ROBERT C. ROBERTS



RECOVERING CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

. . . .

The PSYCHOLOGICAL WISDOM *of*

SØREN KIERKEGAARD

KIERKEGAARD AS A CHRISTIAN THINKER

C. Stephen Evans and Paul Martens
General Editors

The Kierkegaard as a Christian Thinker series seeks to promote and enrich an understanding of Søren Kierkegaard as a Christian thinker who, despite his many critiques of Christendom, self-consciously worked within the Christian tradition and in the service of Christianity. Volumes in the series may approach Kierkegaard's relationship to Christianity historically or topically, philosophically or theologically. Some will attempt to illuminate Kierkegaard's thought by examining his works through the lens of Christian faith; others will use Kierkegaard's Christian insights to address contemporary problems and competing non-Christian perspectives.

That Søren Kierkegaard profoundly influenced nineteenth- and twentieth-century theology and philosophy is not in doubt. The direction, extent, and value of his influence, however, have always been hotly contested. For example, in the early decades of the twentieth century, German theologians Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Emil Brunner all acknowledged deep debts to Kierkegaard, debts that would echo through the theological debates of the entire century. In spite of this, by the middle of the twentieth century, Kierkegaard was also hailed (or cursed) as a father of existentialism and nihilism because of his appropriation by Heidegger, Sartre, and others. At the same time, however, he was beginning to become the reveille for a return to true Christianity in North America through the translating efforts of Walter Lowrie and David Swenson. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Kierkegaard's legacy is once again being seriously and rigorously debated.

While acknowledging and affirming the postmodern appreciation of elements of Kierkegaard's thought (such as irony, indirect communication, and pseudonymity), this series aims to engage Kierkegaard as a Christian thinker who self-consciously worked as a Christian in the service of Christianity. And, as the current discussion crosses the traditional boundaries of philosophy and theology, this series will necessarily do the same. What these volumes all share, however, is the task of articulating Kierkegaard's continuities with, challenges to, and resources for Christianity today. It is our hope that, in this way, this series will deepen and enrich the manifold contemporary debates concerning

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Recovering Christian Character

The Psychological Wisdom of Søren Kierkegaard

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In memory of Paul Leroy Holmer, who taught me the way of reading Kierkegaard that this book evinces

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Foreword

Several recent books have attempted to interpret Kierkegaard as a thinker who has something to teach us about the virtues. Some other writers have questioned whether Kierkegaard should be considered a "virtue ethicist" at all, chiefly because of a well-known quote from *The Sickness unto Death*, where the Kierkegaardian pseudonym Anti-Climacus affirms that the "opposite of sin is not virtue but faith." In *Recovering Christian Character* Robert Roberts offers a convincing way to resolve this argument by first giving us a clear picture of Kierkegaard's view of the human self. This portrait of a Christian psychology then serves as a basis for Roberts to explore Kierkegaard's account of what it means to become a person who possesses a genuinely Christian character.

I can think of no one better qualified than Roberts to tackle these issues. He brings to the task a lifetime of reading Kierkegaard's works, both for scholarly purposes and for personal edification, as well as a formidable and highly respected body of work on moral psychology, especially emotions, and the virtues.

It turns out that Christian character as Kierkegaard understands it requires the development of a number of excellent qualities, including, as one might expect, faith, hope, and love, often described by other Christian writers as the "theological" or "infused" virtues. Roberts shows us that Kierkegaard's account of these central Christian qualities is deep and penetrating. Surprisingly, Roberts shows that Kierkegaard, who is often disparaged as "the melancholy Dane," sees these Christian qualities as accompanied by a kind of deep joy that can be had even in the midst of suffering. Faith, hope, and love in turn undergird a number of other excellences that are usually described as virtues: patience, gratitude, generosity, and both pride and humility, which, understood rightly, turn out to be virtues on Kierkegaard's view. (Though other qualities called by those names turn out to be vices.)

So far as I can see, the only grounds for questioning whether all these qualities deserve the label of "virtues" is that, as Kierkegaard understands them, they seem quite different in important ways from those described in the philosophical literature as "Aristotelian virtues." Even if this is so, why should

Aristotle's account of the virtues be the only one deserving of the name? It seems plausible that there are many different accounts of human excellences: Confucian virtues, Nietzschean virtues, Stoic virtues, and Buddhist virtues, to name just a few. Roberts uses Kierkegaard's writings to give us a finely delineated account of some important virtues, qualities that indeed have a distinctively Christian character. Christian virtues, unlike Aristotelian virtues, turn out to be ones that humans cannot acquire without divine assistance. However, Kierkegaard is not the only Christian thinker who sees things this way. Even Thomas Aquinas, who tries to follow Aristotle when he can, recognizes that the "infused virtues" are impossible apart from God's actions. Furthermore, Aquinas also says that when faith, hope, and love are received, all the other virtues are transformed as well. Kierkegaard's account of the virtues, as Roberts explains them, can, like that of Aquinas, be compared in illuminating ways with Aristotle's, with interesting similarities as well as differences.

The opposite of sin for Kierkegaard is indeed faith, not "virtue," understood as a human quality that can be achieved by autonomous moral striving. However, that does not mean that faith, hope, and love, understood as gifts of God, are not genuine human excellences that in turn make possible a number of other virtues. Here we have an account of the virtues that is deeply and distinctively Christian. The proof is in the pudding, and Roberts does not give us simply a theoretical account of the virtues and their taxonomy. Rather, like Kierkegaard himself, he wants to help us understand what it would be like for us to embody those virtues in our daily lives. In the spirit of Greek philosophers, but with the guidance of God's revelation in Christ, Roberts wants to help us learn how to live in a way that is fitting to our nature, and also pleasing to God.

C. Stephen Evans

PREFACE

Like many others, I first encountered Kierkegaard in a college course on existentialism when I was nineteen or twenty years old. And the book was *Fear and Trembling*, of course. I was charmed, delighted, amused, elevated, and befuddled. I had never read the likes of this. It seemed to be philosophy—at least it was on a philosophy reading list. When I was in high school in Wichita, Kansas, I had read a bit of Kant and Schopenhauer, drawn to them by Will Durant's *The Story of Philosophy*. I was used to it being hard going, requiring that I pore over every sentence, groping to connect it to something I understood. So the fact that *Fear and Trembling* created in my mind a blinding fog of elusive profundities was nothing new. But the urbane, jesting, light-hearted put-downs of the intelligentsia in the preface were like nothing I had encountered in Kant or Schopenhauer. This appealed to my own somewhat rascally nature. (After reading a bit of Schopenhauer, I delighted in announcing to a particularly prim English teacher, and then again at home to my mother, that I was now a "pessimist.")

But what drew me to philosophy in the first place, I now see in retrospect, was an interest in my soul. I somehow felt that in the deep waters of Kant and Schopenhauer I might find personal treasures, a wealth of life by which to be formed into something worthwhile and everlasting, an understanding that would put me in touch with the eternal. And here was Kierkegaard, in the winking persona of Johannes de Silentio, "poetically" rhapsodizing with boundless admiration about *the faith of Abraham* (!) and deftly showing it to be an achievement of the human spirit well beyond anything the authors I revered could offer.

In the sixty years that have intervened since that existentialism class, I've seen that part of what I was responding to in Kierkegaard's writing was a deep stylistic feature that he calls "upbuilding" or "edifying." When he writes about faith, as in *Fear and Trembling*, or love, as in *Works of Love*, or about hope or patience or forgiveness or joy or humility or compassion or gratitude, as he does in various works, the writing is never "theoretical," as though its ultimate aim is to prove or defend a thesis about the topic. Instead, it is designed to encourage, and if

possible to improve, the reader in whatever spiritual traits are under discussion. That is, it is designed to "build up" the reader's character—to build up *the reader*. This is not at all to deny that the thinking in which Kierkegaard leads us is conceptually rigorous. On the contrary, its conceptual rigor—what he calls its "dialectic"—is essential to the upbuilding power of the writing. The reader's responsiveness to God and neighbor is to be "controlled by conceptual definitions" (BA, 112), as he says in *The Book on Adler*. His writing embodies this conceptual rigor as necessary to the upbuilding style. I think it was the masterful combining of the "poetry" and the "logic" that dazzled my raw but hungry mind in the early sixties and continues to this day to awe me, combined with the fact that he deployed these powers on behalf of God and the human soul.

The reader will find quite a few references to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in these pages. Kierkegaard was steeped in ancient philosophy, but Socrates is his real hero, and Plato is more evidently influential than Aristotle. But since this book is a concerted look at Kierkegaard's psychology of character, and since Aristotle's *Ethics* is the paradigm text for ancient thought about character, I have found that Aristotle's thought can throw light on Kierkegaard's.

I am dedicating this book to the memory of Paul Leroy Holmer, who taught me the way of reading Kierkegaard that this book evinces. I do so in the hope that it doesn't fall too far short of what he taught me. As I reread the book in preparing it for publication, it strikes me as "Holmerian," and evokes grateful and respectful memories of the man.

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SIGLA

In this book I refer to works of Kierkegaard and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* parenthetically in the text with abbreviations of the titles and page numbers as follows: (BA, 15).

WORKS BY KIERKEGAARD

BA	*The Book on Adler*. Kierkegaard's Writings 24. Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995. (*Bogen om Adler*, by Petrus Minor, ed. S. Kierkegaard, 1847.)
CA	*The Concept of Anxiety*. Kierkegaard's Writings 8. Trans. Reidar Thomte, in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980. (*Begrebet Angest*, by Vigilius Haufniensis, ed. S. Kierkegaard, 1844.)
CD	*Christian Discourses* and *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*. Kierkegaard's Writings 17. Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. (*Christelige Taler*, by S. Kierkegaard, 1848, and *Krisen og en Krise i en Skuespillerindes Liv*, by Inter et Inter., *Fædrelandet* 188–91 [24–27 July 1848].)
CUP	*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Two volumes. Kierkegaard's Writings 12:1–2. Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. (*Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift*, by Johannes Climacus, ed. S. Kierkegaard, 1846.)
DCF	*Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, including part 4 of *Christian Discourses*, *Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, First Christian Exposition from No. 3 in *Practice in Christianity*, and *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*. Trans. Sylvia Walsh. Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011. (*Christelige Taler*, by S. Kierkegaard, 1848; *Tre Taler ved Altergangen om Fredagen*, by S. Kierkegaard, 1849; *Indøvelse i Christendom*, by Anti-Climacus, ed. S. Kierkegaard, 1850; *To Taler ved Altergangen om Fredagen*, by S. Kierkegaard, 1851.)
EO 1 and EO 2	*Either/Or*. Two volumes. Kierkegaard's Writings 3 and 4. Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987. (*Enten/Eller* 1–2, ed. Victor Eremita, 1843.)
EUD	*Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*. Kierkegaard's Writings 5. Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990. (*Atten opbyggelige taler*, by S. Kierkegaard, 1843–45.)
FSE	*For Self-Examination*. In *For Self-Examination* and *Judge for Yourself!* Kierkegaard's Writings 21. Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990. (*Til Selvprøvelse*, by S. Kierkegaard, 1851, and *Dømmer Selv!* by S. Kierkegaard, 1852.)
FT	*Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition*. Kierkegaard's Writings 6. Trans. Howard V.

	Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983. (*Frygt og Bæven*, by Johannes de Silentio, ed. S. Kierkegaard, 1843.)
JP	*Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, assisted by Gregor Malantschuk. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. In seven volumes, 1967–1978.
LFBA	*The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air: Three Godly Discourses*. Trans. Bruce Kirmmse. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016. (*Lilien paa marken og fuglen under himlen*, by S. Kierkegaard, 1849.)
PC	*Practice in Christianity*. Kierkegaard's Writings 20. Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. (*Indovelse i Christendom*, by Anti-Climacus, ed. S. Kierkegaard, 1850.)
PF	*Philosophical Fragments*. Kierkegaard's Writings 7. Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985. (*Philosophiske Smuler*, by Johannes Climacus, ed. S. Kierkegaard, 1844.)
PV	*The Point of View*, including *On My Work as an Author*, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, and *Armed Neutrality*. Kierkegaard's Writings 22. Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998. (*Om min Forfatter-Virksomhed*, by S. Kierkegaard, 1851; *Synspunktet for min Forfatter-Virksomhed*, by S. Kierkegaard, posthumously publ. 1859; *Den bevæbnede Neutralitet*, by S. Kierkegaard, posthumously publ. 1880.)
SUD	*The Sickness unto Death*. Kierkegaard's Writings 19. Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980. (*Sygdommen til Døden*, by Anti-Climacus, ed. S. Kierkegaard, 1849.)
TA	*Two Ages: The Present Age and the Age of Revolution; A Literary Review*. Kierkegaard's Writings 14. Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978. (*En literair Anmeldelse. To Tidsaldre*, by S. Kierkegaard, 1846.)
UDVS	*Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*. Kierkegaard's Writings 15. Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. (*Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand*, 1847.)
WL	*Works of Love*. Kierkegaard's Writings 16. Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995. (*Kjerlighedens Gjerninger*, 1847.)

Work by Aristotle

NE	*Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. David Ross. Rev. J. L. Ackrill and J. O. Urmson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980.

Introduction
KIERKEGAARD'S MISSION

> *What is more difficult—to awaken someone who is sleeping or to awaken someone who, awake, is dreaming that he is awake?*
>
> *Works of Love*, 5

KIERKEGAARD'S ACCOUNT OF HIS ACTIVITY AS A WRITER

In *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, published posthumously by his brother Peter four years after Søren Kierkegaard's death, Kierkegaard says that while he was writing under a diversity of pseudonyms (from 1842 on) that represented a variety of lifestyles and views of life, he himself was already a religious author. He proves the point by noting that within days or weeks of the publication of each of the pseudonymous books, he published overtly religious discourses under his own name. Though he doesn't call these upbuilding (or edifying) discourses "Christian," all but two are expositions of texts from the Old and New Testaments. He admits that he was not, at the beginning, entirely clear how this combination of writings—pseudonymous writings with an "aesthetic" character, and frankly serious writings for religious character formation—was to work as a communication strategy. He attributes the design to God's guidance, about which he becomes clearer as his life project unfolds. It seems to me that he may also have been guided by Plato, as I'll suggest briefly in a moment.

Kierkegaard's activity as a writer, he says, was missionary activity on behalf of Christianity. His mission work, unlike that of missionaries to regions previously unchurched, was entirely a work of reflection designed to take account of the fact that the pagans in his mission field thought they were Christians. Suppose you're a missionary and go to some far-off country to convert the native population to Christianity, but when you get there, the people claim to be Christians already. You are delighted that God has so wonderfully anticipated your arrival. But when you learn their language, talk to them, and observe their way of life, you find that they live in deeply unchristian ways, think about themselves and the world in which they live in very different categories from the Christian ones, and have aims and projects starkly alien to Christianity. You decide to stay among

them and try to convert them to real Christianity. But their conviction that they are already Christians makes your project awkward. From their perspective, it is like earnestly teaching and exhorting them to stand upright rather than to crawl on all fours, whereas that is what they've been doing all along. So they brush you off as an eccentric and continue happily to practice what they regard as Christianity. Now you have a prior task: to disabuse them of their confusion about Christianity. You can't begin to shape their minds and hearts in Christian ways until you get them to stop thinking they are Christians. This is the situation in which Kierkegaard finds himself in nineteenth-century Denmark. So the work had to surmount first the "monstrous illusion" of Christendom—his contemporaries' supposition that all it takes to qualify as a Christian is to be born in a Christian country, to be on the church rolls by way of a baptismal certificate, to say yes to the creed, and maybe show up for a worship service now and then. The illusion deafened people to any call to transform their lives by the thought of God and that his Son had died on the cross for their benefit. Only after this illusion had been dispelled, or in concert with dispelling it, could one get down to the business of converting people to Christianity. Since the illusion had the character of mis*conception*, mis*understanding*, confusion of *concepts*, and the like, the mission work had to be conceptual, a mission work that consisted in *thinking*. In Kierkegaard's lingo, it had to be "dialectical" and "reflective."

It also had to be "dialectical" in another sense: not a straightforward telling of the gospel, which would just be absorbed into the illusion, but rather an indirect approach that first gets inside the deceived minds of the pagans to remove the illusion. The paradigm is Socratic. Think of Socrates's "dialectical" approach to Euthyphro, a self-styled teacher of religion.[1] Socrates starts out presenting himself as Euthyphro's pupil and, by careful ironic efforts to "learn" from him, shows Euthyphro that Euthyphro doesn't know what he's talking about. This is the analogue of the first phase of Kierkegaard's project. The second phase is well beyond Socrates's aporetic dialogues with Euthyphro and others. It is the long and arduous soul-education described in *Republic*, books 5–7,[2] in which the society's leaders are inwardly transformed into complete human beings by a process of which philosophical dialectic (critical reflective dialogue) is the central aspect. To the *Republic*'s arduous education corresponds Kierkegaard's "second" authorship, works such as *Works of Love*, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, and *Christian Discourses*.

