have previously argued that the principle of justice or equality, which is basic to all objective morality, traces its ontological basis to love and the covenant relationship entailed thereby (ii.1.7). Passion is, as noted above, none other than love, expressed through the dialectical union of the self and the other. It is the proper inward condition for the mutual exchange of the *gift of love*, an ongoing chain of the self's receiving of the other's good will and the giving of the self's good will to the other. In other words, relating passionately to some objective uncertainty is not exerting some raw and arbitrary feeling, which would be pure insanity, but rather, it has an intelligible intentional object; in this case or the Nazi case, passionate thinking would lead one to conclude that the object (the unborn or the Jews) is a reflection or image of one's own self because of the essential equality that both one and the other share. Subjectivity requires in the first place an *honest* thinking about myself, my intrinsic dignity and my desire for others to recognize it, and in turn, *equally* relating it to the other in question. In short, what explains the difficulty of imagining the woman to feel passionate about her decision to kill the unborn is that her subjective thinking, which would essentially involve reflecting on the principle of Equality based on love, is thereby naturally conducive to seeing the equal dignity of the unborn, worthy of preservation and

actualization of life's goodness—the very same gift she herself has received from her mother and countless others.

In this sense, the subjectivity thesis is the equivalent of recollection: 'the Equal' drives both activities. The parallel analysis of Plato and Kierkegaard on the recollection thesis, I believe, has done much to dispel the common misunderstanding of the latter's view of truth. But it is clear that Kierkegaard has appropriated the theory somewhat differently than much of the Platonic tradition. For him, recollection does not merely remain an epistemological explanation about our rational activity, though important as that might be, but more significantly, it is a comprehensive *lifestyle*—a lifestyle of passionate and tireless pursuit after truth, the truth realized in one's actual existence. For this reason, Kierkegaard never lost his personal affection for Socrates, the one who seems to have consciously lived out the principle of Equality, or what is now clearly the same, the subjectivity thesis; readers may recall the dialogue *Crito* where he courageously refuses to escape the unjust execution purely for the sake of justice.

### 3. *The Concept of Repetition in Abraham's Faith*

Despite the high ideal and truth expressed in the 'Socratic-Subjectivity' thesis, Kierkegaard readily acknowledges its incompleteness, for there is a higher truth still: hence, "Subjectivity is untruth" (CUP, 207). Climacus attributes the reason for this seemingly contradictory statement, not to some internal inconsistency, but to the extrinsic contingent reality of sin, as understood in the Christian scriptures: to use Anti-Climacus' definition, "self-willfulness against God, a disobedience that defies His commandments" (SUD, 81). Though sin is, Christianly understood, not a necessary actuality, it has had a total dismantling effect on our capacity to realize the moral ideal. The essential

shortcoming of the Socratic-Subjectivity thesis is its superficial understanding of our own capacity for evil, “the demonic” that lies deeply within the sinful human heart, because it assumes we are “essentially *integer* [uncorrupted]” (205). Having described in some detail the highest truth in the immanent sense, namely the recollection-subjectivity thesis, we are now in position to appreciate the transcendent religious: “Religion B.” In the remaining section of this chapter, *Fear and Trembling* will serve as our guide for navigating through the profoundly vexing matters of sin and its remedy, faith, which constitutes the replacement, or rather, the restoration of recollection: repetition.

### 3.1. *Father Abraham and Ethics*

While *Either/Or*'s dialectical battle takes place between the aesthetic and the ethical, the conflict shifts to the ethical and the religious in *Fear and Trembling*. Silentio labels their conflict as that between *the universal* and *the particular*. Referring to the former term, he states that “the ethical as such is the universal, and as the universal it applies to everyone, which from another angle means that it applies at every moment” (FT, 54). By contrast, the latter term only applies to a single individual in his or her specific time. Given the above discussion of recollection, we can see why the ethical is the universal: the universal validity and actualizability of the truth due to the universal human condition of rationality. However, against this comely system is thrown a disturbing particularity: “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you” (Genesis 22:2).

What does the story about an ancient religious figure have to do with moral philosophy? Like the knight of infinite resignation examined earlier, Abraham the

“knight of faith” stands for some ideal—in fact, the highest—which we are enjoined to actualize. In the first place, the story raises a question about conflicting duties: a universal duty *qua* the ethical (‘thou shalt love thy son’) and a particular duty *qua* the religious (‘thou shalt kill thy son’) (FT, 59). And as the previous chapter explained (iii.1.9), duty inextricably relates to love; concerning what we profoundly love, we freely and willingly make it our duty to seek its fulfillment. Consequently, the narrative is essentially about the reality of conflicting loves and their proper ordering in life. God placed such a challenging obligation on Abraham because, as Scripture attests, He wanted to test his faith, whether he loved Him more than his son, who was after all the gift God Himself gave as a token of His love. In the second place then, the binding of Isaac story raises the question about the right way of relating to *finite* things, and we have already discussed the theme of an improper form of this love to some extent: idolatry.

### 3.2. *Idolatry and the Absolute*

Another way to characterize the theme of idolatry is through first analyzing the notion of ‘the absolute,’ that is, to raise the question, “what do or should I value absolutely or unconditionally in life?” and then seeing the difference between the ethical and the religious definition of it. Hegel’s absolute idealism, arguably the main target of Kierkegaard’s polemic in *Fear and Trembling*,<sup>30</sup> describes the highest duty in terms of the individual’s absolute relation to the state:

The state is the actuality of the substantial *will*, an actuality which it possesses in the particular *self-consciousness* when this has been raised to its universality; as such, it is the *rational* in and for itself. This substantial unity is an absolute and

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<sup>30</sup> C. Stephen Evans, “Faith as the *Telos* of Morality: A Reading of *Fear and Trembling*” *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Fear and Trembling and Repetition*, vol.6, ed. Robert Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1993), 16.

unmoved end in itself, and in it, freedom enters into its highest right, just as this ultimate end possesses the highest right in relation to individuals, whose *highest duty* is to be members of the state.<sup>31</sup>

For Hegel, the absolute for any individual is the state, the final moment of the *Sittlichkeit* that includes the prior moments of family and civil society; it is the concrete embodiment of the eternal moral law and the ultimate fruition of Reason's movement in history. On the contrary, for Christianity, the absolute is unmistakably the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." One crucial difference between the two lies with their vision of the absolute's relation to the individual; according to the former, the relation of the highest (i.e., the eternal moral law) to the individual is universal, while for the latter, it is particular. The absolute *qua* the ethical relates to the individual purely objectively, since it relates to all subjects equally regardless of their particular determinations of life, while the absolute *qua* the personal God of Christianity relates to the individual as one unique individual to another. Therefore, the latter view runs parallel with Silentio's startling claim that "Abraham's act is entirely unrelated to the universal, is a purely private endeavor," for "the paradox of faith has lost the intermediary: the universal" (FT, 59; 71). In other words, the relationship between God and the knight of faith is the absolute, and all other relations from this standpoint become relative; Abraham's ordeal is for "God's sake, and what is altogether identical with this, his own sake" (59).

While sharing the common theme with the popular criticism of Hegel, namely that the individual must be considered prior to an abstract universal like the state,<sup>32</sup> Kierkegaard's concern for the loss of individuality runs much deeper, as it is grounded in

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<sup>31</sup> *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, ed. Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 275.

<sup>32</sup> I have in mind such well known twentieth century critics of Hegel as Karl Popper. See *The Open Society and its Enemies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950).

a rich psychological account of self. Both Judge William and Silentio have argued that the proper acquisition of personal identity requires a single-minded passion for some object on which one bestows an absolute value, i.e., some universal-ethical categories like one's lover, family, career, or larger community. Even though none of these ethical categories is bad in itself, such absolute devotion to what is after all a finite thing, a gift from God (and not the Giver Himself), becomes lust and pride; lust because it is an inordinate and misdirected love and pride because it is a defiant willfulness to make our love of finite things our source of the truth, the good. In short, what explains the apparent absence of the "intermediary" (i.e., the universal-ethical) and thus the pure particularity in the faith relationship is *sin*: "When the particular by his own guilt has come outside the universal, he can only come back to it by virtue of having come, as the particular, into an absolute relation to the Absolute" (FT, 98).

### 3.3. *Greek vs. Christian Concept of Sin*

While the next chapter devotes a sizable portion to specifically analyzing Kierkegaard's phenomenological account of how sin comes into existence, we shall first attempt a more general understanding of sin. Johannes curiously describes sin as "a later immediacy" in contrast to the philosophical description of sin as "the first immediacy" (FT, 98). A rather simple psychological reflection accounts for this foreign notion. Small children (and animals) are purely immediate with respect to their action because they unqualifiedly act on the principle of pleasure and pain; this is what "the first immediacy" means. The apparent fault of the first immediacy is its wrong identification of the good with pleasure. Pleasure has an inherently particularistic and momentary characteristic, for no other than the experiencing subject can have it and it is only good

while it lasts for that moment. However, such a conception of the good cannot possibly sustain human existence that requires mutual cooperation to realize the common good. As rationality becomes increasingly prominent, one's notion of the good should move toward becoming more universalistic and temporally mediated; for, through reason, one gains the ability, on the one hand, to see that it is better for one's action to produce the good for others than solely for oneself, and on the other hand, to think and act in terms of possibilities or ideals (i.e., future possibilities). Therefore, "Philosophy teaches that the immediate should be annulled" (FT, 99). So understood, one's progress toward moral perfection is one continuous movement from the particularistic will to the universal. Hence, "the ethical [i.e., the universal] is of the same nature as a person's eternal salvation" (54).

Under such a view, sin essentially turns out to be *ignorance*, that is, a simple finite perspective or less than fully rational conception of the good. And this view ultimately leads us back to that uncomplicated but incomplete account of human nature, i.e., the Socratic, which, as noted in our discussion of Plato's recollection thesis, defines virtue as knowledge and hence its opposite as ignorance. However, sin is a *later* immediacy, not a pre-rational, innocent identification of the good with pleasure, but a self-conscious intention to make one's own pleasure the final good by desiring and willing the finite with infinite passion. And sin is an infinite choice that permanently prevents our moral will from willing the good purely by establishing the good of one's own self as the final end of one's existence. Thus, Silentio writes, "In sin, the particular is, in the direction of the demonic paradox, already higher than the universal, because it is contradiction of the universal to want to demand itself from the one who lacks *conditio*

*sine qua non*” (FT, 98). The “Socratic” view of sin—which stands for a purely philosophical view free of the Christian categories (“genuinely Greek”)<sup>33</sup>—could not really grasp the extent to which sin has perverted our moral will, so that the ultimate and deepest motivation for our action is always our own good. The effect of sin runs so insidious and destructive, it is claimed, that only a radical remedy like Abraham’s faith can restore the sinner to “being able to fulfill [*gjøre*] the universal” (99).

Absent such a complex psychology, Socrates’ intellectualist view of sin is afflicted with a perplexing theoretical problem in ethics, called *the weakness of will*: since virtue is defined as knowledge, truly knowing that some act is good but being unable to will the act is impossible. The Socratic view is, however, based on a rather intuitive principle of practical reason: if I truly know *x* is good, I will do *x* and if I truly know *x* is evil, I will refrain from doing *x*. This is a difficult problem for the Platonic tradition in general, which conceives the movement of will as ultimately dependent on the activity of the intellect. The Platonic tradition therefore cannot fully understand the profound effect of sin on the will and hence the depth of wickedness of which we are capable individually, as well as collectively.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The reader has to be careful with always attributing the notion of a purely philosophical standpoint prior to the introduction of Christianity to the term “the Socratic,” since Kierkegaard ambiguously refers to that notion by the term as well as Socrates the person. Most of the time, he uses it in the former sense, but sometimes he refers to Socrates the person, distinct from the Greek: “This [pure idealism] is the Greek (but not the Socratic, since Socrates is too much of an ethicist for that) (SUD, 93).

<sup>34</sup> Aristotle dealt more seriously with this problem than Socrates or Plato. However, his account still remains an intellectualist understanding of sin, thereby lacking seriousness about the human propensity for evil. Concerning cases of extreme evil, he writes, “Other things are not naturally pleasant, but some of them become so because of a disability, one’s habits, or a wicked nature... By brutish states I mean, for example, the female human who people say rips open pregnant women and devours their babies; or the pleasures of some of the savages that live around the Black Sea, who are alleged to eat raw flesh, or human flesh, or to lend their children to one another to feast upon... These states are brutish, but others develop through disease, and in some cases madness, as in the case of the person who sacrificed and ate his mother. Or the one who ate the liver of his fellow slave.” *Nicomachean Ethics*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, ed. and trans. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 127-8; Book Vii,

Even so, Kierkegaard never denies the truth of the Socratic at the wholesale level, only denying its completeness. Anti-Climacus, the proper Christian pseudonym, vows that he “will never dismiss the Socratic definition on the grounds that one cannot stop there” (SUD, 88). Instead, he will use the Socratic to illuminate the Christian view by identifying their difference, the former’s deficiency:

It is: the will, defiance. The Greek intellectuality was too happy, too naïve, too aesthetic, too ironic, too witty—too sinful—to be capable of getting it into its head, that anyone with his knowing could fail to do the good, or with his knowing, with knowing about what is right, do what is wrong. The Greek exemplifies an intellectual categorical imperative. (90)

The ‘Greek’ notion of sin fails to account for human existence fully because of its “pure ideality” that does not take into consideration “this tiny little transition from having understood to doing” (93-4). The will, already damaged by sin, can override the intellect’s judgment in many subtle ways that are simply too deep for the intellect to detect on its own. Sin is the self’s defiant willfulness against what it knows in some sense to be true and good. Even though there appears to be some element of objective uncertainty in almost every act of sin, that is, some room for doubt about which choice is truly good or evil, what the consequences of an act are in its full scope, etc., Anti-Climacus unequivocally argues that sin is essentially located in the will rather than knowing. He tells a short narrative of sin’s progress: (a) will disagrees with (or does not like) what knowing says is good or evil; (b) will thus postpones the verdict (i.e., doubt arises); (c) meanwhile, the base nature that influenced the will in the first place increasingly gains the upper hand; (d) knowing thus becomes more and more obscure and eventually agrees with the will’s desire (94). Given its self-deceptive nature, sin

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Chapter 5. To call these acts brutish or mad is to imply the lack or little degree of rationality, and as such, it is still an intellectualist conception of sin.

ironically turns out to be what Socrates says it is—in a way: “sin is indeed ignorance; it is ignorance of what sin is” (96). And precisely because the will functions at such a global level, even exercising control over the direction of our thoughts with such pernicious subtlety, the universal category of the ethical, supposedly knowable by rational thinking alone, cannot be properly known or willed; what we think is a universally valid ethical norm and practice as such is always influenced by the distorted will. So, “there has to be a revelation from God to make manifest what sin is” (89), a *personal* revelation: faith.

### *3.4. Faith as Repetition*

Christianity argues that only faith, an absolute devotion to God, can cancel sin, thereby reversing its obscuring effect on our moral perception and intuition and restoring the will to its proper place of willing the good purely, that is, for the sake of the Good alone, that is, God. Through faith, a dynamic personal relationship with God based on mutual love, I am increasingly revealed of the truth about myself, the deeper side of my sin—idolatry, lust, and pride—and by affirming the truth through repentance (i.e., infinite resignation) and gaining the true perspective of my proper moral end (unconditional love analogous to divine love), I progressively become free from being enslaved to my own selfish desires and securely move toward moral perfection. For this reason, the full restoration of our moral intuition about good and evil, right and wrong—“a healthy form of intuition”—cannot be instantiated apart from the specific divine revelation about sin through faith.

Let us now see more closely how faith can cancel sin and bring about repetition, the restoration of our lost capacity for the good. As Silentio’s version of the famous biblical story goes, Abraham receives the command to kill Isaac—the very gift from God

and the heir to His promise of blessing to all generations—and he is willing to do it. His willingness to sacrifice “the most precious thing in his life” is not the absurd for Silentio, for any knight of infinite resignation could do it as well (FT, 20). What is decisively absurd is Abraham’s ability to receive Isaac more joyfully than ever *after* having determined to slit his throat (36). This ‘absurd’ can be analyzed from two perspectives: Abraham’s emotional state *antecedent* and *consequent* to the moment of sacrifice. Concerning the first, Johannes marvels at the fact that Abraham can exemplify two incommensurable passions respectively to their *maximal degree* and at the *same time*: the love for Isaac and courage to slaughter him (35). According to human reason (i.e., quantitative judgment, as described above), Abraham could not instantiate both emotions fully at once, for (1) if he maximally loved Isaac, then he could not have the courage to kill him, whereas (2) if he had the utmost courage to kill him, then he could not be loving Isaac maximally. In other words, one passion necessarily negates or diminishes the other.<sup>35</sup>

The second perspective, namely Abraham’s intense feeling of joy over receiving Isaac back after the mortal resolution also astonishes the author. What is absurd from Silentio’s perspective (again, that of pure reason) is that after mustering up the courage to

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<sup>35</sup> As noted earlier (i.1.3), Kierkegaard writes in his journal that all logic or reasoning is quantitative dialectic (JP1: 759). Since reason places all objects of thought in one single continuum of ideality (i.e., concrete things idealized) to be examined, the incongruous concepts like Kant’s antinomies negate each other, that is, if reason affirms or tends toward affirming one of the contraries, then the other is thereby negated or diminished. However, Kierkegaard argues that there is such a thing as *qualitative* dialectic, which cannot be explained by reason, and faith, which is a species of resolution, is one such example. All of this implies that his example of faith’s dialectic concerning Abraham’s contrary emotions of courage and love is an implicit argument against Hegel’s mediation, for this incongruity between courage and love cannot be mediated in any meaningful, substantive sense; reason could only posit the Abraham case as a mere possibility devoid of any positive explanation as to *how* this is possible. As we have seen several times already in the previous two chapters, this is a characteristic Kierkegaardian *Aufhebung* of Hegel: while retaining the general form of dialectical movement (i.e., a contradiction between two opposites formed first and then a higher unity), he rejects the content, namely that reason can grasp or achieve the unity.

kill Isaac—which would have been possible, Johannes thinks, only if Abraham had consciously resigned his love for him—he receives Isaac with even greater joy when God returns him. Silentio now identifies the double movement of faith: the movement of (1) infinite resignation and (2) faith (FT, 36). For the knight of infinite resignation, if Isaac were to return to him, he could keep Isaac “only with pain,” for he has already made the movement of infinite passion to let go of his finite happiness for the sake of the infinite. In other words, to grasp and affirm the infinite without faith, that is, purely humanly, is to negate the finite, and this is the same worldview we have seen in Plato’s works.

However, Abraham could keep Isaac with greater joy than ever, even after having made the first movement, and this absolutely amazes Silentio. From pure reason’s perspective, Abraham’s final determination to slaughter Isaac should have negated his love for Isaac, since his courage to affirm the infinite (God) would have meant a conscious willing resignation of his love for the finite (Isaac). On the contrary, the quality of Abraham’s post-sacrificial ethical relation to Isaac is even better than that of his pre-sacrificial relation. Abraham’s ethical relationship undergoes the process of being lost and returned, and therefore, repetition occurs, not in a simple monotonous way, but a new and transformative way, as he now has greater love for Isaac than ever.

### *3.5. Grace*

How then can we explain Abraham’s paradoxical passion of faith? The short answer is found in the Christian doctrine of grace. Grace means an undeserved favor or gift from God freely conferred on us. In the soteriological context, it refers to the gift of salvation through faith, one’s subjective response to Christ’s sacrifice for and forgiveness of sin, and one’s humble submission to Christ’s lordship over one’s life. In the most

general sense, however, it pertains to our relation to the finite object(s) which constitutes an essential component of our overall happiness. That is, our sinful idolatrous love for the finite gets loosed by the movement of infinite resignation, i.e., repentance, while the movement of faith restores our proper love to the finite as we come to see every finite object as a precious gift from our Lover, God.

Inherent in the idea of gift is a mutual relationship of love and the dual psychological condition and perspective therein: the ‘objective’ condition that what is given is freely given and undeserved and the ‘subjective’ condition that it is an expression of love from the lover to the beloved. The first condition implies both a positive and negative—not in the sense of bad—effect on the moral psychology of the recipient of grace. The positive effect is the element of surprise, newness, and change, the particularities that make life interesting; since I know that I did not deserve this good, I had no expectation of receiving it and thus receiving it brings surprise. On the negative side, this condition of grace secures the prevention of unhappiness in case of losing the finite object; since the finite object is given to him freely in the first place, the knight of faith can freely let go of it, which is to say that he is able to enjoy the object without any selfish possessiveness toward it (i.e., idolatry and lust), as though it were the absolute object of his happiness. When an unspeakable disaster strikes, the grace-filled knight of faith can say in truth: “the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” If I am not a knight of faith, however, I relate to those finite objects which I have acquired with moral earnestness in such a possessive way that I will face great psychological difficulty accepting the loss of it when it is taken from me; it has so become part of my identity that its loss means the loss of my own self.

### 3.6. Faith and Morality

If faith and grace become the central mode of one's existence, it would have profound moral implications. Insofar as we relate to all finite objects of happiness as gifts from God, freely, undeservedly, and lovingly given to us, we can avoid both extreme ways of relating to all finite objects. We can describe the two extreme ways in terms of (1) the ethical sphere *proper* (absolute love for the finite) and (2) Religiousness A (resignation of that love). While infinite resignation, the first movement of faith, annuls the inordinate attachment to the object of our finite happiness, it regrettably leads to pure asceticism. However, the second movement of faith contrarily and paradoxically re-conditions and re-establishes our relation to the finite in such a way that we are capable of upholding both the resignation of and the passionate concern for and enjoyment of the finite *at once*; this is the paradox which reason cannot comprehend. In this way, grace allows me to maintain the stoic ideal of inner freedom—'happiness-no-matter-what'—but without actually turning me into a Stoic.

Contrary to faith, even the best rational articulation of the good life cannot think and realize such a paradoxical possibility. As we have seen, Plato prescribes to us the most rational stance, espousing the vision of infinite resignation: give up the desire for those external goods that are beyond your control. Terence Irwin describes Plato's "adaptive" conception of happiness in these words: "the rational person will react by giving up the desires that have become unfeasible; once he has given them up, the fact that they are not satisfied no longer causes unhappiness."<sup>36</sup> However, this view simply ignores the thorny problem of our temporal and finite existence: since the future cannot be fully predicted and controlled, how can reason determine which specific external

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<sup>36</sup> *Plato's Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 117.

goods are feasible and unfeasible to be satisfied? Since by definition all finite objects have an end and thus such external goods are beyond our full control, be it one's wealth, health, friends, or lover, it would seem most rational to become a full-fledged Stoic as soon as possible: to resign all desires for external goods in light of our essentially temporal and finite existence, and instead, simply to work toward developing the internal, i.e., fully controllable, goods that involve the activity of pure reason and will. This wholly human perspective, therefore, cannot maintain the paradoxical tension between the resignation of finite goods and the passionate concern for them.

The second condition of grace in the knight of faith, the subjective condition, precisely overcomes the irreconcilable dualism of Plato. Grace means that its recipient can maximally and unashamedly enjoy the gift since it is an expression of love from his/her lover: I can enjoy it as *particularly mine*. The proper notion of gift contains both particularity and subjectivity. Its particularity comes from the fact that there is a specific intention behind the gift, namely the giver's desire to give it to (1) a particular person as an expression of love (2) according to the recipient's particular taste of what he/she enjoys. So I love *this* particular thing rather than something else that is identical in its material constitution, precisely because it is a gift, an expression of love to me from someone who loves me. This condition is also a subjective perspective because the value of a gift is determined not by some objective or universal standard (e.g., how much money it costs in the world), but rather, the love relation inherent in it. For example, I value the scarf somewhat awkwardly knit by my beloved sister's hands much more than the one by a top designer, purchased with my own money, because her love infused in the

gift has far more meaning to me. In sum, the essence of a gift lies not in the material stuff with its bare configuration, but rather, the intention of love expressed in it.

If I see everything in life as a gift from God, not only am I protected from despair in the presence of some evil in my life, but my experience of the world in general, my day-to-day life, will be one of joy and newness. For the fact that God, the infinite and eternal Being of all beings, is the lover and the giver renders an infinite validity to the knight's relation to all finite objects. So powered by divine love, the knight can now relate to the finite beings with infinite passion and energy. For instance, if I grasp *truly*, i.e., through the eyes of faith, that it is God who, out of love for me and for my own good, has given me the gift to philosophize and the task to teach the next generation of youth the truth, it provides me with utmost passion to engage it; my love for God, my willing response to His love for me, will provide an infinite source of *ethical motivation* to live my daily life and fulfill my moral duty; I thus come to have a *divine calling* on my life. Any universal-ethical relation in a person's life, which initially begins with an excitement of love, be it marriage, fatherhood, or a new career, is bound to be reduced to a static and boring repetition in the constant ebb and flow of time. However, if one gains the perspective of grace through the movement of infinite resignation and faith, the universal is repeated with newness and excitement again and again, for it is God, being identical to Love itself, who continually provides the knight with "that highest passion, the holy, pure, and humble expression for the *divine madness* which was so admired by the pagans" (FT, 23; italics added).<sup>37</sup> Silentio, in short, recognizes the perennial struggle

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<sup>37</sup> This passage shows another textual evidence for the connection between recollection and repetition *qua* faith, for Kierkegaard, being an astute reader of the *Phaedrus*, realized that what Plato described as the highest truth, the activity of recollection described in that dialogue, is the counterpart to the

against time, the incongruity between the infinite task of the moral ideals and our brief momentary existence, as a central feature of the problem of morality, and finds faith as the one and only solution: “[Abraham] had fought with that crafty power which invents all things, with that vigilant enemy who never slumbers, with that old man who outlives everything—he had fought with time and kept his faith” (19).<sup>38</sup>

### 3.7. *The Highest Concrete Universal*

Since faith transforms all ethical-universal relationships by infusing them with divine passion, it constitutes the most complete sense of concrete universal. The concrete universality of faith combines the truth of both concrete universals of the aesthetic and ethical sphere, as discussed in the previous chapters (ii.2.7; iii.1.9). The aesthetic concrete universal is the paradoxical union of the abstract universal of beauty and the particularity of one’s concrete experience at the level of passion—that sheer force of life which A felt in *Don Giovanni* and longs to possess permanently for himself. In the ethical, Judge William introduces the idea of ‘universal individual,’ referring to the moral agent’s individual appropriation of the universal moral law in his or her ethical existence; the emphasis is therefore on the subjective ownership and expression of the universal law. Since faith enables the moral law to be fulfilled by restoring passion’s rightful place, namely love as both the *means* (motivation) *and* the *end* (perfection) of our

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passion of faith. Furthermore, Plato also recognizes divine madness as subversive of social morality: “And it now views with contempt the conventions and proprieties on which it once prided itself” (252a).

<sup>38</sup> The problem of our temporal existence for moral perfection, of course, is more fully addressed by the eschatological dimension of Christian faith: glorification and resurrection. The doctrines relate to faith intrinsically because one’s faith in this life determines the possibility of resurrection to eternal life. Since in faith the hope of eternal life is given to the knight, he comes to have an eternal perspective on the good life. Through faith, he grasps the reason and has the motivation to will the good always, even when he must suffer pain or great harm (even death) for it.

existence, which is obtained and maintained through an exclusive subjective relationship with God, it preserves the elements of both aesthetic and ethical concrete universals.

Structurally speaking, faith reconciles the two lower spheres by preserving their respective essential elements while cancelling their untruths; hence, Silentio remarks that faith “is the only power that can rescue the aesthetic from its battle with the ethical” (FT, 93). The exclusive and mutual love relationship between the knight of faith and the God of grace satisfies the essential element of the aesthetic sphere, i.e., particularity, the desire to be a unique individual as well as continually experience newness and change, while preserving the universality of human nature, that with which the aesthetic sphere by its own means cannot reconcile itself. Faith has basically the same effect on the ethical as well. While retaining its truth, namely the validity of humanity’s universal-ethical nature, the religiously qualified particularity negates the despair of the ethical, as seen in the Judge’s hidden despair, and regenerates the universal category of duty—which on its own is only capable of a boring repetition—with the infinite source of newness and moral strength of divine love.

### *3.8. Recollection Repeated*

We can now safely conclude that the common depiction of Kierkegaard’s view of the relationship between reason and faith cannot be true, namely his ‘irrationalism’ where the two always remain in conflict. Rather, the conflict exists only insofar as sin exists and the reconciliation results insofar as faith removes sin from reason. If we take the recollection thesis to stand for pure reason’s highest attempt at grasping the truth, faith is a repetition of recollection in the following two senses. First, since faith restores the knight’s subjective awareness of God’s love for him, existence becomes intelligible and

coherent despite the presence of evil in and around his life; this satisfies the core *desideratum* of recollection, that one understand the *final* causality, i.e., how God's goodness explains and unifies the apparently fragmented reality. The second sense of the repetition of recollection again relates to the transformation of our moral vision, but also the renewal of our moral capacity. The infinite ethical demand—the principle of justice (i.e., the Platonic Form of the Equal) or the golden rule (our duty to love others as we desire to be loved ourselves)—cannot be sustained and fulfilled as long as we are in sin and thereby prevented from exercising pure love, for one's capacity to love the other infinitely and unconditionally depends on one's being loved that way as well. Since faith endows the knight with the subjective awareness of God's infinite love for him, replacing his failed loves with the divinely infused love, he feels *free* to love others infinitely and unconditionally, even his enemies who will unjustly persecute him and perhaps put him to death, thereby fulfilling the moral law based on the Form of Equality. Being continually motivated by God's love in this way is thus the only way to have the *real* concrete hope of fulfilling the lofty moral ideal and possessing the perfect truth. And this *practical* resolution is the only true reconciliation of the one and the many for us, the spiritual beings who exist in time and space afflicted with sin.

Far from the truth therefore is the kind of superficial reading that hastily judges Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* as fundamentally undermining morality. More accurately, Kierkegaard is trying to restore the highest rigor and purity to morality by introducing the Christian concept of sin, while at the same time, through his penetrating insight into the reality of faith, shoring up our trust in God for making moral perfection attainable for us. Anti-Climacus argues that Christianity offends the natural (sinful)

human mind with the highest moral ideal, shown in its conception of sin as existing in despair “*before God*” (SUD, 121), but the same “before God,” though the loftiest ideal it may be, also offers the highest reward and means to acquire the ideal: “this human being exists *before God*... can talk with God at any moment he wants, sure of being heard by Him; in short, this human being is offered to live on the most intimate term with God!” (85). Or in Silentio’s words: “becoming God’s confidant, the Lord’s friend” (FT, 77). Unlike the intellectualist union with the divine *nous*, the philosophers’ idea of the highest good, or the aesthetic view of momentary pleasures, Christianity construes the mutual love relationship between the divine and human person as the eternal happiness. The Christian idea of happiness is thus thoroughly egalitarian, for “no human being is excluded from it” (67). No endowment of a powerful intellect, wealth, or good looks is a prerequisite, but only an earnest desire to love God above all else. Then, everything will become new.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Moment of Time and the Phenomenology of Sin

“Nevertheless *death* reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.”

Romans 5:14

“And then lust, after becoming pregnant, gives birth to *sin*, and sin brings forth *death*.”

James 1:15

“Cause me to know, O LORD, *my end*, and what is the *extent of my days*, let me know how *fleeting* I am.”

Psalms 39:4

Having described Kierkegaard’s overall vision of the moral life that can overcome the perennial conflict between the aesthetic and the ethical sphere of our existence, the remainder of this dissertation will take a closer look at some of the most foundational categories that make up this Christian moral vision. We must thus introduce another distinct term of art in Kierkegaard’s oeuvre that deeply relates to a Platonic concept: the moment (*Øieblikket*).<sup>1</sup> This and the next chapter will respectively explicate *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Philosophical Fragments*, two works where the term makes its most prominent appearance. In the most general sense, the moment refers to the relation of the eternal with the temporal, that is, the *metaphysical* moment of how the eternal ideas (i.e.,

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<sup>1</sup> The previous English translators used ‘the instant.’ Since Kierkegaard’s unique *philosophical* connotation of the word, as will be soon explained, negates any sense of temporal duration, some of the recent Kierkegaard scholars prefer the older translation. See David Kangas’ *Kierkegaard’s Instant: On Beginnings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 200 (note 14). While this is certainly understandable, I prefer ‘the moment’ due to the rich existential significance in the English language, e.g., as in ‘seize the moment’ or ‘live in the moment.’ While ‘the instant’ may be preferred for its greater proximity to the strictly philosophical perspective, ‘the moment’ better captures Kierkegaard’s overall authorial intention in my view.

Platonic Forms) relate to the temporal concrete particulars. We examine below Kierkegaard's critical engagement with Hegel's metaphysical attempt at explaining the moment in *Anxiety* (Section 1) and his critical yet appreciative discussion of Plato's attempt in the dialogue *Parmenides* (Section 2). The final section carefully analyzes Kierkegaard's account of philosophy's intrinsic inability to explain the moment, i.e., the consciousness of time, which is caused by the *existential* moment called sin.

### 1. *The Critique of Hegel in The Concept of Anxiety*

*The Concept of Anxiety* is, as its pseudonymous author claims, a "psychological" treatment of the Christian doctrine of hereditary sin, and despite its theological subject matter, it freely engages in metaphysics, especially when critiquing Hegelian philosophy. Because the central philosophical issue throughout *Anxiety* concerns the category of transition, i.e., 'motion',<sup>2</sup> and an act of freedom is a species of that category, one's metaphysical view has a significant bearing on one's ethical-religious understanding. Since the term 'motion' refers to transition from one state to another at the highest generality, namely 'becoming' (change from being to nonbeing and from nonbeing to being), explaining motion has been the dream of every philosopher. This section in particular examines Kierkegaard's critical evaluation of Hegel's terms of art equivalent to the moment: transition, negation, and mediation (*Aufhebung*).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> By 'motion' I will mean generally the most general kind of change, not to be confused with locomotion. However, there is a sense in which all change assumes some locomotion. Typically change includes three kinds, namely change in quality, quantity, and location, but each type of change cannot occur without the other two in the natural world.

<sup>3</sup> These are all synonymous terms for Hegel: "*Transition* is the same as becoming except that in the former one tends to think of the two terms, from one of which transition is made to the other, as rest, apart from each other, the transition taking place *between* them." *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1969), 93.

### *1.1. Motion and Mediation*

We hear the familiar echo of Kierkegaard's polemical line that mediation is a presupposition, that is, the most foundational concept to Hegel's system, while being the only concept left unexplained: "for to use something that is nowhere explained is indeed to presuppose it" (CA, 81). In what sense is mediation a category of transition and how is it supposed to explain motion?

In the first part of *The Science of Logic*, Hegel describes a series of supposedly conceptually necessary movements of being at its highest generality (i.e., pure being), stripped of any specific determination. First, the conscious mind posits pure being, being without any concrete finite quality, but it quickly discovers that such being is basically identical to its opposite, nonbeing, since pure being is wholly indeterminate and thus immediate. Pure being just is the nothingness and complete emptiness which the conscious mind can only *feel* or *intuit* without being able to describe in any definite way. Hegelian dialectic consists of a threefold logical progression: (1) positing an idea, (2) discovering the necessary entailment of its opposite from (1), and (3) concluding that the two are *inseparably* identical, held within a third category (i.e., 'identity-in-difference,' not the abstract Aristotelian identity). Hegel tries to allay his readers' puzzlement at the identity of pure being and nothingness by drawing an analogy from the nature of light and darkness: although they are opposites, one cannot exist without the other and both the fullness of light and total darkness have exactly the same effect of not-seeing on the observing eye.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> "One can easily perceive that in absolute clearness there is seen just as much, and as little, as in absolute darkness, that the one seeing is as good as the other, that pure seeing is a seeing of nothing. Pure light and pure darkness are two voids which are the same thing." Ibid, 93. Of course, as with all analogies, a disanalogy follows here as well. The eye does not respond to absolute light and absolute darkness in the

Now comes the transition into the third, *becoming*, which is the process of ‘being’ passing over into ‘nonbeing’ and ‘nonbeing’ into ‘being’ (i.e., perishing and coming into existence); being sublates or ‘goes under’ into its opposite and vice versa in becoming. Becoming is thus the dialectical unity of being and nonbeing; it is the inseparability of contradictory opposites, being and nonbeing, that gives rise to the necessary movement into the third, becoming. Therefore, the negating element of the whole process supplies the impetus, as it were, for the necessary movement; being’s negation is nonbeing, nonbeing’s negation being, and becoming is both the negation of being *into* nonbeing and of nonbeing *into* being. With the necessary outcome of becoming from pure being and its necessary opposite, both of which are infinite—in the primitive, negative sense of having no limit or determination, as opposed to Hegel’s more rarefied notion of infinity—we thus arrive at *finitude*, the finite determination of being. This dialectical concept of transition consistently permeates, and hence explains, all of reality for Hegel including human reality, as the reader can readily detect its presence throughout his moral, political, and religious works. In other words, Hegel’s metaphysical reflection, if true, explains *all* cases of motion or change because they are part of the necessary unfolding of ‘being.’

### *1.2. Critique of Mediation*

Concerning the Hegelian notion of transition, Vigilius Haufniensis writes: “The term ‘transition’ is and remains a clever turn in logic. Transition belongs in the sphere of historical freedom, for transition is a *state* and it is actual” (CA, 82). While reiterating his critique already given in the Introduction, namely that Hegel erroneously blends into

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same manner, for one causes blindness, whereas the other does not. Light is not a ‘void’ like darkness since it can cause an effect that the other cannot; it can cause something precisely because it has being, that is, *determinate being*.

confusion the sphere of actuality (whose essence lies in contingency) and of logic (necessity), this statement also reveals Vigilius' positive metaphysical view that stands in direct contrast to Hegel's: all motion is caused by a free act. This view implicitly affirms or entails the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* against the necessitarian view of the origin of the universe; the Creator God's free and contingent act causes the existence of all beings, and sets all things in motion except for the creatures who can exercise their own freedom, being capable of instantiating the absolute creative power pertaining to their own action.<sup>5</sup> All instances of motion are thus exhaustively explained by divine and creaturely free acts under this view. According to Christianity, the category of motion cannot be explained rationally, that is, by the necessary categories of logic, since a genuinely free act finds no higher end than that within the self; freedom is a transcendent category alien and inexplicable to logic.<sup>6</sup>

According to Haufniensis, Hegel's confusion of the spheres is cleverly masked by a subtle equivocation of the term 'mediation':

Does it therefore also follow that this reality, which is consciously brought forth by thought, is a reconciliation [*Forsoning*]? ... "Mediation" is equivocal, for it

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<sup>5</sup> Given textual evidence elsewhere, it is highly plausible that the absolute creation view belongs to Kierkegaard himself: "Every cause ends in a freely acting cause" (PF, 75). Vigilius' implicit appeal to the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* as an analogue for our freedom resembles C. A. Campbell's well known defense of the libertarian view of free will where he precisely makes such a connection. He writes, "Reflection upon the act of moral decision as apprehended from the inner standpoint would force him to recognize a *third* possibility, as remote from chance as from necessity, that, namely, of *creative activity*, in which (as I have ventured to express it) nothing determines the act save the agent's doing of it." *On Selfhood and Godhood* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1957), 178.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Aquinas, a major representative of the Christian intellectual tradition, holds that the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* cannot be proved with logical certainty, which is to affirm in another way Vigilius' claim about freedom: "*I answer that*, We hold by faith alone, and it cannot be proved by demonstration, that the world did not always exist. ... Likewise neither can it be demonstrated on the part of the efficient cause, which acts by will. For the will of God cannot be investigated by reason, except as regards those things which God must will of necessity, and what He wills about creatures is not among these, as was said above. But the divine will can be manifested to man by revelation, on which faith rests. Hence that the world began to exist is an object of faith, but not of demonstration or science." *Summa Theologica*, vol.1, Great Books of the Western World, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, rev. Daniel J. Sullivan (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), 253 (Prima Pars Q.46, A.2).

suggests simultaneously the relation between the two and the result of the relation, that in which the two relate themselves to each other as well as the two that related themselves to each other. It indicates movement as well as repose. (CA, 11)

What Vigilius finds spurious and sophistical is the unexplained jump in the dialectical movement that takes place from pure being to becoming, from a purely formal category (i.e., what has no actual being) to another category belonging to actual reality (rocks, trees, rabbits, and people). The success of Hegel's explanation rides on the equivocation of 'becoming,' which subtly exploits the apparent ambiguity that lies between our conceptual and empirical world—"repose" and "movement" respectively. According to Vigilius, Hegel's notion of becoming refers to both "the relation between the two," i.e., the mutual sublating relation between pure being and nonbeing, and "the result of the relation," i.e., becoming, the actual existence of some finite object.

From another—say, more psychological or phenomenological—viewpoint, the entire mental exercise in Hegelian dialectic renders a certain impression to the thinking mind that this becoming, when it is considered side-by-side with pure being at the conceptual level, is also without any real determination. But the very notion of becoming necessarily entails the idea of real finite determination in a way that runs contrary to the purely conceptual treatment of becoming in the idealist mind. Hegel's category of transition, becoming, is equivocally both purely formal (i.e., without any determination like the Platonic Forms) and informal (literally '*in*-Formed,' i.e., determined). For Vigilius, this subtle equivocation results in the opposite kind of confusion of spheres between logic and actuality from Eleatic monism: "The eternal expression for the logical is what the Eleatics through a misunderstanding transferred to existence: nothing comes into being, everything is" (13n); Hegel conversely brings "movement into logic" (12n).

That is, Hegel first takes and transfers the dynamic expression appropriate to existence, i.e., the dialectical movement of freedom, unto the logical.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.3. *The Hegelian View of Sin*

The above clarification of Vigilius' criticism of Hegel sheds light on how one's view about the most fundamental metaphysical question, namely motion, has a direct

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<sup>7</sup> Contemporary philosopher and Hegel scholar, Charles Taylor, has lodged a criticism of Hegel in the same line of thought. Hegel further develops the notion of finitude by pointing to self-destructiveness inherent in finite being itself. Following Spinoza's dictum that all determination requires negation (e.g., to be red is to be not-blue, etc.) but taking it a step further, Hegel adds to the meaning of negation another significance, an *interactive* negation between finite things. That is, a finite thing cannot exist on its own but only by virtue of being limited by some other finite thing (e.g., a forest is not a field, etc.); a determinate being can only be defined by reference to another that is contrasted with it, i.e., it is negated by another. Being-for-itself and being-for-another are therefore the same, that is, inseparable. The entire history of the universe is one giant series of a finite being going under or being sublated by another based on this self-negating principle inherent to finitude. But Taylor argues that the move to determinateness from self-annulment depends on "an equivocation on the concept of negation," which is to say that the purely conceptual notion of negation is confused with the empirical—again, "It indicates movement as well as repose." What Hegel gives us ultimately is not a strict proof but a mere "portrayal of the mutability of all reality as springing from an inner conflict, a negation of self... a more or less persuasive gloss on the facts of finitude." *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 238-9.

Robert M. Wallace writes in direct response to Taylor that "the 'becoming' or 'passing into' that Hegel is discussing here is not the physical process of the something's ceasing to exist and the other's coming into existence. Rather, "it is the logical dependence of the something on others for its determinate quality... Something 'becomes' or 'passes into' an other in the sense that something's quality is not just a fact about it, but depends upon other somethings, so that its nature, as a finite thing, does not depend on it alone, but depends instead upon the conceptual space that is composed of all the other that there are." *Hegel's Philosophy of Reality, Freedom, and God* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 123. Terry Pinkard's work on Hegel's logic also gives the same explanation: "'Becoming' does not here refer to the ordinary conception of it that would imply that *something* (a determinate being) passes over into nothing. It denotes rather the 'shiftiness,' the 'unsteadiness' of the previous conceptions of pure being and pure nothing." *Hegel's Dialectic: The Explanation of Possibility* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 24. Pinkard clarifies further that "This principle of 'self-mediation,' so Hegel thinks, is not a presupposed ultimate principle that explains everything else but is not itself explained. It is, rather, supposed to be self-subsuming and therefore self-explanatory." Such responses seem to me to undermine Hegel's dialectical logic itself. If we assign Hegel's logic only to the logical sphere, only abstractly describing the events in the concrete sphere, it can no longer be seen as dialectical, both necessary and contingent, but only necessary (since logic is pure necessity), and consequently, also purely necessary in the concrete as well. This is even greater confusion than Hegel's logic itself. On the other hand, Stephen Houlgate describes the process in a more nuanced way as one where "thought leads itself from pure indeterminacy to the thought of bare determinacy." *Freedom, Truth and History: An Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 55. While this is closer to Hegel's intention, as I see it, it just serves to accentuate the critique of Taylor and Kierkegaard. In particular, it is a conceptual confusion to say something is more or less determinate; something is either determinate or indeterminate. To be sure, something can have more or less *determinations* (i.e., more complex beings have more qualities than simpler ones), but that is different from saying the thing is more or less determinate, for the former assumes that the thing is determined in some way already, whereas the latter does not, and when there is no such assumption, it makes no sense to say whether something is more or less determinate. Determination already presupposes there being something, to which this "bare determinacy" is supposedly prior.

bearing on one's ethical-religious understanding. Vigilius argues that Hegelian philosophy, by undermining the distinction between the sphere of logic and of actuality, "has quite consistently volatilized every dogmatic concept" (CA, 35). How does Hegel volatilize, for instance, the doctrine of sin? When referring to "Hegel's favored remark that the nature of the immediate is to be annulled," Vigilius seems to have in mind Hegel's view of the Fall as part of the overall necessary movement of Reason. The necessitarian reading of the doctrine can be hardly missed here:

In its immediate shape spiritual life appears first as innocence and simple trust; but it is of the essence of spirit to sublimate this immediate state, since spiritual life distinguishes itself from natural life, and more precisely from the life of animals, by the fact that it does not abide in its being-in-itself, but is *for itself*. ... But in this connection, we must give up the superficial notion that Original Sin has its ground only in a contingent action of the first human pair. It is part of the concept of spirit, in fact, that man is by nature evil.<sup>8</sup>

It seems as if Hegel turns the Christian doctrine into his own version of 'the state of nature' theory. The period of innocence refers to the earlier history of mankind when humans—the rational animals—were more animal than rational, acting primarily in accordance with their natural desires toward fulfilling selfish interests. However, as reason became more prominent, there progressively came a 'cleavage' between the animal nature and the spirit (i.e., reason), necessitating humanity to act more and more on the principle of reason, the universal moral law of *equality*. This grand story is also the story of every individual's passage from childhood to adulthood, from singular will to universal will, to be culminated in "universal self-consciousness." Just as pure being in the presence of its opposite sublates into becoming, likewise in the practical realm, where a self encounters its equal other, one's simple selfish desire integrates into a higher unity

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<sup>8</sup> *Encyclopaedia Logic*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991), 61, 63.

with that of the other through the mutual recognition of each other as a *subject*, a free being (an end in itself) and not as an object (a mere means to an end).

As Hegel's last remark above affirms, evil is, in the first place, the natural immediate state in which all humans find themselves, namely the selfish desire to fulfill one's own end that disregards the will of others. Derived from this concept is the secondary sense of evil: the state of conflict between the two principles, nature vs. reason.<sup>9</sup> In Hegel's system, evil can be explained in purely intellectual terms, the state of *ignorance*, the finite and limited perspective of one's reason or that of the general spirit in a given society. This also means that good and evil are inseparably identical, or in other words, there are only relative good and evil at the dialectically incomplete level of existence.

#### *1.4. Hegel's Intellectualist Concept of Will*

For Kierkegaard, Hegel's account denies the reality of sin by turning the Christian notion (i.e., defiant will against God) back into the Greek conception of sin (ignorance or limited command of reason). The apparent cause of this blunder, according to Vigilius, stems from the same confusion of the spheres (i.e., logic and actuality), owing to the same equivocation of the category of transition, mediation: "The concept of immediacy belongs in logic; the concept of innocence, on the other hand, belongs in ethics" (CA, 35). If innocence is something to be annulled and mediated in and by the necessary

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<sup>9</sup> This distinction is found in Part III of *Lectures on the Philosophy Religion: One-volume Edition, The Lectures of 1827*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 442-52. He intentionally equivocates on the term 'evil,' (1) the natural selfish will (as noted above) and (2) the state of separation between nature and spirit caused by the emergence of the latter, and it is his discussion of the latter that contains much insight to be explored. The main idea of necessary transition, however, is consistently maintained there as well: evil-(1) has to be sublated by reason in order to achieve a higher selfhood, which recognizes 'the other' as a necessary component of its self-consciousness, and this therefore results in evil-(2).

progress of reason, the proper concept of guilt—with a strong notion of freedom of the will and responsibility—becomes significantly weakened, if not denied altogether ultimately.<sup>10</sup> To reject the proper concept of sin in this way has a detrimental effect on our moral thinking and practice, for it leads to taking our own individual and societal capacity for profound evil all too lightly. In Kierkegaard's words, the Hegelian or any other purely philosophical ethic cannot understand the *demonic* (the “anxiety about the good”) which can easily turn into hatred toward the good—the topic of a lengthy discussion in the latter part of *Anxiety*—and to lack such understanding would mean a serious absence of self-knowledge that gravely underestimates our capacity for evil.

While Hegel's system includes violent political conflicts as the human spirit's necessary struggle toward freedom, it could not imagine such a gratuitous and horrendous evil as systematic genocide, paradigmatically exhibited in the Holocaust.<sup>11</sup> This brings back the memory of our previous discussion of the Greek idealist-intellectual view of sin as ignorance (iv.3.3); the same charge Anti-Climacus lays against Greek ideality that ignores the “tiny little transition from having understood to doing” (SUD, 93-4), namely the will, applies to Hegel's idealism as well. Hitler's initial internment of the Jews for

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<sup>10</sup> Even though the negating of the innocent natural state is necessary, Hegel does not deny moral responsibility to adults who act on natural principles against those of reason. This means then that he denies ‘PAP,’ the principle of alternative possibilities, as a necessary condition for freedom and responsibility; thus he might be best considered a soft determinist or compatibilist. To the natural objection to any determinist position that still tries to uphold freedom and responsibility—e.g., “since evil is inherent in the concept and necessary, man would not be responsible if he committed it”—Hegel responds all too casually and dogmatically: “it must be replied that the decision is man's own act, the product of his freedom and responsibility.” *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, ed. Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 170.

<sup>11</sup> Hegel scholar Peter Hodgson puts it aptly: “And, while he is profoundly aware of the tragic and violent character of human history, he does not envision the sort of radical evil that is represented by the Holocaust and other forms of genocide. Whether the experience of evil in the past century calls for a fundamental rethinking is one of the questions posed to Hegel by postmodernity.” *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 154.

forced labor may possibly pass off as a wrong calculation of good/evil (i.e., the good of free labor just outweighed the evil of inflicting unjust suffering); after all, human history is riddled with such practices. However, a deeper reflection would affirm that the whole event cannot be fully explained simply by appealing to one man's or nation's lack of proper moral knowledge. The philosophical view of sin cannot grasp such a senseless yet deliberate massacre of an entire race, which had no discernible higher order of good; it was pure hatred toward the race—*demonic madness*.

What is instructive about Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel in *Anxiety* is that it exemplifies a sensible method of testing the validity of any philosophical system. That is, a crucial and effective way to assess the truth of a philosophical claim is to inquire about its relation to actuality. We typically use this method in natural science where a theory is first formed out of actual empirical data and is then tested against more data for its validity. If there are sufficient anomalous data against the theory, it is to be rejected. Likewise, a metaphysical system, which also arises from our initial reflection about empirical being, must again be tested against actuality itself, including moral existence; whether it preserves or undermines morality should be one crucial criterion. In short, a theory is not worth more than the given data it is supposed to explain in the first place. Hegelian idealism, even with all of its "marvelous transparency and inner vision" (CA, 81), fails the test of reality along with many other similar attempts.