Kierkegaard designed his pseudonymous works to dispel the monstrous illusion. He did this by depicting, in a fetching and profound way, the lifestyles

and outlooks on life that were, more or less, real possibilities for his contemporaries. The characters of the pseudonymous authors are diverse. A seducer (Johannes the Seducer) delights primarily in intricate, inventive psychological strategies of the seduction process. An aesthete ("A"), purported author of the first volume of *Either/Or*, ruminates about the meaning of life. A solidly ethical middle-class married man (Judge William), the supposed author of the second volume of *Either/Or*, is religious in a conventional way, and he describes in rich detail the character of the ethical life, with a long illustration of marriage as an ethical institution. Some characters are on the road to Christianity but are not there yet: Johannes de Silentio (author of *Fear and Trembling*) and Johannes Climacus (author of *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*). Yet another, Anti-Climacus (author of *The Sickness unto Death* and *Practice in Christianity*), is a superlative Christian. It is as though characters from these outlooks on life are speaking—and sometimes telling their own stories—from their own points of view. So their ruminations and autobiographical details are first-personal: the pseudonymous characters *occupy* ("exist" in) the lifestyles and outlooks on life that they represent and discuss. Being fictional, this is all work of thinking and imagination; and Kierkegaard assumes that such work can draw a reader into an understanding, of sorts, of what it is like to *be* such a character, and thus to live in such a character's world, shaped as a person by the master-thoughts of the character's way of life. But to clarify their own way of living, these pseudonymous characters often discuss other lifestyles and outlooks on life as well. For example, Judge William writes long letters to the aesthete "A" comparing A's outlook with his own and arguing for the superiority of his own (ethical) way of life. Just as Socrates leads Euthyphro to the cusp of acquaintance with himself, the aesthetic, pseudonymous works of Kierkegaard invite the reader to ask, "Is this me?" For example, in *Either/Or* the liabilities of what Kierkegaard calls the "aesthetic" life are illustrated in the aphorisms that he calls Diapsalmata. And Judge William, in his long letters to the aesthete in the second volume of *Either/Or*, reinforces the liabilities of the aesthetic life and points out that what the aesthete seeks can be found in marriage without the liabilities of the aesthetic life.

Kierkegaard designs the pseudonymous works as a sort of mirror in which he and his contemporaries may see themselves. In these characters, his contemporaries find people living and thinking as they themselves do or may, though more articulately and profoundly. Or they see lives to which they aspire, or might aspire, and they see them in a way that allows them some insight into

the adequacies and liabilities of the worldview. The writings invite us to explore human life from a greater diversity of directions than we could ever do by way of our own reflective resources. But Kierkegaard designed this exploration of life-views ultimately to throw light, by comparison and contrast, on the Christian way of life. In a journal entry from 1850 (JP 1:522), he says that the aim of his writing was "to nail down the Christian qualifications" with such clarity and power that no amount of rationalizing would be able to evade them; it was "like locking the door and throwing away the key" on such mitigating, intellectualizing "reflection." If you were to read well both from the pseudonymous works and the religious works, both early and late, you would get a clear impression of where you stood "existentially" vis-à-vis Christianity, as well as vis-à-vis other life-views located above and below where you currently live. "Existentially" here means *with respect to actual living as a human being*.

Let me say a bit about Kierkegaard's words "existence" and "existential." We sometimes speak of climate change as an existential threat, meaning that climate change could wipe us out. It could kill us, deprive us of existence. In this sense, climate change is an existential threat to species other than human beings, perhaps even more so. This is not Kierkegaard's use of the word. In his usage, rabbits and trees, not to speak of rocks and water, don't "exist." Only human beings "exist" or have existence. When Anti-Climacus speaks of Socrates as "existentially expressing ignorance about everything" (SUD, 88), he is saying that Socrates *lived out* his "ignorance" in a way that modern skeptical philosophers, who mostly just talk about it, do not. When Johannes Climacus says that his contemporaries have forgotten what it means to "exist," he is saying that they have forgotten what it means to be a human being, to live the kind of life that is distinctively human. They are selling themselves short, settling for something less than a truly *human* existence. It is a moral criticism, in a broad sense of "moral." When Kierkegaard says that profundity "is really the deep *existential* carrying out of an idea that is directly related to God" (BA, 245, italics original), he is saying that to be profound is to realize (i.e., make real), in one's life and actual character, an ideal way of relating to God—for example, to have the character traits of faith, hope, or love. Johannes Climacus says,

> It may seem natural enough for a learned theologian to devote his entire lifetime to a scholarly investigation of the teaching of the Scriptures and the Church. But it would surely be a ridiculous contradiction for an existing individual, in asking what Christianity is with a view to existence, to employ his entire life in considering the question—for when would he then find time to exist in it? (CUP 1:370)

In the usual sense of "exist," it wouldn't make any sense to speak of someone who spends his whole life investigating the Scriptures and the church without being an "existing individual." But Climacus thinks there are people who do this, so "exist" must have a different meaning in this context. An "existing" individual in this sense is someone who is passionately concerned about *living in accordance* with the Scriptures and *living as an exemplary member* of the church. Such a person cannot put off "existing in" these specified ways until he has spent a lifetime figuring out what they are! In chapter 1 we will address what Kierkegaard thinks human nature is like. It is this nature, with its "calling" to become a being of the kind that has actualized this nature, that constitutes existence in Kierkegaard's special sense. While some of the pseudonyms—especially Johannes Climacus—frequently use this vocabulary of "exist," neither Kierkegaard nor any of his pseudonyms refer to themselves as existential*ist*s, nor to their outlook as existential*ism*. Existentialism is a phenomenon of the twentieth century, and it originates with Kierkegaard only by mistaken attribution. Such a mistake is what lands *Fear and Trembling* on an existentialism reading list, and it's a misleading context in which to try to understand that book. The present book is about Kierkegaard's psychology of character, but typical existentialists don't believe in character, or they think that to have character is to be "inauthentic," as will become clear in more detail in chapter 2.

The title of Kierkegaard's first published book, *Either/Or*,[3] indicates a general character of his goal in writing. The self-clarification that his works are supposed to bring about in his reader will involve a crisis of self-understanding in which one needs *either* to remain in one's current lifestyle and way of thinking about life, but to do so in a clear understanding of its deficiencies, *or* to "move up"—say, from the aesthetic to the ethical, or from the ethical to the religious, or from natural or "Socratic" religiousness to Christianity. Kierkegaard's writing aims to provoke existential upward motion, character improvement. Christianity is the ultimate goal of such lifestyle changes. But Christianity is a historical phenomenon, a tradition with a rich past that goes back to its origins in the New and Old Testaments. So Kierkegaard's project is a kind of archaeology, a recovery of lost treasures. To indicate what a wrenching experience this clarification would be if it really cast light, Kierkegaard comments in a later journal entry (from 1852),

> Like the unfortunate madman who says he'll climb down into Dovrefjell to blow up the whole world with a syllogism, what was needed was someone who could, to everyone's knowledge, climb really

> deep down into the whole world of mediation, mediocrity, and spiritlessness to plant there, for all to see, the explosive either/or.[4]

A syllogism may seem an odd choice of explosives, but like the syllogism with which the madman proposed to blow up the world, the explosive that Kierkegaard plants in that world of Christendom is his thought, in the form of his writings, both pseudonymous and signed. In a spectacular exercise of empathy, Kierkegaard gets *inside* the living life-views of his readers to disintegrate them from within. Since the "integration" that is undone by Kierkegaard's exploration and empathic explosion is delusory, the *dis*integration is a progress toward truth, that is, true self-knowledge of the invaded consciousness. The reader comes to see himself or herself reflected in the pseudonymous author, and coincidentally, how far removed his or her self is from Christianity. Another way to say this is that the equilibrium or complacency of the reader's life-view—a false equilibrium—is destabilized so that upward movement becomes, to some degree, urgent. The pseudonymous works are more or less hidden explosives, designed for ambush, while the signed works are set to explode "to everyone's knowledge" and "for all to see."[5] The illusion of Christendom obscures the terms of choice, preventing people from having to confront it. So two things must be understood: (1) where the reader stands in human existence—what his or her current character is—and (2) what Christianity is, in all its inward contours in communion with God, who is both eternal and historical. Kierkegaard devotes his writings to increasing both self-understanding and understanding of Christianity, because this combination of accomplishments in understanding is the crisis that he seeks to foment in the individual lives of his contemporaries.

What Kierkegaard calls "Christendom" is both unlike and like religious life in twenty-first-century America. It's unlike it insofar as nominal Christian identity could be almost assumed in nineteenth-century Denmark. The Lutheran Church was (and is) the state church, and very few Danes represented alternative religions such as Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. The situation is different for us in contemporary America with its more or less official religious and ethical diversity, though something more like Danish Christendom is found in rural places, especially in the south-central states, and in places like Wheaton, Illinois. But even where church life is conducted with vivid awareness of other religious "options," the conception of what Christianity amounts to can be very muddled with alien elements. When an explosive goes off, it breaks apart what the

explosion affects. An explosion such as Kierkegaard envisions for his writings would break apart such things as (in our day) the reduction of Christianity to self-help psychology, to a feel-good prosperity gospel, to a confusion of Christianity and America-first evangelical Trumpery (*tromperie*). Such a demolition would be a first step in the formation of Christian character among victims of the "monstrous illusion of Christendom." Kierkegaard sees that you can't start building or rebuilding Christian character in people suffering from such illusions unless you first explode the illusion.

The fact that so many of Kierkegaard's writings are attributed to pseudonymous authors presents a problem for expounding his thought. He begs the reader not to attribute to him thoughts that belong to the pseudonymous personae, but in fact some of the ideas expressed by these personae are, or are very similar to, Kierkegaard's own thought. This is especially true of such authors as Johannes Climacus and Anti-Climacus, but even *Either/Or* contains much that is of Kierkegaard himself (for example, some of the things Judge William says about ethical character). My policy in this book will be to honor Kierkegaard's request by attributing thoughts to the pseudonymous authors where I get them from their works. But our main interest here is not to sort out which thoughts are Kierkegaard's and which ones are not, but to learn what we can about Christian character—what it is, how it can be acquired, what are the difficulties and obstacles to its acquisition. And we'll pursue this understanding using the writings of Kierkegaard, including those with pseudonymous attributions.

Johannes Climacus describes the task of becoming a Christian as "pathetic-dialectic." That is, becoming a Christian is a matter of *feeling* correctly by *thinking* correctly. It is a matter of both conceptual clarity and proper passion (concerns and emotions). These aspects of the task are not separable: thus it is better to write "pathetic-dialectic" than "pathetic and dialectic." Being a Christian is not merely correct thinking about Christian topics (say, the ability to give unimpeachable lectures on theology); in the Christian thinker, correct theological thinking must shape the thinker's emotional life. For example, a person who thinks about the gospel of Jesus Christ (*good* news) will not be emotionally indifferent to it if he or she correctly understands it. Instead, she will find the thoughts to be *joyful*. Personally appreciating it—*feeling* it *as* good news —is essential to understanding it. If someone can lecture with flawless orthodoxy on the good news, making all and only correct conceptual moves, but doesn't rejoice in the news, then she doesn't understand it. She doesn't "get" the goodness of it. The goodness doesn't make a personal impression on her.

Kierkegaard seeks to promote understanding of Christianity—and this is not possible without a personal formation in the emotions.

On the other side, if someone feels a lot of joy but doesn't grasp properly what Kierkegaard calls the definition of concepts, then her joy won't be *Christian* emotion. Her joy won't have the right targets; it won't be a response to *the gospel* (maybe it's a response to *her high salary* or *her excellent reputation*, or to *Something vaguely transcendent*).

> The individual's being deeply moved by something higher is far from being an adequate qualification, because completely pagan views, pagan conceptions of God, can be expressed in deep emotion. In order to be able to express oneself Christianly, proficiency and schooling in the Christian conceptual definitions are also required in addition to the more universal heart language of deep emotion, just as it is of course assumed that the deep emotion is of a specific qualitative kind, is Christian emotion. (BA, 114)

Or imagine someone who thinks the good news of the gospel is that if you just give generously to the church, you'll become wealthy (it's a great investment!). No matter how intense this person's joy in this thought may be, it will fail to be joy in the gospel. Her *thinking* misguides her *emotion*, and the fact that the gospel is mentioned in connection with it may mislead her into thinking that her joy is Christian joy. In the interest of her religious life, she needs to be a better "dialectician"—or at least to get some help from a dialectician like Kierkegaard.

"Dialectic" and "dialectical" and "dialectician" aren't words that trip naturally off the tongues of most of us. They are related to the word "dialogue" and have to do with disciplined thinking that has a back-and-forth character, especially where the back-and-forth is critical and rigorous. Plato's dialogues present Socrates as someone who thinks by asking questions and then giving a response that leads to further questions, all with the aim of refining and defining concepts like *justice*, *courage*, *love*, *virtue*, and *knowledge*. Like Kierkegaard, Socrates thought that getting clear about such concepts was important to *living a life* of justice, courage, love, and other excellences. Kierkegaard's idea that emotions integrate thought, so that correct and healthy emotions require sound thinking, and that the virtues are largely dispositions to correct and healthy emotions, offers a plausible explanation of Socrates's idea that dialectic is an important discipline for cultivating a good human life. Socrates said, famously, that "the unexamined life is not worth living" (*Apology* 38a5–6), and Kierkegaard would agree that a life is off-track as a human life if it is not dialectically well-shaped.

Kierkegaard's task of reintroducing Christianity to Christendom, then, revolves around the activity of correcting *thinking* so as to correct *emotions*. This

kind of thinking requires a special kind of writing. The writing will have to be as emotionally evocative as poetry, and as intellectually rigorous as the most careful philosophy. So Kierkegaard calls himself a "poet-dialectician." "Poet" here doesn't suggest that he writes verse, but rather that he writes in a strongly moving and literary style; in his work as a dialectician, he is a rhetorician; he speaks to the heart. Like the corresponding aspects of his task, these aspects of his writing are not separable. In his brilliant use of narrative, metaphor and simile, humor and irony, he is virtually always clarifying concepts as part of his larger task. In his capacity as a specialist in analyzing concepts, in making distinctions and connections among concepts, he deploys skills in persuading, moving, inciting the heart with words. In a sense on which Kierkegaard would insist, an expositor who attempted to abstract merely the logical or doctrinal points embodied in his writings, removing the poetic or rhetorical aspect, would fail to convey the concepts that Kierkegaard wishes to convey. The reason is that concept and understanding are correlative. To have a concept is to understand something, and to understand something is to have the concepts involved. But to understand ethical and religious concepts is not merely dialectical, but *pathetic*-dialectical, and to communicate pathos with words, the words must be rhetorically apt.

For example, in the sixth discourse of The Gospel of Sufferings (part 3 of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*), Kierkegaard has a brief discussion of the ethical-religious concepts of *deliberation* and *choice* (UDVS, 306–11). These concepts come up frequently in his writings. He points out that before we decide what to do, we deliberate. When we deliberate we "weigh" our options. The metaphor of weighing is less hidden in the Danish word for deliberate (*overveje*) than it is in the English word "deliberate" (from *libra*, a pair of scales, a balance). But, he says, a human being doesn't weigh her options with an initial indifference to the result, as a balance-scale dispassionately weighs a piece of cheese relative to the weight on the other side of the balance. No, the human being approaches her deliberations with prior preference-dispositions. She knows, at least in a general way, what she *wants*. You can't begin to deliberate if you don't initially want anything. Her deliberations presuppose her concerns. And given human nature as "composed of temporality and eternity, … properly understood the eternal already has a certain overweight and the person who refuses to understand this can never begin really to deliberate" (UDVS, 307).

Thus our human nature prescribes that the eternal be given more weight in our choices than the temporal. However, in Christendom this is not the

tendency. Some people even "forget" that there is an eternal dimension at all. They do all their deliberating among options conceived in purely worldly terms. Kierkegaard illuminates their situation with "a simple picture."

> When the well-to-do person is riding comfortably in his carriage on a dark but starlit night and has the lanterns lit—well, then he feels safe and fears no difficulty; he himself is carrying along the light, and it is not dark right around him. But just because he has the lanterns lit and has a strong light close by, he cannot see the stars at all. His lanterns darken the stars, which the poor peasant, who drives without lanterns, can see gloriously in the dark but starlit night. The deceived live this way in temporality: busily engaged with the necessities of life, they are either too busy to gain the extensive view, or in their prosperity and pleasant days they have, as it were, the lanterns lit, have everything around them and close to them so safe, so bright, so comfortable—but the extensive view is lacking, the extensive view, the view of the stars. (UDVS, 310)

This beautiful simile speaks to the heart of someone who may have "forgotten what it means to exist" (to quote Johannes Climacus). The simile is as much a part of Kierkegaard's analysis of deliberation and choice as the more obviously conceptual remarks that dot these six pages. In the serious reader it tends to awaken the kind of concerned self-reflection (Have I been neglecting eternal considerations in my choice-making?) without which I would not have a full-blooded understanding of these concepts. Which is to say, I wouldn't have the concepts of deliberation and choice that fit the Christian way of life.

Consider another concept. *Duty* belongs to the sphere that Kierkegaard calls ethical. An existence-sphere is a way of life, inhabited by people who live ("exist") in a certain way. People who live in the ethical sphere do many of their duties out of a *sense* of duty. To do so, they must be able to distinguish duties from possible actions that are prohibited and other actions that are permitted but aren't duties. But living in the ethical sphere involves more than just the intellectual ability to distinguish duties from non-duties. If you live in the ethical sphere, you will not just be good at distinguishing duties from non-duties. You will also *care* about doing your duty, and you will take a certain *joy* in doing it because it is your duty.[6] This is because duty is both compulsory and excellent. If you don't see (conceive) duty as something compulsory and excellent for yourself, then you don't understand duty as it is understood in the ethical sphere. That is, you don't have the whole ethical concept of duty, and so you aren't (fully) living in the ethical sphere. The fact that you can't appreciate duty as compulsory and excellent unless you have an appropriate "pathos" or feeling attitude toward it implies that discourse aimed at fostering an understanding of it will need—as a *conceptual* matter—to have an appropriate rhetorical character.

The discourse that conveys the concept must have an ethical mood, rather

than, say, the purely "objective" mood that often characterizes ethical "theory." We see such a mood, such passionate ethical seriousness, such discourse as from within the sphere, when we read those passages of *Either/Or* 2 in which Judge William discusses the concept of duty, or those pages in Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* in which he discusses duty. This rhetorical character of Kierkegaard's conceptual explorations is one of the most important ways his writing differs from "standard" philosophical writing about ethics. But if he is right about the nature of ethical concepts and the understanding of them, his way of writing should be standard, rather than the "disinterested," mock-scientific fare that usually counts as philosophical ethics.

Faith is a major virtue in the Jewish and Christian traditions. It preoccupies Kierkegaard from the beginning to the end of his writing career. Between "The Expectancy of Faith," which accompanied the publication of *Either/Or* in 1843, and *For Self-Examination* (published in 1851), Kierkegaard wrote voluminously about faith in such works as *Fear and Trembling*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, *Philosophical Fragments*, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, *The Sickness unto Death*, and *Practice in Christianity*. All these writings explore and map the concept of faith. They assume that people who are confused about faith, as Kierkegaard thought the inhabitants of Christendom were, will be severely hampered in developing the virtue. Faith depends on reflection in that one cannot have the virtue unless one has the *concept* of the virtue, or at any rate the concepts that govern faith's understanding of self, world, and God. In these writings, Kierkegaard and his personae make and elaborate numerous conceptual points. For instance, *faith is not "the immediate"* (an unreflective, effortless attitude shared by all human beings), as Hegel held, but an enormously challenging spiritual goal. Faith presupposes an attitude of *infinite resignation* of worldly prospects. In a strong sense, you can have faith only if you've given up hope in all contingent remedies. The object of faith must be such as *possibly to offend* rather than elicit faith. To conceive the object of faith as something that would offend no one is to misconceive it. Faith has a *historical presupposition*. It is directed at a historical fact (the incarnation of the Son of God as Jesus of Nazareth). Faith is *against understanding*. The person of faith must live with a certain inability to explain himself, even to himself. Faith is a *gift of God*. Faith is an *ongoing personal dependency* on its historical object, which is also contemporaneous with every generation. Faith is *rest in God*. Faith is a *happy passion*. Faith is a *resolution of fundamental dispositional despair and anxiety*. Faith is a *proper synthesis of the infinite and the finite* in an individual's life. Faith

is, *when all earthly hope is lost, to believe that with God all things are possible*. Different pseudonymous characters make these various points, and these characters don't all have a complete Christian conception of faith. The pseudonymous characters that are closer to Christianity, or Kierkegaard himself, make the more distinctively Christian points. But all the remarks belong in a Christian conception of faith. Only a person whose faith satisfied all the conditions would have fully Christian faith. So the identification of the trait of faith, among people who are inclined to be confused about its nature, is an important part of the reintroduction of Christianity to Christendom. But it isn't the whole.

An academic paper or lecture that expounded all the above points in a dry, utterly passionless and personally uninvolved way, making the conceptual points with logical precision, objectively correcting all dissenting opinion and contrary arguments, would be incongruous with its own subject matter. After all, as the dialectic of faith itself points out, that subject matter is one of the most momentous issues in any human life. It is a way of *living* ("existing," having a trait of character). Despite the conceptual accuracy and scholarly precision such an exposition displayed, it would risk failing to induce an understanding, or might even induce a *mis*understanding, of the subject matter in anyone who was not already independently affectively well-prepared to understand faith.

Again, if we look at Kierkegaard's and his characters' writings about faith, we see conceptual explorations embodied in an appropriately personal rhetoric. Johannes *de Silentio* expresses boundless admiration for Abraham in the course of his conceptual remarks. He interprets the Abraham narrative, as well as the various narratives with which he compares and contrasts it, in affecting ways. His own repeatedly expressed inability to understand Abraham conveys to the reader the high and demanding character of faith. In *Philosophical Fragments*, Johannes Climacus presents his analysis of faith under a modestly dense cloak of irony, in the form of a puzzling mock-Hegelian "deduction" of Christianity from the (supposedly abstract) idea of a teacher who is in every respect unlike Socrates. He doesn't even use the word "faith" until nearly the end of the book. This rhetorical form is designed to lure the "speculative" thinker, one who enjoys mounting up on syllogisms to see what conceptual heights he can reach. But the pamphlet is also poetic in the more usual sense. In chapter 2 Climacus tells a touching story of a king in love with a humble maiden to illustrate the sacrificial love of God in becoming incarnate for the sake of the "learner," and the attitudinal conditions that the learner (the humble maiden) must satisfy to allow

God's (the king's) love to succeed in its object of communion.[7]

Two paragraphs above I offered a quick rundown of some of Kierkegaard's main points about the Christian concept of faith. It was a rough summary drawing on the discussions of faith found in a variety of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works. As far as I know, Kierkegaard himself never provides a "systematic" account of faith. Had he thought that it would serve his reintroduction of Christianity to Christendom, he could easily have done so. In a journal entry from 1845 he says that "dogmatics as a whole is a misunderstanding, especially as it now has been developed" (JP 1:627). He probably has in mind a systematic treatment such as I have just imagined. Instead, he gives us various personally embedded pseudonymous treatments, highlighting one or another aspect of the dialectic of faith in the form of "poetry." Or Kierkegaard himself offers us some aspect of the concept of faith highlighted in the form of a scriptural exposition, also employing various devices of narrative, character-sketch, metaphor, simile, irony, and humor. In either case, the writing is a concentrated aspectual treatment tailored to some particular pathology or need that he takes to be abroad among his potential readership. In this he is like a pastor embedded in a congregation, who tailors what she says to the congregation's needs. Kierkegaard's congregation is nineteenth-century Denmark, and especially Denmark's cultural elite. He frequently makes cutting remarks about Hegel's "system," perhaps the most pretentious effort in intellectual history to give an "overview," not just of particular topics such as faith, but of everything. What does Kierkegaard have against system?

We can distinguish two senses of "system." In the preceding paragraph I mentioned the possibility of assembling all the conceptual remarks about a given topic, such as faith, and arranging them in some systematic order. I said that Kierkegaard seems uninterested in system even in this modest sense. Hegel's system was far more ambitious. It was a deductive system, in which each concept was shown to be derived, with something like logical necessity, from each preceding concept, so that the concepts were not just complete and felicitously ordered, but *necessarily* complete and in their *inevitable* order. Kierkegaard belongs to a strand of philosophical tradition that makes the aim of reflection something like therapy, character-transformation, or the inculcation of wisdom, rather than the production of a discursive product that aims to give a complete account of something. He may even think that "system," as a form of discourse, is existentially undigestible—not the sort of intellectual fare that is well concocted to make people wise, or to help them live their lives more fully, more

wholesomely, more faithfully, more dutifully, more virtuously. This would go not only for the Promethean kind of system that Hegel aspired to, but even the more modest sort of "theory" of faith that might be proposed by some analytic or continental philosopher. For Kierkegaard's therapeutic project of reintroducing Christianity to Christendom, the kind of discourse he needs is fragmental discourse, discourse from an angle, adapted to particular needs rather than to the parochial and artificial professorial desire to tie up all the intellectual loose ends, and aimed at his reader's heart.

Some of the writings to which Kierkegaard signed his own name he calls "edifying" or "upbuilding." The self of his readers is the edifice to whose architecture he means them to contribute. They are devices in aid of the construction or renovation of human beings. Preaching is naturally fragmental. It takes an idea from the Christian outlook or tradition (Scripture), tries to anticipate or diagnose a concern or need of the congregation to which the idea speaks, and then feeds the idea with appropriate pathos to the congregation in an effort to move, deepen, change, enlighten, build up. The sermon is an exercise in character-construction, applied bit by bit to the regular churchgoer/worker over the years. The serious churchgoer, on her or his part, understands that the sermons are there for the slow process of character-construction, and so attends regularly and listens carefully and eagerly for the "material" from which to form the building blocks of a faithful character.

Leading Concepts in Kierkegaard's Approach to Mission

I have illustrated Kierkegaard's literary activity by reference to three concepts that seemed pastorally important to him—*deliberation/choice*, *duty*, and *faith*. But these are just a few out of an array of concepts on which he drew, some of which he more or less invented, in the service of his project of reintroducing Christianity to Christendom. I shall spend the rest of this introduction trying to give an impression of this array of concepts.

Virtues. In a note printed at the end of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and signed with his own name, Kierkegaard declared that the importance of his pseudonymous authors

> unconditionally does not consist in making any new proposal, some unheard-of discovery … but precisely in the opposite, … in wanting, at a remove that is the distance of double-reflection,[8] once again to read through solo, if possible in a more inward way, the original text of individual human existence-relationships, the old familiar text handed down from the fathers. (First and Last

Explanation, CUP 1:629–30)[9]

What he says here about the pseudonymous authors is even more obviously true of Kierkegaard himself. We have seen that the concept of *faith* that he lovingly digs out of the patristic soil and clarifies for his contemporaries in Christendom is derived from the Bible. Faith is one of the two most important traditional virtue concepts treated in Kierkegaard's writings, both signed and pseudonymous. The other is *love*, which comes in for treatment in many places: extensively in *Either/Or* and *Works of Love*, but also in *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, *Repetition*, *Stages on Life's Way*, and *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*. This is the concept that is most naturally distributed across the whole range of the spheres of existence: in *Either/Or* it is treated in several of the substages of the aesthetic (erotic and romantic love), as well as at length in the ethical sphere (especially married love), and *Works of Love* is centered on the Christian virtue of *agapē*.

Sprinkled throughout Kierkegaard's writings, both pseudonymous and signed, are shorter treatments of other traditional virtues such as *purity of heart*, *patience*, *perseverance*, *gratitude*, *hope*, *trust*, *courage*, *bold confidence*, and *humility*. Often his discussions of these virtues, as well as of faith and love, connect them to one another; the "dialectic" of one virtue concept necessarily involves its interconnections with other virtue concepts.[10] Thus, just as love changes shape through its contact with the story of Jesus, courage, associated in the Greek tradition primarily with heroes of military combat, changes shape when brought into connection with faith and love. Johannes de Silentio writes often about the importance of courage for faith. From the way the discussion of any virtue brings forth other virtue concepts, it is clear that for Kierkegaard, as for the classical tradition, the virtues are very much an interdependent *set* of traits. Together, they make for a complete, integrated, healthy personality or character. These concepts are at the center of Kierkegaard's work, because for Christianity to be introduced into Christendom would be for the single individuals in Christendom to begin to exemplify the Christian virtues, that is, for these individuals to have the passions and emotions, the patterns of thought, and the dispositions to action characteristic of genuine Christians.

Kierkegaard also coined, or at least semi-coined, some virtue-related terms such as *the single individual* and *earnestness*. Being a single individual, or being earnest, is not a trait of the same order as courage or patience or faith; instead, it is a characteristic without which a person cannot be properly or deeply

courageous or patient or exemplify any of the other virtues (purity of heart has this status as well). It has the same status as the virtue of integrity. In fact, being an individual is a kind of integrity, an ability to hew one's own course morally when there is little or no encouragement, and perhaps even strong opposition, either overt or, more likely, subtle, from other people. Being the single individual is a kind of moral solidity or constancy in the face of social pressures. But the "content," as we might put it, of the solidity or constancy is the first-order virtues of faith, hope, love, truthfulness, and so forth. Similarly, earnestness is an intensity and purity of moral concern that begets a resistance to distraction from or emotional undervaluing of what is of ultimate importance. Such a capacity of constancy and focus is necessary for the possession, in a high degree, of any of the virtues.

Dimensions. If earnestness and being an individual are less specific than faith and love, the concepts that I call dimensions are less specific still. *Subjectivity*, *passion*, *inwardness*, *existence*, and *character* are concepts that Kierkegaard uses, with variable frequency, in both his pseudonymous and signed works. In principle, they are moral and spiritual dimension-concepts: not names of personal traits, but rather of the dimensions of psychological reality that need to be attended to by anyone who would undertake the spiritual and moral tasks that Kierkegaard describes in his works. One might say that they specify where the virtues are located. They locate what must undergo formation for the virtues to emerge. When, for example, Johannes Climacus avers that because of the influence of Hegelian speculative philosophy, the intellectual members of Christendom have "forgotten what it means to exist," and that "truth is subjectivity," he is not saying that these unfortunates have become unable to understand sentences that use the existential quantifier (*there is*), or that truth is just whatever a person thinks or feels it is. He means instead that these people are paying insufficient attention to an eminently important dimension of human living, namely, the moral and spiritual cultivation of their consciousness, their emotions and passions, the territory of inwardness or subjectivity. Subjectivity is what the New Testament calls "the heart."

Just as Kierkegaard writes, in *Either/Or* 1, in the *personae* of aesthetes, so as to entice aesthetes to walk into the arena where he will draw them away from the aesthetic life and introduce them to the ethical life and Christianity, so he writes, in *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, in a language reminiscent of Hegelian speculation so as to engage that segment of Christendom in a conversation that may lead to their conversion. They are

neglecting the dimensions of themselves in which the virtues are located. They will never get to the point of having Christian excellences like humility, patience, and gratitude if, in favor of their "paragraphs," they so neglect their passions as to be uninvolved in the formation of their character. Kierkegaard frequently uses his dimension concepts to awaken the inhabitants of Christendom to this neglect. In this use, the dimension concepts become important instruments for Kierkegaard's explorations of the virtues.

Diagnostic emotions. In many of his works, both signed and pseudonymous, Kierkegaard discusses a group of unhealthy emotions—chiefly *despair*, but to a somewhat smaller extent *anxiety* (worry, or concern in the sense of anxiety or worry) and *envy*. Episodes of these emotions are symptoms of deeper character dysfunctions that can be healed, finally, only by the acquisition of the Christian virtues of faith and love.

Let's focus on despair as an illustration. Anti-Climacus gives a full-length treatment of despair in *The Sickness unto Death*. But it appears at some length also in *Either/Or* 2, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, *Works of Love*, and elsewhere. Throughout the various discussions of despair, pseudonymous and signed, Kierkegaard distinguishes felt despair—we might call it episodic or emotional despair—from a despair that may be completely unconscious and is compatible with feeling contented and full of joy. Emotional despair is a feeling of intense frustration about oneself, of hating what one currently is, and of being without hope of relief; it is a feeling of basic and apparently incurable misery.

We might call the other kind of despair "character despair," because it is a fundamental dispositional orientation of the self to itself, to the world, and to God. It is a state of the self such that, in some circumstances that might well occur, the individual *would be* cast into emotional despair. Only the self that "rests transparently in the Power that posited it" (SUD, 14) is proof against emotional despair and thus free of dispositional despair. But this "resting" in God is faith. Kierkegaard also shows how despair is cured by Christian love. A is in character despair if she loves B in such a way that, *were* B to abandon her and she *were* to see clearly that the abandonment was definitive, she would be cast into emotional despair. If A's relationship to B, whether happy or unhappy love, is that she does not merely love him with spontaneous erotic love, but is responding to God's *command* that she love B, then her identity and the worth of her life are not found in B's response to her, but in her relationship with the giver of the command. Her love for B is frustrated, all right, painfully and perhaps definitively, but not *ultimately*, not desperately. So God's command to love is

consoling in a deep and thoroughgoing way, whereas consolations to the effect that "maybe B will come around" or "you'll find another lover" are counsels of despair (WL, 40–43). Since the diagnostic emotions are all uncomfortable (if not horrific), they too constitute a bridge or natural motivation for the inhabitant of Christendom to become a Christian, and Kierkegaard's writings point out this bridge by explaining the dialectic of the Christian virtues in their relation to the diagnostic emotions.

Existence spheres. I mentioned Kierkegaard's spheres or stages of existence, but I will say a bit more about them. The concepts of the spheres—*the aesthetic*, *the ethical*, *religiousness A*, *religiousness B*, and the "boundary" conditions of *irony* and *humor*—deserve a separate treatment because they are such an important element in the project of reintroducing Christianity to Christendom. The main purpose of the scheme of existence spheres is to clarify possibilities of character formation. They are Kierkegaard's culturally adapted way of exploiting the clarifying power of juxtaposition and concreteness. He might have achieved a similar result by comparing religions or philosophies of life. Stoics, Epicureans, Buddhists, and Muslims also have different character-formations. The comparison of these with the Christian formation might clarify the nature of the Christian life and character. You can imagine writing in the voice of pseudonyms representing these life-views. In this way you might achieve the concreteness of representation and comparison that Kierkegaard also desired. But such a tactic would not have served Kierkegaard's purposes as well as his own scheme of stages, for several reasons.