## 2. *Plato and the Moment*

However, not all idealisms fail the test to the same degree, for some are much more modest about their claim to knowledge than others. Plato is an example of such modesty: "Plato fully recognized the difficulty of placing transition in the realm of the

purely metaphysical, and for that reason, the category of *the moment* cost him so much effort” (CA, 82). Unfortunately Kierkegaard allows his readers only a glimpse—a footnote-length look—into his own reading of the Platonic dialogue most notorious for its impenetrability: the *Parmenides*. Because his insightful reading of it, I believe, partly birthed his concept of the moment, a fuller view of Kierkegaard’s claim that philosophy cannot in principle explain motion and thus cannot give us the truth—the *complete* truth about our existence—requires some comprehension of the dialogue.

### 2.1. *The Dilemma of Participation*

Plato sets out to defend his theory of Forms by placing it under a rigorous self-scrutiny in order to test its viability. We have previously discussed the theory, namely its claim about the Form of Equality, that is, Unity, as the most basic Form of all Forms (iv.1.3). The claim entails that if every Form is to be capable of unifying all the various sensibles out there, thereby being capable of providing the univocity of meaning and the intelligibility of reality, they all must exhibit the quality of unity. Since the Forms, however, have separate and independent existence from sensibles and thus are in principle non-sensible entities, the only way to know their existence with sufficient confidence is by successfully explaining the relationship between the Forms and their sensible particulars, namely the nature of participation: what does it mean for a spherical object (e.g., a basketball) to participate in the Form of ‘sphere’? And, as we shall see shortly, ‘the moment’ (τὸ ἐξάφνης) is that in which participation, the union between the Forms and the sensibles, is presumed to take place. Plato puts the challenge in the mouth of the famous presocratic champion of Eleatic monism, Parmenides:

However that may be, tell me this. You say you hold that there exist certain Forms, of which these other things come to partake and so to be called after their names: by coming to partake of Likeness or Largeness or Beauty or Justice, they become like or large or beautiful or just? Certainly, said Socrates. Then each thing that partakes receives as its share either the Form as a whole or a part of it? Or can there be any other way of partaking besides this? (130e-131a)<sup>12</sup>

The question whether a sensible thing participates in the whole or a part of the Form may seem odd at first, but it is right nonetheless, for the very meaning of the word ‘participation’ (μεταλαμβάνειν), some activity of *taking part* in something, naturally suggests the part/whole relation. But to admit the part/whole relation to the Form itself is basically to materialize it in such a way that many absurdities, including the well-known “third man” objection, inevitably result (130a-132b). Consider a simple version of the objection: (1) *x* is large because it participates in Largeness, (2) but Largeness itself must be large in order for *x* to be large in virtue of *x*’s likeness to itself, (3) then Largeness must participate in some other Largeness, and so on *ad infinitum*.

Plato makes the young Socrates his ardent but dialectically immature defender of the theory. Socrates’ best (and final) attempt at rescuing the theory is that the concrete examples relate to the abstract Forms analogously as some object relates to its *paradigm* (132d), for example, the way an actual house relates to its blueprint; this is the primary way in which the Forms are characterized in the middle dialogues (e.g., *Phaedo*, 74-76). Unfortunately, as all analogical arguments tend to be, this argument is too weak, but more specifically, it fails because of its explicit appeal to sense image. That is, it reinvites the third man (132e-133a), as the analogy to a perceptual object materializes the

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<sup>12</sup> *Plato and Parmenides*, trans. F. M. Cornford (London: Keegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1939), 84. All quotations from the *Parmenides* are taken from Cornford’s translation. Also, the overall interpretation of the dialogue I render here is based on Cornford’s commentary. Since the goal is to illuminate Kierkegaard’s reading of the dialogue, I need not survey all the available readings of it, and therefore, the fact that both Cornford and Kierkegaard consider it an aporetic dialogue is the relevant point.

Forms again. R. E. Allen precisely pins down the root problem of Socrates' unsuccessful defense of the theory, calling it the "dilemma of participation":

If characters [i.e., Forms] are to be in sensibles, and sensibles in place or space, how is it that characters are not in place or space? And if they are, how can they be universal, any more than sensibles are universal? If they are not, how can they be said to be in sensibles after all?<sup>13</sup>

If the answer to the question concerning the Forms' relation to the sensibles is that they somehow inhere *in* the sensibles, the 'in' relation seems unintelligible to us unless it has a spatio-temporal connotation, but if they are limited to particular times and spaces, they are reduced to mere particulars. This would entail that the Forms are not 'one *over* many,' but rather, 'one *among* many,' and can no longer serve their essential function of providing the univocity of meaning; consequently the vortex of anti-realism and relativism looms large. On the flip side, if we do not construe the Forms in terms of those finite categories, that is, if the Forms are *infinite*, unlimited by time and space, as Plato wants to claim, then our epistemic access to the Forms and their relationship to the concrete objects can never be complete, which then invites global skepticism to perpetually afflict our epistemology. Either way, truth eludes our grasp.

## 2.2. *The Hypotheses*

The significance of explaining the category of transition cannot be emphasized enough, for now it seems clear that our knowledge of truth, its very possibility, depends on it. This is also the reason why Parmenides reaffirms the existence of Forms even after so thoroughly demolishing Socrates' theory:

If, in view of all these difficulties and others like them, a man refuses to admit that Forms of things exist or to distinguish a definite Form in every case, he will

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<sup>13</sup> *Plato's Parmenides* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 120.

have nothing on which to fix his thought, so long as he will not allow that each thing has a character which is always the same; and in so doing he will completely destroy the significance of all discourse. (135b-c)

With this reassurance, the dialogue transitions into the second part where the existence of Forms is reexamined under a different method, a purely logical analysis where a set of carefully deduced claims follows from a hypothesis. Since appeals to examples can no longer be part of a satisfactory defense of the theory of Forms, the newly proposed method is highly abstract and speculative. For our main purpose of illuminating Kierkegaard's reading of the dialogue, however, it is only necessary to examine the first two hypotheses, since they lead up to the part where 'the moment' makes its entrance.<sup>14</sup>

Hypothesis I (henceforth 'H<sub>1</sub>') proceeds by assuming the most general statement about being, namely its bare unity: "if there is a One." Whatever the One is, it is one, and consequently, it cannot be many, neither a whole of parts nor any part of a whole (137c-d). The One's not having any parts entails a series of logical consequences whose cumulative result is the absolute exclusion of any positive determination. The One has no limits since it has no parts, i.e., beginning, middle, and end (137d); no extension due to having no limits (137d-e); and therefore, it can neither be located in itself nor another (138a-b); for that reason, the One is neither in motion nor at rest (138b-139b); consequently, neither the same as, or different from, itself nor another (139b-e)<sup>15</sup>; and

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<sup>14</sup> Besides, according to Mitchell Miller, the rest of the hypotheses can be seen as further explications of the first two. *Plato's Parmenides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 99.

<sup>15</sup> The argument concerning sameness/difference seems the most obscure of all in H<sub>1</sub>, but it is crucial because the remaining arguments depend on it. While the denial of the One's sameness or difference with another can be easily accepted, and also of its difference with itself, since it clearly contradicts the One's oneness, the denial of the One's sameness with itself seems difficult to concede at first. Parmenides states: "Nor yet can it be the same as itself. For the character of unity is one thing, the character of sameness another" (139d). In other words, that something is one and that something is the same (as whatever) have different meanings, for sameness, even when referring to the same subject, is a *comparative* predicate (like 'larger than'), denoting some notion of difference; a thing is the same as itself

following from this, neither like, or unlike, itself nor another (139e-140b); neither equal, or unequal, to itself nor to another (140b-d); and finally, the One can neither be or become, older or younger than, or of the same age as, itself nor another, i.e., it cannot be in time at all (140e-141d). With the denial of the last quality, Parmenides concludes that there is “no way in which the One has being” since “a thing can have being only in one of these [i.e., temporally determined] ways” (141e). This is a significant statement for both the reading of the rest of Plato’s *Parmenides* and of Kierkegaard’s *Anxiety*, since being, if it is to be intelligible at all, is defined as *determinate* being for both thinkers, and more specifically, *temporally* determined being. Since the One is denied of being and any being must be temporally determined, it cannot even be said to *be* one, much less *be of* anything else (142a). The absolute One of H<sub>1</sub> turns out to be *nonbeing*, and as such, the second horn of the dilemma of participation thus comes to full light under H<sub>1</sub>: we know nothing about the Forms.

Hypothesis II (H<sub>2</sub>), however, begins with the assumption contradictory to the conclusion of H<sub>1</sub>: ‘if a One *is*.’ With the emphasis on ‘is,’ Parmenides explains that the antecedent denotes a real distinction between unity and being, which means that “‘is’ and ‘one’ stand for different things,” or what is the same, “the One *has* being” (142c). The first consequence established by the hypothesis is that the One is both one and many, or in other words, it is a *composite unit*. The One is one by virtue of being itself but also many by virtue of there being a real difference between itself and being. From affirming

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*despite* the difference. This is why the preposition ‘as’ necessarily follows the predicate—thereby indicating some difference between the subject and that which is placed after ‘as’—in the way that no such preposition follows the predicate ‘one’; e.g., the sentence, ‘I am the same man as I was three years ago,’ entails a difference in time. If this argument is sound, denying the rest of the qualities (i.e., un/likeness, in/equality, and time) follows since they all assume and thus depend on the sameness/difference distinction.

the unity/plurality distinction, the One is shown to be both unlimited and limited (142d-145a); the One is unlimited because, being composed of parts, it can be divisible *ad infinitum* but limited because the parts that make up the whole are limited precisely by its wholeness, that is, by being one thing.<sup>16</sup> Being limited then entails extension since it means that the One has extremities (145a-b); extension entails the paradoxical consequence that the One is both in itself (since the parts are in the whole) but also in another (since the whole itself cannot be in any part) (145b-e).

In this way of generating apparent contradictions, H<sub>2</sub> moves through the same categories as in H<sub>1</sub> with the category of time as the last stop. H<sub>2</sub> has therefore completely reversed all of H<sub>1</sub>'s purely negative conclusions, producing instead a maximal list of 'both-and' statements that affirm all the contradictory categories of H<sub>1</sub> (i.e., un/limited, motion/rest, un/likeness, etc.) from all possible perspectives (for the One itself and another). The cumulative effect of both Hypotheses so far is that they respectively describe two senses of being: the purely indeterminate being of the Forms (i.e., nonbeing *qua* the infinite) and the determinate being of the sensibles (being *qua* the finite).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The argument Plato actually renders is much more complicated and longer than I suggest here. Rather than immediately conjuring up the sense image of a composite unit, Plato presents a metaphysically subtler—and much more obscure—argument that utilizes a third category, namely 'the different' or otherness, in order to generate an infinite series of numbers: "it is not virtue of being one that the One is different from the being, nor is it in virtue of being 'being' that the being is other than the One: they differ from one another in virtue of being *different* or *other*" (143b). In other words, though 'supervening' on unity and being, difference is a genuine third that is distinct from and cannot be abstractly reduced to either one. The pure oneness and abstractness of H<sub>1</sub>'s One, not containing any distinction between itself and the other (i.e., there is no other), is incapable of generating a series of number, whereas the distinction between unity and being is enough to generate an infinite series. If the difference between the first and the second is a third, then the difference between the first and the third will be a fourth, that between the second and the third a fifth, etc.

<sup>17</sup> "In I, on the one hand, the real point of the denials is to set the One beyond the order of spatio-temporal existence; if it 'is' at all, the One has the timeless being of the forms. In II, on the other hand, Parmenides shows how the One is subject to the categories, the basic kinds of character, proper to spatio-temporal existence." Miller, 96.

### 2.3. *The Moment*

The next part of the text, commonly referred to as ‘Hypothesis IIa,’ introduces the concept of the moment for the first time in the dialogue, whereby Plato attempts to reconcile the paradoxical conclusions from the first two Hypotheses (i.e., nonbeing and being) under the category of time: the One’s coming into existence (from nonbeing to being) and ceasing to exist (from being to nonbeing) (155e-156a). In short, Plato will now explain the category of transition, how the Forms and their concrete particulars are united. Vigilius defines Plato’s ‘moment’ as “nonbeing under the category of time” (CA, 82n), “the category of transition,” which “lies between motion and rest without being in any time, and into this and from this moment the moving thing changes into a thing at rest, and the thing at rest into a moving thing” (83n). Two difficulties immediately arise from positing this concept: how can the moment of transition be (1) nonbeing and (2) a temporal category yet without being in, i.e., occupying, time at all?

Concerning the first question, Plato himself shows that the moment’s nonbeing logically follows from the nature of being’s relation to time. Given the fact that, for example, we can only conceive of something as either being in motion or at rest but not both simultaneously at any given time slice, the precise transitional *moment* must be *neither* in motion *nor* at rest, “neither  $\epsilon\nu$  [one] nor  $\text{πολλά}$  [many]” (CA, 83n). To see this more analytically, let  $t_1$  stand for the closest time slice prior to the moment of transition,  $t_2$  the closest time slice after the moment, and  $t_{1*2}$  the moment itself. Suppose at  $t_1$  something is (a) in motion and (b) not at rest, but at  $t_2$  it is (c) at rest and (d) not in motion. It seems to follow that  $t_{1*2}$  would include the effects of both  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ , that is, (a) and (b) plus (c) and (d). At  $t_{1*2}$  then, the object is *both* (a) in motion and (b) not at rest

*and* (c) at rest and (d) not in motion. However, (a) contradicts (d) and (b) contradicts (c), which entails that there is no positive determination whatsoever at  $t_{1*2}$ . In other words, the moment instantiates a purely negative state—“neither  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$  nor  $\pi\omicron\lambda\lambda\acute{\alpha}$ .” For this reason, the moment does turn out to be nonbeing, as Vigilius has described, hence resulting in the same consequence of  $H_1$ . The epistemological implication of Plato’s analysis of the moment is now obvious: the moment of transition, so essential to a scientific, that is, metaphysical, construction of reality, is utterly inaccessible to us.

The other qualification of the moment, that it occupies no amount of time (156c), in fact follows from its nonbeing status. However, we have no idea of what it can mean for something to be in time without undergoing any duration. Plato nevertheless cannot avoid this paradoxical view: on the one hand, since the moment of transition can be neither one nor many, as shown conceptually just now, no determination, including temporal ones, can be predicated of it, while on the other hand, the moment must be in time insofar as our senses can tell. In other words, logically or conceptually the moment must be nonbeing, whereas empirically the moment appears to have being. This entails that, as Vigilius’ critique of Hegel has demonstrated, Plato cannot overcome the divide between the conceptual and the empirical either, though he, unlike Hegel, at least soberly acknowledges the difficulty.

#### *2.4. Unreality of Time*

What is more, if we pursue the logical end of Plato’s abstract concept of the moment, time as our commonsense tells us (i.e., a dynamic forward movement that consists of past, present, and future) can only be seen as an illusion. Since time as a whole must consist of these moments where all transitions from one state to another take

place, but they are individually nonbeing, it logically follows that time as a whole turns out to be nonbeing; no matter how many zeroes we add up, we will have exactly—0.<sup>18</sup>

Vigilius aptly expresses Plato's predicament in these words: "Plato deserves credit for having clarified the difficulty; yet the moment remains a silent atomistic abstraction, which, however, is not explained by ignoring it" (CA, 84n). The silent atomistic abstraction is the nothing at which all philosophical efforts at knowing the truth must arrive in the discomfiting presence of the moment: either a philosopher constructs a system of knowledge based on a self-deception that the moment has been adequately explained (e.g., an immanent idealism like Hegel's) or arrives at an irreconcilable form of dualism between the immanent and the transcendent sphere because the philosopher, through a self-critical examination, honestly recognizes the inexplicability of the moment (a transcendent idealism like Kant's).<sup>19</sup> If this appraisal is fundamentally true of philosophy, virtually all of our knowledge claims become reducible to an act of 'faith'—a leap—that our immanent concepts somehow correspond to the transcendent Forms; the next chapter will elaborate on this epistemological claim.

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<sup>18</sup> Herein lies the meaning of Kierkegaard's oft stated claim that Greek idealism lacks the proper understanding of time: "for Greek culture the atom of eternity [i.e., the moment] was essentially eternity, and therefore, neither time nor eternity received its proper due" (CA, 88). Vigilius argues that the closest temporal expression of Plato's abstract conception of time is *time past*, thereby characterizing 'recollection' as the essence of a philosophical system of existence (87, 89-90).

<sup>19</sup> For Kierkegaard, there are two types of idealism—Berkeley's idealism is out of consideration due to its nominalism—respectively corresponding to Hegel and Kant: "a logical immanence or in an immanence within a transcendence that it is unable to explain" (CA, 50). In addition, Kierkegaard (through the voice of Judge William) makes a brief gloss on the difference between Hegel and Kant, clearly favoring the latter: "the latest philosophy [i.e., Hegelianism] has made it a term of abuse to speak of Kant's honest way" (SLW, 152). Plato, however, does not clearly belong to either of the categories due to the intentional ambiguity with which he wrote his dialogues. The aporetic reading of the *Parmenides* I have given so far places Plato closer to Kantian transcendental idealism, whereas the Neoplatonic and Hegelian reading of the same dialogue (and other late dialogues like the *Timaeus*) characterizes Plato's thought as an immanent idealism. The ambiguity arising from the Platonic dialogues also explains why Kierkegaard seems to have different attitudes toward Plato from one work to another. For example, Climacus criticizes the speculative side of Plato in the same way as that of Hegel (CUP, 205-6), whereas Vigilius, as we have seen, favorably contrasts Plato against Hegel.

### 3. Time, Freedom, and Sin

It may be clear to my reader by now that the thorny problem afflicting philosophy at its foundational level, that is, the inexplicability of the category of transition, is basically the problem of time.<sup>20</sup> Because its ‘essence’ is pure motion—though we cannot even properly talk about the ‘essence’ of pure change itself—time remains the perennial stumbling block to philosophy whose fundamental activity consists of abstracting motionless ideas as objects of thought. Plato’s abstract notion of the moment that ends up with—literally—nothing shows the inevitable outcome of treating time as an object.

#### 3.1. Subjective View of Time

It then follows that time must be construed entirely differently, namely as a *subjective* category (i.e., a built-in feature of the mind), for example, in the way Kant does in his first *Critique*. For Kant, time (along with space) is a “transcendental form of intuition,” the pure sensible intuition inherent in the subject that constitutes a cognitive condition necessary for the possibility of sense experience, which enables the mind to *re-present* the sensible particulars as objects of thought, i.e., as objects existing at the same time (simultaneity) or at different times (succession).<sup>21</sup> Kierkegaard’s subjective

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<sup>20</sup> Kierkegaard’s recognition of time’s problematic relation to philosophy is similar to Kant’s. Norman Kemp Smith writes: “The problem of knowledge may therefore be described as being the analysis of the consciousness of duration, of objectivity [in space], and of self-consciousness, or alternatively as the analysis of our awareness of meaning. Kant arrives at the conclusion that the conditions of all four are one and the same.” *A Commentary to Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, revised 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), xxxiv. More recently, Richard M. Gale argues that “the problem of time is not a single problem... [it] is a group of intimately related questions having to do with the nature of the concepts of truth, events, things, knowledge, causality, identification, action, and change.” *The Philosophy of Time* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), vii.

<sup>21</sup> “For simultaneity or succession would not themselves come into perception if the representation of time did not ground them *a priori*. Only under its presupposition can one represent that several things exist at one and the same time (simultaneously) or in different time (successively).” *Critique of Pure Reason*, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 178.

conception of time, however, differs from Kant's in a crucial way, for it makes claims about the very origin of time consciousness, that time, as we now experience it, is brought into existence *contingently*. What is ingenious about his view, though the same point makes itself somewhat impervious to philosophical reasoning, is its inclusion of the Christian doctrine of sin as an essential explanatory component. For this reason, extreme care must accompany our reconstruction of it, as well as some measure of sympathetic readership.

Vigilius first brings his readers' attention to the familiar formulation of self: "*a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal*" (CA, 85). The naturally ensuing question concerns the identity of "the third factor"—the synthetic unity—without which, Vigilius notes, the temporal and the eternal would form a simple contradiction. The author then clarifies the 'essence' of the temporal: "If time is correctly defined as infinite succession, it is most likely also defined as the present, the past, and the future." Call the first description of time 'time as infinite succession' (TIS) and the latter 'time as tensed reality' (TTR). Vigilius, however, considers TTR an *impure* conception: "this distinction is incorrect, if one thinks that it lies in time itself, for it only emerges by time's relation to eternity and by eternity's reflection in time. That is, if one could find in time's infinite succession a foothold, i.e., a present, that was the dividing point, then the division would be entirely correct." The key phrase is "eternity's *reflection* in time."

### 3.2. *Intersection of Time and Eternity*

The denial of TTR as a proper definition of time contains a rather straightforward reasoning: first, TIS in itself possesses no temporal distinction because it is the infinite itself and something infinite (i.e., unlimited) can in principle have no distinction within

itself, as our previous discussion of the *Parmenides* has shown (the One of H<sub>1</sub> has no limits since it has no parts, i.e., beginning, middle, and end), and second, a thing with no distinction in itself is utterly unintelligible. This implies from another angle that, as many philosophers including Plato and Hegel have insightfully argued, the finite categories of being require the accompaniment of their opposites to be intelligible (e.g., one/many, like/unlike, motion/rest, etc.). Let us help ourselves to a concrete example of this idea. Imagine an object circling around you first at a slow speed but progressively at an increasing speed, approaching infinity. When the object's speed reaches an extremely high level, it can no longer be perceived as moving but looks as if it disappeared. Likewise, time as an infinite successive movement could not be perceived at all unless its opposite is introduced into it, namely rest (i.e., a "foothold"), and *the present* (i.e., simultaneity) precisely constitutes that rest which makes time perceivable to our consciousness. In other words, it is with the assertion of the present into TIS that the *secondary* time consciousness, TTR, emerges, for the temporal division (i.e., past/future and before/after) logically depends on the present.

Therefore, simultaneity actually belongs to time only heterogeneously and incongruously. The present moment is, so to speak, an attempt at *stopping* time; it denotes *eternity* and not temporality as such. The term 'simultaneity' has been an essential ingredient of the standard definition of eternity since Boethius: "Eternity, then, is the complete, simultaneous and perfect possession of everlasting life."<sup>22</sup> Vigilius brings our attention to the linguistic fact—remarkably true in Danish as well as in English and German—that the word 'present' ambiguously has temporal as well as spatial

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<sup>22</sup> *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Penguin Classics, trans. Victor Watts (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 132 (Book V, Prose 6).

connotation. And it is the latter that properly represents the eternal, as he writes in the spirit of Boethius, “the eternal is the present, and the present is full” (86); the presence of physical objects simultaneously *fills* empty space. Consequently, time as we know it, that is, TIS *plus* TTR, results from *eternity’s insertion into time*, or in Vigilius’ own words, *the moment* in which “time and eternity touch each other... in time” (89). The moment therefore denotes “the third,” the synthesis of the temporal and the eternal. Although this is the same definition of the moment as Plato’s, i.e., the place of participation of the *temporal* sensibles in the *eternal* Forms, what escapes Plato’s purview entirely is the possibility that a *subjective* phenomenon, rather than an objective reality, explains the moment, for “anxiety is the moment” (81). That is, eternity’s intersection with time is not an objectively given state, but a contingent consequence of subjectivity—a human act of freedom.

### 3.3. *Freedom as the Moment*

While Vigilius’ identification of the moment with anxiety might appear peculiar to most readers, the overall logic behind it is fairly simple. The moment where eternity intersects time is anxiety because anxiety constitutes the psychological precondition necessary for all genuine human acts of freedom, and free action is, in essence, the subject’s conscious attempt to bring the eternal into the temporal, the infinite into the finite, and nonbeing into being. The very philosophical meaning naturally written into the language of ‘action’ conveys Vigilius’ thought to its general truth. Action or actuality in its most general sense just means a *realized potential* or *actualized possibility*. Possibility is not real (i.e., it is nonbeing) until it is actualized. Accordingly, possibility is infinite because its nonbeing status of having no determinate quality makes it without any

limit. Its infinity then logically entails its eternity; it is not bound by anything including time, or in other words, it cannot undergo any change in itself. In short, possibility denotes the One of  $H_1$  (i.e., Forms) and actuality the One of  $H_2$  (exemplars). This metaphysical truth formally applies to every action or actuality in the world, which means that human acts can be also described as actualized possibility ('finitized infinity' or 'temporalized eternity'), the eternal-infinite ideal becoming actualized in the world.

However, this particular actuality, human action, differs from all other actualities in the world in one crucial respect, and that difference is precisely what makes 'the moment' of actuality *conscious* to its originator—something unavailable to any other earthly creatures—and thus is begotten time consciousness. In sum, the origin of time consciousness has everything to do with an act of freedom that brought the realm of possibility (ideality) down to the sphere of actuality (reality). When Adam committed his first genuinely free act, the present or the simultaneous moment (which is, as defined earlier, the eternal) for the first time entered into the human consciousness in its original state—i.e., Adam's mind that was only conscious of TIS, which is to say, unconscious of time at all—and thereby brought into existence time consciousness: TIS *plus* TTR.

### 3.4. *Anxiety in the Garden*

We are now in need of an explanation about the claim that anxiety is the psychologically necessary precondition for freedom. When the divine prohibition is given to Adam,<sup>23</sup> his purely innocent state comes to be imbued with anxiety, which is an

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<sup>23</sup> The fact that 'Adam' in Hebrew literally means 'man' or 'mankind' is significant for Vigilius' analysis, for he rejects any account of original sin that lacks the dialectical view of the human self as both the individual and the race (CA, 25-9). Adam must be essentially viewed in the same way as any of his descendants, and vice versa, with respect to the *qualitative* aspect of sin, i.e., the actual committing of sin

ambiguous desire toward and away from the possibility of transgressing the divinely ordained moral boundary. In anxiety, we are both attracted to and repulsed by—“sympathetic and antipathetic” toward—that possibility (CA, 61). Awakened with this desire, Adam acquires “knowledge of freedom” (44).<sup>24</sup> This knowledge is, however, not a *propositional* kind, the subject of which can be analyzed into a set of finite predicates, but rather, a much more primitive knowledge, something like *acquaintance* or *intuition*, which seems resistant to being abstracted in the mind like some simple representational knowledge of a sensible object. With his conscious awareness of the prohibition, Adam intuits a certain power within himself: the power of freedom to “*be able*,” the possibility concretely felt in anxiety (49).

According to Vigilius, however, anxiety has no object, or rather, has *nothing* as its object, because mere possibility, as shown above, does not have being in the sense of finite determination (CA, 41-3). But this nothing paradoxically has to be something in some sense—albeit, again, what precise sense of being it has cannot be determined—for absolute nothingness could not cause anything, let alone an anxious emotion that attracts and repels Adam’s consciousness. What can be affirmed here at least is that something like Platonic realism about abstract possibilities underlies Vigilius’ analysis; after all, the Platonic definition of truth (i.e., recollection) can be described as an attempt to unite one’s consciousness with those abstract objects.<sup>25</sup> So anxiety’s ‘object’ must be real in

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itself. Vigilius commits himself to Pelagianism, that Adam’s sin and guilt thus could not be literally attributed to us. What gets handed down hereditarily is the *quantitative* aspect of sin, namely anxiety.

<sup>24</sup> Positing some knowledge in the prelapsarian state in fact makes the Genesis story more sensible, since total ignorance would be inconsistent with the idea of moral culpability assumed in the narrative.

<sup>25</sup> Gregory Vlastos notes that Plato was the first philosopher to realize just how profound our attachment can be to abstract objects like social reform, poetry, art, sciences, and philosophy. “The

some ontological sense but not in a way that can be defined in terms of determinate qualities; that is, it is the *unknown*. In other words, its identity belongs in the sphere of the One of H<sub>1</sub>, that which is utterly unintelligible due to its unrepresentability. The ambiguous movement in anxiety is caused by the fact that good and evil lie only implicitly and confusedly in that power of *being able*, the concrete yet vague intuitive knowledge of the realm of *moral* possibility. And Adam's freedom precisely lies in this psychological condition where the concrete possibility of good and evil simultaneously attract and repel him.

A concrete illustration somewhat analogous to the Genesis account may serve to illuminate Vigilius' discussion. Imagine an 8<sup>th</sup> grade teenage boy named Sam, and to maintain the thought experiment's proximity to Adam's Edenic state, suppose further that he grew up being strictly instructed of and conforming to the Christian sexual ethic. His parents and their church taught him regularly that he is to keep himself pure by not giving his sexual affection in any way to anyone except his unknown future wife. While not fully understanding all the reasons for the moral instruction (e.g., concerning the precise nature of human sexuality), Sam has enough sense or intuition about his and others' bodily integrity and sacredness that he commits himself to the teaching. One day he is at his friend's house after school. His friend asks him if he would like to look at a 'dirty magazine.' This temptation arouses in Sam an implicit yet burgeoning desire to satisfy his sexuality (i.e., sympathy) and simultaneously another desire against the former (antipathy), and then, his psychological state becomes imbued with anxiety. To rid

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Individual as an Object of Love in Plato" in *Platonic Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 27.

himself of this uncomfortable state, Sam must freely choose either to obey the moral teaching by denying his friend's offer or go against it by agreeing to gratify his sexuality.

Strictly speaking, Sam's anxiety has no definite object. His sexual desire itself seems to have an object, namely the magazine. The deeper look at the situation will, however, affirm that what he is truly seeking is transcendent Beauty itself, though objectified in the concrete photos, for if the object of his desire were those pictures *simpliciter*, his desire would be totally satisfied by looking at them, but that is not a likely result; rather, his desire will seek more illicit ways of satisfying his sexuality after being awakened by the initial sinful movement (provided that genuine repentance does not follow from the first act). This implicitly shows that if the object of the will is infinite, the will itself, its activity, must be infinite as well. So in willing a sinful act, the act does not remain a discreet, finite act for that moment, but sin essentially becomes *lust*, the ever growing bottomless pit of desire that never gets satisfied. Or perhaps, anxiety might be described as fear, that is, the fear of doing something wrong and the ensuing punishment of some sort. But again, fear only affirms one side, the opposite movement from desire, namely the repellant aspect of anxiety, and thus cannot be identical to anxiety either. Moreover, like desire, the real object of fear is not something concrete like some harm from his parents' punishment, for it is likely that his parents could never find out about this illicit rendezvous. Rather, it is something much more intangible like Sam's intuitive sense of the evil of engaging in the proposed activity. To sum it up then, anxiety is first of all the apparently contradictory psychological condition that lies somewhere between, or dually affirms, desire and fear. Secondly, while it is occasioned by some definite sensible object, the real object of anxiety is some abstract reality: the desire for the Good

(i.e., in this scenario, more specifically the Beautiful) and the fear of Evil (some vague sense of harm on the self).

### 3.5. *Freedom as the Good*

If anxiety is not about any definite object, what is it really? Anxiety is the first person awareness of the subject's will power to choose between good and evil. As shown just now, the concrete sensible object to be chosen (like the magazine photos) constitutes neither good nor evil in the absolute sense, that is, in and of itself, but only serves an accidental and relative role by providing an *occasion* for the subject to choose either the good or the evil that essentially inheres in one's volition: the inward act of intention. For this reason, Kant's claim that the good will is the only absolute good basically underlies the thought here: through my exercise of freedom, I determine good or evil for myself. It is in the very exercise of freedom itself, choosing whether to obey or disobey the law (e.g., the divine prohibition given to Adam or the parental one to Sam), that the human reality of good and evil in the absolute sense exists. Vigilius therefore identifies freedom with the good itself: "the good is freedom" (CA, 111n).<sup>26</sup>

However, identifying freedom with the good is bound to strike many readers as highly problematic, for it leads to pure subjectivism and ethical relativism, thereby equating Kierkegaard's view with the twentieth century existentialist's definition of freedom and the good, the so called "radical choice" reading that reduces the good to a "criterionless choice," the kind of choice that makes the chosen object good just by virtue

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<sup>26</sup> This is a view unmistakably attributable to Kierkegaard himself: "The good is the being-in-and-for-itself, posited by the being-in-and-for-itself, and this is freedom" (EO2, 224). He further elucidates the identity relation in his journal: "*Liberum arbitrium*, which can equally well choose the good or the evil, is basically an abrogation of the concept of freedom and a despair of any explanation of it. Freedom means to be capable. Good and evil exist nowhere outside freedom, since this very distinction comes into existence through freedom" (JP2: 1249).

of its being chosen.<sup>27</sup> While we initially broached the subject (iii.1.2 and 3), it now behooves us to clarify more precisely Kierkegaard's view of the relation between good and freedom—though it must be clarified yet still further later on (vi.3.6). According to *Either/Or II*, the meaning of free choice, conveyed in his unique term “intention,” is a synthesis of necessity and freedom. The term denotes the act of freely—what is the same for Kierkegaard, self-consciously and passionately—choosing some necessary condition of one's life (necessary not in the strictly logical sense but only in the practical sense of being given without one's prior conscious willing). In the immediate context of Judge William's letters, the paradigm case of intention is marriage, one's passionate act of choosing the beloved to whom one is immediately drawn. The dialectical nature of this freedom entails two essential conditions: in the first place, something is given to the agent without his or her prior consent (i.e., the *external* condition of givenness), and in turn, the agent must freely and willingly accept (or reject) the given as a gift, that is, with love (the *inward* condition of choice); the two conditions can also be captured in terms of the more familiar pair of contraries, *passive/active*. The foregoing notion of freedom is clearly captured in Kierkegaard's standard definition of self: “the synthesis of necessity and possibility.” Based on this dialectical definition of the self and its corresponding definition of freedom, the identity of freedom and the good in Kierkegaard's thought means the following: the self achieves the good only by realizing the dialectical freedom through one's inward choice of the external given. The end of human existence is, as Judge William argues, to “choose oneself”—and not to *create* oneself.

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<sup>27</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre's celebrated work has given this 'proto-existentialist' reading a wide hearing. *After Virtue*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Notre Dame: University Notre Dame Press, 1984), 40-3. For critical evaluations of MacIntyre's reading, see *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre: Essays on Freedom, Narrative, and Virtue*, ed. John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd (Chicago: Carus Publishing Company, 2001).

If Kierkegaard's dialectical view of freedom must include both conditions, the external givenness and the inward choice, the "radical choice" reading cannot be the right way to interpret Kierkegaard, precisely because it denies the first condition; and this idea indeed corresponds to the notion of grace observed earlier (iv.3.5)—that all of reality is God's benevolent gift—and will reappear when we examine Kierkegaard's epistemology (vi.2.4). In Adam's or any case of moral action, one's true freedom—the good—lies not in choosing whatever one will, but choosing for oneself, with passion, some divinely given external expression of the moral law.<sup>28</sup> Freedom is, in short, the passionate willing and hence the *internalizing* of the moral law received initially as an extrinsic reality; hence, freedom is both a discreet occurrent conscious event as well as a progressively realized state of consciousness as a whole. Kierkegaard's description of self as "a relation that relates itself to itself" by relating to "an other," namely God,<sup>29</sup> squarely denies the idea of an absolutely free self that can create its own good *ex nihilo* and apart from the Other (SUD, 13-4). According to Anti-Climacus, such a purely and undialectically free self would obliterate the very notion of sin (i.e., willful defiance against the good)—and the idea of guilt along with it—and hence its consequence ("despair of defiance"): "If a human self had posited itself, we could only talk about one form of despair, the despair not to will to be itself, to will to do away with itself, but we could not talk about the despair to will to be itself" (14). By refusing the divinely given condition with simple faith but instead choosing the forbidden, Adam attempted to be like

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<sup>28</sup> Many of the psalms in Scripture express this idea of taking delight or pleasure in God's law: "May your mercy come to me, that I may live, for Your law [*torah*] is my delight" (119:20).

<sup>29</sup> While other human selves can and must provide the content of the other as well, God constitutes the ultimate other, that is, for the highest perfection of the self. For a fuller analysis of this claim, see C. Stephen Evans, "Who is the Other in *The Sickness unto Death*? God and Human Relations in the Constitution of the Self," *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006).

God, the only one capable of *creatio ex nihilo* in its pure sense, and thus has *fallen from grace*.

### 3.6. *Sin to Time to Nihil*

According to the Platonic tradition (of which, I have been arguing, Kierkegaard is a sympathetic yet critical proponent), evil has no being in and of itself: it is nothing.<sup>30</sup> However, this nothing acquires a morally significant concrete content in the Christian view. By choosing to disobey the divine law in the moment of sin, where the eternal entered actuality through an act of freedom, Adam came to *grasp finitude* for the first time, that is, he grasps finitude by loving the finite infinitely, making something finite his highest good (i.e., idolatry), and in turn, grasps finitude in another sense, namely that he now understands his mortality: “And freedom now looks down in its own possibility, and then grasps [*griber*] finitude to get a hold of itself. In this dizziness freedom sinks down”<sup>31</sup> (CA, 61). Time consciousness, so caused by the moment of Adam’s self-conscious action, is at once *finitude consciousness*: Adam now sees all of reality,

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<sup>30</sup> Vigilius assumes the Platonic or Augustinian view of evil as non-reality parasitic on the good: “Sin’s actuality is, to be precise, an actuality that has not existed” (CA, 53). In another place he draws an analogical connection from this metaphysical view to the ethical: “One uses in general a more metaphysical expression about evil, that it is the negative; the ethical expression here is precisely when one sees the effect of that [evil] in the individual, the inclosing reserve” (124).

<sup>31</sup> The Danish word *segner*, translated as ‘succumbs’ by Reidar Thomte, is one of those Danish words that do not have a close English correspondence. It describes the slowly sinking motion by an animal or human as its vitality is being sapped. Kierkegaard specifically uses this word here instead of *falde* (‘to fall’), in order to highlight the dimension of weakness that seems to accompany sinful action: “psychologically speaking, the Fall [*Syndefaldet*] always occurs in weakness” (CA, 61). Of course, so as not to appear to do away with moral responsibility, Vigilius immediately qualifies his statement by pointing to the “selfish” dimension of sin. This discussion foreshadows Anti-Climacus’ dialectical view of sin as both weakness and defiance in *The Sickness unto Death*.

centrally his own existence, as inexorably moving toward nothingness.<sup>32</sup> Once the moment of sin is posited in anxiety, Adam and his posterity become subject to anxiety yet in another sense, namely “anxiety over death.”<sup>33</sup> Since the conscious recognition of one category depends on that of its opposite and subsequently the whole cognitive process is mutually reinforcing in its scope (i.e., the degree of the consciousness of one category is equally commensurable to that of the other), humanity’s intensified consciousness of finitude through sin manifests itself in the equally intensified consciousness of infinity. Thus we come to have the separation between the one and the many, creating in us an insatiable longing for eternity—the One.

Adam asserts his independence from the Source of all being through his disobedient act, which consequently opens his eyes to the basic truth about his existence: a finite, mortal life sustained only by the gracious act of an infinitely good God. Once sin brings into existence the consciousness of time and finitude, its effect is irrevocable, for freedom, identified as the good, is an infinite reality, which makes the first sinful moment an infinite choice, thereby permanently disposing Adam against the good; his will is bent away from the good *for good*. All subsequent attempts to actualize the eternal (the good) in time are thus reduced to empty contentless moments, which together culminate in the existential phenomenon that robs meaning of all existence: boredom, and its more

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<sup>32</sup> Note well, however, that this account does not identify sin with finitude, as in Hegel’s dialectic that, as seen above, equates sin with finite reasoning. Kierkegaard’s view only affirms that sin *results in* the consciousness of finitude; sin and finitude (or finitude consciousness) thus are not the same thing.

<sup>33</sup> According to the Genesis account, even birth, the coming into existence of the human self, is cursed with pain in order to remind us of our tragic inevitable end in death: “The anxiety over death therefore corresponds to the anxiety over birth” (CA, 92n). The anxiety over death, however, could not be identical to the anxiety in which sin is first posited by Adam since he could not have known what death was. Thus Vigilius distinguishes two senses of anxiety: “Sin entered in anxiety, but sin in turn resulted in anxiety. . . . Anxiety then means two things: The anxiety in which the individual posits sin by the qualitative leap, and the anxiety, which entered and enters with sin, and which accordingly also quantitatively enters the world every time an individual posits sin” (53, 54).

intensified form, despair. And that is nihilism in its purest form, our conscious awareness of nothingness. With human existence fundamentally reduced to a static and boring nothing, no motion toward the eternal-infinite Good can ever be realized by the effort of our own will, infinitely disposed and conditioned toward sin and evil—nothing. Adam and the rest of mankind are consequently in need of exactly the opposite moment, that is, the moment *full* of the eternal: the Incarnation, the Atonement, and the Resurrection. That is, *the fullness of time*—faith.

## CHAPTER SIX

### The Moment of the God/man and Faith

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος ...  
Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν

John 1

“He made known to us the mystery of His will... the plan for  
*the fullness of time to unite all things in Christ*, things in the  
heavens and things on the earth in Him”

Ephesians 1:9-10

“For it was the Father’s good pleasure for  
*all the fullness* to dwell in Him, and  
through Him to *reconcile all things*  
to Himself, having made peace  
by the blood of His cross.”

Colossians 1:19-20

Kierkegaard’s category of the moment, as noted in the last chapter, refers to the consciously willed intersection of the eternal and the temporal, the infinite and the finite. He takes us to the conclusion based on the Christian revelation that the *first* moment of sin explains our consciousness of time and finitude, resulting in the phenomenological sense of nothingness, boredom, and its more intense form, despair. In what follows, we shall examine Kierkegaard’s discussion of the exact opposite kind of moment in *Philosophical Fragments*, the moment that effectually unites the eternal with the temporal, thereby reversing the effect of the sinful moment: faith in Christ the God/man. Divided up in three parts, the chapter explains three dimensions of the moment: (1) the historical moment, i.e., in the most general metaphysical sense, (2) the epistemic mechanism (“organ”) corresponding to the historical moment, namely faith (or belief),

and (3) the moment of a believer's faith in the God/man, the existential-religious application of (1) and (2) in relation to the moment of the God/man.

### *1. The Metaphysical Moment: Coming-into-existence*

The term "the historical moment" refers to the intersection between the eternal and the temporal in the most general sense metaphysically. As it turns out, the account put forth by the pseudonymous author of *Fragments*, Johannes Climacus, exactly corresponds to that of Vigilius Haufniensis. This means that Kierkegaard continues to address the problem of motion (i.e., change) in *Fragments* as a fundamentally important philosophical problem.

#### *1.1. Coming-into-existence*

Besides "the historical moment," Climacus has another term denoting change in the ordinary and general sense: 'coming-into-existence' (*Tilblivelse*). He distinguishes two types of change: (1) "coming-into-existence [which] is the transition from possibility to actuality" (PF, 74), i.e., from nonbeing to being, and (2) "all other change [which] presupposes the existence of that in which the change occurs" (73), an existing object changing its quality. Climacus' statement that "every change has always presupposed a something" (PF, 74) points to the dialectical feature of motion discernible in its very language: change must include continuity as well as difference.

The constant factor in the second type of change is obvious, for it is the existing substance (e.g., green leaves turn yellow in the fall). But what constitutes the constant in the first type, the transition from possibility to actuality? To reply, as Climacus does, that the change in question is "not in essence but in being" implies that the grammar of

motion itself assumes a Platonic ontology, for it is the essence or the Form that remains constant in the change (PF, 73); the essence ‘was’ merely *possible* before the change, but in and after coming into existence, it ‘becomes’ actual. Hence, in Climacus’ metaphysics, as well as in Haufniensis’ (v.3.3), possibilities correspond to Platonic essences.

### 1.2. Critique of Hegelian Modality

We can additionally infer the two pseudonyms’ agreement about the nature of the moment from their similar criticism of the Hegelian account. As commentators typically note, one of Climacus’ main purposes in “The Interlude” is the criticism of Hegel’s claim that the past necessarily occurred the way it did.<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, Hegel explains modal categories dialectically by construing necessity as a mediating unity-in-difference of possibility and actuality: *x*, some *actuality*, comes into being *necessarily* from the previous conditions that jointly make *x*’s existence a *real possibility*.<sup>2</sup> The Hegelian notion of necessity is thus *relative*, that is, relative to the surrounding conditions; if the right conditions are in place, some actuality will necessarily be brought forth into existence. Michael Inwood explains Hegel’s modality more fully in its relation to his

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Roberts seems baffled by the sheer incredibility of the Hegelian claim: “The proposal that Hegel seems to be making—that events occur by logical necessity—is indeed very strange. So strange that one might be inclined to think of his entire construction of historical events and movements as a colossal grammatical joke if there were even the slightest hint that it ought to be taken that way.” *Faith, Reason, and History: Rethinking Kierkegaard’s Philosophical Fragments* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986), 104. In reality, however, the claim is no stranger than the foreknowledge problem that has puzzled philosophers since antiquity. The only way for a knower to know the future that involves ‘free’ actions (and this without annulling the temporal reality) is to know the *logic* inherent in those actions, which in turn negates freedom. Whether grasping the logic of the past actions entails necessity or not, the question pertinent to Hegel and Climacus is essentially the same as the foreknowledge problem. For this reason, Climacus writes: “If the past had become necessary, . . . the future would also be necessary” (PF, 77).

<sup>2</sup> Hegel writes, “when all the conditions are present [i.e., what Hegel calls ‘real possibilities,’ which are the pre-existent actualities altogether necessary to bring about what is to become actual], the matter *must* become actual, and the matter is itself one of the conditions.” *Encyclopaedia Logic*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991), 220.

whole metaphysical system: “since the emergence of the thing from its conditions involves the sublation of those conditions, the sublation of mediation into immediacy, it is also absolute or unconditional necessity, so that it is exemplified by any relatively self-contained and self-sustaining entity that absorbs the conditions of its emergence: a work of art, an organism, a person, a state, etc.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, any given thing’s existence is necessary, not in the absolute sense, but in the *dialectical* way, for it exists necessarily in the relative sense, i.e., in its relation to the surrounding reality, but also ‘absolutely,’ first, in itself as a subsisting thing, and secondly, in the metaphysically broadest sense, as a constituent part of the absolute whole. Necessity, construed so relatively, runs through and through all of reality, from the evolution of new organisms to the establishment of new political states; e.g., given the conditions of the abject poverty of the masses, the growing resentment toward absolute monarchy, etc. in the late eighteenth century France, the French Revolution and the new forms of government following the event were necessary.

Johannes contends that the Hegelian move conflates two separate spheres, essence and being, thereby basically affirming Vigilius’ charge of equivocation (v.1.2):

Possibility and actuality are not different in essence but in being. How could this difference [in being] constitute a unity that is necessity, which is not a determination of being but of essence, since the necessity’s essence is to be. In such a case, possibility and actuality, by becoming necessity, become absolutely another essence, which is not change, and would, by becoming necessity or the necessary, become the one and only thing that rules out coming-into-existence, which is just as impossible as it is self-contradictory. (PF, 74)

So fundamentally incommensurate is the category of necessity with that of contingency that Climacus denies any attempt at a philosophical synthesis. Parenthetically referring

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<sup>3</sup> *A Hegel Dictionary* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), 198. While Hegel tries to account for contingency in his system, Inwood concludes that he ultimately fails to give a satisfactory account of the notion or how it can be reconciled with that of necessity.

to Aristotle, he acknowledges the general temptation toward mixing up necessity and possibility by moving from the former to the latter. While the absurdity of going from possibility to necessity may seem obvious to anyone, going from necessity to possibility nevertheless seems plausible: If it is necessary to be, it is possible to be. Climacus seems to have a *reductio* in mind against this intuition: (1) suppose that if it is necessary to be, it is possible to be; (2) if it is possible to be, it is possible not to be; and therefore; (3) if it is necessary to be, it is possible not to be; but this is absurd; therefore, (1) is false.

Aristotle's intuition fails because "the necessary is absolutely different from both [possibility and actuality]" (PF, 75). For every necessary truth, there is absolute unconditionality and self-referentiality, of which no contingency can be predicated: "the necessary is [*er til*] because it is necessary or because the necessary is." Take a necessarily true judgment like 'the sum of all angles in a triangle makes two right angles.' The geometrical principle is true unconditionally—true in all possible worlds—and no empirically observable triangle can falsify it. Moreover, what is necessary is true because any and all predicates about triangle as such, not this or that sensible triangle, are true analytically, that is, by definition; the subject and the predicate in a judgment that *S* is *P* are strictly identical. But no contingent thing we know of can be necessary in these ways; *S* and *P* (e.g., in 'the sky is blue') are *never* strictly identical. Our common modal intuition seems to affirm an entrenched division in reality with necessity belonging to the sphere of the infinite (the unconditioned) and contingency the finite (the conditioned).

### *1.3. Ethical Implication*

Hegelians would no doubt charge Climacus of assuming uncritically the truth of the commonsense modal intuition, which on their account finds its sufficient

explanation—i.e., it is sublated—in Hegel’s system. My point is not to settle the dispute conclusively here, but rather, simply to consider yet another argument in favor of Kierkegaard’s overall point that a metaphysical synthesis between the two spheres, the one and the many, cannot be attained. By showing that no historical moment is necessary, Kierkegaard once again affirms the inexplicability of motion at the precise moment of transition from nonbeing to being, the infinite to the finite.

However, there is a more significant motivation behind Climacus’ criticism of Hegelian modality. According to Climacus, there is an enormous ethical price to pay if Hegel’s view were in fact correct or his idea became embodied in people’s actual existence individually and socially, for “freedom itself would be an illusion and coming-into-existence no less an illusion” (PF, 78). Therefore, Kierkegaard’s rather abstruse and challenging metaphysical-epistemological discourse in “The Interlude” serves the ultimate purpose of guarding what he takes to be the true conception of freedom, without which the highest and most rigorous view of the moral life, envisioned by Christianity, cannot be properly understood and realized.

## 2. *The Epistemological Moment: Faith*

Freedom is such a pervasive and fundamental reality of our conscious life that, according to Climacus, even a belief about *any* given historical moment is “an act of freedom, an expression of will” (PF, 83). Many readers have been baffled and embarrassed by this supposed ‘doxastic voluntarism,’ the idea that we have voluntary control over our beliefs. Louis Pojman is one such reader, criticizing the Climacian account from a “phenomenological perspective,” that is, a straightforward commonsense view of consciousness: “Normally, as we have seen, believing takes place apart from the

will; it is an event rather than an act; and trying to get oneself to believe what the evidence doesn't permit is generally immoral.”<sup>4</sup> However, looking beyond the common caricature of this view as claiming that any belief whatsoever can be willed directly, the following section will offer a deeper perspective behind this controversial epistemic view, for I shall argue that it is a natural consequence of what is, for all we know, the correct ontological view of reality, expressed by the dualistic account of modality as described above, the view assumed in Platonic ontology. In other words, if necessity and contingency cannot be mediated, which as a whole affirms our familiar Kierkegaardian thesis that the infinite sphere *qualitatively* differs from the finite, Climacus' account of the belief forming mechanism of our consciousness, his 'doxastic voluntarism,' is the epistemological story most consistent with the dualistic metaphysical picture.

### *2.1. Immediate Knowing: Sensation*

Climacus begins his case with an obviously true disjunction: knowledge is either immediate or mediate. He further divides the immediate into two categories: “Immediate sensation and immediate cognition cannot deceive” (PF, 81). The first category denotes the most primitive kind of sensation, whereas the second type the intuiting of what is necessarily true. In what sense are these two modes of knowing immediate? It is obvious to see how mere sensation can be immediate: it is wholly unmediated and unobjectified by the concepts which the mind subsequently uses to make sense of it.