First, there were few Buddhists and Muslims in Kierkegaard's Christendom, and he wanted to represent life-views that were instantiated among the people he was attempting to lure back to Christianity. The whole idea was to represent his readers. Second, the religions and philosophies of life are all more serious than many of the people in Christendom were. Kierkegaard needed to encompass frivolous life-views as well as the more serious ones. He achieved this by including various versions of the aesthetic sphere. And third, because Christendom is after all an inheritance from Christianity (however degenerate that inheritance may have become), the spheres needed to reflect this fact. Judge William (the ethical character from *Either/Or* 2), Johannes Climacus and Johannes de Silentio (both representing some kind of religiousness that falls short of Christianity), and the aesthetes (Don Juan as well as "A") are not Christians. Yet, in one way or another, all are products of a "Christian" civilization. This connection to his readers would have been absent had

Kierkegaard written under the pseudonym of a Chinese Confucian or a Tibetan Buddhist.

Broadly, the differences among the virtues in the upper three spheres (the ethical, religiousness A, and religiousness B) are determined by the different conceptions of God. In Judge William's virtues of dutifulness and marital fidelity, God is present in a way, but is not clearly differentiated from the moral law. William's religion/ethics resembles that of Immanuel Kant. We might say that on this view the moral agent is on his own; the eternal, the transcendent, is entirely within the agent. Ultimately, he is responsible to himself. In religiousness A, as represented by Johannes Climacus, God is transcendent enough that there is such a thing as being faithful *to God*. Though as Climacus describes this sphere in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, as people grow in religious earnestness before this God, they grow in their sense of inadequacy and disillusion with themselves, of suffering and guilt at their spiritual failure—so that the chief virtue ends up being a sense of guilt, a forerunner of Christian contrition. But earnestness about striving for religious excellence is presupposed. In religiousness B (Christianity) God is conceived as having become incarnate as a particular individual human being, at a given moment of history, and as having atoned for the guilt of the individual believer. This incarnate God continues to be present (contemporary) with the believer, and the believer's virtues of faith, hope, love, patience, gratitude, humility, contrition, and courage all reflect this ongoing communication of the believer with God.

The traditional concept of a virtue applies only by a kind of extension to the psychology of the aesthetic sphere. A virtue is, by traditional definition, a principle of continuity in a person's life—a disposition to be constant in your desires, responses, actions, feelings, and thus capable of commitment to ends and persons. But the aesthetic life, as depicted in the first volume of *Either/Or*, is marked by a deliberate *dis*continuity, by a dissociation from one's past and future. One aims to keep every new moment fresh and interesting (see especially the essay on crop rotation). This is why I title chapter 3 of this book "Flight from Character." Still, it is hard to get away from dispositions and continuity altogether, and one could say that the aesthetic virtues are those dispositions and ready skills of dissociation in which the aesthete attempts to train himself. According to Kierkegaard, to the extent that the aesthete succeeds, he turns himself into a psychological disaster. But the dispositions and skills by which he pursues the aesthetic enterprise would seem to have continuity in time (otherwise the aesthete will cease to be an aesthete). And the fact that he makes

himself into a psychological disaster doesn't negate the fact that *from the aesthetic point of view* these dispositions and skills are personal excellences.

Readers have often noted the difficulty, if not impossibility, of giving a consistent account of the existence spheres as they appear and are discussed in Kierkegaard's works. For example, the ethical in *Either/Or* doesn't seem to be the same as the ethical in *Fear and Trembling*. How does the religious (Abraham's faith) in *Fear and Trembling* relate to the religiousness A and B of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*? Perhaps consistency across the pseudonyms is not to be expected; after all, they are supposed to be different authors. And Kierkegaard's purpose here is not to produce a theory of the spheres, but to use this rather shifting conception in the therapeutic service of reintroducing Christianity to Christendom.

I have suggested that Kierkegaard's elaborate framework of thought is in the service of a missionary project that is at the same time an educational project. He wants to awaken Christendom to the nature of Christianity, but he will do this by the ambitious expedient of transforming the moral and spiritual character of his reader. In chapter 1 I will clarify Kierkegaard's notion of character by considering the basic human nature in which character is to be etched, a nature that turns out to be classical in form. In chapter 2 I will compare that notion of human nature and its corresponding fulfillment in Christian character with that of the existentialism of which Kierkegaard used to be regarded as the "father," with its strongly contrasting picture of human fulfillment.

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1. Plato, *Euthyphro*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 1–16.

2. Plato, *Republic*, in *Plato*, 971–1223; see 1077–1155.

3. To be strictly accurate, Kierkegaard had earlier published *From the Papers of One Still Living*. However, little attention was paid to it, and he ignores it in his account of his "authorship."

4. *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, 20 vols. (Gyldendal, Copenhagen, 1909–48), X^4, A665, p. 476; notebook (NB) 26:112. Quoted in Alastair Hannay's introduction to his translation and abridgement of *Either/Or* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 1. Hannay notes that "the reference is to a short story by the Danish author S. S. Blicher (1782–1848)."

5. Though one set of upbuilding discourses is labeled, "Thoughts That Wound from Behind—for Upbuilding" (*Christian Discourses*, part 3), and other discourses, like "The Cares of the Pagans" (*Christian Discourses*, part 1) are sly: the cares of the "pagans" turn out to be the worries and anxieties that beset "Christians" in Christendom.

6. Joy in doing something because it is one's duty differs from joy in doing the same action for a more essential reason, such as love, compassion, justice, or truthfulness. Joys get their identity from their

intentional objects, as we will see in some detail in chapter 8. Wanting to do your duty in relieving someone's suffering is not the same as wanting someone's suffering to end, though the two may coexist.

7. For commentary, see C. Stephen Evans, *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's "Philosophical Fragments"* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) and Robert C. Roberts, *Faith, Reason, and History: Rethinking Kierkegaard's "Philosophical Fragments"* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986).

8. What is double reflection in this context of the pseudonyms? The pseudonyms are themselves reflecting, taking positions, having insights, expressing their emotions, and so forth; but Kierkegaard and the reader are also reflecting about the pseudonyms' reflections about these things. Thus Kierkegaard and the reader are thinking about the thinking of the pseudonymous characters, but are doing so in a way that, under Kierkegaard's artistic guidance, aims to cause the reader to think about himself, his relation to God, his obligations, his character. Kierkegaard, as teacher of the reader, is thus teaching indirectly. When Kierkegaard writes in his own voice, by contrast, he communicates "directly" with the reader. This, you might say, is "single refection."

9. See also WL, 210.

10. Thinking of these interconnections as a kind of "conversation" between the virtues or the virtue-concepts, we see how the study or understanding of them can be called "dialectical." A more recent word for this "conversation" is "grammar." In grammar, too, things are what they are because of the way they interact with one another: adjectives qualify nouns, adverbs qualify verbs and adjectives, the various voices and tenses of verbs are what they are in relation to other voices and tenses, and so forth.

PART ONE

The Psychological Framework



1 Human Nature

*Although Socrates did his very best to gain knowledge of human nature and to know himself—yes, even though he has been eulogized for centuries as the person who certainly knew man best—he nevertheless admitted that the reason he was disinclined to ponder the nature of such creatures as Pegasus and the Gorgons was that he still was not quite clear about himself, whether he (a connoisseur of human nature) was a more curious monster than Typhon or a friendlier and simpler being, by nature sharing something divine (*Phaedrus *229e).*

Johannes Climacus, *Philosophical Fragments*, 37

Aristotle and Anti-Climacus

Aristotle thought you could discern the nature of an animal or plant species by considering the conditions of its flourishing and the ways it may deviate from such flourishing, leaving it sick and moribund. Each species of plant and animal has its own way of *living*, its *function*, its own way of thriving and doing the sorts of things that its species nature (we might say its DNA) prescribes that it should do. For optimal growth and functioning, each plant species requires its own special combination of heat and light, water, and type of soil. In the same way, according to Aristotle, the human species is rational and social in such a way that it will thrive and function optimally only if it lives in a well-constituted city-state, has acquired virtues like justice and temperance, and engages in inquiry about itself and its world. Aristotle pictures plant and animal species as being driven by their inner nature toward fulfillment, maturity, and thriving. The difference between plant and animal species on the one hand and the human species on the other is that we human beings can become aware of our inner teleology and try to arrange our life for ourselves to maximize the likelihood that we will live well as human beings. That is, we can consciously and rationally *pursue* our own happiness. We might say that the desire for happiness is the master passion for human beings.

In the first part of *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard's pseudonym Anti-Climacus offers a sort of Aristotelian normative account of the human being in which he sketches what it takes for such a being to live well the characteristically human life. The "drive" for completeness in the human case, in contrast with all the other animal species, is to become a self or spirit. We human beings are

driven by our human nature to *be somebody*, to acquire and develop a particular human identity. Thus, Anti-Climacus's account takes constantly into consideration a peculiarly human and fundamental kind of failure to flourish that he calls *despair*. No other animal is subject to this sickness because no other animal has the distinctively human nature, with its drive for selfhood. For most plants and animals, the conditions of their flourishing are environmental. Given the right external conditions, the individual plant or animal grows automatically to be healthy and to function properly. While human beings are subject to environmental conditions as well, our flourishing depends, in addition, on internal conditions, in particular the *choices* we make, many of which are about *attitudes* that we adopt. What is this nature that makes the human species uniquely liable to despair, this sickness unto death? Let's first think in general terms about despair.

Despair

What is despair (*Fortvivlelse*)? We despair of something when we care very much about being or having or doing something, and we see that circumstances definitively prevent it. It is an unhappy *emotion*, an attitude we may *feel*. Imagine a man deeply in love with a woman who refuses to return his love. He cannot help loving her and wanting her to return his love; but he also sees that he cannot get her to love him. So he despairs of her love. His despair would be resolved by either one of two changes: either that he ceases to care about her, or that she begins to love him. If neither resolution is available, he despairs. The pain of emotional despair is a pain of frustration—the pain of being denied what we passionately desire and cannot stop desiring.

By extension, we might be in a kind of virtual despair if we care very much about being, having, or doing something while, unbeknownst to us, circumstances definitively rule it out. Without knowing it, we are in "desperate" circumstances. We wouldn't be *aware* of being in despair in this sense, but we would be *disposed* to feel despair if we found out that circumstances rule out what we "desperately" desire. Imagine a person who has dreamt for years of emigrating to America, the land of opportunity, to rear his children. He has been saving money to that end. This dream is a constant preoccupation, a goal that gives meaning to his every choice and action. But unbeknownst to him, the bank in which he has been depositing his money for years has been embezzling it, so that he cannot possibly emigrate. As long as he is ignorant of this fact, he is

optimistic and full of hope for his children's future. But since his circumstances are in fact desperate, he might be said to be virtually in despair even though he doesn't realize it. Similarly, we might be in virtual despair if, though we know that something is impossible, we are not aware of caring about it. Imagine an Anna Karenina who is in love with Vronsky but who is, as yet, unaware of being so; being married, she knows that to be united with Vronsky is impossible. She too might be said to be in virtual despair—virtual in this case because of her ignorance of something about *herself*. So explicit, conscious despair combines an awareness of wanting something very much and an awareness that it is impossible. It is painful. Virtual despair occurs when a person is unaware of one or the other of these two states. As long as it remains virtual, this kind of despair is not painful.

The examples I've given so far—being in love with someone, the desire to emigrate—are concerns that in principle a person could give up, even if this particular sufferer cannot bring himself psychologically to give up the concern and so escape despair that way. Fundamental despair, by contrast, is despair based on a concern that is fundamental to human nature: in particular, the concern to become a self. *The Sickness unto Death* is a systematic treatment of fundamental despair. This kind of despair is based on a completely nonnegotiable, unavoidable, and not-to-be-forsaken concern to be a self or spirit. It is a concern with which every human being is *stuck*, like it or not. If this concern is not satisfied by actually becoming spirit, the person will be in despair.

Although the word "despair" is an emotion term, in *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard's pseudonym Anti-Climacus treats fundamental despair as a kind of character trait. This is not an unusual way to treat an emotion-term. When we say, "Joe is an envious young man," we are not claiming that Joe is currently feeling envy, but that he has a disposition that marks Joe's personality or character. We are not necessarily even saying that *when* Joe is in the grip of the *emotion* of envy, he feels envy. Perhaps his envy is repressed, so that he honestly doesn't think he is envious as he belittles one of his more talented colleagues. He might say that he feels contempt for the colleague or concern for the work that he supposes the colleague should be doing but, in his opinion, is shirking. Similarly, when Anti-Climacus writes about the universality of despair among human beings, he isn't claiming that we are all feeling the emotion of despair, but that our souls are such that, were we to become aware of ourselves and our situation vis-à-vis God, we would feel the emotion. He calls it a sickness, but he might also have called it a vice, though a vice with many forms, as we will see.

As far as we know, human beings are the only creatures for whom the identity of the self, and the acceptance of one's identity, is an issue. Kierkegaard will say that this being an issue for human beings is part of there being "something eternal" in the self.

All despair, as well as its virtue-counterpart of faith, involves "willing," either to be oneself or not to be oneself. That is Anti-Climacus's way of saying that these states of the self are basically concerns, desires, cares, or passions. We are reminded of the saying of Jesus, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21). That is, what you *care* about makes for what you *are*. The ultimate or most fundamental concern of a human being is the passion for selfhood, the desire to be "spirit." We all want to be selves; we want to be somebody, somebody in particular, an individual human being, a genuine human being, really ourselves. Yes, this is what we want fundamentally; it is the real and ultimate spring of our motivation; but it is subject to many distortions and misconceptions of its target. So we need instruction in the questions: What is a human being? What kind of being are we?

Spirit

Anti-Climacus notes, "A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself" (SUD, 13). This is pretty abstract, but it says that the self is composite, made up of pairs of aspects that are related to one another—or rather, the self itself actively *relates* its polar aspects to one another. The "activity" of relating the aspects may be of either of two kinds: the self may "relate" the aspects by the way it cares about and thinks about itself and its world; or it may "relate" them even *more* "actively" by "choosing" itself (though in choosing itself, it chooses a way of caring and thinking about itself and its world). What are these aspects, and what is the nature of the activity in which the self relates them to one another? "A human being," says Anti-Climacus, "is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity" (SUD, 13). So the relation between the polarities is "synthesis": the two poles are integrated with each other in some way. He goes on to distinguish two applications of the word "synthesis." In one sense, the self is a synthesis of these elements whether or not it is willing and glad to be that; we might say that a human being is *stuck* with being finite *and* infinite, temporal

and eternal, subject to necessity *and* free (we might call this the "given" synthesis, and label it synthesis 1 or selfhood 1). If you are not glad to be such a synthesis, then you are in despair. In a second sense of "synthesis," the self "synthesizes" these elements of itself only if, of its own will, it orders these elements of itself in an appropriate order, relating them to each other in a correct relation. Let us call this synthesis 2 or selfhood 2. In this case, the self is no longer in despair. We learn later that the name of this proper relating of the elements of the self to one another is called "faith." The human being has become genuinely a human self, or "spirit." Let's try to get clear on the three polarities of which the self is a synthesis (synthesis 1), and which the self actively synthesizes (synthesis 2). The three polarities are

the finite / the infinite
the temporal / the eternal
necessity / freedom

Let's begin with the temporal/eternal polarity. We human beings are *temporal* insofar as we have a lifespan of some finite number of years, and at any moment of our lives we identify that present moment by reference to our past and our future. I grew up in Wichita, Kansas, and am the son of Verne and Betty Roberts; and as I write this I will (God willing) turn seventy-nine years old next month. The past cannot be changed, but the future is somewhat unknown and open. We are also nontemporal or eternal. We are not locked into the present moment the way other sentient creatures are. Our eternal aspect is exemplified in a kind of mental or imaginative power to consider times past, before we came into existence, and times future far beyond the temporal boundary of our lives. In a certain sense, we can step out of our present moment in time and "live" the past or the future by the power of our imagination. Think of reading history or a historical novel—or of vividly planning next summer's vacation. It is also exemplified in that we can access eternal truths such as moral principles by which, say, our duty is defined (and also necessary and unchanging mathematical principles, though Kierkegaard shows little interest in this). If we will admit it to ourselves, we have longings for contact with what is eternal; man does not live by temporality alone. And finally, we are eternal insofar as we can and sometimes do have a kind of harmonious fellowship with what is eternal, the divine being, the power from which the synthesis (that is, we the self) has sprung. Anti-Climacus calls that fellowship "resting in." More of that later, and in chapter 9. What are the finite/infinite polarity and the necessity/freedom

polarity?