How does immediate sense knowledge entail indubitability? Consider Climacus' examples:

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<sup>4</sup> *The Logic of Subjectivity: Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1984), 114.

When the perceiver thus sees a star, the star becomes for him doubtful in the moment he wants to become aware that it has come into existence... So if, for example, sensation shows me an object at a distance as round, which is seen as square nearby, or shows me a stick broken in the water, although it is straight when it is taken out, sensation has not deceived me. But I am first deceived when I conclude something about the stick and that object. (PF, 81-2)

The mind cannot deny what is given to it immediately, namely the presence of sensation in the form of sheer bundles of qualities.<sup>5</sup> Hence, the bare *existence* of the sensed object, that something exists, is not in question, that is, its abstract existence in the Hegelian sense of being considered in and of itself apart from its relation to any other fact about reality: “it does not believe that the star [i.e., the shiny blot] exists, for that it sees” (81). However, in the moment I try to link the bundle to some essence or concept by making a judgment about it in the form of a proposition (e.g., ‘that shiny blot is a *star*’ or ‘the broken object is a *stick*’), I have left the realm of certain and immediate knowledge and gone over into that of *mediate* knowledge about the historical moment, whose essential component is the belief that “the star has come into existence,” and absolute certainty is lost thereby.<sup>6</sup> This is to say, every judgment that some subject has some predicate (*S* is *P*), not that it exists (*S* is), inherently entails the belief about the historical moment, that the process of becoming (i.e., coming-into-existence) where a mere possibility becomes an actuality has occurred; some eternal essence became exemplified in time and space.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The ‘bundle’ language immediately conjures up David Hume’s epistemology. C. Stephen Evans rightly associates Climacus’ view to Hume’s epistemology. *Ibid.*, 131-2.

<sup>6</sup> Climacus’ notion of perception *proper* seems to correspond to what we call today, in accordance with Robert Audi’s category, “*simple perception*,” while that of the conclusion about a perceived object may correspond to “*perceiving that*,” which issues in a propositional belief. *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 15.

<sup>7</sup> Climacus describes the explanatory gap as ‘double uncertainty,’ the presence of which explains the possibility of doubt, our conscious awareness of uncertainty: “nonbeing’s nothingness and the annihilated possibility, which is again every other possibility’s annihilation” (PF, 81). There are three logical components to every historical moment: (1) nonbeing (i.e., mere possibility or essence), (2) transition from nonbeing to being (the moment), and (3) being (some finite quality). “Nonbeing’s

Or in other words, the object of belief is always some *change*, transition from essence to being, that occurs in the world, and this explains why Climacus discusses the metaphysical problem of motion first, as we saw in the previous section.

Immediate sensation emits epistemic certainty because of its *apparent* absoluteness: when seeing these objects immediately, one cannot help but see them as shiny, broken, or round things. But, as Hegel rightly notes in *Phenomenology of Spirit*,<sup>8</sup> this ‘sense certainty’ is a deceptive kind of certainty because it is wholly abstract and thus an incomplete truth. In other words, it is incomplete because it disregards the sense object’s inherent *relativity* and *conditionality*, for any object of sensation behaves differently to the mind depending on its relation to the surrounding environment and the mind (e.g., the broken stick in the water and the round object at a distance from the observer). Since this is the essential truth about any finite being, immediate sensation thus gives us false absoluteness. However, our recognition of the false absoluteness of all sensibles, that is, finitude’s inherent relativity and conditionality, owes itself to our awareness of the *real* absolute and unconditioned (i.e., the infinite), for the very notion of relativity could not be known apart from being aware of the true absolute. In other words, the essential relativity-conditionality of sensibles can be grasped only when the objects are *consciously made* to be in relation to the absolute-unconditioned. What then is the absolute? It is the law of cognition: logic (i.e., identity and noncontradiction) and mathematics (arithmetic and geometry).

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nothingness” refers to (1), while “the annihilated possibility” (2), and these together cause two ‘blind spots’ in our consciousness. While (3) is immediately sensed via perception, it is unintelligible on its own, and therefore, consciousness must mediate (3) with (1) somehow.

<sup>8</sup> Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 58-9.

## 2.2. Immediate Knowing: Cognition.

Let me explain this structure of the mind with the aforementioned example of the broken stick. Why should the mind think that the straight stick in the air and the broken stick in the water are the self-same object, when the two properties are contradictory? We *believe* they are the identical object, for our consciousness, owing to its intrinsic law of unity according to Plato (iv.1.3), can intuitively recognize the object's self-identity without being able to explain the difference immediately. In turn, however, the identity claim can be justified and explained based on scientific knowledge, in particular, the physical law of optics (the light's ability to refract), which is really governed by the absolute-unconditional law of mathematics (since physics is an applied mathematics). These laws constitute the second type of immediate knowing because, in a purely logical or mathematical proof, a conclusion follows *deductively* (rather than inductively) from its premises, and this is what Climacus calls 'cognition' (*Erkjenden*).<sup>9</sup>

While Climacus does not discuss cognition as much or directly as sensation, his scattered comments in the text make it plausible to say that it refers to certain immediate recognition or intuiting of the *necessarily true*. He takes such knowing to involve "essence and not being" (PF, 85) and it is necessity that "pertains to essence" (86). As is commonly known in philosophy, the laws of cognition mentioned above are *a priori* in the sense that their truth does not depend on the empirical matters of fact. Furthermore, the *a priori* cognitive law is the intrinsic, ready-built-in feature of our consciousness,

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<sup>9</sup> The Hongs have translated the Danish word *Erkjenden* and *Erkjendelsen* respectively as 'cognition' and 'knowledge' for the most part. Unfortunately the English word 'cognition' connotes a sense of purely discursive reflection, which Climacus does not necessarily intend. 'Recognition' or 'intuition' might be a better choice in one sense because of the greater sense of immediacy than 'cognition.' However, the translation is correct insofar as Kierkegaard's word corresponds to Kant's term *Erkenntnis*, commonly translated as 'cognition,' which precisely denotes what is meant by Climacus (as we shall see shortly).

which means that it is not added extrinsically by sense perception as one particular learned fact among many; in accordance with the Platonic epistemological view of recollection, it is the Form of Equality, something that is *basic* to thinking itself.

The mind's essential function is then to synthesize the object of sensation with the law of cognition into a *general concept* that in turn makes it possible for *further* cognition at various levels of complexity, ranging from the simplest judgment (*S is P*) to a systematic-scientific construction. When coming to be in contact with sensibles, our consciousness, laden with the law of cognition, first recognizes the self-identity of the object, and in turn, creates a concept based on its mathematical law about numbers and figures, which makes bundles of indistinct patches and shapes into an intelligible universal. These universal concepts then precisely refer to the essences (or possibilities) knowable to the mind, and it is in this sense that Climacus argues that immediate cognition relates to "essence and not being."

### *2.3. Faith as Unity of Consciousness*

Having explained two modes of immediate knowing this way, one can observe a striking feature about them: they form extreme contraries on the one/many dialectical continuum. First consider subjectivity/objectivity and particularity/universality. Immediate sensation is the most purely subjective and particular mode of knowing, for there are exactly as many sense data of an object as there are perceivers, whereas immediate cognition is the most purely objective and universal for precisely the opposite reason. Yet paradoxically both entail unfalsifiability respectively in and of themselves and thus "cannot deceive." Of the two epistemic modes, more contraries can be predicated: temporal/eternal (the validity of sensation is only for that moment while that

of necessary truths transcends time) and contingent/necessary (sense objects are subject to coming-into-existence, whereas necessary truths are not).

It should be clear, I hope, by now that the two modes of immediate knowing respectively fall under the two spheres to which the two modal categories earlier mentioned belong separately, with immediate cognition belonging to the infinite-unconditioned, the realm of necessity, and immediate sensation to the finite-conditioned, the realm of contingency. If Climacus' commonsense—Platonic—intuition about these two spheres is true, they cannot be mediated through reason: there cannot be a necessary relation from one to the other. So understood, Climacus' voluntarism about belief, that every belief is “an act of freedom, an expression of will,” can no longer be seen so implausible; or better yet, it is the epistemological view we *ought* to expect if reality were so disjointed into the infinite and the finite sphere. Since *mediate* knowledge essentially involves a judgment about the historical moment of coming-into-existence from nonbeing to being (i.e., that *S* is *P*), these two metaphysical spheres and the epistemic modes that relate to them respectively are so radically contradictory that their connection cannot possibly be a natural—rationally explainable—transition, but rather, one that must be forged by the mind's active self-conscious relating of the two, i.e., in an act of freedom.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> This is the decisive difference between Kierkegaard and the entire German idealist tradition. The epistemological story in Kant, for example, locates the synthesis in “transcendental apperception” and thus construes it as transcendently necessary; this necessity becomes dialectical necessity with Hegel as seen above. While noting that Kant's synthetic *a priori* is in the background of Kierkegaard's immediate/mediate knowledge distinction, Ulrich Knappe identifies their fundamental difference this way: “Kant attempts to relate understanding and intuitions by establishing a kind of transcendental truth or transcendental content of knowledge. ... However, the difference between intuitions perceived by sense perception and intuitions in themselves—what Kierkegaard calls ‘actuality’—is *not absolute*. ... But, according to Kierkegaard, Kant doesn't separate *things in themselves* from things we perceive in a radical enough fashion, since the very same *things in themselves* both affect us and are represented by us through space and time.” *Theory and Practice in Kant and Kierkegaard*, Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series 9 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 42. Though Knappe's characterization of Kierkegaard's disagreement with Kant is broadly correct, it lacks a substantial explanation of the former's metaphysics as well as psychology; his ensuing conclusion that the Kierkegaardian criticism against Kant is unjustified precisely

The two spheres are so contradictory mutually that when they come together in the historical moment, they cancel each other out to nothingness, as it were: “nonbeing’s nothingness—the possible ‘how’ of the actual thus and so” (PF, 85). And in this specific sense, the reader must understand Climacus’ description of any coming-into-existence as “contradiction” (and not that something coming into being is impossible): “What has been here applies to the directly historical, whose contradiction is only that it has come into existence, whose contradiction is only that of coming-into-existence” (86).

To note Kierkegaard’s favorite thesis again, we cannot explain the moment, *how* the two contradictory spheres can be joined together, and this is precisely why “faith in the ordinary sense”—i.e., “an act of freedom, an expression of will”—and not reason’s necessary movement, is the only epistemic “organ” that can cross over the explanatory gap. This is then the proper connotation of Kierkegaard’s concept of ‘leap of faith,’ that consciousness takes a leap over the gap between the two spheres in order to make a historical judgment, that is, a judgment about some change in the world. Therefore, we can safely conclude that Climacus’ voluntaristic epistemology is a natural consequence of the metaphysical view that espouses “the paradox,” which arises from the two contrary spheres of reality that cannot be mediated by reason. With this conclusion, it follows that every time we make a judgment about something, we are faced with this paradoxical reality, though virtually unconscious of it in most cases. For this reason, Climacus states that the paradox is “fundamentally present everywhere in thought,” but “because of habit

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shows the apparent lack of a fuller understanding of Kierkegaard’s epistemology. His epistemology simply cannot be made sense of apart from a meticulous reconstruction of his account of belief.

we do not discover this” (PF, 37). Only when one begins to probe deeper, i.e., engage in philosophy, does one actually discover the paradox everywhere.<sup>11</sup>

#### 2.4. Faith as Freedom

In sum, it is an epistemological truth first, before one can render its religious implication, that faith provides unity to our consciousness; it synthesizes the two immediate modes of knowing and thus the two contradictory spheres by an act of will. Faith is then identical to freedom, insofar as a free act is, as defined before (v.3.3), any *conscious* relating of the infinite and the finite. While more will be said about freedom toward the end of this chapter after considering the nature of religious faith in the final section, we have now seen the metaphysical and epistemic foundation of human freedom, which in turn explains why freedom pervades human existence so thoroughly in Kierkegaard’s thought. Precisely because reality *qua* the two incongruous spheres is paradoxical when philosophically scrutinized, as Plato’s philosophy demonstrates so clearly, it is Kierkegaard’s philosophical—and I dare say *Platonic*—conclusion, aided by the Christian revelation, that an act of faith must provide the “missing link”<sup>12</sup> between the two spheres, even though we make this move virtually unconsciously when forming ordinary beliefs about the world. If this view is true, the relation from seeing an object via sensation to a conscious judgment about it through intuiting its essence cannot be

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<sup>11</sup> Kierkegaard writes in his journal that the paradox is “not a concession but a category, an ontological determination that expresses the relation between an existing cognitive spirit and the eternal truth” (JP3: 3089). In other words, paradox is not simply some problem that strikes us as puzzling, but it is our epistemic recognition of the fundamental duality of our ontology.

<sup>12</sup> This phrase is taken from Kierkegaard’s journal entry concerning the nature of the paradox and faith: “By reason [Leibniz] understands, as he says many places, a linking together of truths (*enchainement*), a conclusion from cause. Faith therefore cannot be *proved, demonstrated, comprehended*, for the link which makes a linking together possible is missing, and what else does this say than that it is a paradox” (JP3: 3073).

such a simple transition as Pojman suggests, a direct and unmediated event entailing some necessary relation. In essence, Pojman's claim contradicts the truth of our dualistic metaphysical reality, as Hegel's philosophy does.<sup>13</sup>

We shall end this section with an important qualifier, however. Though belief turns out to be an act of freedom on Climacus' metaphysics and epistemology, this freedom must not be understood as an *absolute* one that can, in the most literal sense, create an object for our consciousness at will, for there holds the distinction between "an absolutely freely acting cause" and "a relatively freely acting cause" (PF, 76). Since absolutely creative freedom is for God—only His conscious intersection of the infinite and the finite really results in the creation and conservation of the world, the mind independent world—I cannot simply believe at will any belief whatever. Instead, I must *freely* accept what is *freely* given, because, as argued previously (v.3.5), human freedom is a *dialectical* reality that involves the self-conscious relation of the external condition of *givenness* with the internal condition of *choice*.<sup>14</sup> For this reason, it is safe to say that Climacus' 'doxastic voluntarism' is not committed to the implausible claim that we have a direct voluntary control over all of our beliefs, but rather, it is a simple honest

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<sup>13</sup> Thus, it turns out that by seeing belief as a causally necessary event, Pojman unwittingly agrees with Hegel's necessitarian view as shown above; Hegel's seemingly outlandish view is therefore simply the logical conclusion of what many philosophers believe without seeing the deep structure of their beliefs.

<sup>14</sup> C. Stephen Evans likewise sees the problem with Pojman's criticism as stemming from a superficial view of Kierkegaard's notion of will and freedom, for the terms must be understood in the context of his overall depth psychology. "If anything is evident about Kierkegaard as a psychologist, it is that he is a depth psychologist. While Kierkegaard certainly assigns will a central place in the human personality, he thinks that human beings hardly ever make choices with full consciousness of what they are doing. ... Secondly, Climacus nowhere says that beliefs can be controlled by the will *directly*. Pojman's reading implies that beliefs can be produced or annihilated willy-nilly, but this is simply not present in the text. Pojman simply does not consider the possibility that Climacus, in speaking of the human power to will to believe something, may have in mind the well-known fact that beliefs can be modified indirectly, in the course of doing other things. That it is the latter possibility that Climacus has in mind is strongly suggested by the fact that he calls both belief and doubt passions." *Passionate Reason* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 134.

acknowledgment of our creatureliness: it affirms, on the one hand, the Platonic metaphysical view, which is to say that reality is the paradox that cannot be overcome by reason's necessary movement, and correspondingly on the other hand, the relative-dialectical nature of our freedom.

### *3. The Pride of Man, the Humility of God, and the Moment of Faith*

We are now ready to see how Climacus' metaphysical-epistemological account of the moment—the view that zealously tries to preserve a robust (*vis-à-vis* Hegelian) yet appropriately modest (*vis-à-vis* Sartrean) concept of freedom—relates to our moral existence. This brings us to the two existential moments and paradoxes, two radically contrary expressions of freedom: sin and faith. The chapter titled, “The Absolute Paradox (A Metaphysical Caprice),” particularly provides a proper textual point of departure, as it seamlessly weaves together the metaphysical-epistemological discussion of the moment and the existential moments of sin and faith.

#### *3.1. To Know the God of the Moment*

The chapter contains Kierkegaard's well-known criticism of traditional natural theology, the philosophical approach to the knowledge of God. It begins by identifying “the paradox” as “the passion of thought” to “want to discover something which thought itself cannot think” (PF, 37) and furthermore the paradox as “the unknown,” i.e., “*the god*” (39). Climacus' identification of the paradox, “the passion of thought,” with God indicates that God is the final object of our desire, both intellectual and moral. Hence, in the manner consistent with the western intellectual tradition at large, influenced by Plato's thought, Climacus equates the knowledge of God with the “eternal

consciousness,” that is, the “eternal happiness.” According to Climacus, however, God only admits negative knowledge to our intellectual consciousness, for He is absolutely different: “It is the limit to which it continually comes, and therefore, when the category of movement is replaced with that of rest, it is the different, the absolutely different. But it is the absolutely different, about which there is no distinguishing mark” (44-5).

The passage must be understood in terms of the problem of motion (i.e., change) with which the present and previous chapter have been primarily concerned. Climacus’ claim is that change from one category to its contrary requires a third that is absolutely different from either of the two. The difference cannot be a *quantitative* difference (i.e., more or less likeness relation) of one or the other category, insofar as the switch into the opposite quality can never occur by pure quantitative change (e.g., less and less motion in itself can never arrive at rest, the absolute zero). Rather, a *qualitative* difference that is neither like motion nor rest must occupy the moment of transition. The problem precisely is, however, that our mind cannot grasp “the absolutely different.” The passage effectively recapitulates Plato’s dilemma in the *Parmenides*, as seen previously (v.2.3), where, in trying to explain the category of change, he found himself in a thoroughly ironic situation. Plato had to posit the concept of the absolute difference that occupies the moment of change between motion and rest, but precisely because it is absolutely different from either category, our mind cannot grasp it. This reference to Plato indicates again that the epistemological mechanism undergirding Climacus’ discussion is Platonic, for it is our *recollective* mind that functions based on a *kinship* relation; we explain things by making various conceptual connections among the universal concepts ‘abstracted’ from the empirical objects. In other words, thinking can only comprehend its objects in

terms of the categories immanent to itself, those that are generated from itself, as we have seen above (i.e., the law of identity). However, since the absolutely different inhabits every moment of change, there is no “distinguishing mark (*Kjendetegn*)”<sup>15</sup> from which the mind can comprehend. To know this absolute difference *absolutely*, according to Climacus, our consciousness would have to “transcend itself” or “negate itself” absolutely, which it cannot do by itself (PF, 45).

All of this points to the fact that the unknown God must be identified with Kierkegaard’s metaphysical concept of the moment, the point of transition in which the paradoxical unity of the two spheres holds. The moment then refers to both the moment of change in the first divine act of creation when something was created from nothing and every moment of change thereafter. This is simply a philosophical way of affirming the common theistic assertion that God is both the creator and active sustainer of all that exists: “in Him we live and move and exist” (Acts 17:28). Precisely because reality as we know it is a direct result of God’s *free* act, in His creation as well as conservation of the world, we cannot know the moment absolutely, but rather, only relatively and analogically by exercising our own free act, that is, by *believing* it.

### 3.2. *Philosophical Idolatry*

Climacus then explains, perhaps to his readers’ surprise, that not only is the metaphysical approach to the knowledge of God doomed to failure, but it is a basically *sinful* enterprise, for it commits pride and idolatry by making God in man’s own image and collapsing God’s difference from man into likeness:

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<sup>15</sup> This Danish word is pregnant with Platonic connotation, insofar as it lexically means some mark by which one recognizes or recalls something one has already seen in the past.

But this difference cannot be maintained. Every time it happens, it is basically an arbitrariness, and at the bottom of [philosophical] devoutness there madly lurks the capricious arbitrariness, which knows that it itself has produced the god. If the difference cannot be maintained because there is no distinguishing mark, it is with the difference and the likeness as with all such dialectical opposites—they are [made] identical. The difference, which attaches itself to the understanding, has so confused this [understanding] that the understanding does not know itself, and totally consistently mistakes itself for the difference. (PF, 45)

The understanding's philosophical self-identification with the difference (i.e., God) is later identified as sin: "What, then, is the difference? Indeed, what else but sin, since the difference, the absolute difference, must have been caused by the individual himself" (PF, 47). Suddenly identifying the metaphysical way to the knowledge of God with sin may seem rather dubious to some readers, but there is a deeper basis for their identity. Christianly viewed, the root of all sin is pride, the act of making oneself out to be like God, and its converse, idolatry, making God out to be like oneself. The metaphysical explanation of God, the nineteenth century culmination of which was found in Hegel's pantheistic system, expresses the same idea of pride and idolatry as when one commits sin by transgressing the divinely established moral limit.

### *3.3. Sin of Pantheism*

To equate sin with the pantheistic standpoint with respect to God is a surprisingly common thread in Kierkegaard's thought. The Christian pseudonym Anti-Climacus clearly identifies sin with pantheism: "the qualitative difference between God and man is pantheistically abolished" (SUD, 117). Anti-Climacus further describes two modes of pantheism, the intellectual and the moral, thereby making Climacus' point above more explicit: "first the aristocratic mode of speculation, then the vulgar mode in the highways and byways." Either way ends up committing idolatry, either by identifying some finite

object as the infinite-absolute or by identifying the infinite in terms of some finite object; whether God becomes identified with the intellectual self's metaphysical system or the moral self identifies some finite object as its eternal happiness, it is the same spirit that makes the infinite God into something finite.<sup>16</sup>

Both forms of pantheism share further structural identity, insofar as they equally transgress against “the unknown”; that is, they have the same object. The last chapter explained that the object of anxiety, the necessary psychological condition for human freedom, is nothingness or the unknown (v.3.4), which must be identified as the power of willing good or evil, the creative power *analogous* to God's. The unknown against which one morally transgresses through a sinful act is the same unknown, “the absolute difference,” which philosophers reduce to something immanent to their understanding.<sup>17</sup> If this is true, no philosophical thinking that tries to attain the truth, to obtain the knowledge of God by its own understanding, can claim innocence, for it essentially arises out of the prideful will to identify itself with God. Therefore, the two types of the God/man identity, i.e., at the speculative as well as the existential sphere, constitute two faces of the same coin, two symptoms of the same disease: sin.

This analysis of sin also corresponds to that according to *The Concept of Anxiety* and it makes sense of the aesthete A's claim that boredom—the psychological awareness of nothingness resulting from sin—is pantheistic:

In pantheism inheres in general the category of fullness. With boredom it is the reverse—it is built upon emptiness—but precisely for that reason, it is a

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<sup>16</sup> The foregoing analysis of sin perfectly corresponds to Kierkegaard's account of sin and original sin in *The Concept of Anxiety* (v.3.6).

<sup>17</sup> Not only do the two forms of pantheism have the same object, their activities also have the same overall structure of mediating the one and the many. Just as intellectual knowledge requires the conscious intersection of the absolute law of cognition (i.e., identity) with the relative, concrete particulars (sensibles), moral action involves the conscious realization of the law of morality in some finite act.

pantheistic category. Boredom rests on the nothing, which is interwoven through existence; its dizziness is like that which comes from looking down into an infinite abyss—infinite. (EO1, 291)

The last chapter concluded with the thesis that the moment of sin, whereby we attempt to identify ourselves with God by exercising the eternal power of will to create the good for ourselves apart from the divine law, deprives existence of any meaning, resulting in the existential state of boredom called nihilism (v.3.6). Now based on the additional thesis about the moment inferred just above, namely that God precisely *is* the moment, we are able to conclude that sin removes from our conscious existence the very mediating center of all existence that provides meaning and coherence. Just as if relativism is true (i.e., ‘everything is true’), there is no truth, if pantheism is true (‘everything is God’), there is no God.<sup>18</sup> And within Kierkegaard’s analysis of the moment, the common religious belief that life is meaningless without God finds a much deeper explanation.

With a prophetic zeal, Anti-Climacus casts a fiery indictment against the lack of dialectical unity of existence resulting from the pantheistic transgression—philosophical or otherwise—of the boundary between the finite and the infinite, man and God:

Never at any time in the world has any teaching actually brought God and man so close together as Christianity, nor could it, for only God Himself can do it; any human discovery remains just a dream, an uncertain illusion. But neither at any time has any teaching ever so painstakingly defended itself against the most awful of all blasphemies—that, after God has taken this step, it should be taken in vain, as if it all amounted to the same, God and man—never at any time has any teaching defended itself in such a way against this as has Christianity, which defends itself with the help of the offense. Woe to the loose talkers, woe to the frivolous thinkers, and woe, woe to all those sycophants who have learned from them and praised them! (SUD, 117)

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<sup>18</sup> Based on a careful study of Hegel’s pantheism, Merold Westphal concludes in agreement with Heidegger that Nietzsche’s famous ‘death of God’ declaration is in fact the full culmination, and not a rejection, of Hegel’s metaphysical pantheism. “Hegel and Onto-Theology,” *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* 41-42 (2000): 160.

Sin violates the God/man relationship and thus fails to maintain the dialectical unity between God and man, fully envisioned only by Christianity, which paradoxically upholds their difference and identity, God's transcendence as well as immanence.

### *3.4. The Absolute Paradox*

The exact opposite of such a pantheistic God/man identity is the God/man paradox, the historical moment in which God Himself became a man, for Christ is the greatest expression of *humility*: the suffering God who "in love wants to be equal with the lowliest" (PF, 34). In other words, our existence becomes the most profound case of irony when, having pridefully made ourselves equal with God, we stand juxtaposed against the holy God who humbly made Himself equal with us. For this reason, the God/man is the only remedy for sin, the pride of man, and consequently, his very nature as both God and man fully reveals God's true intent for humanity: to be so radically different from and yet equal with God.