The finite and the infinite overlap the temporal and the eternal inasmuch as the finite aspect of the self includes its temporal finitude, and the eternal can be thought of as infinite time. They also overlap necessity and freedom in a human life. Necessity in this connection is not logical necessity, as in the necessity that if *if p then q is true*, and *p is true*, then *q is true*. Instead, necessity is all those facts about your life which, though not by nature unchangeable, are fixed and cannot be changed by any action that you might take. For example, Søren Kierkegaard was born in 1813 in Denmark and had a certain genetic makeup that made him a genius of intellect and imagination. He couldn't change these facts, and insofar as he could choose what to do with his life, the choice would have to be made within the boundaries of these finitudes or "necessities." But if he is not merely finite in this sense, but also has freedom to choose within these limits, then his humanity is a synthesis of necessity and freedom. The range of his possible choices is not literally infinite, but it is somewhat open and certainly not fixed in advance. So when he writes in his diary at the age of twenty-three—

> What I really need is to get clear about *what I must do*, not what I must know, except insofar as knowledge must precede every act. What matters is to find a purpose, to see what it really is that God wills that *I* shall do, the crucial thing is to find a truth which is truth *for me*, to find *the idea for which I am willing to live and die*. (JP 5:5100, italics original)

—he may have several options to choose from. The choice that he makes is not "necessary." Yet he chooses from a finite number of options, and he might choose unwisely, in such a way that he doesn't tether his infinite and eternal aspect rightly to his temporality, or that he doesn't infuse his temporality rightly with the demands of eternity. What does "rightly" mean here? It might mean two things: (1) he must choose an occupation that is suited to his talents, but more importantly, (2) he must choose that occupation in such a *way* as to dedicate it to God, to "offer" it to God on a daily basis, to trust God for daily sustaining in the vocation, to thank God for the vocation and its fruits. Thus he relates himself to himself (*he* chooses what he himself will *be*), and in doing so relates himself to Another. He can make either of these kinds of choice well or badly, but making especially the second badly leads to despair, a kind of self-hatred. It would seem that even choosing the first kind of option badly would be inconvenient and distressful, but a life that fails in finite terms can nevertheless succeed and even flourish if the relation to the eternal is right. In the thoughts that he records in his journal, the young Kierkegaard is definitely on the right track insofar as he is

looking for an activity that accords with God's will (thus satisfying the need for the eternal and infinite), an activity that will exercise his given talents and occupy his time (thus satisfying the need to synthesize the eternal and infinite with the temporal and finite) and will do so within the natural limits of his talents and time.

Thus Anti-Climacus believes not only in what we might call finite necessity—the finite limits on a person's options that are set by circumstances and natural talents—but also in another kind of "necessity" that is encompassed within freedom. What we might call *eudaimonic* necessity is a conditional necessity: you must subject yourself to the divine being and to that being's eternal law *on pain of despair*. This is a necessity *within freedom* because it must be chosen (it cannot be entered into except by choosing it), but it is a *necessity* within freedom because your human nature is such that if you don't subject yourself to the divine being you will be in despair. Eudaimonic necessity has the following classical "logic": a species is subject to eudaimonic necessity of fulfillment just in case any member of that species has a psycho-spiritual need such that if that need isn't satisfied, the individual will lack fulfillment (happiness). In claiming that the human self is potential spirit, and spirit is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, Anti-Climacus is claiming that human beings are under eudaimonic necessity of relating rightly to God.

The three polarities, thinks Anti-Climacus, imply an interpersonal relationality requirement on the part of the human self. The self is essentially social, and the sociality of the self is like that of an infant in relation to a parent. Just as the infant must be in fellowship with and pay personal attention to his or her progenitor on pain of failure to develop properly as a person, so the self, in virtue of its infinite, eternal, and free features, must "rest (*grunder*) transparently in the power that established it" (SUD, 14).

What is *rest*, and what is it to rest *transparently*? "Rest" suggests security, confidence, trust, equilibrium, and satisfaction in the relationship with the divine power that constituted the self. Rest is freedom from anxiety and the desperate pursuit of happiness and love. It is like the confident happiness of a small infant who looks into the smiling, adoring face of his mother and sees his own beauty reflected there. It is joy in being who one is, in the absence of anxiety and frustration, due to the unconditionally loving gaze of the progenitor. Relatedly, "transparently" (*gjennemsigtigt*) suggests that in so resting in the power that established him the self is hiding nothing from the Other before whom he stands. He is utterly naked, undefensive, and willing to be seen just as he is. He is

completely open to and comfortable with God's gaze. This is "the state of the self when despair is completely rooted out" (SUD, 14). Later, at the beginning of the second part of the book, Anti-Climacus names (or, better, *renames*) this state: "Faith is: that the self in being itself and in willing to be itself rests transparently in God" (SUD, 82).

"To despair over oneself, in despair to will to be rid of oneself—this is the formula for all despair" (SUD, 20). Desiring to be rid of oneself is spiritual death. But this is a death that fails to do away with the self, to "consume his self" (SUD, 21).

Deviations from Spirit: The Forms of Despair

After commenting that despair, the sickness unto death, is universal among us—that no human being has ever escaped it entirely—Anti-Climacus notes that some may object that this is a gloomy view. He answers that "it is not depressing but instead is elevating, inasmuch as it views every human being under the destiny of the highest claim upon him, to be spirit" (SUD, 22).[1] We will get clearer about our wondrous nature (spirit) as a synthesis of polarities if we consider some of the main ways it can go wrong.

Anti-Climacus arranges the forms of despair in three different ways. (A) In the broadest classification, he distinguishes not willing to be oneself from in despair willing to be oneself. (He says that in despair not even to be aware of having a self is not strictly a kind of despair. Earlier I called this "virtual" despair.) (B) He distinguishes the ways in which the three sets of polarities can be wrongly synthesized: the despairs of finitude and infinitude, of temporality and eternity, and of necessity and freedom. (C) He distinguishes the degrees of awareness of being in despair.

The Broadest Categories of Despair

In the heading to part 1, section A.a., Anti-Climacus divides despair into three broad kinds: (1) in despair not to be conscious of having a self; (2) in despair not to will to be oneself;[2] and (3) in despair to will to be oneself (see SUD, 13). An example of the first of these might be a happy twelve-year-old girl. She's had an ideal childhood with parents who love her, wisely care for her, and protect her from the most sordid realities of the world. Most of her desires meet with

satisfactions, and her small disappointments are soon swamped in fun activities. She's not conscious of being what Anti-Climacus calls "spirit"; she doesn't reckon seriously with the possibility that her happy world might collapse at any moment, by way of an accident or illness or her father's going to jail for white-collar crimes. She loves her life and is unaware of its fragility. She is unaware of needing to face tragic dilemmas, to make sacrificial decisions of duty. She is in the kind of despair that I earlier called virtual. Anti-Climacus says that this is "not despair in the strict sense" (SUD, 13). The reason is that if you don't know you have a self, you can't, strictly speaking, will to be (or not to be) yourself.

So there are really just two broad categories of despair. The first of these is "to will to do away with oneself" (SUD, 14). Imagine that our happy twelve-year-old is now twenty-one and for years has set her heart on going to medical school to become a pediatrician. But she doesn't have what it takes to be admitted. An aspect of her finitude/temporality/necessity is that she isn't cut out for medical school. She is miserable. "If only I had what it takes!" And she wishes she were somebody else and hates the self she's been given.

The second broadest kind of despair is that of willing to be yourself but wanting to be so on your own terms—that is, defiantly. Now, wanting to be just the person you are is the formula for spiritual health and the *absence* of despair. But Anti-Climacus says that *this* kind of willing to be yourself is despair because you want to be who you are *on your own terms*, that is, defiantly. Wanting to be yourself couldn't be a form of despair if there were not Someone Else on whose terms you must be willing to be yourself to avoid being in despair. If you wanted to be yourself on your own terms, and nobody else existed on whose terms you were obligated to be yourself, you wouldn't have anybody to defy, and willing to be yourself on your own terms wouldn't be defiance or despair.[3] Despair, as Anti-Climacus conceives it, is essentially self-rejection. The fact that the second kind of attitude toward yourself is despair implies that wanting to be yourself on your own terms is in fact rejecting yourself after all, not wanting to be the self that the Power that created you made you to be. Each human self is created, and created for a relationship of submission, trust, acquiescence, gratitude, and obedience to its creator. A person cannot ultimately be happy, thinks Anti-Climacus, if she doesn't "rest transparently" in God.

> If a human self had itself established itself then there could only be one form [of despair]: … To will to do away with oneself, but there could not be the form: in despair to will to be oneself. This second formulation is specifically the expression for the complete dependence of the relation (of the Self), the expression for the inability of the self to arrive at or be in equilibrium and rest by itself. (SUD,

A little later he identifies a person becoming "decisively and eternally conscious as spirit, as self," with his having "gained the impression that there is a God" (SUD, 26, 27). In receiving willingly from the hand of God the self that God has "posited," the self goes beyond being a *given* synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, and *actively synthesizes* the eternal and the temporal in himself or herself.

Despair as Misrelation of the Polarities

In the preceding subsection we saw that all despair is unwillingness to be yourself. And earlier we saw that your self is a synthesis of temporal and eternal, finite and infinite, necessary and free aspects. It follows, then, that any failure to synthesize the polarities properly (according to the design plan, so to speak) will be a form of unwillingness to be the self that you truly are, and thus a form of despair. In this connection to the polarities, we have the makings of a finer-grained taxonomy of ways to distort your nature as a human being. And we can use these as a basis for thinking in a more specific way about Kierkegaard's conception of human nature.

In this finer-grained account, Anti-Climacus assimilates the temporal/eternal polarity to the finite/infinite one, and he writes only of the latter. He says the power of imagination is the infinitizing faculty; thus it is crucial to the distinction between the human being, who has a self, and other animals, which do not. Imagination radically affects the other mental or spiritual faculties of feeling, knowing, and willing.

The Despair of Infinitude

Imagination is the infinitizing faculty because it is not limited in the way that, say, sense perception is. When you open your eyes, what you see is restricted by what is in your field of vision. If you're looking at a silver spoon, you can't just, at will, be seeing a green valley in the Alps. By contrast, you can, at will, *imagine* a silver spoon and then freely turn to imagining the green valley. These are examples of visual imagination, but that is just one kind. We also have auditory imagination, tactile imagination, olfactory imagination, and so forth. And we have imagination that isn't tied (at least not strictly) to the senses. In praying, we use our imagination to turn our attention to God. When we think about

ourselves, assessing ourselves for guilt or innocence, for example, our imagination must be in play. When we try to apply a theory to some subject matter to see whether the theory fits, we hold the theory in imagination and also, possibly, the subject matter.

Imagination also lends a certain limited freedom to sense perception. When we see the duck-rabbit as a rabbit, or a duck, we are using our imagination;[4] and, if we have the skill, we can move back and forth between these construals at will.

> As a rule, imagination is the medium for the process of infinitizing; it is not *a* capacity, as are the others—if one wishes to speak in those terms, it is the capacity *instar omnium* [for all capacities]. When all is said and done, what feeling, knowing, or willing a person has, depends upon what imagination he has, upon how that person reflects himself—that is, upon imagination. (SUD, 30, italics added)

The power of imagination can be used to foster a relationship to God, a relationship in which you acknowledge God's presence, feel gratitude to God for the blessings of this life and for his grace, obey God as the one who sets your obligations, and so forth. You connect the infinite in a healthy way with the finite details of your life. Thus you synthesize the temporal and the eternal in yourself, you become an intersection of the infinite and the finite, and you become a mature self. This is not despair, but faith. You are gladly willing to be the real you, a creature of God.

But the imagination can go haywire, failing to integrate the finite. Imagine someone who experiences lofty emotions only while reading or writing fiction. In his own daily flesh and blood life, his emotions are all about money, reputation, physical health, competition with others, and the everyday pleasures and disappointments of eating, drinking, rivalries, and joking. Only his reading-emotions are about anything transcendent. His "significant" emotions are all about imaginary situations detached from his own life. This might be an example of abstractly infinitized feeling. And the person who forms himself in this way is in despair, whether he knows it or not. He wills to be somebody other than who he truly is.

Or consider the scholar, the intellectual who lives in a realm of ideas. Let's say she's a theologian, so the content of her thought is God, Christ, human nature, and faith. She is very concerned that her thoughts all be consistent and as profound as possible, but they fail to touch base in her own life. She insists on her thoughts' being *knowledge*; so she relentlessly pursues their grounds in evidence and faultless logic. Her thoughts and their perfection "absorb" her

completely, but somehow *she* fails to absorb *them*! They all stay in her books and articles and lectures, never venturing to affect and shape her own personal attitude to God, her neighbor, her community, her children. She, too, despite the loftiness and even "truth" of her thoughts, is in despair and fails to gain a real self. Her "truths" have failed to be truths *for her*. There's plenty of infinity in her life—enough for ten lives—but she fails to synthesize it with her finitude.

Finally, consider being the person whose willing of the good remains a product of your imagination untethered to the finitudes of your self. You love and intend the good in your own way, and you spend a great deal of time and energy deliberating, debating with your friends, and imagining the fine outcomes that would be achieved by your schemes. You even feel emotions regarding the vicissitudes of the moral schemes and issues that you "care" about: joy when they prosper, disappointment when they fail, anger at those who obstruct their progress, anxiety when they are threatened. But as far as action goes, you are inert. You never lend a hand. Your "willing" never gets more concrete than ambitious talk, imaginative deliberations, and vaporized feeling. This person too is in despair—of the kind that Anti-Climacus calls the despair of infinitude, which is a failure to integrate infinitude with one's finitude.

The Despair of Finitude

If the despair of infinitude is an unwillingness to make the infinite and eternal fruitful in your finite, temporal life, the despair of finitude is the unwillingness to infuse and guide your finite, temporal life with the light and rigor of eternity. "The secular mentality," says Anti-Climacus, "is nothing more or less than the attribution of infinite worth to the indifferent" (SUD, 33).

> Because a person is in this kind of despair, he can very well live on in temporality, indeed, actually all the better, can appear to be a person, be publicly acclaimed, honored, and esteemed, be absorbed in all the temporal goals. In fact, what is called the secular mentality consists simply of such people who, so to speak, mortgage themselves to the world. They use their capacities, amass money, carry on secular enterprises, calculate shrewdly, etc., perhaps make a name in history, but themselves they are not; spiritually speaking, they have no self, no self for whose sake they could venture everything, no self before God—however self-seeking they are otherwise. (SUD, 35, translation slightly altered)

A major fulcrum of this kind of despair is the natural human concern to fit in with, and thus to be approved by, other people. Once the "secular mentality" of idolizing money, fame, and power has become the unquestioned standard of human conduct, this crowd mentality disposes each person to conform, out of

fear that "the others," or at least the "important" others, will disapprove. The normative role that is proper to the eternal has been hijacked by "the crowd."

Possibility Despair

You will recall that one of the polarities constituting the self is freedom/necessity. Freedom is that feature of the human self for which the future is somewhat "open," not set in stone. This openness of the future to human choice is *possibility*, the affordance of options. Our nature as "necessary" places needed constraint on our nature as free; we are to become, and are free to become, not just anything at all, but *ourselves*. Freedom without constraint is inhuman, destructive of selfhood. The person who treats the future as not bounded by the reality that is his or her given particular self doesn't thrive as a self. "The question is how the necessity of this particular self defines it more specifically. Possibility is like a child's invitation to a party; the child is willing at once, but the question now is whether the parents will give permission" (SUD, 36). The point at which everything seems possible to the self "is exactly the point at which the abyss swallows up the self" (SUD, 36). When Jean-Paul Sartre says that "existence precedes essence,"[5] he is saying that we human beings are free to decide what our nature will be (we exist first, then choose our "essence"). According to Anti-Climacus, to try to live out such radical freedom is to fall into a despair of finding yourself, and the reason is that you must find yourself within given parameters: you are free but not infinitely so. Your freedom is bounded by your nature, both as an individual and as a member of the human species.

Necessity Despair

We can think of human speech as composed of openings and closings of various kinds placed in a sequence. In this sequence the vowels are the openings and the pure consonants are closings that separate the openings. Anti-Climacus says that trying to live without possibility is like trying to speak without vowels. The consonants can't be sounded properly without the vowels to separate them, and so speech becomes impossible. In like manner, the person who, in extremity, has no hope (the possibility of life) cannot live a human life. But the world supplies many examples of situations that are hopeless—without possibility—to a secular viewpoint, and every life will face such a situation at one point or another. This fact is available to anyone who reflects on it, and it is part of being a mature

human being to have reflected on it and assimilated it in your self-understanding. But to do so is to be in despair unless you have a hope—a vision of possibility—that transcends the finite world. Such a hope opens the future by de-secularizing it, and such hope is the conviction that with God all things are possible. To integrate this conviction into your given life is the virtue of faith, the opposite of despair. Here possibility makes room for hope. A different application of possibility is to human action. Actions are events that can be attributed to agents, and for which the agents can be properly held responsible. I don't think Anti-Climacus makes explicit the distinction between the possibility of action and the possibility of hope.

He divides necessity despair—the failure to believe that with God all things are possible—into two kinds: "To lack possibility means either that everything has become *necessary* for a person or that everything has become *trivial*" (SUD, 40, italics added). I think the first kind is the one that is literally necessity despair, and it seems most relevant to there being room for human action, which is an important part of being a spiritual being. Here Anti-Climacus is talking about fatalism or determinism. Determinism is the view that for everything that happens (including human actions), antecedent causal conditions strictly guarantee that that thing happens. Fatalism, by contrast, is the view that everything that happens has to happen, but it doesn't necessarily attribute this necessity to antecedent causal conditions. Either doctrine entails that the world doesn't admit of any real options—things that might *or might not* happen, thus creating openings for human intervention. To believe this, thinks Anti-Climacus, is deeply unhealthy for the human self, because it frustrates the self's need for possibility—its need to be able to "breathe" spiritually or, to change the metaphor, its need for vowels to create separation between the consonants, making speech possible. This breathing room is scope for genuine action—for being more than a cog in a system, a cog that transmits movement necessarily to other cogs and that moves necessarily in response to antecedent motion of cogs.

Determinism would deprive us of possibility absolutely, undercutting our agency, our ability to perform *actions* in the distinctively human way. The philistine bourgeois does not lack possibility in that way, but he lacks the kind of possibility that a living belief in God affords: that with God all things are possible. When worldly reality completely lets you down, completely deprives you of hope, so that you are cornered and can see no finite way of escape, the person of faith can still hope in God with whom all things are possible.

> The philistine bourgeois mentality lacks every qualification of spirit and is completely wrapped up in probability, within which possibility finds its small corner; therefore [this mentality] lacks the possibility of becoming aware of God. Bereft of imagination, as the philistine-bourgeois always is, whether alehouse keeper or prime minister, he lives within a certain trivial compendium of experiences as to how things go, what is possible, what usually happens. (SUD, 40–41)

For example, the philistine bourgeois might think: the powerful tyrant who is currently destroying our nation is very powerful, but maybe things will work out. It's possible she'll be overthrown; or if not that, maybe the old goat will have a heart attack and die; if worse comes to worst, my family and I can always escape to Canada. If one of his philistine-bourgeois children gets seriously sick, he hopes only in the probable outcomes of medical treatments and the statistical likelihood of recovery. The kind of possibility that he allows for is limited to "what usually happens," and he is smugly confident that he has life figured out and under control. By contrast, the kind of possibility that God's will represents is the possibility of *anything*, the miraculous. It is clear that when the philistine-bourgeois character is confronted with the extremity of terminal illness, irrevocable loss of what is most precious, or unforgiveable sin, his worldview runs out of resources. It is despair. But it doesn't have to wait for the extremity to materialize to be despair; since his self is essentially and by nature a synthesis of necessity and possibility, and his mind is fixed only on probabilities, he is already in despair, though unaware of being so. His character formation is that of despair. As Anti-Climacus comments, "The philistine-bourgeois mentality reassures itself with the trite and obvious and is just as much in despair whether things go well or badly" (SUD, 41).

He summarizes the three despairs of necessity: "The person who gets lost in possibility soars high with the boldness of despair; he for whom everything became necessity overstrains himself in life and is crushed in despair; but the philistine-bourgeois mentality spiritlessly triumphs" (SUD, 42).

Degrees of Consciousness of Despair

I have noted that Kierkegaard is fond of treating human beings in terms of "stages" of maturity or spiritual depth, and that is what he has Anti-Climacus do in his treatment of consciousness of despair.

> First comes despair over the earthly or over something earthly, then despair of the eternal, over oneself. Then comes defiance, which is really despair through the aid of the eternal, the despairing misuse of the eternal within the self to will in despair to be oneself…. The despair that is the thoroughfare to faith comes also through the aid of the eternal; through the aid of the eternal this self

has the courage to lose itself in order to win itself. (SUD, 67)

So far, Anti-Climacus has explored despair in terms of the "dialectic" or interaction inherent in the nature of the self as a synthesis of "opposite" constituents: infinite and finite, necessary and free. Now he turns to another feature of human nature, that of being conscious of our selves. One of the crucial features of human nature that make us spirit, in contrast with the other living creatures, is the degree to which we can be aware of ourselves and our condition. This awareness, which is a product of reflection and imagination applied to our experiences of living, is to a large extent *evaluative*. We constantly assess ourselves, making judgments about how well we are living up to whatever standards we have adopted. Our evaluative awareness of our identity and condition is of central moment to us.

We've seen that you can be in despair without being aware of it. In fact, in the most common kind of despair, according to Anti-Climacus, the one who is suffering from it is unaware of being in despair (SUD, 45). Nevertheless, the more conscious the sufferer is of being in despair, the more "intensive" is his despair. What does "intensive" (*intensiv*) mean? I'm not sure, but I'm pretty confident that one who is unconscious of being in despair has an obstacle to faith that someone who is aware of being in despair doesn't have, since being aware of it is a condition of its getting resolved. We can also say that the person who is aware of being in despair will *feel* more desperate than someone who isn't (feelings can be less or more intense, and it seems true that the more aware of being in despair a person is, the more intense will be his feeling of it). But this last point needs an important qualification.

Anti-Climacus points out that consciousness of being in a psychological condition such as despair requires two things: a correct *concept* or *category* of the psychological condition, and an *application* of that concept *to oneself*, that is, to an understanding of oneself. We might also note that the correctness of a concept or category of a condition like despair comes in *degrees of approximation to truth*. For example, despair over the eternal is closer to the truth than despair over the earthly or something earthly. But then in part 2 he claims that despair is sin, but nobody in paganism knew it. So none of the descriptions of despair in part 1 (where the concept of sin is not in use) are *fully* correct. (See the discussion of sin in chapter 5.) So perhaps the degree of correctness of the concept that one employs in understanding and feeling one's despair is another dimension of "intensity" or of being "intensive."

And what about the application to oneself? A person might have the concept of despair in an "academic" sense, in his ability to rattle off in a seminar the conditions for the application of the concept, and he might understand it in the sense that he can correctly connect the concept of despair with neighboring concepts, but still not apply it to himself in such a way as to feel his own despair. He might lack the necessary skill in applying the concept, but more likely lack ethical-spiritual qualifications such as honesty, humility, and courage, or have these only up to a point. Since all three of the virtues just mentioned come in degrees, one person might apply the concept of despair to himself more "intensively" than another.

Reflection, a power that belongs to the infinite/eternal/free side of our nature, has a large role in the development of consciousness of being a self. Let's consider how it might figure in the development described in the quotation at the beginning of this section. "First comes despair over the earthly or over something earthly." The latter is more likely to come first. When people are financially ruined, they sometimes commit suicide. This would be a case of despair over something earthly (one's finances, to oversimplify). Now let's say this individual's son reflects about his father's suicide and sees that the essential unreliability of finances is just one example of something fundamentally inadequate as a basis for hope: everything earthly—the earthly *as such*—is vanity and a striving after wind. And he despairs over the earthly. But in doing so, he occupies a perspective that transcends the earthly, and this perspective is his deeper self. *He* is not to be identified with any externality, and so, in despairing over the earthly he discovers the eternal in himself. But the eternal and infinite that is in himself is no more reliable than the earthly was as a basis for hope and life. That is, he despairs *of* the eternal of which he has discovered the need, *over* the eternal that he finds in himself. Thus, "then despair of the eternal, over oneself. Then comes defiance, which is really despair through the aid of the eternal, the despairing misuse of the eternal within the self to will in despair to be oneself" (SUD, 67). Through despair he has discovered that he is a dependent, created being. But he lacks the humility to embrace that identity and gladly rest transparently in the Power that made him. He misuses the infinite in himself, his freedom, in an effort to establish himself by himself, to be his own man all the way to the bottom. This despair is defiance of God.

> With the help of this infinite form, the self in despair wants to be master of itself or to create itself, to make his self into the self he wants to be, to determine what he will have or not have in his concrete self. His concrete self or his concretion certainly has necessity and limitations, is this very specific

> being with these natural capacities, predispositions, etc. in this specific concretion of relations etc. But with the help of the infinite form, the negative self, he wants first of all to take upon himself the transformation of all this in order to fashion out of it a self such as he wants…. In other words, he wants to begin a little earlier than do other men, not at and with the beginning, but "in the beginning"; he does not want to put on his own self, does not want to see his given self as his task—he himself wants to compose his self by means of being the infinite form. (SUD, 66–67)

That is, he wants to usurp the place of creator of his self (note the allusion to Genesis 1), a place that belongs to God. Since the "necessities" in his makeup aren't within the scope of his freedom (except to accept them and be glad), this is a painful, frustrating, situation. It is despair: not wanting to be the self that one is. In this case, this not-wanting is rebellion, defiance. Anti-Climacus colorfully describes this defiant despair:

> Figuratively speaking, it is as if an error slipped into an author's writing and the error became conscious of itself as an error—perhaps it was actually not a mistake, but in a much higher sense an essential part of the whole production—and now this error wants to mutiny against the author, out of hatred toward him, forbidding him to correct it and in maniacal defiance saying to him: No, I refuse to be erased; I will stand as a witness against you, a witness that you are a second-rate author. (SUD, 76)

Features of Human Nature Uncovered in the Exploration of Despair

What is a human being? Paul L. Holmer, to whose memory this book is dedicated, used to refer to emotions like despair and anxiety in Kierkegaard's writings as "diagnostic." In medicine, a diagnosis is an examination of symptoms that aims to tell you what kind of pathology you're looking at. I'm not sure exactly what Holmer had in mind in calling despair and anxiety "diagnostic." It is true that we learn more about these pathologies by examining them, and so become better at recognizing (i.e., diagnosing) them. But they *are* the pathology, so if we treat them as symptoms, a basis for diagnosis, they would have to be symptoms of something other than the pathology. If Holmer meant to regard despair and anxiety as symptoms, they would not be symptoms of any pathology, but symptoms of *humanity*. These pathological emotions, in the hands of a diagnostician like Kierkegaard, have a way of telling you what kind of being you are dealing with.

In this chapter we've seen what Anti-Climacus thinks human beings are, given that we are susceptible to despair. To be spirit is to be an individual being that is limited in many ways: physically, socially, culturally, and in one's capacities, but at the same time a being that has capacities that soar far

("infinitely") beyond these limitations—in particular, the powers of reflection, imagination, and choice. This being can choose a way of thinking and feeling and acting that properly integrates these two sides of our nature, and doing so is our life's task: it is we who must (freely) relate these relata in our being if they are to be properly related. Despair is the condition in which we find ourselves when these polarities of our being are misrelated—say, where we live in our finitude without qualifying it by our infinitude or live in our infinitude without qualifying it by our finitude. We are derived and profoundly social, needing for our fulfillment to be in a proper relationship of love, gratitude, submission, and trust to the Power from whom we are derived, the Power that corresponds, as an Other, to the infinite and eternal that we find in ourselves.



In the next chapter we will look at some things that Kierkegaard says about character, and we will begin to see how the person of character—that is, *good* character—exemplifies the kind of synthesis of the polarities of selfhood that we have just reviewed.

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1. See also Kierkegaard's discourse, "How Glorious It Is to Be a Human Being" (UDVS, 183–200).

2. In the fifth paragraph, Anti-Climacus clarifies this phrase with the words, "to will to do away with oneself" (SUD, 14).

3. In the next chapter (on character) we will see that a paradigmatic kind of existentialism imagines the self to be autonomous in this way. And in chapter 3 (on the aesthetic flight from character) we will see a systematic program for seeking happiness without choosing oneself as a synthesis of the finite and the infinite, and so forth.

4. See Peter Strawson, "Imagination and Perception," in *Experience and Theory*, ed. Lawrence Foster and Joe William Swanson (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), 82–99.

5. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, trans. Carol Macomber (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

2 Character

What I have wanted has been to contribute, with the aid of confessions, to bringing, if possible, into these incomplete lives as we lead them a little more truth (in the direction of being persons of ethical and ethical-religious character, of renouncing worldly sagacity, of being willing to suffer for the truth, etc.), which indeed is always something and in any case is the first condition for beginning to exist more capably.

The Point of View for My Work as an Author, 17

A Self without Character

The strange hero of Albert Camus's *The Stranger* is to many of us only barely recognizable as a human being. As Camus wrote in 1955, "Readers have been tempted to regard [Meursault] as a human wreck." Against this impression, Camus defends him as an understated hero of self-expressive honesty who is strange to his society because he refuses to "play the game" of pretending to be nicer than he is: "He is animated by a passion that is deep because it is tacit, a passion for the absolute and for truth."[1]

This description is itself strange, because the strangeness of Meursault is his utter lack of sustained passion. In nothing that he does has he any larger plan in view; rather, like a piece of driftwood floating on a river, he just "goes with the flow" of the events of his life, the elemental stimuli of his environment. If ever an animal fit the behaviorist stimulus-response model of action, it is Meursault. He doesn't seem to mind that his mother has died, except for the annoyance of having to go to the funeral. When his girlfriend asks him whether he loves her he says that it doesn't matter, but in fact he doesn't love her; still, he is willing to marry her. When she protests that marriage is a serious matter, he says it isn't. At work, he is indifferent about advancement.

He falls in with Raymond, a pimp, and becomes a willing accomplice of the man's petty, violent revenge against his mistress. He testifies before the police that the mistress was cheating on Raymond—something Meursault does not know, nor does Raymond have any but circumstantial evidence. He goes to the beach with Raymond and there meets his undoing: like a leaf blowing passively in the wind, Meursault behaves aimlessly in response to physical comforts and discomforts and trivial emotions and shoots dead an Arab who is the brother of

Raymond's abused mistress. He doesn't plan this murder or have any but the most momentary intention of doing it. Later, when asked why he did it, he says it was because of the intense sunlight. And, asked whether he regrets having done it, he says truthfully that he feels more annoyance than regret. Repeatedly he comments that this or that is of "no importance" or "doesn't mean anything" or "does not matter." He does, however, care about physical comforts and pleasures: he enjoys the warm sun on his body, sex with Marie, cigarettes, a cup of coffee, a dry towel in the restroom at work. He is also mildly bothered when people disapprove of him.

The novel contains no detectable evidence for Camus's claim that Meursault has a passion for truth. It is true that he is disarmingly frank (though not with perfect consistency), but the reader gets the impression that his "truthfulness" is by default rather than by any considered concern for truth or understanding of its importance. Meursault is a different character from Joseph Conrad's Charlie Marlow, who comments,

> You know I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie, not because I am straighter than the rest of us, but simply because it appalls me. There is a taint of death, a flavor of mortality in lies—which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world—what I want to forget. It makes me miserable and sick, like biting something rotten would do.[2]

That is a person with a passion for truth.

How can Camus regard this human wreck as a hero? The answer is that Meursault exemplifies an eccentric ideal of human nature to which Camus was committed at the time that he wrote this novel (1942). As he writes in the 1955 foreword from which I quoted, "I tried to sketch in my character the only Christ that we deserve."[3] Meursault is a pioneer of a new humanity, the firstborn from the dead all around him, who condemn him to death because he isn't one of them. Jean-Paul Sartre makes this clear in a review of Camus's novel. He defends Meursault against our impression that Meursault is unloving by asking, "Isn't he completely in the present, completely devoted to his present feelings?" and comments on the scene in which Meursault tells Marie that he doesn't love her (though he's willing to marry her). Sartre cites Camus's comments about love in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (also 1942): " 'What we call love,' he writes, 'is nothing but a socially constructed way of seeing, for which books and legends are responsible, that links certain beings.' "

> What one calls a dispositional attitude [*sentiment*] is nothing but an abstract unity and the meaning of discontinuous impressions. I am not always thinking about those I love, but I claim that I love

> them even when I don't think about them—and I could compromise my tranquility in the name of an abstract attitude, if I didn't feel any real, episodic emotion.[4]

Sartre is probably thinking along the following lines. If Meursault admits to Marie that he loves her, he ought to be referring to a feeling that he is having at the moment of the utterance. After all, the verb is in the present tense, and he is attributing love to himself—and love is a feeling, isn't it? But at the moment when she asks him whether he loves her, he can't find any such feeling in himself, so he says he doesn't. If he said "yes," he would not be telling the truth about what's going on in his consciousness. Sartre confesses that he is not such a "christ," but often claims to love someone when he is currently feeling nothing, because not doing so would upset people and get him in trouble: "I could compromise my tranquility in the name of an abstract attitude, if I didn't feel any real, episodic emotion." Meursault, being after all "a christ" that we deserve, deals in no such shabby accommodation to social expectations. He is heroically truthful.

> Meursault thinks and acts differently: He does not acknowledge great attitudes that are continuous and all alike; for him, love does not exist, nor do loves. Only the present counts, the concrete. He'll go see his mother when he gets the urge, and that's that…. "I acknowledge nothing of love but this mixture of desire, of tenderness, and of understanding that binds me to another." So we see that we must not neglect the *theoretical* side of the character of Meursault.[5]

On the theory in question—the existentialist metaphysics of the person[6]—we are nothing but the episodes of our lives. Only the present counts because only it is real; character traits are social fictions having no reality. This is a radical empiricism, a positivism of the episodic, with obvious ethical implications. Honesty about oneself, to oneself and to others, is a sheer spontaneous expressivism of the moment: you say how you feel now and only that, without reference to your dispositional personality, since such personality is only a fabrication. Nor do you refer to your history, since it contains only episodes to summarize, no indicators of any stable characteristics. Love, as a character trait or as a subsisting relationship with someone, doesn't exist. When Meursault tells Marie he doesn't love her, he is not searching his heart and the history of their interactions for patterns that indicate how he "really feels" about her. Instead, he is voicing the feeling of the moment (or its lack), and honoring the metaphysical premise that what people think they are talking about when they search their hearts and histories in that way is an empty social construct, a concept without reference. And the same must be true of justice, courage, the sense of duty, and

all the virtues. This metaphysics of the momentary and the discrete lies behind the personal emptiness that is Meursault. Or, rather, Meursault is the fictional projection, the biographical thought experiment and christ-myth that corresponds to this "theory" of human nature and its redemption.[7] For Camus in the period between 1942 and 1955, Meursault represents a perfection, an ideal case of true humanity.