Since our understanding failed to humbly embrace the paradox in the general sense (i.e., God's absolute difference from man), instead pridefully identifying itself with God, the paradox of the God/man is the only effective means of re-teaching us the difference between God and man. That is, this particular paradox is so contrary to our understanding that it absolutely cannot be comprehended. How can the eternal and infinite God be at once a temporal and finite human being that lived on the earth two thousand years ago? C. Stephen Evans aptly sums up the matter:

The paradox of the incarnation cannot be known to be a logical contradiction... Relative to our experience and expectations, it is totally incongruous. It appears to us to be a contradiction... because our sinfulness makes it impossible for us to

understand an act which is a manifestation of pure, unselfish love, and our pridefulness demands that we dismiss what we cannot dominate and master.<sup>19</sup>

The only remedy for our prideful position that assimilates our absolute difference from God into likeness is to be confronted with its exact contrary, namely the highest act of humility and love, and to embrace the paradox humbly and voluntarily in faith.

### *3.5. Faith as the Highest Passion*

Climacus makes it clear that the essential characteristic of faith (i.e., its genus) is passion, the individual's absolute love of God. Passion has been the ultimate desideratum of each sphere of existence and it now finds its final and highest expression in faith in Christ. Since the object of this passion is the most profound paradox both metaphysical-epistemologically and existentially—"the absolute paradox"—faith in Christ can arouse the highest passion in us. Only such a deep passion could fully reverse the insidious and global effect of sin that was initially brought into existence by Adam's sin at the Fall as well as continually by our own sin. Just as Adam's and our sinful moment was an infinite choice, thereby permanently altering our will to a sinful position, the moment of faith is likewise "the decision of eternity" (PF, 58). This is also the reason why "faith is not an act of will," that is, a simple act of will (e.g., willing an ordinary belief or action), "for all human willing is always efficacious only within the condition." The idea is that since our will is not a purely infinite and unconditional will like God's, but precisely consists in the mixture of the infinite and the finite, the condition of our will has been established by the first act of will by Adam and continually reaffirmed by our own individual sin: it is directed toward evil. Therefore, as long as the basic condition is evil, continually causing our consciousness to remain in the erroneous self-identification

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<sup>19</sup> *Passionate Reason*, 139.

with God, the passion of faith, which in truth, i.e., dialectically, unites the believer with God, could not be willed. The new condition must first be posited to replace the old by dethroning the aberrant union with God. And this is something only God can give as a sheer act of grace, which Climacus calls “the consciousness of sin.”

Analogous to Johannes de silentio’s view, Climacus’ account of faith requires a double movement: (1) the negative movement “by bringing forth sin’s absolute difference [from God]”—and herein lies the sin consciousness—and (2) the positive movement “by willing to lift this absolute difference in the absolute equality” (PF, 47). For this reason, faith is also the paradox and “everything true of the paradox is also true of faith” (PF, 65). That is, faith is the passion that at once upholds both the difference between the finite and the infinite (i.e., transcendence) and their identity (immanence), insofar as through faith God is brought back to signify *the moment*, the mediating center of all existence, thereby infusing the true meaning and coherence into the believer’s existence. Just as the moment metaphysically refers to the point of union, i.e., transition, between nonbeing and being, occupied by God Himself, faith is the *existential* moment of transition from nonbeing to being for the believer whose existence now becomes permeated by God’s graceful presence.

### *3.6. Faith as Freedom (again)*

As we have seen amply, the moment’s ontological components are nonbeing and being. Likewise, the existential moment, faith, contains nonbeing and being. In faith, nonbeing refers to sin consciousness, one’s passion-filled acknowledgment of the absolute difference between oneself and God, and this passionate recognition purifies the self’s will, annihilating the self, i.e., the self in defiance against God. Yet this sin

consciousness at once entails the “absolute equality” with God in the sense that the self-conscious self and God are finally in agreement about the self’s state of nonbeing in sin; “therefore, they are, yet indeed, in understanding with each other” (PF, 47). The content of this agreement, however, does not remain solely negative, insofar as the God/man’s atoning work on the cross makes it possible for the believer to attain the full sense of the absolute equality with God: the fulfillment of the eternal moral law of love on the strength of the paradox, God’s purely selfless love perfectly shown in the person of Christ. The concrete personal knowledge of Christ, the second Adam who demonstrated the life of perfect obedience to God, produces real hope for moral perfection, providing the self with the necessary motivation to complete its task, existential unity. This would constitute the *being* in the existential moment.

Faith in Jesus Christ, then, is the true freedom intended for human existence: we make a self-conscious intersection between the infinite and the finite by freely, that is, with love, (re)choosing the moral law initially imposed on us only externally, for we therein make the absolute-unconditioned, namely the law of love, true in our finite existence. We can now observe how the same idea of freedom connects the previous metaphysical-epistemological discussion of the moment (i.e., faith in the ordinary sense) with the existential-religious (faith in the God/man): in both cases, we self-consciously relate the absolute law, of identity and of the Good, to the finite world. By drawing a striking parallel between reason and love, Harry Frankfurt insightfully explains the seeming puzzle as to how freedom—which he, like Kierkegaard, identifies with love—can coexist with necessity, the law:

Now it is especially notable that while each imposes upon us a commanding necessity, neither entails for us any sense of impotence or restriction. On the

contrary, each characteristically brings with it an experience of liberation and enhancement. When we discover that we have no choice but to accede to irresistible requirements of logic, or to submit to captivating necessities of love, the feeling with which we do so is by no means one of dispirited passivity or confinement. In both cases—whether we are following reason or following our hearts—we are typically conscious of an invigorating release and expansion of ourselves... The explanation is that an encounter either with volitional or with rational necessity eliminates uncertainty.<sup>20</sup>

Appropriately then, faith, “the inner certainty that anticipates infinity,” is freedom (CA, 157).

### 3.7. “*The Fullness of Time to Unite All Things in Christ*”

In this full sense—metaphysically, epistemologically, and existentially—Christ is “the absolute paradox,” *the moment* which unifies the infinite and the finite sphere in His very existence, and as a result, we become progressively free as we imitate Him in our moral existence. Therefore, the scriptural references in this chapter’s heading attest that Christ is the full manifestation of the *mystery* of God’s will to unite all things, “things in the heavens and things on the earth”—or in the philosophical term, the one and the many. So stated, the person of Christ perfectly expresses God’s desire for the eternal union with man and enables man’s desire for the same union with God to be fulfilled in the proper way; Christ is thus said to be the *mediator*, and consequently, faith must be seen as the *true* mediation (*Aufhebung*), for which Hegel vainly sought in his otherwise extraordinary philosophical system. And God desires this union because *He is love*, the highest truth that could not be known to any natural mind unaided by the divine revelation:

It could well happen to a human being to poetize himself in likeness with the god or the god in likeness with himself, but not to poetize that the god Himself poetized in likeness with a human being; for if the god gave no indication, how could it occur to a man that the blessed God could need him? (PF, 36)

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<sup>20</sup> *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 64-5.

Love is a desire and as such implies some inherent lack, as Plato makes it clear in the *Symposium*: “anything which desires something desires what it does not have, and it only desires when it is lacking something” (200a). For this reason, the idea that God infinitely desires mutual love with human beings goes well beyond the philosophical mind that strives to articulate the idea of perfection—God as ‘pure actuality’—without the explicit revelation of the Christian truth expressed in Christ.

The ultimate answer to the most fundamental and perplexing philosophical question, namely motion, is simply love. It is a metaphysical truth that God’s love brought things in motion (i.e., creation) and continues to move all things (conservation), and what is more, it is the most extraordinary display of love in Christ’s suffering-filled life and death that moves the most unmovable of all things, the sinful human heart. Since God is love according to Christianity, there is no reason that explains His action other than love. However, love is thereby not to be considered arbitrary, as if something unloving could have equally been enacted, but rather, it is a reason in itself, the *absolute* end in and of itself; it is thus identical to freedom and in turn the good. For this reason, love is itself a paradox: “Self-love constitutes the ground of love, but its paradoxical passion, precisely at the highest point, wills its own downfall” (PF, 48). And the ultimate *telos* of our existence thus consists in the knowledge of God’s love, the kind of knowledge that we can only have through passion.

By way of a concluding remark, we note just one more paradox and wonder that awaits those who will seize faith with the divine passion of love: “But within this wonder *everything holds Socratically again*, but in such a way that the wonder is never cancelled, that is, the eternal condition is given in time” (PF, 65; my italics). While canceling the

untruth in the Socratic view, namely the irreconcilable form of dualism that discards the temporal as a mere illusion, faith preserves the truth in the Socratic—that each individual has the condition to realize the truth—by restoring the God-relationship in such a way that the Spirit of God *indwells* the believer’s spirit: “the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was *given to us*” (Romans 5:5). In short, our analysis of the moment in *Fragments* leads us to affirm our main thought again: Socratic recollection finds its fulfillment—*repetition*—in faith. As faith removes the once hostile relationship between God and man and instead reestablishes their mutual love, reason is reconciled to faith in humble submission.

## CHAPTER SEVEN:

### The Dialectic of Neighbor Love and Platonic Love

“And He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord Your God with your whole heart, and with your whole soul, and with your whole mind.’ This is the great and first commandment. The second is like the first, ‘*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*’”

Matthew 22:39

“And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given them; That they may be one, just as *We are one; I in them,* and *Thou in Me*, that they may be perfected in unity”

John 17:22-23

“And above all, put on love, which is *the bond of perfect unity*”

Colossians 3:14

After having articulated the concept of faith in Kierkegaard’s well-known works, principally defined as the unity of the one and the many resulting from the mutual love relationship between God and the believer, our present study will appropriately end with a discussion of the Christian normative vision of love at the human interpersonal level: love of the neighbor. This chapter will also constitute a fitting end since the work that contains the idea of neighbor-love, *Works of Love*, recapitulates several important themes in Kierkegaard’s earlier works. To turn to the subject matter itself, Christ’s words above affirm that our love of God is the same as love of our neighbor, or more precisely, the former will find its proper expression in the latter. The present chapter will delineate the general structure of this love in terms of the one/many dialectic. Since anything dialectical involves a contradiction and a task for higher unity, we can expect neighbor-love to contain such a tension. That is, if the Christian love of neighbor, as we shall see,

purports to deconstruct our commonsense understanding and practice of love, called “preferential love,” by instructing us to love all persons equally without any preference, then how can the human self, which must relate to *both* the finite and infinite dimensions of its existence, practice such infinite love, while still maintaining our finitude, our various personal relationships like family and friends?

Not surprisingly, this specific dialectical problem, inasmuch as it is dialectical, is not unique to Kierkegaard’s ethic, but is present in any view seriously committed to universality; thus the problem is as old as philosophy itself. As recent Plato scholarship has shown, a strikingly similar problem afflicts Plato’s ethic of love. Socrates’ love of abstract-transcendent Beauty and Good has seemed to several prominent commentators of late to exclude any genuine love for the concrete individual. For this reason, even though *Works of Love* mentions Plato only scantily, it will prove beneficial to examine, for one last time, the relevant similarities and differences between Plato and Kierkegaard. The first section below includes a reading of Kierkegaard’s account of neighbor-love, while the second an analysis of the *Symposium*’s view of love and its problem. In the final section, I shall highlight the decisive difference between the logic of Platonic love and of Christian love, namely the divine revelation of love in Jesus Christ, explaining how the latter overcomes the problems inherent in the former.

### *1. Neighbor-love’s Negation of Preference*

Kierkegaard defines neighbor-love negatively first, that is, by relating it to its opposite, namely preferential love. Preferential love is “to love this one person before all others, to love him in contradiction to all others” (WL, 19). On the contrary, “the Christian doctrine is to love the neighbor, to love the whole race, all persons, even the

enemy, and not make an exception, neither that of preference nor of aversion.” Does Jesus really expect us to love without preference, loving everyone equally? Kierkegaard generally considers making life difficult for everyone the hallmark of his authorship, but one wonders whether he has gone too far with his interpretation of the second commandment. We will try to clarify the idea of neighbor-love below in a way that removes some obvious difficulties (with others to be treated in the final section), and subsequently, consider the most pertinent objection against this view of love, namely that its ‘abstract’ universality negates love’s essential personal dimension.

### *1.1. Self-Love*

It seems wholly natural to us that love should begin at a particular point of departure. All of us begin the journey of love in a set of circumstances unique to each, being loved by people who have personal significance and relationship to us. Based on this obvious feature of human existence, our natural attitude concerning love is that we love those who bear some likeness relation to us, such as our family, friends, fellow countrymen, etc. As natural as it may seem, however, preferential love has something unnatural about it because it excludes loving those who do not bear such relation to the self. Through our distant as well as recent history, marred by violence based on partiality, be it religious parochialism, racism, sexism, homophobia, etc., we have gradually learned the value of impartiality, that we ought to love people irrespective of their skin color, nationality, religion, etc.; impartiality then seems to be a legitimate part of love as well. So, under the prevalent practice of preferential love, love is made conditional upon the neighbor’s likeness relation to the self, whereas neighbor-love is unconditional, springing from the source different from such relation.

From this brief sketch, it might be tempting to equate neighbor-love with pure selflessness that negates self-love altogether. As Kierkegaard makes clear from the beginning, neighbor-love is not contrary to self-love as such, for its demand to love the neighbor *as yourself* presupposes self-love; instead, it “wants to teach proper self-love” (WL, 18). Therefore, Kierkegaard identifies the second law of love with a command to “*love yourself in the right way*” (22). The term ‘as yourself’ makes neighbor-love dialectical, which is realized through neither pure self-love nor pure selfless love of others, but the equal instantiation or the dialectical identity of self-love and love of others. In other words, self-love is properly fulfilled in loving others *and vice versa*. Preferential love’s error thus lies in its undialectical nature, for the object of its love, e.g., “the beloved” or “the friend,” actually turns out to be one’s own self, for “the love they [the poets] celebrate is secretly self-love.” While it is certainly true that preferential love’s problem consists in making distinctions so as to love some people but not others, the most fundamental error, which often escapes commonsense, is an inordinate form of self-love. Preferential love thus only loves one person in truth: ME. Therefore, however admirable a lover’s exclusive devotion to the beloved seems to be on the surface, “there is in this enormous devotion an enormous *self-willfulness*, and the lover relates himself, in this impetuous, limitless devotion, essentially to *himself in self-love*” (55; my italics).

### *1.2. Love’s Redoubling*

Kierkegaard explains the reduction of preferential love to exclusive self-love by considering the concept of ‘the neighbor.’ After defining the neighbor as “the person who is nearer to you than anyone else,” he describes preferential love’s version of the neighbor: “for to love the one, which in the sense of preferential love is nearer than all

others, is self-love” (WL, 21). In other words, the neighbor is identical to the self in preferential love *abstractly*, as in the Aristotelian sense of identity: i.e., undialectically. While the proper concept of the neighbor is “the redoubling of your own self,” the selfish form of self-love cannot redouble itself: “It is namely an impossibility in the selfish sense, consciously, to be two in being a self; self-love must be by itself.”

The concept of redoubling, as analyzed before (iv.2.7), speaks of the dialectical nature of truth, upholding sameness and difference simultaneously. Truth, as we have noted often, has ultimately to do with the question of personal identity according to Kierkegaard: what makes the self the true self? Applying the dialectical structure of redoubling to neighbor-love then, the neighbor is the same as and yet different from the self, and the improper form of self-love cannot instantiate such dialectical unity:

But what the selfish unconditionally cannot tolerate is: redoubling, and the command’s word “as yourself” is just the redoubling. The one aflame with erotic love can in no way, by reason or by virtue of this flame, tolerate redoubling, which here would mean: to give up the love if the beloved demands this. The lover thus does not love the beloved “as himself,” for he is demanding, but this “as yourself” contains just the demand toward him—alas, and still the lover thinks he loves the other person even more than himself. (WL, 21)

The preferential lover cannot give up the beloved because he sees her not as a *subject*, i.e., an end in and of herself, an individual who has personal identity apart from her relation to him. Rather, she is fundamentally perceived as an *image* of himself—“the *other self*, the *other I*” (53)—and consequently as a mere means to his own end, his own pleasure and happiness, for what he really loves is himself.

### *1.3. Classic Kierkegaardian Themes*

Here in *Works of Love* we see the repetition of several important themes concerning love, contained in Kierkegaard’s earlier works. First in particular, *Either/Or*

*II* precisely affirms this idea of loving the other as “the other *I*,” for Judge William’s idea of self-choice, that the self chooses itself in consciously choosing the object of one’s immediate passion, expresses the same thought (iii.1.3). According to William, the self’s ethical love of its beloved in faithfully committing itself to loving the beloved is equivalent to choosing its own self, since the beloved is an expression or image of itself. While, in assessing *Either/Or II*, we have affirmed the *formal* correctness of this account, which is to say that love’s essential function is to unify and realize perfect dialectical equality between the self and the other, its content can go no further than preferential love due to the profound effect of sin, which the ethicist does not fully realize. *Philosophical Fragments* clarified for us that it is only by the divine revelation, called “sin consciousness” (vi.3.6), that we can recognize just how deeply sin is written into our consciousness and how it perennially disables us from truly loving. Moreover, *Fear and Trembling* (iv.3.2) adds to this picture the idea that such a disordered structure of love stems from the wrong ordering of goods, the infinite and the finite, which then results in idolatry, pride, and lust.

These terms denoting sin all describe distorted love in various ways, and preferential love, however natural it seems to us at first, is reduced to such sinfulness.<sup>1</sup> The lover’s unconditional devotion to the finite beloved, while appearing noble, is really sin because such unconditional devotion is only worthy of God and it thus makes an idol of the beloved. And since the essence of idolatry is to make God in one’s own image

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<sup>1</sup> By employing the term “self-willfulness” (*Selvraadighed*)—the same term used in Anti-Climacus’ definition of sin, “self-willfulness against God, a disobedience that defies His commandments” (SUD, 81)—Kierkegaard makes it unmistakably clear, given our many discussions of sin, that the selfish way in which we preferentially love is caused by sin: “there is, consciously or unconsciously, self-willfulness—unconsciously insofar as it is in the power of natural determination [i.e., original sin], consciously insofar as it limitlessly [*grændseløst*] abandons itself and consents to this power” (WL, 55).

and, as we have seen, it amounts to its converse, namely pride that makes oneself to be God the highest (vi.3.4), the object of such unconditional love for the finite beloved really is the self. Kierkegaard thus appropriately relates preferential love to idolatry and pride in *Works of Love* as well: “And just as self-love in the strictest sense has been described as self-deification, so also erotic love and friendship... are idol-worship” (WL, 57). Moreover, this “self-deification” entails lust insofar as it impudently parodies God’s absoluteness in relation to His creation: just as everything solely exists for God’s pleasure and glory, sin makes everything a mere means to the ultimate end, my own pleasure. By undialectically, i.e., abstractly, identifying itself with God, the sinful self identifies itself as the sole object of love essentially, even if most of us, without personal revelation about our own sinfulness, do not consciously think this way. The sinful self acts like God, for He, being identical to the Good, is the only proper object of love. This is precisely why sin makes me incapable of loving the beloved for his or her own sake but only as a means to the counterfeit final end, my own pleasure, and consequently, I cannot “tolerate redoubling” and give up the beloved in truth.

#### *1.4. First Commandment First*

How can I then redouble myself so as to see the neighbor not as the *other I* but, as Kierkegaard puts it, “the *first you*”? Kierkegaard’s solution, to repeat the central theme of his earlier works again, emphasizes the first commandment’s priority to and its grounding work of the second:

There is only one a person with the truth of eternity can love higher than oneself; it is God. Therefore, it does not say “You shall love God as yourself,” but it says, “You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole mind.” A person must love God unconditionally *in obeying* and love Him *in worshipping*. It is ungodliness if any human being dares

to love himself this way, or dares to love another human being this way, or lets another human being to love him this way. (WL, 19)

As Kierkegaard goes on to say, a rather intuitive case of practical reasoning can point to the universal truth about love: if your beloved desires you to do something that will be in truth harmful to her and you know it, while she does not, then precisely because you love her, you do not fulfill her wish. This implies that love is normatively grounded in the Good that is independent of anyone's preferred view of what is good, neither mine nor hers. Or in other words, only the Good, or what is the same for Christianity, God, can be the proper object of love.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, Kierkegaard unequivocally argues that the first commandment grounds the second: "Ultimately, love for God is the decisive factor; from this stems love for the neighbor" (57).

Neighbor-love thus sees God as "the middle term" between the lover and the beloved (WL, 58). For every valid categorical syllogism, the subject and the predicate term of the conclusion are unified by the middle term to which the subject and the predicate individually relate in the minor and major premise. For example:

Major premise:	All humans ( <i>middle</i> term) are mortal (major term).
Minor premise:	Socrates (minor term) is human ( <i>middle</i> term).
Conclusion:	Socrates is mortal.

Analogously, the union of love between the lover and the beloved gets fully realized only when they *individually* relate first and foremost to God and then to each other: "Love

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<sup>2</sup> This is precisely why Harry Frankfurt in his recent work on love misunderstands Kierkegaard and the former's theory of love practically amounts to preference: "To be wholehearted *is* to love oneself. The two are the same. Kierkegaard used as the title of one of his books the emphatic declaration 'Purity of heart is to will one thing.' Taken too literally, this is inaccurate. People who will only one thing are not being pure; they are only being single-minded. The degree to which a person's heart is pure is not a function of how many things the person wills... People do not achieve purity of heart by becoming narrowly focused... Purity lies, as Kierkegaard doubtless intended to convey, in wholeheartedness." *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 95-6. In other words, Frankfurt's account of love includes no notion of loving God wholeheartedly as the proper and prior ground of love, which is precisely implied in the title of Kierkegaard's work Frankfurt mentions. For Kierkegaard, but not for Frankfurt, wholeheartedness cannot come about without loving God or the Good unconditionally.

God above all else; then you also love the neighbor and in the neighbor every human being.” C. Stephen Evans puts this rather foreign notion, God as the middle term, into more familiar terms by appealing to the doctrine of *imago Dei*:

To love my neighbours as my neighbours is to love them because they are God’s creatures, made in his image. This relation to God constitutes what Kierkegaard calls the ‘inner glory’ that all humans possess equally, and so to construe humans as creatures of God is to construe them in terms of this inner glory that is not visible to the senses.<sup>3</sup>

The philosophical relevance of the doctrine is that this inner glory, what amounts to Kierkegaard’s notion of the “God-relationship,” is the only absolute and intrinsic ground of one’s personal identity and selfhood, and consequently, once this truth is grasped and appropriated in one’s conscious existence, the finite distinctions that originally gave rise to preferential love become only relative and extrinsic to—though not completely irrelevant in—one’s ethical existence. These differences are dethroned as the absolute principle of love for the individual when God becomes the middle term: “He [i.e., the neighbor] is your neighbor on the basis of equality with you before God, but unconditionally every person has this equality and has it unconditionally” (60).

### *1.5. The Abstractness Problem*

Self-critically honest readers would rightly be troubled by this view of love, as Kierkegaard well anticipated: is it really possible for us to love this way, loving all persons equally without any preference? Even if such love is possible, is it really love after all? Theodor W. Adorno, one of the twentieth century’s harshest opponents of Kierkegaard’s ethic of love, firmly responds in the negative to the latter question in his

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<sup>3</sup> Kierkegaard’s *Ethic of Love*, 193.

short essay, “On Kierkegaard’s Doctrine of Love.”<sup>4</sup> It is neighbor-love’s universality which seems to negate *by default* any particularity of human love that most deeply troubles Adorno’s moral sensibility. I love my parents because of my special relationship to them—that I bear their image and they have been my caregivers—and if that particular relation is consciously taken away, the love relation ceases to exist. According to Adorno, such universality inevitably entails that “the object of love is, in a way, irrelevant” and “the neighbor is reduced to the general principle of the otherness or of the *universal human*.”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the implications of Kierkegaard’s “overstraining of the transcendence of love” are rather colorfully described in terms of “the darkest hatred of man” and “the lordly demonology of asceticism.”<sup>6</sup>

Adorno’s criticism is, however, most telling when it treats Kierkegaard’s ethic as yet another product of modernity’s failed project to ground ethical universality, which constitutes a strikingly contrary reading vis-à-vis today’s popular renderings of Kierkegaard, both the so called ‘postmodern’ reading (*a la* Derrida) and the ‘irrationalist’ reading (MacIntyre); Kierkegaard truly makes himself ‘all things to all men.’ Adorno writes:

One cannot imagine the Gospels taking the step from this concrete, unproblematic neighbor [“fishermen and peasants, headsmen and publicans, people whom one knows and who have their established locus in a life of simple production which can be realized adequately by immediate experience”] to the abstract, universal idea of neighborhood. Kierkegaard has the abstract concept of man of his own period and substitutes it for the Christian neighbor who belongs to a different

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<sup>4</sup> *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 8 (1939-40): 413-29. Besides Adorno, Martin Buber and Knud Løgstrup are frequently cited as major critics of Kierkegaard’s ethic of love. I take Adorno to be the major figure for our purpose because his criticism that Kierkegaard’s view is pure abstractness really gets to the heart of the matter for any transcendent view of love.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 415, 419, my emphasis.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 417.

society... The Christian neighbor loses the concreteness which alone made it possible to behave concretely towards him. Modern man is deprived of the last chance of love by moulding love after the pattern of frugal conditions which are not valid any longer.<sup>7</sup>

Adorno's criticism amounts to the following claim: Kierkegaard's universalistic love is possible only at the expense of doing away with love as such. To put it differently, it lacks the *dialectical* truth, for it is only capable of realizing pure universality at the expense of love's inherent particularity.<sup>8</sup> So understood, the critique, if true, produces a highly ironic situation in light of our broad portrayal of Kierkegaard's thought as fundamentally proffering the reconciliation of the one and the many: Adorno ascribes to Kierkegaard the same exact charge he himself places upon his philosophical predecessors—indeed, the entire Platonic tradition. Adorno's challenge, if unmet, will prove to be a doubly devastating critique against Kierkegaard and his Christianity.

## 2. Platonic Love

If we want to avoid the ironic situation into which Adorno's criticism forces Kierkegaard's account of love, the most natural response would be to seek out resources, internal to the account, that can (re)establish the concrete particularity of human love, so as to balance out, as it were, its universality. Recent commentaries on *Works of Love* have taken this route, I believe, with a considerable measure of success in disentangling

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 421.

<sup>8</sup> However, Adorno also critiques Kierkegaard's apparent social conservatism, for he, unlike the typical modern proponents of universal equality, seems reluctant to apply the principle socio-politically. He writes, "Instead of any real criticism of inequality in society, he has a fictitious, merely inward doctrine of equality... Kierkegaard's ascetic rigorousness is carried through only abstractly." Ibid., 421-2. The reason for this critique is Adorno's inability to understand Kierkegaard's dialectical view of love, which upholds both similarity and dissimilarity. We shall explain the dialectical view more fully in the final section.

Kierkegaard from this problem.<sup>9</sup> However, I wish to take a slightly different approach, for I shall first describe in greater detail philosophy's *original* abstract-universalistic lover, namely Plato. The point is that an understanding of Plato's ethic of love will, first, bring Adorno's critique to a sharper focus and place Kierkegaard and his critic in the broader philosophical context, and secondly, better enable us to see how Kierkegaard's view of love decisively differs from Platonic love, to which Adorno assimilates it.

### 2.1. *Plato's Erotic Dialogue*

The *Symposium* is a natural place to inquire about Platonic love. It contains several speeches in praise of Eros, the god of love, given by Agathon, the famous writer of tragedy, and his friends, including Socrates. Beyond the introductory drama setting scene, the dialogue has broadly three parts: (1) five speeches, culminating with Agathon's speech, (2) Socrates' critique of Agathon's speech (and hence all the previous speeches) and his account of Diotima's view of Eros, which climaxes in the *ascent passage*, and (3) Alcibiades' drunken speech in praise of Socrates. While this chapter's particular aim naturally prevents us from giving the text an in-depth look, the brief analysis below will nevertheless be sufficient to illuminate our present concern.

One general characteristic of the first five speeches is the presupposition and celebration of the truth in the lover/beloved relationship, i.e., Greek pederasty wherein an older man pursues an erotic relationship with a younger boy for the (supposedly) mutually beneficial exchange of goods, moral education and political connection in exchange for sexual favors. By referring to 'the truth' in such a practice—which I shall

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<sup>9</sup> I have in mind M. Jamie Ferreira's excellent commentary as one such example: *Love's Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard's Works of Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 76-83.

call henceforth ‘unplatonic love’—I do not necessarily mean to imply that these speeches’ main purpose is to give a rational justification for the Greek pederastic practice itself (though they certainly do it as well), but that the essential truth of unplatonic love lies in the lover’s *absolutizing* attitude toward the *finite* beloved and the love relation. That is to say, the unplatonic lover perceives his or her love relation as the absolute source of personal identity and meaning in life, equating it with *the* Beautiful and Good itself; in this sense, unplatonic love is essentially identical to preferential love. This concept is best illustrated in the last two speeches before Socrates’ account, namely those of Aristophanes and Agathon, whose special importance is subtly affirmed by the final scene of the dialogue where Socrates the philosopher and the two famous Greek literary figures remain in conversation concerning whether a successful tragedian must also be at once a successful writer of comedy.

## 2.2. Aristophanes’ *Incomplete Self*

The comedian offers a charming myth about a distant hermaphrodite race in an effort to explain why all of us so desperately seek love: “each human being formed a complete whole, spherical, with back and ribs forming a circle. They had four hands, four legs, and two faces,... four ears, two sets of genitals,... They stuck their legs straight out all round, and went bowling along, supported on their eight limbs, and rolling along at high speed” (189e-190a).<sup>10</sup> These humorous looking creatures, however, met the most unfortunate fate, for “their ambition led them to make an assault upon the gods” and Zeus in response “started cutting them in two, like someone slicing vegetables for pickling”

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<sup>10</sup> All quotations from the *Symposium*, as well as the *Phaedrus*, come from *Symposium and Phaedrus*, trans. Tom Griffith (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000).

(190b-e). With this amusing tale, Aristophanes thus comic-tragically explains just why our desire to find love is so innate and intense: “When man’s natural form was split in two, each half went round looking for its other half” (191a). The essential idea here is much like Judge William’s self-choice model of love: when one loves the beloved, one in actuality loves one’s own self. As one commentator puts it, this self-love “means at the human level that erotic self-striving which characterizes all being: the desire of each thing to become what it is.”<sup>11</sup> This thought might be well captured in the term already familiar to us, ‘existential unity,’ which is to say that Plato also conceives love’s teleology as the unification and completion of an otherwise fragmented and unfinished self. Aristophanes’ story of self-love thus shares a Kierkegaardian view of the self: the self’s task is to become oneself, one’s *true* self.

While the comedian’s general characterization of love, beyond the veneer of its humor, appears to be sound, the deeper perspective later to be introduced by Socrates will find it just as incomplete as its imagined creatures. Martha Nussbaum captures what such love amounts to in the end:

The objects of these creatures’ passions are whole people: not ‘complexes of desirable qualities,’ but entire beings, thoroughly embodied, with all their idiosyncrasies, flaws, and even faults... Nor are love objects interchangeable for these people, as seats of abstract goodness or beauty might be. The individual is loved not only as a whole, but also as a unique and irreplaceable whole. For each there is, apparently, exactly one ‘other half.’<sup>12</sup>

While absolute love and devotion to the one and only beloved appeals to our aesthetic sensibility, Nussbaum perceptively points to its downfall, namely “the sheer contingency

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<sup>11</sup> L. A. Kosman, “Platonic Love” in *Eros, Agape, and Philia: Readings in the Philosophy of Love*, ed. Alan Soble (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 156.

<sup>12</sup> *Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 173.

of love, and our vulnerability to contingency through love”<sup>13</sup>; its excessive passion toward the beloved subjects the lover’s selfhood to even greater disunity, for it is bound to chance upon finitude’s inherent relativity, whether expressed by the lover’s or the beloved’s change of mind or their death, and helplessly meet the fated end of its ephemeral existence. Such a self thus never gets to complete the task of becoming a unified self.<sup>14</sup>

### 2.3. *Agathon’s ‘Complete’ Self*

Following the comedian’s speech, the tragedian recapitulates the previous speeches and casts Eros in the most idealistic, pompous light. All the symposiasts in one way or another hold that love provides a certain “guide” to the good life and increases moral virtues. For example, Phaedrus claims that love endows lovers with a deepened moral perception, “a horror of what is degrading and a passionate desire for what is good” (178d).<sup>15</sup> Agathon reiterates the *absoluteness* of love, that it is wholly complete in itself, enjoying both perfect beauty and goodness: “he is the most beautiful and the best” (195a). Possessing beauty perfectly, love is purely contradictory to ugliness: “Ugliness and Eros are ever at odds with one another” (196a). Love is also perfect goodness, for the four cardinal virtues are none other than various expressions of love. Since love is contrary to force, it breeds “mutual consent and agreement, there is justice” (196c); since temperance is “control of pleasures and desires, and no pleasure is stronger than love,”

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>14</sup> Here the reader may recall the same problem Judge William’s ethic encounters for being committed to the absoluteness of love, its eternity and hence unrepeatability (iii.2.5).

<sup>15</sup> We can draw another parallel to Judge William’s account of love, for he argues that being committed to a particular beloved, i.e., the concrete object of one’s moral will, causes the category of good and evil to emerge much more clearly for one’s moral consciousness (iii.1.4).

love can properly govern other pleasures<sup>16</sup>; etc. Finally, love not only leads to personal goods but also excellent social goods: “He gives us the feeling, not of longing, but of belonging, since he is the moving spirit behind all those occasions [festivals, dances, sacrifices] when we meet and gather together” (197d).<sup>17</sup>

Socrates begins to criticize the earlier speakers, especially Agathon, for their sole concern for the form rather than the content of their speeches, all too pleased to use “hyperbole and rhetoric, regardless of truth or falsehood” (198e). Before giving his own speech, Socrates engages in a brief *elenchus* with Agathon to force *aporia* upon him and subjects him to his embarrassing admission of ignorance: “I rather suspect, Socrates, that I didn’t know what I was talking about” (201b). What humbles the proud Agathon, however, is a rather simple thought: love is a desire and desire is always about that which is not possessed fully, that is, absolutely (200a). Love is, as far as Socrates can see, a desire for and motion toward the absolute but not the absolute itself, i.e., the Good-in-itself. It is a vehicle, not the destination; to equate love with the absolute, as Agathon does (along with all the other symposiasts), would be as if my plan to go on a trip to the Grand Canyon stops with renting a car because I am just enamored with the excitement of driving a brand new car. Socrates clearly distinguishes love from its object, the absolute Good, whereas Agathon conflates love with its object.

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<sup>16</sup> This argument brings our previous discussion of *Either/Or II* to mind again. I have argued that Judge William envisions love to be the ontological ground of justice (iii.1.7), as well as holding that the ethical passion properly stabilizes and orders all other passions (iii.1.4).

<sup>17</sup> Allan Bloom accurately assesses Agathon’s speech: “The description of the first three virtues is amusing and contains some interesting reflections on the virtues. But none of this has anything to do with the true possession of the virtues in the soul. Eros is treated as a pleasant substitute for virtue, essentially as Phaedrus used it with specific reference to courage... Agathon concludes with a kind of faked enthusiasm, as though he were possessed by Eros or the Muse, telling his audience that all the wonderful harmonious things dominate because of Eros. When one reads and thinks about it, it appears hopelessly callow.” *Plato’s Symposium*, trans. Seth Benardete with commentaries by Allan Bloom and Seth Benardete (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 119-21.

#### 2.4. *Scala Amoris*

How could Agathon have missed such a basic fact as the very genus of love, i.e., desire, and its inherent notion of relativity and movement? As is usually true of Plato's dialogues, there is more than meets the eye, but the fuller view first requires our understanding of Plato's more mature account of love given in the ascent passage. In recounting his conversation with Diotima, a priestess, Socrates describes love in terms of knowledge, one's progressive revelation about the Beautiful and the Good itself. I cite his shorter summary version of the erotic ascent:

Such is the experience of the man who approaches, or is guided towards, love in the right way, beginning with the particular examples of beauty, but always returning from them to the search for that one beauty. He uses them like a ladder, climbing from [1] the love of one person to love of two; from two to love of all physical beauty; from physical beauty to [2] beauty in human behavior; thence to [3] beauty in subjects of study; from them he arrives finally at [4] that branch of knowledge which studies nothing but ultimate beauty. (211b-c)

Broadly divided into four parts, the ascent involves gradually moving from the concrete object of love to the abstract, from loving beautiful bodies to the pure love of absolute Beauty itself, attainable only through philosophical-mystical contemplation. The most striking feature of Socrates' vision is, of course, *Platonism* itself, the idea that there is *one* absolute object of love, Beauty-in-itself, of which all concrete finite beautiful things are mere examples or images. Nussbaum considers its stark implication:

It is a startling and powerful vision. Just try to think it seriously: this body of this wonderful beloved person is *exactly* the same in quality as that person's mind and inner life. Both, in turn, the same in quality as the value of Athenian democracy; of Pythagorean geometry; of Eudoxan astronomy... These proposals are so bold as to be pretty well incomprehensible from the ordinary point of view."<sup>18</sup>

Once the philosopher has climbed the Platonic ladder of ascent and realized that the true object of all of his loves—when he loves, for example, his beautiful, virtuous,

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<sup>18</sup> *Fragility of Goodness*, 180-1.

and intelligent wife—is the transcendent Good, he will surely find himself incapable of loving any finite object in the same way as before, that is, loving the finite object of love absolutely. Even so, it is important to acknowledge that Aristophanes and Agathon have not uttered gross falsehood, insofar as both rightly recognize, however vaguely, the intrinsic relation between love and the absolute, that is, love’s essential function, *qua* infinite desire, to cause motion toward the self’s absolute completion. Their essential error is not even the absolutizing way of loving as such, since Plato elsewhere makes it clear that in loving something, the lover “mustn’t love one part of it and not another, but he must love all of it” (*Republic*, 474c)<sup>19</sup>; as in Kierkegaard’s own account, love is an eternal-infinite affair. It is rather that, lacking the awareness of a clear separation between the Good-in-itself and its finite images, their passion is entirely misdirected toward the wrong object. And absent such Platonic consciousness, one can only relate to one’s finite object of love absolutely, for one construes the beloved as the absolute and wholly irreplaceable, as Aristophanes’ account suggests.<sup>20</sup> The problem does not stop there unfortunately, as such blind love subtly creates *moral blindness* in the lovers who allow themselves to be dazzled by the beauty of love; this is implied in Agathon’s uncritical self-confidence in his knowledge of love’s absoluteness, which prevents him from seeing his *neediness*, i.e., his own moral flaws and the incompleteness of his selfhood.<sup>21</sup> Agathon’s perception of moral sufficiency within his erotic relation with his

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<sup>19</sup> Translation by G. M. A. Grube, revised by C. D. C. Reeve. *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> The reader may recall our previous analysis of the theme of idolatry in *Fear and Trembling* (iv.3.2) in connection to Plato’s assessment of the absolutizing characteristic of unplatonic love.

<sup>21</sup> See Kierkegaard’s parallel discussion of blindness inherent in preferential love and the superior kind of blindness in neighbor-love, blindly loving all people (WL, 68-9).

beloved, Phaedrus, blinds him to the crucial deficiency in his love, namely that his happiness is wholly dependent on a relationship to another—a finite and changeable other.<sup>22</sup>

### 2.5. Platonic Love-lessness

It is Plato's program of transcendence that precisely exposes the contradiction inherent in such human love, of loving the finite infinitely and the relative absolutely, and subsequently, works to restore one's moral perception to its rightful place, to gaze at absolute Beauty and Good only. While being critical of Plato ultimately, Nussbaum nevertheless sees a powerful rational appeal in his prescription for love: "to see in this way, if one could do it, would indeed change the world, removing us both from vulnerable attachments and from severe conflicts among them... since all *kalon* is one thing... A contemplative life is a natural choice."<sup>23</sup> Platonic love is in the end the very negation of love itself; it is devoid of practically all desires and needs for the finite world. Socrates' superhuman self-sufficiency, indicated by Alcibiades' anecdotal account of his supernatural powers (e.g., his ability to walk on ice barefooted), precisely constitutes the highest existence for Plato, one that has virtually transcended from and is indifferent to the finite world.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The dramatic context of the dialogue implies this thought. Pausanias' speech is that of an abandoned lover's mournful plea for the return of his old love; he was the old lover of Agathon when the latter was youthful. Agathon's self-confident love with Phaedrus ironically awaits the same end as Pausanias' love relationship with Agathon. Plato deliberately includes these dramatic psychological backgrounds to communicate the sense of volatility and finite perspectives inherent in unplatonic love, which subjects lovers to an uncontrollable array of extreme emotional highs and lows, and in turn, to redouble and reinforce his main case for Platonic love which Socrates expounds and espouses.

<sup>23</sup> *Fragility of Goodness*, 181.

<sup>24</sup> Nussbaum summarizes the central idea behind the extraordinary stories about Socrates: "We are invited, instead, to look for the explanation in his psychological distance from the world and from his body

Gregory Vlastos' famous essay, "The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato," has clearly articulated the essential problem that afflicts Plato and his posterity, that is, any universalistic treatment of love:

We are to love the persons so far, and only insofar, as they are good and beautiful. Now since all too few human beings are masterworks of excellence, and not even the best of those we have the chance to love are wholly free of streaks of the ugly, the mean, the commonplace, the ridiculous, if our love for them is to be only for their virtue and beauty, the individual, in the uniqueness and integrity of his or her individuality, will never be the object of our love. This seems to me the cardinal flaw in Plato's theory. It does not provide for love of whole persons, but only for love of that abstract version of persons which consists of the complex of their best qualities.<sup>25</sup>

It seems there are three related problems—really, three expressions of the same core problem—inherent in Platonic love. First, it is the familiar *abstractness problem*. Due to love's essential particularity, it can no longer be considered love if its object is not loved for its own sake. Unfortunately, under the Platonic logic of love, no finite object can be anything more than a faint example of the true object of love, the Good. Platonic love thus faces the second problem, call it the *instrumentality problem*. Since no intrinsic, absolute value can be accorded to any finite object, no finite object of love can be loved as an end in and of itself but only as a means. The third way in which Platonic love shows its practical downside can be called the *conditionality problem*, because it will always be a conditional love. Since what I really love in loving my beloved is a complex set of her excellent qualities under the category of the Good, not only do I not really love

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as an object in the world. He really seems to think of himself as a being whose mind is distinct from his body." Ibid., 183.

<sup>25</sup> *Platonic Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 31.

her, i.e., failing to love her for her own sake, I love her—that is, if I am said to love her at all—only inasmuch as and to the degree that she exemplifies these qualities.<sup>26</sup>

Even seeing problems so mounting up for Plato, however, should not convince us to prefer the obvious alternative to the Platonic view, namely unplatonic love that denies a clear separation between the Good-in-itself and its examples. The return move seems like a far worse option, insofar as it places our moral existence right back in the hands of those volatile and uncontrollable passions; without Platonic consciousness, lovers ineluctably and blindly subject themselves to Lady Luck's precarious dealings. Another commentator has affirmed this thought in the following way:

For otherwise the erotic love of another would constitute seeing the other as part of oneself which one is desirous of possessing and making one's own. I have no doubt that love often enough takes that pathological form with others. But if the criticism of Plato's theory is that it makes impossible erotic love of other individuals in *this* sense, and of *this* sort, then it strikes me as strange we should count it a criticism.<sup>27</sup>

The single core problem in Platonism, which expresses itself in these various ways, is *dualistic consciousness*, the very recognition of the divided worlds, finite and infinite. Yet the problem is not that this recognition is false, but precisely that it is true. Its truth, whether one recognizes or not, alienates us from our own home, the sensual world. As our previous discussion of infinite resignation has shown (iv.2.3), Platonic consciousness, our awareness of Perfection, spoils our full enjoyment of the finite world, leaving us constantly unsatisfied. This is so because the finite object of our love is always juxtaposed against the idea of perfection, whether consciously or unconsciously, thereby

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<sup>26</sup> It is rather striking that although preferential-unplatonic love and Platonic love are contraries, their love of the finite beloved both amount to a means-to-an-end relationship and conditional love, albeit in different ways. It goes to show that these positions are two extremes on the one/many continuum that are qualitatively the same; only the third reconciliatory position, Christianity, is qualitatively different.

<sup>27</sup> Kosman, 158.

making us aware of its imperfection. The Platonic self then simply chooses to resign the desire for finite enjoyment altogether to attain the soul's equanimity.

### 2.6. *Religious Platonism, Platonic Religion*

Having thus considered Plato's view of love and its problems, Adorno's criticism of Kierkegaard's own transcendent ethic of love—"the darkest hatred of man" and "the lordly demonology of asceticism"—finds itself in good company. Given the striking similarity between Adorno's Kierkegaard and Vlastos' and Nussbaum's Plato, Kierkegaard's ethic of love becomes, as far as Adorno is concerned, Platonism dressed up in a religious garb. In other words, the Platonic language of love for the Good and the religious grammar of love for God appear to be seamlessly interchangeable. Nussbaum precisely makes this point, equating Platonism with some theistic doctrine, presumably the doctrine of *imago Dei*:

We might even imagine the interchangeability of souls, helped by a religious heritage according to which we are all equally, and centrally, children of God. We might even try putting these two [i.e., Platonism and Christianity] together, to get a thoroughgoing interchangeability of persons; and we can see how that sort of replaceability would indeed subvert motivations for certain troublesome and disorder-producing acts.<sup>28</sup>

Since it makes the same Platonic infinite/finite distinction, the Good-in-itself (i.e., God) and its image (humans), the Christian doctrine of *imago Dei* seems to face the same exact problems as Platonism, and this is precisely the essence of Adorno's charge.

### 3. *Dialectical Unity in Christ's Revelation of Love*

Kierkegaard's own reading of the *Symposium*, evidenced in his very early work, closely resembles that of the aforementioned critics of Plato:

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<sup>28</sup> *Fragility of Goodness*, 181.

The final presentation of Eros's essence inhales, that is, by no means, what the foregoing development had exhaled, but in a continual ascent, reflection lifts [*hæver*] itself higher and higher above the atmospheric air, until almost the breathing stops in the pure ether of the abstract. The foregoing discourses are therefore not seen as moments [*Momenter*] in the final understanding but more likely as a terrestrial weight from which thought must be more and more freed [*frigjøres*]. (CI, 41-2)

We know from our above exegesis of Plato that “the foregoing development” and “discourses” refers to the five speeches that assume the truth of unplatonic love, i.e., preferential love. With Vlastos, Nussbaum, and Adorno, Kierkegaard agrees that the abstract Platonic ascent of love is at variance with and denies the essence of (unplatonic-preferential) love, its particularistic attachment, and therefore, incapable of a higher unity that reconciles itself with the lower position. Unlike them, however, Kierkegaard is thereby willing to deny neither the transcendent nor the immanent dimension of love because, as the overall thesis of this project has consistently maintained, he conceives Christianity as a reconciliation of the two spheres that appear irreconcilable to philosophy. Moreover, as has also been constantly noted hitherto, Kierkegaard generally sees the Platonic categories—ethical, epistemic, or whatever—as the highest that philosophy can achieve prior to the divine revelation, which makes *incompleteness* its main flaw. If this is true, it should not be surprising that Kierkegaard's description of neighbor-love, in terms of its self-denying characteristic (in denying our natural loves) and its sharp polemical stance against preferential (unplatonic) love, should bear some important affinity to Plato's account; after all, as argued before (iv.2.4 and 5), Platonism is essentially Religiousness A, the sphere of infinite resignation, which is the last movement before faith, Religiousness B. Neighbor-love is then supposed to complete what Platonic love cannot on its own. What then is the difference?

### 3.1. *Reconstruing the Doctrine of imago Dei*

In spite of his relentless indictment against erotic love and friendship, Kierkegaard claims that “you are not to cease loving the beloved because of this [i.e., neighbor-love]—o, far from it,” but rather, “it is only the preferential love that should be taken away”—“the snare of self-love” (WL, 61). He even speaks of the danger of “twisted preference” whereby “you would love the neighbor in contradiction to the beloved.” When one, a cancer researcher for example, engages wholeheartedly in some project that supposedly benefits the whole of humanity, while neglecting one’s own family, the motive may well be a subtle form of self-love—just as in Gauguin’s case (iii.3.2). Kierkegaard instead exhorts us to let love of the neighbor transform our natural love:

No, love the beloved faithfully and tenderly, but let love for the neighbor be the sanctifying element in your union’s covenant with God. Love your friend sincerely and devotedly, but let love for the neighbor be what you learn from each other in the friendship’s intimacy with God! Death, you see, abolishes all dissimilarities, but preference is always related to dissimilarity: yet the way to life and to the eternal goes through death and through the dissimilarities’ abolition—therefore only love for the neighbor truly leads to life. Just as Christianity’s joyful message is contained in the doctrine of humanity’s kinship with God, so is its task humanity’s equality with God. But God is love and therefore we can be like God only in loving, just as we also, according to an apostle’s word, can only be “God’s coworkers in—love.” (62-3)

“The doctrine of humanity’s kinship with God,” an obvious allusion to *imago Dei*, is claimed to be the sanctifying agent of our natural loves. For the doctrine to do its proper work in us, however, the truth about our intrinsic likeness to God must not be understood as an abstract ethical principle or the statically given universal human status, as Nussbaum and Adorno seem to take it. In Kierkegaard’s own words, “none of us is pure humanity” (70). Rather, the image of God in all of us is a *moral task* to be achieved by

our conscious striving toward becoming like God, concretely appropriating God's unconditional and selfless love, and in turn, realizing it in our own existence through loving the neighbor, all persons; to use Kierkegaard's words again, "Christianity is too earnest to romanticize about pure humanity; it wants only to make human beings pure."

### *3.2. Equality through Death*

Of course, Plato conceives our erotic relationship to the Good as a moral task as well. Not only that, the Platonic program of transcendence also "goes through death" in some sense, i.e., by detachment from the finite world. However, the kind of self-denial Christianity has in mind goes even deeper—qualitatively deeper—than that which is possible in the Platonic system, because of sin consciousness. To recognize that one is infinitely severed from the Good is only possible when our sin, pride, is juxtaposed against God's infinite selfless love, manifested in Christ's passion (vi.3.4). The consciousness of sin brings about true equality between oneself and the neighbor because the self, conscious of its sinfulness, recognizes that, due to sin's *infinite* nature (and infinity not admitting of degrees), we all have *equally* fallen from the Good and hence are *equally* in need of grace. The absoluteness of this equality in turn obliterates all extrinsic dissimilarities, purifying my love: my love for my beloved will not be commensurate with her proximity to the Good, since sin makes us equally and infinitely far from the Good. In this specific way, the conditionality problem of Platonic love is cancelled in Christian love. Such recognition will establish the deepest kind of self-denial and humility in us, the necessary conditions of the soul for loving the neighbor (WL, 374).

This negative side of equality, that we are all sinners, must accompany its positive, that we all are God's children, in order for us to have appropriate passion. Love

is not simply a matter of moral will to act lovingly (though it certainly must include this), but essentially having the right kind of passion, for passion is moral perception.<sup>29</sup> So Kierkegaard writes, “To be able to love a person despite his weaknesses and defects and imperfections is still not perfect love, but rather this, to be able to find him lovable despite and with his weaknesses and defects and imperfections” (WL, 157-8). A sheer ethical will without an appropriate passion may bring about the changes that better the lives of others *externally*, but will not be truly, that is, inwardly, transformative of either the agent or the recipient of such love; it can only effect equality, to use Kierkegaard’s term, “in a worldly way.”<sup>30</sup> Passion cannot be simply willed, but is a *gift* that must be received from God in the context of a dynamic love relationship with Him, that is, faith.