Kierkegaard and Classical Ethics

Kierkegaard used to be regarded as a proto-existentialist, "the father of existentialism," and thus as a thinker opposed on principle to the classical notion of settled character traits, including virtues. According to existentialist ethics, we betray ourselves unless we are living on the very knife-edge of decision, reconstituting ourselves ever anew by acts of sheer contextless and dispositionless will. It is our nature always to be ahead of ourselves, living into the "future," so as soon as we understand ourselves and live our lives in terms of the established selfhood created by our upbringing or our past actions and decisions and the accretions of these in dispositions, habits, and character traits, or in terms of a tradition given to us independently of our decision, we betray our individuality and are "inauthentic."

If Sartre's interpretation is right, Camus's novel is a philosophical objection to an ancient and historically abiding supposition on the part of thinkers, including Christian thinkers, about human nature, ethics, and related matters. I will call this supposition "classical ethics,"[8] numbering among its adherents Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, the church fathers, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Adam Smith, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, and John Rawls, as well as countless less distinguished thinkers. Characterized most generally, classical ethics is the view that people have traits or personal qualities that partially explain their actions, perceptions, judgments, desires, and emotions. If the traits are ethically good, then the actions, perceptions, judgments, desires, and emotions will tend also to be ethically good; and if they are bad, then bad. If the traits are really explanatory, as the tradition supposes, they are not merely socially constructed fictions, but real dispositions. They are relatively constant qualities of persons. In addition to making their "outputs" good or bad, these qualities make the persons who possess them good, functional and well, or bad, dysfunctional, and unwell, as the case may be. So classical ethicists tend to think it important, ethically and

otherwise, for people to develop virtues and overcome or avoid vices.

Classical ethicists are concerned with moral education—the ethical formation of persons. Not just momentary acts, impulses, and feelings are important. It is important what kind of stable dispositional attitudes a person has—what kind of *person* one is. Classical ethicists differ widely among themselves on many questions, including the question about exactly which traits are virtues and which are vices. For example, Nietzsche's and Aristotle's lists of virtues diverge strikingly from those of the Christians I mentioned above, as well as from each other. Stoics reject compassion as a virtue.[9] Aristotle's magnanimous ("great-souled") man (NE 4.3) is abhorrent to Christians, and abhorrent because of his "magnanimity," which Aristotle says is the "crown of all the virtues."[10] But despite these differences, classical ethicists all agree on the importance of character traits. They assume that human beings can be shaped morally or immorally in such a way that their traits *characterize* them; they can become moral (and immoral) *kinds* of persons. I argue in this book that Kierkegaard belongs to this group of thinkers and therefore decidedly not to the much smaller and less distinguished dissenting group represented by Camus and Sartre around the time of World War II—despite the fact that the standard twentieth-century textbook interpretation of Kierkegaard associated him with this group.

In footnote 7 (pp. 47–48 above) I cited the early twenty-first century situationist movement. Here the claim was that character traits as understood in classical ethics do not, or only rarely, exist. The regular patterns of action from which we get the impression that there are character traits are due instead to the similarity of the *situations* in which the actions are taken. Situations, not traits of character, account for regularities in individuals' behavior. Defenders of classical ethics note that situations do affect our actions. Indeed, virtues sensitize us to features of situations, so that the virtuous person picks up on them to a degree, and in ways, that a person without the virtue would not. For example, the compassionate person will tend to detect the suffering of others (perhaps by very subtle signs of distress) and so act compassionately, where the uncompassionate person will tend to miss them. But the situationist literature shows that, sometimes, even features of situations that seem irrelevant to virtuous action affect it. For example, experiments seem to show that a person who has just fortuitously found a dime is more prone than others to help someone in distress.

Protestant theologians that Jennifer Herdt calls "hyper-Augustinians" have yet another reason for denying virtues, though their reason bears an interesting resemblance to that of the existentialists. If the existentialists fear that relying on

our character traits to guide our actions mires us in identifying ourselves inauthentically as something less than a choosing will, the hyper-Augustinians fear that virtues take us down the road of works-righteousness and a grace-belittling autonomy.[11] After all, virtues seem to be an accretion partly due to the history of a person's actions. So if we think of virtues as dimensions of righteousness, our actions ("works") will be (indirectly) a source of our righteousness. Kierkegaard, in agreement with classical ethics, thinks that we are responsible for developing our character, and that our wills are free enough to make this requirement reasonable. For example, if I am prone to anger over trivialities, and decide that this is a bad trait, I might undertake a discipline to learn to control my anger better, or even not to get angry at all about trivialities. I might succeed, and in succeeding become a better person. But the hyper-Augustinians think that if any goodness at all comes from us, the sovereignty of God and the utter neediness of human beings are threatened.

If the existentialists fear traits because they mean a relaxation of the human being's precarious walk on the vanishing knife-edge of the will (authenticity as nothingness), hyper-Augustinian Christians fear traits because their association with human agency threatens to make us more than nothing before God. In their different ways, both groups are committed to human nothingness. Existentialist nothingness (no traits, no ongoing or established qualities, no "identity," just spontaneity of conscious will) makes human beings sovereign in their abstract will over all mere being, whereas "Lutheran" nothingness makes God everything. In existentialism the sovereignty of man requires atheism; in hyper-Augustinian Christianity the sovereignty of God requires the nothingness of man. But since existentialism reduces (or exalts) the human being to the ever-vanishing nontemporally extended knife-edge of the will, it too identifies the human being as a nothingness. Consider Sartre's famous title: *Being and Nothingness*.[12] Hyper-Augustinian theological anthropology and existentialist metaphysics are two peas in the pod of rebellion against classical ethics. Herdt, like Kierkegaard, accepts neither of these accounts, opting instead for a "noncompetitive account of human and divine agency."[13]

Among classical ethicists' orientations we can distinguish a mainline whose high point is arguably Aristotle (or Aristotle and Aquinas) from the less fertile variants represented by Stoicism, Kant, and others. And I propose that Kierkegaard belongs in this mainline. Indeed, it seems to me that his writings are not only a rich instance of the classical ethicists' way of thinking about persons,

but significantly extend and deepen it. In what follows, my references to classical ethics will be to this mainline part of the tradition.

I propose that most of Kierkegaard's writings can be profitably read as explorations of various traits of character—of Christian and quasi-Christian (theistic) virtues, as well as formations or deformations of character that are alternatives to those virtues, such as the formations of the various aesthetes of *Either/Or* 1.

Character

As a way of getting into Kierkegaard's ideas about character, let me make a few general points about the concept. The word "character" comes from a Greek word, *charassein*, which means (1) to sharpen; (2) to cut a furrow, to plough; (3) to engrave or inscribe. The last is most suggestive of the meaning of the English word "character" and its Danish cognate *Charakteer*. Kierkegaard appeals to this etymology in *Two Ages* (77–78). The letters with which we write words are called characters, presumably because each one has a distinctive (inscribed) shape that differentiates it from the other characters of the alphabet. We speak of the character of things: the character of a house, the character of a forest, the character of a climate, the character of a musical piece. In doing so, we speak of the broad features of the thing. To speak of a character in a novel is just to speak of a distinct individuality, a person with his own name, his own history, his own connections with others and with things in the world, and so forth. But we also speak of being a person of character, and this is the usage that is relevant to Kierkegaard's ethical thought. Our discomfort with the character of Meursault—his "strangeness"—might be expressed by saying that he lacks character. The aesthete who supposedly penned the first volume of *Either/Or* is a distinct character, but a major dimension of his life-project is to avoid being a person of character, as I will argue in the next chapter.

I propose eight aspects or dimensions of character, as applied to persons: (1) *Definite form*: To identify an alphabetical character is to refer to the shape that defines it; and analogously a person's character is the "shape" that "defines" him in some respect (e.g., he is devious or courageous). (2) *Ideality*: When it comes to a *person's* character, some shapes are good and others are bad. In chapter 1 we discussed the teleology of human nature—what it "demands" that a person should become to be a successful (good) specimen of the human kind. Colloquially, when we say that someone is "a person of character" we typically

mean that her character is good by the standard of whatever ideality we use to measure goodness. If we want to say that it's bad, we don't say that she has character, but we specify: "She's a bad character." Like us, Kierkegaard often identifies character with good character. But just in itself, the word "character" is neutral as to goodness or badness. (3) *Permanence, durability, consistency*: To have character as a person is to have temporal continuity in whatever "shape," good or bad, one takes. Character is a steadiness or reliable duration, a resistance to change. This desideratum comes out strongly in Judge William's letters to the aesthete in *Either/Or*, and it comes out there because the aesthete undertakes measures designed to avoid it. See chapter 3. (4) *Power of stability*: This will be the attribute or ability that *enables* the person of character to resist disintegrating forces that work against permanence in his character. It supplies something like a causal explanation of the permanence. Strength of moral passion is part of the story; another part is temptation-resisting virtues like perseverance, patience, and courage. (5) *Mental constituents*: What is it in moral character that receives the shape and thus lends itself to the shaping of character? Is it, say, the intellect, the concerns, or the behavior—or a combination of these? In Kierkegaard's thought, passion is a central ingredient of character, but passion is given its form by thought, for example, ethical thought or Christian thought. To be a person of character is to be a person with good passions shaped by true thoughts about the good. (6) *Whatever is qualified* by the shape of his character will be what is essential to being the person one is, to being one's self*hood* or person*ality*. When Kierkegaard speaks of the possibility that a human being might lack a self, he is referring to the second synthesis, the synthesis that the individual freely undertakes. A person who is successful in this endeavor will thereby be a person of character. But it is selfhood as the first or given synthesis (selfhood 1) that is to be *qualified* with character (selfhood 2). That is what is shaped in the shape of character—the raw material, as it were. (7) *Qualities, features, or traits*: A person's character is composed of a set of distinct but interrelated traits that contribute, each in its own way, to the "shape" or form of a person's character. Here we are speaking of virtues or vices as the case may be. These traits are modes of responsiveness to the features and situations of life. For example, the love called *agapē* is a responsiveness to the presence of other human beings in a person's world, and being a "single individual" is a virtue that is responsive (resistant) to social pressures to conform in unhealthy ways, pressures that are exerted by others (knowingly or not) and have sway because of a natural social concern to be accepted.

(8) *Authenticity* is the correspondence of "existence" with profession/thought/beliefs, a person's accepted or claimed ideality. Authenticity in self-presentation is the contrary of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is dishonest, untruthful, disingenuous self-presentation; authenticity is ingenuous self-presentation, analogous to honesty. I say "analogous to" rather than "a kind" of honesty because Meursault is pretty authentic, but not honest.[14] He is not evasive about his motivations, for example; what you see is what you get. But in truthfully presenting his motivations to others, he isn't motivated by a passion for truth; authenticity in his case is not a virtue. Another kind of inauthenticity is what Aristotle calls "incontinence," a failure to be or act in accordance with what one knows to be right. Authentic people are ones whose character perfectly matches their ideality. (To understate the matter, there aren't very many.) "Continence," the ability to act correctly despite contrary impulses, is also a kind of inauthenticity. Here a person's *behavior* conforms to his ideality, but not all of his impulses do. Meursault is *almost* authentic: he is neither a hypocrite nor (mostly) is he incontinent (or continent). His "existence" corresponds almost perfectly with his ideality. His ideality can be summed up: *nothing matters*. But even this existentialist "christ" falters: in his jail cell awaiting execution, he can't get his mind off the possibility of a way out of his fix, though at the very end he regains his equilibrium and his authenticity, and he speaks of the benign indifference of the universe. Let's look at a few passages in Kierkegaard's writings that illustrate the eight dimensions of character.

Kierkegaard on Character

In *Two Ages*, a book-length book review that Kierkegaard wrote after deciding to stop being an author,[15] he takes the occasion to criticize the character (*Charakteer*) of the present age. The personality formation typical of the present age is "*devoid of passion, flaring up in superficial, short-lived enthusiasm and prudentially relaxing in indolence*" (TA, 68, italics original). This kind of character is characterlessness, a lack of the normative features of character (now using 'character' for *good* character). As he says, "Morality is character [*Charakteer*]; character is something engraved (*charassein*); but the sea has no character, nor does the sand, nor abstract common sense, either, for character is inwardness" (TA, 77–78). In this passage, Kierkegaard refers to several of the dimensions of character. To say that the sea is characterless is to point to its fluidity: the water has no definite form (1) of its own (6) but assumes the shape

of whatever contains it, pushes, pulls it, or blows it (8). Similarly, the person who lacks moral fiber lacks lasting, reliable (3) traits (7), and instead adopts the "traits" of whatever social circle (8) she happens to find herself in. Again, a sand dune easily changes shape by the mere action of wind or water (8) *on* it; it has no internal (6) integrity (4), no characteristic shape *of its own* (6). By contrast, morality, as an attribute of a person, is a set of features (7) that are deeply etched into the person *herself* (6). She can move from environment to environment (7) yet retain her "shape." In speaking about "inwardness," Kierkegaard refers to both the fact that the features belong to the person herself (6)—they are not "superficial"—and to the mental constituents (5) of character, here the person's passions (concerns, emotions, motivations)—not ephemeral, momentary passions, but steady, reliable (3) interest (5) in the good.

What does he mean by comparing "abstract common sense" with the characterlessness of sea and sand? Abstract common sense traffics in such thoughts as "avoid extremes," "hedge your bets," "be careful," "don't rock the boat," "time heals all wounds," and other such morally tepid bits of flaccid "wisdom." By contrast, the person of character has a robust, steady (3) passion (5) for the good and is willing to suffer the consequences of his commitments. So we see that, as regards the mental constituents of character (5), chief among them are passion *and* a kind of thinking (2) that goes with it. And what they qualify (6) is the self.

Something without character has no inner structure (4) to hold its shape in the face of vicissitudes. Just as water takes the shape of whatever vessel happens to hold it, a person without character may change his "mind" depending on which person he spoke with last. He changes his interests in accordance with fads. Like the characterless person, the person with character acts differently in different circumstances, but does so *intelligently*, sizing up the situation from the perspective of his own well-formed concerns and corresponding patterns of moral thought. He offers to an observer something "to dwell upon," something real, something stable, whereas a person without character is an "unstable emptiness" that stands only in "transitory relations" to other persons (see TA, 54). Lacking "essential passion," the person without character is "an uncomfortable lack of specific quality" (TA, 62). These descriptions remind us of what Judge William (the ethical interlocutor from *Either/Or*) says about the personality (or rather, lack thereof) of the main aesthete of *Either/Or*, who from the judge's point of view is insubstantial, unconsolidated, lacking a definite personal identity because he never chooses himself in a decisive way, never

becomes a definite synthesis of "finite" and "temporal" dimensions, but drifts in realms of possibility (see EO 2:163).

Unconstrained passions tend to be chaotic, unworkable, and destructive. So essential passions contain in themselves a vector toward their own order. Civilizations are orderers of the passions of their participants, and civilized parents seek, early in their children's lives, to moderate the children's selfishness, anger, fear, and other passions, and to shape them to make the children fit to participate in civilization.

> [Propriety] is feeling's and passion's own invention, and just as prose is unconstrained language, so also prosiness [as an attribute of persons] is unconstraint that does not know propriety; it is not the lack of discipline that produces terrible prosiness but instead a dismal lack of character. Fundamentally, essential passion is its own guarantee that there is something sacred, and this gives rise to the determinant propriety. (TA, 64)

What is *essential* passion? Perhaps a prior question is, essential to *what*? Being essential to civic order is one thing; being essential to human personhood is another; and being essential to salvation is yet another. Just as human beings have a natural drive to civilization, we have a natural drive to moral personhood and salvation. The *most* essential passion (if I may speak thus) is, for Kierkegaard as for Augustine,[16] the concern to "rest" in God—to find oneself in a relationship of happy trust in God. But though this passion burns with *some* degree of intensity in every human breast, most of us are developmentally stunted; we are a sloppy, compromising, and lazy lot. We fall into a "terrible prosiness"—Kierkegaard also calls it bourgeois philistinism—and this prosiness is compatible with tremendous self-discipline. Think of the young businessperson or lawyer who puts in seventy hours a week striving for "success," or the young professor who burns the midnight oil producing publications whose sole purpose, it seems, is to get tenure or to establish a reputation. It's not for lack of discipline that such human beings fall into prosiness, but a dismal lack of character—a shortfall of what Kierkegaard calls earnestness about life. And the mark of such earnestness is honest ideality, passion, and courage.

One of Kierkegaard's trademark concepts is "the single individual." His frequent reference to it has sometimes been thought to indicate a perverse "individualism," but it is in fact a way of speaking about a person's character. If the sand is inherently unable to hold its shape, being malleable by wind and wave, many people, Kierkegaard thinks, are morally shapeless, putty in the hands of what he calls "the crowd." The "crowd" is a social force of public opinion, a system of anonymous felt approvals and disapprovals that pressure people

without character to conform and leaves them without a stable and deep moral anchor. It is contrary to Christian faith, hope, and love, which can be exemplified only by people of character, since they are virtues. Thus the notion of the single individual is a special case of the idea of character. It is a power of resistance (4) designed for a specific environmental vicissitude (7), "the crowd."