### 3.3. *Love and the Good*

Let us describe the fundamental difference between Christianity and Platonism from another, more metaphysical, angle, namely how they conceive the relation between love and the Good: is love a means to an end, i.e., the Good, or is love somehow identical with the Good itself? Within the Platonic-philosophical viewpoint, the idea of ‘dependent relationality,’ the essential feature of love to be *needful*, cannot possibly be predicated of the Good-in-itself. Plato’s *Symposium* gave us a profound insight into our

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<sup>29</sup> C. Stephen Evans explains Kierkegaard’s account of love, using Robert C. Roberts’ view of emotion as a concern-based construal, that emotion is a way of seeing based on our deep concerns and commitments. *Kierkegaard’s Ethic of Love*, 191-4.

<sup>30</sup> Kierkegaard is therefore critical of the superficial way in which societies try to establish justice by obliterating the external dissimilarities, such as wealth, for the finite dissimilarities of life are, as it were, a mere “disguise”: “Christianity has not wanted to storm forth to abolish dissimilarity, neither the dissimilarity of distinction nor of lowliness; nor has it wished to effect in a worldly way a worldly compromise among the dissimilarities... In other words, when the dissimilarity hangs loosely in this way, then in each individual there continually glimmers that essential other, which is common to all, the eternal resemblance, the likeness” (WL, 88). C. Stephen Evans has an excellent, though mildly critical, discussion of Kierkegaard’s view of love and its social-political responsibilities. *Kierkegaard’s Ethic of Love*, 215-22.

erotic nature, that the various experiences of love, indicated by the different stages in the ascent, make us consciously aware of the incompleteness of our selfhood to varying degrees, and in turn, propel us toward moral perfection, toward the absolute union with the unconditioned Good. Therefore, while he defines the soul's essential nature as love, i.e., "motion within itself from itself" (*Phaedrus*, 245e), Plato cannot imagine that the soul's perfect, final existence should remain in this state of perpetual need.

It seems perfectly reasonable that Plato should think the soul's final existence is one where every need of the soul is met, thus instantiating a motionless state. However, it seems rather paradoxical that, when the *essential* nature of the soul is love, i.e., self-caused motion—a thesis Plato affirms in the *Phaedrus*—the soul's perfection would actually exclude love, for he argues that the highest human existence is "whole, uncompounded, *unmoving*" (250c). Nussbaum thus aptly describes Platonic Eros in terms of "the old familiar *eros*, that longing for an end to longing, that motivates us here to ascend to a world in which erotic activity, as we know it, will not exist."<sup>31</sup> In sum, there arises an unresolved tension in Plato's metaphysical story. On the contrary, Christianity conceives love not only as a necessary means to obtain the end but identifies it as the end in and of itself—thus unifying the means and the end<sup>32</sup>—because the very nature of God, the transcendent Good, is love. The Christian vision of the perfect state of human existence consists of a dynamic personal love relationship with a God of love, and

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<sup>31</sup> *Fragility of Goodness*, 183.

<sup>32</sup> Harry Frankfurt gives a phenomenological account of how love obliterates the traditional means/end distinction in ethics: "Similarly, the value to us of useful activity is never exclusively instrumental. This is because it is *inherently* important for us to engage in activity that is devoted to advancing our goals... It turns out, then, that instrumentally valuable activity, precisely because it is useful, necessarily also possesses intrinsic value. And, by the same token, intrinsically valuable final ends necessarily are instrumentally valuable precisely in virtue of being essential conditions for attaining the intrinsically valuable goal of having something worthwhile to do." *The Reasons of Love*, 58-9.

this is precisely the element missing in Platonic love: that the transcendent Good loves us, Perfection itself desires our love and attention, as if He needed us.<sup>33</sup> Such a notion of the Good is “foolishness” to the Platonic self; it thus requires God’s revelation to accept this truth.

### 3.4. Platonic Ascent vs. Divine Descent

Kierkegaard explicitly contrasts the divinely revealed account of love with the Platonic ascent in *Philosophical Fragments*:

It [Platonic love] does not mark the teacher’s relation to the disciple but the autodidact’s [the self-teaching one’s] relation to the beautiful, as he, disregarding dispersed beauty, beholds beauty-in-and-by-itself... If, then, the unity could not be brought about by an ascent, then it must be attempted by a descent... In order for unity to be effected, the god must become like this one. And in this way, he will show himself equal to the lowliest. (PF, 31)

Though not directly referring to Platonic love, he nevertheless reminds us again of this difference in *Works of Love*:

Alas, but even the wisest and most ingenious purely human understanding of love is still something high-flying, something vague; Christian love, on the contrary, descends from heaven to earth. The direction is thus the opposite. Christian love is not to soar up to heaven, for it comes from heaven and with heaven; it descends and arrives thereby at loving the same person in all the changes. Purely human love is continually in the process of flying away after, or flying away with, the beloved’s perfections... whereas Christian love grants the beloved all his imperfections and weaknesses and in all his changes remains by him, loving the person it sees. (WL, 173)

The dialectical dilemma of love, brought to the fore of philosophical consciousness by Plato and his critics as well as Kierkegaard and his critics, finds its resolution in the full

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<sup>33</sup> C. Stephen Evans affirms this reading. In response to Adorno’s criticism, Evans qualifies the notion of ‘the inner glory’ when he says, “God is the Good, but this identification requires us to rethink the Good *as embodied in a person* rather than reductionistically to understand God as an abstraction. Because of this identity, the one who wills the Good sincerely wills an alliance with God.” *Kierkegaard’s Ethic of Love*, 193 (my italics). To be a person is to love.

revelation of God's nature, love, in the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore, *Works of Love* conceives Christ as both the ground and the fulfillment of the doctrine of *imago Dei*:

Then he [a pagan] even praises Christianity, which has freed men from the evil [of not loving or even hating others based on dissimilarities] by deeply and forever unforgettably imprinting the kinship between one person and another, because the kinship is secured by each individual's equal kinship with and relationship to *God in Christ*; because the Christian doctrine equally addresses itself to each individual, teaches him that God has created him and Christ has redeemed him; because the Christian doctrine calls each person aside and says, "Close your door and pray to God and you have the highest a person can have; love your Savior and you have everything both in life and in death, and then let the dissimilarities be there; they do not matter either way." (69; my emphasis)

It is now clearer—at least textually—that the doctrine of *imago Dei* cannot be truly understood apart from the specific personal revelation of the God/man; each person must individually accept the truth, that is, Christ Himself. So understood, being created in God's image is not so much a formal universal category to be grasped intellectually and applied at will, as one's subjective relationship with God. Only when we personally experience, that is, willingly receive, God's pure love for us, shown through the most extravagant display of selfless love in Christ's life and death, can we begin to know what kinship with God really means, that is, what it means to be loved and love so infinitely, and in turn, what it means to recognize the intrinsic and infinite value of our fellow divine image bearers; only when I personally know God's infinite love for me can I really see the infinite value of my neighbor, that God also loves them in the same way.

### *3.5. Love's Needfulness*

Since Platonism inadequately grasps love's dependent relationality, it cannot fully appreciate love's *interdependent* relationality either. Because it does not—indeed cannot—see love's needfulness as an intrinsically good state of existence, it will tend to

undermine the actual practice of love, that is, the need “to Remain in Love’s Debt to One Another.”<sup>34</sup> By contrast, Kierkegaard regards love’s interpersonal need as such a deep part of human nature that without the explicit claim about it in Scripture, we would think otherwise, as Plato in fact did: “How *deeply* love’s need [*Trang*<sup>35</sup>] is grounded in human nature! The first remark, if we dare to say so, which was made about humanity and which was made by the only one who could in truth make it, by God, and about the first human being, says just this. We indeed read in Holy Scripture, ‘God said, it is not good for the man to be alone’” (WL, 154). What is more, Kierkegaard beckons those solitary individuals—those who “grow weary of society,” because of its “busy, swarming crowd, which as companionship is both too much and too little”—“not to make the discovery that God’s thought was incorrect—oh no, the cure is simply to learn all over again that first thought, to understand oneself in longing for companionship.” It is ultimately sin that brings about the selfish form of self-love and in turn the wrong conception of self-sufficiency that tries to undermine our inherently dependent nature, that is, our need for God first and then for others.

How do we then learn the right way to long for companionship? The answer is Christ, the One who, though fully God, is a “true human being, tested in everything human” (WL, 155), for it is in one’s personal relationship with Christ that one discovers just how deeply one’s need runs, the need to love and be loved by *The Other* and in turn *the other*. Kierkegaard highlights the paradoxical nature of Christ’s love that exemplifies love in both the universalistic and particularistic way: “he, who loved the *whole* human

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<sup>34</sup> This is the title of the chapter that immediately follows from the chapter we are currently discussing, namely “Our Duty to Love the People We See.”

<sup>35</sup> The Danish word is much richer than can be seen in the usual English translation, ‘need.’ It denotes an intense feeling of desire to acquire something, more like ‘craving.’

race, our Lord Jesus Christ, still humanly felt this need to love and be loved by a *particular [enkelt]* human being” (my emphasis). As an illustration, Kierkegaard movingly describes Jesus’ conversation with Peter that took place after he had denied Him in the presence of others. Jesus’ question to Peter—“Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”—indicates “an appeal for love, the way of speaking that characterizes one for whom it is of great importance to be *the most* loved” (added italics). That is, Jesus’ love embodies the principle of reciprocal recognitivity perfectly, for He longed to be loved unconditionally and selflessly by Peter, just as He himself loved him (and all other persons) infinitely. Christ’s love thus points to “the very mystery of love,” the truth that love, to be known as love, must be expressed concretely. So Jesus himself, the One who knows everything, desired to know Peter’s love for Him through his verbal assurance. Kierkegaard thus writes, “humanly understood, to be unconditionally certain of being loved is not to love, since it is to stand above the relationship between friend and friend” (156). This explains why our final existence—even in the state of glorification and resurrection—will still include needfulness; we will never in all eternity exhaust love, God’s love being known to us and our love given to Him, for eternity precisely consists in this continual and inexhaustible revelation of God’s love. Hence, Jesus’ prayer: “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3).

### *3.6. First Commandment First (again)*

It should be noted carefully, however, that Kierkegaard holds up Christ’s love not as a mere example for us to aspire to, but rather, conceives Christ’s love *in us* as constituting neighbor-love itself. The logic of love requires this thought. Since love’s

essential nature is its *reciprocal recognitivity*, as we saw earlier (iii.1.6), which is to say that my capacity to give love to another is equally commensurate with the degree to which I have received love from another, the inward possession of God’s perfect love in Christ—“the highest” and “everything both in life and in death”—is necessary to love the neighbor in the same divine way, to love all persons equally unconditionally. Therefore, Kierkegaard identifies the command to love the neighbor with another command, “to love as he is loved”—*by God* (WL, 4); “a human being’s love originates mysteriously in God’s love” (10). In other words, faith in the full Kierkegaardian sense is a necessary condition to fulfill the command to love the neighbor, the demand of love to love universally, in the perfect way.

However, the personal relationship with Christ at once means the fulfillment of love’s particularity as well. If anything is true of Kierkegaard’s idea of our God-relationship, it would be that it predicates the highest form of inwardness and subjectivity, that is, the most personal relationship possible for human beings. Love’s reciprocal recognitivity implies that it is a form of *personal knowledge*. The fundamental reason why we value special relationships, such as the husband/wife relationship, is *intimacy*: that she knows me and I know her in ways that no one else does. The mutual personal activity of knowing and being known, characteristic of love, is the highest human good because, as Kierkegaard notes in *Either/Or II*, it produces self-knowledge whereby one becomes “transparent to oneself”—the same point affirmed by Plato’s recollection thesis.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Kierkegaard’s language in the mouth of Judge William is unmistakably Platonic here: “The phrase γινώθι σεαυτόν [know yourself] is repeated often enough, and it has been seen as the goal of the whole of human striving. It is also entirely correct, but nevertheless it is just as certain that it cannot be the goal, if it is not also the beginning. The ethical individual knows himself, but this knowledge is not simply

That said, consider now my relationship with God. No greater intimacy can be conceived of than my wholly inward relationship with God. He perfectly knows me with all my weaknesses and strengths, failings and triumphs, and still loves me; He created me in love, endowing me with a specific set of potentials I now have, and He sustains and sees me at every moment of my existence, leading me to Himself like a good shepherd. It is true that I do not know Him as perfectly, but that is what eternal life, my perfection, will consist of, as we have noted above. This means that my intimate relationship with God *just is* my self-knowledge; my love relationship with God and my highest good are identical. God has this relationship and desires its fullness with every single person, loving them in such an individually catered way. Kierkegaard thus argues that one's subjective God-relationship is the only proper way to become an individual, a subject, oneself and in turn to construe others as individuals, ends in and of themselves (apart from one's relation to them):

Take such an insignificant person: if he has had the courage to be himself before God, then he has distinctiveness [*Eiendommelighed*]... the emphasis lies on "before God," since this is the source and origin of all distinctiveness. The one who has ventured this has distinctiveness; he has come to know what God has already given him, and he believes entirely in the same sense in everyone's distinctiveness. To have distinctiveness is to believe in every other's distinctiveness; for distinctiveness is not mine but is God's gift by which he gives being to me, and he indeed gives to all, gives being to all. (WL, 271)

It is by becoming an individual through divine love that one can then love the neighbor in the proper way, that is, not as a means to an end but for his or her own sake. Neighbor-

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contemplation, for then the individual comes to be defined according to his necessity. It is a *collecting of oneself*, which itself is an action, and this is why I have deliberately used the expression "to choose oneself" instead of "to know oneself"... Through the individual's *intercourse with himself* the individual is made *pregnant by himself* and *gives birth to himself*. The self 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. Only within himself does the individual have the object toward which he is to strive, and yet he has this objective outside himself as he strives toward it" (EO2, 258-9; my emphasis).

love thus resolves the instrumentality problem of Platonic love, since to love the neighbor in this way is to recognize his/her subjectivity, the individual God-relationship. So then, just as there is nothing abstract about God's love for me according to Christianity, neither should there be anything purely abstract about my love for the neighbor. So long as my love is continually rooted in and fueled by God's love for me, receiving the revelation, the firsthand experience of the highest love, I will relate to others in the same distinctive way God relates to me.

### *3.7. The Problem of Socrates*

We have come to the end of our discussion of love and thereby of the entire project that set out to examine Kierkegaard's philosophy in its comparative and contrastive relation to Plato's. This chapter's discussion of love in particular has been couched in terms of the inherent problems in Platonic love which Kierkegaard's account of neighbor-love is presumed to overcome. However, it would not be complete without some reference to Socrates, for this fascinating and paradoxical historical figure presents a challenge, which in our context may emerge in two ways. First, some readers may come to Plato's defense by appealing to his description of the erotic nature of Socrates' life, which seems to undermine, to some degree, the standard criticism by the likes of Nussbaum and Vlastos.<sup>37</sup> Second, Kierkegaard himself affirms this view of Socrates, in particular, elevating the love Socrates embodied in his life above the kind typically found

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<sup>37</sup> Unlike Vlastos and Nussbaum, Mary P. Nichols argues that Plato ambiguously affirms both the intellectualistic vision of life and our intrinsic erotic nature through presenting Socrates as a paradigmatic person of virtue. She argues that this tension precisely explains Plato's reason for writing dialogues; it was his way of combining the soul's spirited desire to achieve unity based on reason at all cost and the irreducible diversity of the erotic existence of our lives. "The *Republic's* Two Alternatives: Philosopher-Kings and Socrates," *Political Theory* 12, no. 2 (May, 1984). In other words, Vlastos and Nussbaum present only one side of Plato's writings. The ambiguity is, however, not resolvable within the Platonic worldview, as my argument has shown.

in the nineteenth century ‘Christian’ world. Kierkegaard explains Socrates’ genuine love for the youth of Athens in terms of his own God-relationship, even seeing Platonic transcendent love as an ennobling element in his love for them. Kierkegaard’s admiring praise of Socrates in *Works of Love* rivals that of Alcibiades in the *Symposium*; only it is truer in the sense that Kierkegaard understood Socrates better. So I quote him at length:

As for the first [the Athenians’ accusation of self-love], was it not because he, as a pagan, could do it, had loved people in something higher, that is, because he had had an awakening effect and not in any way let himself be spellbound by temporality or by any human being, not by any sluggish or fervent solidarity in erotic love, in friendship, in agreement with others, with the times, but preferred to be the self-lover, the teaser, whom no one loved! As for the latter [the charge of worldliness], was it not because he perceived that the youth still had a receptivity for the divine, which is so lost over the years in wheeling and dealing, in erotic love and friendship, in submission to a merely human judgment and to the demands of the times! So, because he, by means of the eternal and “something divine,” had prevented his love for people from coming to a standstill in self-deception or illusion, that is, because he, by holding himself close to the requirement, had been like a requirement to the people. (WL, 129)

What can we say about Kierkegaard’s seemingly inconsistent position, criticizing Platonic love while exalting Socrates’ love? There is really no inconsistency here because, for him, the existentialist-ethicist Socrates differs from the Platonized Socrates. Another way to put it is that Socrates was a perfect example of neither Platonic love nor Christian love; he seems to have gone beyond the former but not reached the latter quite yet. So Kierkegaard claims that Socrates “did not know that the neighbor existed and that one should love him” (373). Furthermore, his journal entry critiques Socrates for the same problem in Platonic love: “This was the truth in the words of Socrates when he reprimanded someone who wanted him to become angry because Xanthippe did something unbecoming toward him—Socrates answered: If a hen did the same thing, you would not become angry. But Socrates’ shortcoming was that he did not have the inward

turning of piety but only the averted turning of objectivity” (JP4: 4545). That “inward turning of piety,” i.e., faith, would have made Socrates more affectionate, more human to his wife. However, it would have been impossible without the revelation of Love itself: Jesus the Messiah.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Conclusion and Further Questions

“And when all things are subjected to Him,  
then the Son Himself also will be  
subjected to the One who  
subjected to Him  
all things, that  
*God may be all in all.*”

1 Corinthians 15:28

“Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face;  
now I know in part, but then *I shall know fully*  
just as I also have been fully known.”

1 Corinthians 13:12

My dissertation set out to paint a synoptic view of Kierkegaard’s philosophy, seen under the purview of the problem of the one and the many. I have defended the central thesis that Kierkegaard’s thought in his major pseudonymous (and some non-pseudonymous) works on the whole constitutes a direct critical response to the Platonic philosophical tradition engaged in solving the one/many problem theoretically, by pointing to its wrong orientation to the problem. For we have seen that Kierkegaard argues based on Christian revelation that the cause of the one/many problem is an existential, subjective reality called sin and the solution is thus the opposite of sin, namely faith. So the problem originates from and thus must be resolved in the sphere of freedom, human subjectivity.

There were broadly two parts that make up the defense of this thesis. The first was to recast the one/many problem existentially by reconstructing Kierkegaard’s theory of the spheres of existence in terms of the dialectical problem of the one and the many.

We have seen that the dialectical conflict between the aesthetic and the ethical sphere corresponds to the contrary features of the one and the many, with the aesthetic sphere exemplifying exclusively the particular and the ethical the universal, and the fundamental contradiction can be overcome only in the religious sphere of faith, the highest expression of passion, through which the self paradoxically upholds both contraries by fulfilling the universal moral law through its particular subjective relationship with God, motivated by divine love. Central to Kierkegaard's works is therefore the idea of Christianity as the third reconciling position, i.e., dialectical unity, to the problem of the one and the many.

In sketching this overarching narrative of the Christian worldview in terms of the one/many dialectic, we found it helpful to examine Kierkegaard's religious categories in parallel to Plato's philosophical categories, which provides the second way in which the main thesis was defended. There we observed Kierkegaard's bold critical engagement with Plato and his philosophical heir, Hegel, concerning the metaphysical problem of motion (or change), how the infinite-universal comes to be exemplified in the finite-particular, and the epistemic problem of explaining the synthetic activity of consciousness in relation to change in the external world. Based on his reading of Plato's *Parmenides*, Kierkegaard demonstrated that the precise *moment* of change, the place of union between the two contradictory spheres, cannot be explained philosophically, for the abstract and static nature of the object of philosophical activity is incommensurable with the ever changing nature of reality perceived through time, and our consciousness of time, as his exegesis of the Genesis creation narrative explained, is derived from the first self-conscious activity of the Fall, first in Adam and then in each one of us humans.

Hence, the real issue lies with the *existential* problem of the one and the many, the proper solution of which has been called in the present work ‘existential unity.’ The Platonic quest for existential unity therefore finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ the God/man, the very paradoxical embodiment of that unity. Our subjective relationship to Him, as divine love gets infused in us through faith, removes sin and its totally dismantling effect on the will, and in turn, we manifest this love to others through neighbor-love.

Quite understandably, most of us enter Kierkegaard’s authorship principally interested in his penetrating insights into human existence. However, my engagement with his texts in dialogue with Plato’s thought has shown—even to my own surprise—how much those existential and religious insights relate to and illuminate the traditional problems in philosophy. Thus I found that Kierkegaard’s unrelenting interest in understanding human existence and his profound grasp of Christian revelation endowed him with a truly unique philosophical point of view to analyze these problems, enabling him to assess critically the responses proffered by such eminent philosophers as Plato, Kant, and Hegel, and leading him to an equally unique solution for them.

It will nevertheless be clear to my readers that this project has merely begun to excavate the surface of Kierkegaard’s fertile texts—and even more so Plato’s. The work as a whole has been in some sense a series of promissory notes, for there are many important ideas that need to be explored still further. For instance, some of my readers perhaps would have liked to see more specific and clear arguments to explain how precisely the existential version of the one/many problem relates to the metaphysical-epistemological versions, for the relation among these problems, as it stands, seems to

give us no more than a highly suggestive analogy. I am not sure that there is a single decisive argument that explains the connection in a crystal clear way, offering us something more than an analogical relation among these different dimensions of existence. Rather, further studies that extend the discussions of this dissertation may prove to result in a *stronger* analogical relation.

To strengthen that relation obviously requires a deeper analysis of the nature of consciousness. As the study led us to affirm, consciousness is remarkably unitive in its aptitude. The dissertation has encountered several times the striking parallel between the *cognitive* aptitude of consciousness for synthesis, to apprehend unity in mental representation, and its *practical* aptitude for another kind of synthesis, to realize unity in our social relationship. The logical principle of identity operates centrally in the former, whereas the law of love in the latter. To explore the relation between the law of identity and of love is to extend the discussions of, respectively, Chapters V and VI on the one hand and III, IV, and VII on the other. The idea is that both reason and love are dialectical, inclined to obtain unity between two similar yet different things, respectively, on the theoretical side, between divine and human consciousness, and on the practical side, between one human person and another.

Concerning the law of identity, the cognitive side of consciousness, Chapters V and VI have begun to examine Kierkegaard's critical assessment of the broader philosophical tradition that attempted to address the problem of the contradictory relation between the infinite and the finite theoretically. I hope to further my understanding of the unitive aptitude of consciousness by engaging in a careful study of the history of modern philosophy, for this project convinced me that particularly the German idealist tradition

as a whole gave us some of the most rich and compelling responses to this problem, and Kierkegaard's relation to the tradition, though critical ultimately, owes a great debt to it nonetheless. My future projects will engage in strengthening my understanding of Kierkegaard's critical relation to such prominent thinkers as Kant, Hegel, and other German thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. While Chapters V and VI have described the salient difference between Kierkegaard and the German thinkers, namely their conceptions of will and freedom, the more precise and substantive articulation of their difference remains a personal task, as well as something yet to appear in literature.

Concerning the law of love, while expositing *Either/Or II* in Chapter III, I made the claim that the idea of justice ultimately owes its ontological grounding to the very foundational constitution of humanity to love and be loved. Moreover, in Chapter IV's discussion of *Fear and Trembling*, I tried to show that the dynamic exchange of divine and human love, called faith, is the fulfillment of the principle of equality or justice. So stated, love is both the beginning and the end of our intrinsic desire for justice: in short, love *is* justice. I hope to make good on this claim in the future by providing more precise arguments for the ontological origin of justice in love. Some contemporary analytic philosophy, e.g., Nicholas Wolterstorff's forthcoming book, *Justice in Love*, has already begun to see the relationship as a legitimate object of fruitful philosophical discourse. In his earlier work on justice, however, Wolterstorff casually dismisses the long tradition of conceiving justice in terms of equality.<sup>38</sup> I think this is a mistake, for the point of connection between justice and love precisely lies in the notion of equality; both are driven toward realizing equality in some way. And much of the wrong conception and

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<sup>38</sup> *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 13-5.

practice of justice today is, I believe, due to the wrong conception of equality, forged in isolation from the proper *dialectical* concept of equality inherent in love. My hope is that my continual engagement with the subject matter of love, principally inspired by the classical texts on the theme, such as Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* and *Works of Love*, as well as Platonic dialogues, will contribute to what promises to be a rich and fascinating discussion in the near future.

I have consistently maintained a sympathetic readership of Kierkegaard in this work—perhaps to some readers overly sympathetic—for there is a sense in which a rather critical attitude toward his works inevitably misses their profound insight. But more fundamentally, I am sympathetic to Kierkegaard's works because I also firmly believe in the Christian vision of how the fundamental problem in philosophy must be overcome, how the infinite and the finite are to be reconciled: faith in Christ. This vision looks forward to the future with Christ's return, as intimated in the Apostle Paul's words above. Full knowledge is promised for that day when God truly becomes all in all, completely dwelling with human consciousness as was originally intended in the Garden of Eden, to realize the full union of the one and the many, "things in the heavens and things on the earth." Until that day, philosophy—and certainly *my* philosophy—will remain an incomplete task, riddled with paradoxes and partial tentative answers. In short, I am on a Platonic quest myself.

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