An intellectualized version of the crowd shames people in an intellectual community into a felt compulsion to *understand* their theological convictions all the way to the bottom, so to speak. It isn't hard to see how spiritually crippling such a bogus intellectual compulsion is, but it is commonplace enough among Christian intellectuals. There is much that it is important or useful to understand in connection with faith, and Kierkegaard provides lots of guidance and insight about it. But he thinks it's a mistake to suppose that faith's conflict with the world is primarily an "intellectual" struggle.

> Faith, the man of faith's conflict with the world, is a battle of character. Human vanity resides in wanting to comprehend, the vanity of not willing to obey as a child but of wanting to be an adult who can comprehend and who then will not obey what he cannot comprehend, that is, who essentially will not obey. The man of faith is a person of character who, unconditionally obedient to God, grasps it as a character-task that one is not to insist upon comprehending. (JP 2:1129)

Character, integrity, being an individual: All of these relate the person of character to his environment (7), and the relation is that the environment doesn't corrode or disintegrate the thing that has integrity (6). The relevant environment is one that contains corrosive elements of opposition to morality—broadly, temptations.

Kierkegaard distinguishes ethical envy, which retains an enthusiasm for the good and a sense for the excellent, and for *this* reason envies the person who displays ethical excellence, from characterless envy, in which the envier really has no interest in excellence but is willing to do away with all excellence for the sake of having no superiors. Again, character is a matter of personality-integrating enthusiasm (interest, passion), but not every interest is capable of integrating the personality. In particular, an interest in self-deceitfully minimizing the excellence of others out of envy is not capable of it, and so the envy that arises on the basis of this interest is "characterless." Characterless envy is marked by lack of passion for the truth, in particular the truth about the excellence of the envied one. Kierkegaard mentions that in Greece sometimes people would ostracize the person of excellence out of envy (the felt need to be equal to or better than him). Thus, being ostracized became a mark of distinction, and the envier frankly avowed that he approved banishment to relieve the painful comparison:

> The man who told Aristides that he was voting to banish him, "because he was tired of hearing him everywhere called the only just man," actually did not deny Aristides' excellence but confessed something about himself, that his relation to this excellence was not the happy infatuation of admiration but the unhappy infatuation of envy, but he did not minimize that excellence. (TA, 83)

By contrast, "Characterless envy does not understand that excellence is excellence, does not understand that it [characterless envy] is itself a negative acknowledgment of excellence but wants to degrade it, minimize it" (TA, 83–84). The difference between characterless envy and a person of character's envy is a matter of truthfulness. The latter's passion for truth, as well as his passion for whatever good the envied person represents, is a limiting factor. His constraint by reality gives him definite moral shape that the characterless person lacks.

In the following passage, Kierkegaard uses the word "profundity" rather than "character," but I suggest that character (or inwardness) is what he is talking about:

> No, just as perseverance (in contrast to the flaring illusion of the moment) is the true virtue, so also profundity is not an utterance, a statement, but an existing. Profundity is the metaphorical, transferred expression that indicates how many feet a person's existing draws in the same sense as one says this of a ship. But the ship is not said to draw [*stikke*] so and so many feet deep in the same sense as a probe that one sticks into something momentarily, but it is the decisive qualification in relation to the ship's entire and daily existence…. [Similarly,] the profound mind is not an esthetic qualification with regard to genius but is essentially an ethical qualification. For that very reason, it must be for everyday use by the one who is really to be called profound, yet not so it becomes conspicuous, since the conspicuous is again an esthetic qualification. (BA, 164–65)

Character is the ethical integration of the person, the degree to which the individual draws on his ideality—say, his Christian beliefs—in his deliberations, his interests, his feelings, and his conduct in daily life, just as a ship, by its very structure and qualities, naturally draws a certain depth of water. This is in contrast with a depth gauge that can be deployed now and then, for specific purposes, and then stored out of sight and unused for extended periods of time. In a similar way, some "moral" thinkers plumb the depths of the good life from time to time, when they need some for their poetry or philosophy or sermons, but don't much use this depth-sounding ability in the conduct of their actual personal existence.

Kierkegaard comments in his journal about the character deficiencies of two contemporary thinkers, Arthur Schopenhauer and Johann Wolfgang Goethe, whose profundity seems to fall under the indictment just described. Schopenhauer's philosophical "pessimism" says that to exist—to live—is to suffer. Life is an evil, and the source of this evil is the will to be happy. The world

frustrates this desire, thus occasioning misery. The desire is the root cause of the misery. So the "ethical" response to this doctrine is to live ascetically, where asceticism means to approximate, in your living, as closely as possible to *not existing*, that is, to not caring about being happy. It is a kind of attitudinal withdrawal from life, a renunciation of the world of living, a detachment in which you give up the will to live and to be happy, thus rooting out the source of evil in the world. The ideality in Schopenhauer's ethics is thus the ideal of the renunciation of life, and the renunciation of life is the withholding of will from it, the cessation of desire and care. So if Schopenhauer is a man of character, he will learn not to yearn for things that can disappoint—things like reputation, fame, success, wealth, and power. He will opt out of the contests in which most people, in their philosophical ignorance, vainly invest their wills.

How does Schopenhauer the individual human being live? Kierkegaard points out that Schopenhauer rails angrily against the professors who earn a living (!) by giving philosophy lectures and who underrate or ignore Schopenhauer's philosophical writings. He enters essay contests, hoping to win, and experiences delight when his essay wins a prize, and disappointment when it loses. He prides himself on being "the first" to introduce asceticism into a philosophical system. That joy and self-congratulation, as well as the disappointment, are a sure sign that Schopenhauer has not renounced life but uses his idea of renunciation for a full-hearted triumphant participation in life's vain contests! Thus his personal existence fails to correspond to the philosophy he professes: gaping daylight shows between his professions and his life. He may be a great writer, but this incongruity between his life and his ideality betokens a lack of ethical character (see JP 4:3877, 3881–83). Schopenhauer fails to be a person of character most glaringly by the criterion of authenticity (8).

In chapter 1 we saw that the faculty of imagination is crucial for our access to what Kierkegaard calls ideality, "a relationship of possibility to the good, the noble, the disinterested, etc." (JP 2:1462). The faculty of imagination makes it possible for us to have a relationship with the eternal, and the person of character is one who has become a self by synthesizing the eternal in her with her concrete and particular finite and temporal existence. She *exemplifies* her ideality in the actions she performs, in what concerns her in the world, and consequently in the emotions she feels about what is good or evil in the very situations of her life. That is, she lives her everyday life by her relationship with the eternal. Kierkegaard says that Goethe represents "the modern lack of character" in that he uses his relationship with the eternal and the good, not to live a good life by it,

but to turn it into poetry. He is like a sailor who from time to time takes a sounding of the depths over which he travels, rather than like a ship that draws deep as a matter of its very construction. Undiscerning people confuse beautiful or high-flown talk with the human reality that it would shape, and so admire Goethe for his excellence of character. But the truth is that he is skilled at using deep and inspiring thoughts to give a false impression of personal profundity.

Goethe's moral failure is "not quite so serious" as that of the Christian pastors who similarly use their powers of imagination and rhetoric to explore Christian ideality as a way of putting food on the table and paying the rent but, like Goethe, fail to "step forth in character of the good" in the actual world where they might be persecuted for what they do and say. And this is more serious because the ideality of which they are the supposed guardians is the gospel of our salvation and the revelation of God.

> It is the purpose of Governance (and thus also the intention of Christianity) that this relationship [of possibility to the good, the noble, the disinterested] draw the human being so far out that he then steps forth in character of the good, the noble, the disinterested, placing it in actuality, where he then comes to attest to how infinite is the difference between possibility and actuality, that what is so alluring in possibility is so hard in actuality. (JP 2:1462)

We human beings have not only an *ability* to be in touch with what is ideal, but also an *appetite* for it. People with some degree of intellectual sophistication realize that without a relationship to something ideal, something transcending our finite existence and placing demands on us and "inspiring" us, our lives would be intolerably trivial. But becoming a person of character who rigorously forms our existence in obedience to those ideals feels, to many of us, too demanding, as though going that far will make our lives *too* "interesting." But at the same time we realize that the ideal is a demand placed on us, a demand that we should live nobly and uprightly in the actual world. So what do we do? Kierkegaard says we "split." He describes the spirituality of a person like Goethe:

> He relates with the help of imagination to the noble, the good, the high-minded—and it is exquisite enjoyment. He knows that well. He immerses himself in it, he as it were abandons himself to it—but look, at the very moment when, through imagination, the good would draw him out so that he now stepped forth in character, put it into actuality, something that, as a man of sense, he has a developed idea of the suffering it would entail—at that very moment he breaks off, and is the egotist. Poetically, then, he possesses ethical ideality, he spends himself poetically—but he himself is aware of his earthly advantage and therefore is not so foolish as to step forth in character of the good. Charming! There is a double advantage: first the straightforwardly earthly profit that one gets from being an egotist, and then the appearance of high-mindedness that is cast over one by the poetic presentation. (JP 2:1462)

As a *splitting* of the temporal from the eternal—as an effort to "have it both ways"—this is a contradiction of our human nature as a *synthesis* of the temporal and the eternal. It is also an effort to evade one of the either/ors: *either* the ethical life *or* the aesthetic life. Splitting is a dishonest evasion of the task of becoming human, though lamentably one that we can recognize in ourselves.

In the next chapter, we'll examine a different—and in a way more "honest"—systematic effort to escape the demand that we become persons of character.

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1. Albert Camus, "Avant-propos" to *L'Étranger*, ed. Germaine Brée and Carlos Lynes (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1955), vii. English translations are mine.

2. Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, in *Heart of Darkness & The Secret Sharer* (New York: New American Library, 1960), 84.

3. Camus, *L'Étranger*, viii.

4. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Explication de '*L'Étranger*,' " in *Situations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), 1:107–9, my translation.

5. "Explication de '*L'Étranger*,' " 109.

6. John Davenport, "Towards an Existentialist Virtue Ethics: Kierkegaard and MacIntyre," in *Kierkegaard after MacIntyre: Essays on Freedom, Narrative, and Virtue*, ed. John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd (Chicago: Open Court, 2001), 265–323, identifies existentialism not with the Sartrean doctrine, but with Kierkegaard. The title of existentialist is contested, and what defines existentialism is controversial (even Fyodor Dostoevsky and Saint Augustine have been classified as existentialists), but I think we have some reasons to use the term more carefully. Though Kierkegaard seems to have invented his special use of the word "exist," he doesn't call himself an existentialist, whereas Sartre does. I am arguing that Kierkegaard is more like the ancient philosophers who made extensive use of the notion of a virtue, than like modern existentialists, and calling Kierkegaard an existentialist associates him with the wrong crowd. Existentialism in the twentieth century is a "new proposal," and I have noted that Kierkegaard has insisted forcefully that he is making no new proposal (see CUP 1:629–30).

7. Sartre's and Camus's existentialism is a kind of mental atomism or episodism. Character is a fictional social construction on mental episodes. Another kind of error theory about character is situationism. The title of a textbook of the movement says it all: John Doris's *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). According to situationism, too, character is a fiction, but now targeting a different aspect of the notion of character; people don't have character traits by reference to which their actions can be explained, but just behavioral episodes answering to situational contingencies, to the sundry and manifold changes of the world. See also Mark Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

8. In my "Virtue of Hope" I called this "the virtuist tradition." I am grateful to Steve Evans for objecting to this unhappy neologism.

9. See, for example, Seneca, *On Mercy* 2.5, in *Seneca: Moral and Political Essays*, ed. John M. Cooper and J. F. Procopé (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 161–62.

10. See my survey of the historical diversity of the conception of a "great soul" in "Greatness of Soul Across the Ages," in *The Measure of Greatness: Philosophers on Magnanimity*, ed. Sophia Vasalou (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 292–318.

11. Jennifer Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

12. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Citadel Press, 1966).

13. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 169.

14. For an argument, congruent with Kierkegaard, that the virtue of honesty is a specific kind of "inwardness," see Robert C. Roberts and Ryan West, "The Virtue of Honesty: A Conceptual Exploration," in *Integrity, Honesty, and Truth-Seeking*, ed. Christian Miller and Ryan West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 97–126.

15. With the publication of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* in 1846, Kierkegaard intended to conclude his authorship, but feeling a strong urge to write, looked for a way of writing without being an author, and thought that writing book reviews would do. He soon gave up the idea of ceasing to be an author, and thus we have the many beautiful writings of his "second authorship."

16. Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1, in *Augustine: "Confessions" and "Enchiridion,"* ed. and trans. Albert C. Outler (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955), 31.

3 Flight from Character

> *I can't be bothered. I can't be bothered to ride, the motion is too violent; I can't be bothered to walk, it's strenuous; I can't be bothered to lie down, for either I'd have to stay lying down and that I can't be bothered with, or I'd have to get up again, and I can't be bothered with that either. In short: I just can't be bothered.*
>
> *Either/Or* 1[1]

Character and Psychological Well-being

We have seen that for Kierkegaard *character* as a normative concept denotes a formation of the self in which its temporal and its eternal aspects are fully acknowledged and integrated with one another. Character belongs to the ethical and religious "spheres" as ways of living a human life. Thus a conceptual framework of character will be a special understanding or type of understanding of what it is to exist as a human being. This understanding is a philosophy or theology of life that uses distinct ideas by which the person of character lives and seeks to live. In Kierkegaard's vocabulary, it embodies an "ideality." These concepts of the ideality shape a self-understanding and understanding of the world that lend a "character" to a person's actions, emotions, and thought.

According to Kierkegaard's overall argument in *Either/Or*, psychic well-being requires character. In the classical tradition, the virtues are not only states of moral *goodness*, but also states of mental and social *health*, of personal flourishing. And an essential aspect of the virtues is "constancy" (to use Jane Austen's term, noted by Alasdair MacIntyre[2]). Thus the concept of constancy or continuity will be one of the concepts essential to the frame of human character. Impulsiveness, flightiness, fundamental unpredictability, unreliability, arbitrariness, and confusion about one's own identity will be reasons for denying that somebody is a person of character, and for alarm on the part of anyone who seeks to be a person of character. A person who, on self-examination, finds such unsteadiness in herself, will see that she has some moral work to do. Some of the virtues have names that suggest such constancy: "patience," "perseverance," "steadfastness," and "integrity." But constancy will also permeate the other virtues—justice, love, wisdom. Such traits will be stable in the person of

character. Such a person will not only be persevering and reliable but will have a sense of her own identity in which past, present, and future self are encompassed. *Either/Or* provides what are perhaps new arguments to this conclusion; at least it brings out for thematic treatment an aspect of the virtues that was not earlier so thoroughly treated. The particular aspect of the virtues that is highlighted in *Either/Or* is their time aspect—they constitute continuity or temporal substance in a person's life. Because temporality is one of the poles of the synthesis that is spirit or true selfhood, mature temporality—an appropriate continuity of the self with regard to its past, present, and future—must be an aspect of good character.

But ethical and religious understanding and character are not the only options for human beings. In this chapter, we'll look at the aesthetic "sphere" as an *alternative* to character. In doing so, I hope to clarify what character and the life of character are and help us learn something about the rationale for developing our character. The aesthete thinks that character threatens certain goods in his or her life, goods such as spontaneity, freshness of experience, and the allure and fascination of things. The aesthete has her own distinctive understanding of what it is to "exist" as a human being, and this understanding prescribes the avoidance of character formation. If ethical character requires a person to live heartily and with full investment in time, the aesthete seeks to undermine, mitigate, or circumvent the natural pressures of her temporality. If ethical character requires a person to develop a strong, consistent, and realistic sense of her own identity and worth, the aesthete seeks to impose an experiential distance between herself and her actions, emotions, and thoughts, taking an ironical attitude toward herself—in a sense, to make herself into a fictional character. Let's take a look at the aesthete's proposals.

"One might say that [the existence spheres] represent different forms of inwardness or subjectivity, different configurations of caring and passion that give particular shape to human lives."[3] Some of the passions that are especially configured in the aesthetic stage as represented in *Either/Or* 1 are sorrow, boredom, joy, erotic love, and sympathy. The aesthete aims to exploit all these emotions, and especially the "negative" ones, for a kind of rarified and unworldly joy. So the aesthete has an aim after all; he is driven by a kind of caring, to use Evans's word. In a word, he cares about *pleasure* and the *avoidance of pain*, but again, not so much crude physical pleasures as the joys of irony, intellectual playfulness, and invention. The reflective aesthete's kind of pleasure is emotional, rather than physical. Even for the seducer of the "Diary of a Seducer," the goal is not what Aristotle calls "the pleasures of touch," ones that involve

bodily contact with the object of pleasure (eating, drinking, sex).[4] We call emotional pleasures "joys," and they come in different types: joy in being fascinated; joy in beauty; joy in the finesse of one's own manipulative agency (see the Diary of the Seducer). In a rather unreflective way Don Giovanni enjoys the excitement of conquest,[5] but physical sexual contact also looms large for him; the reflective aesthete, by contrast, goes for the more sophisticated pleasures that are mediated by thought.

His target is his own mind, and his project is to avoid the pain of boredom, dread, and sorrow, and to foster the "reflective" pleasures. He is a consciousness manager, a subjective spin doctor with an audience of one. The target of his project is not an aim *in the world*, so to speak, but a *reflexive* one. He aims at his own experience. And the overall argument of *Either/Or* is that his project is doomed to failure—at least if the subject lives long enough to experience the full impact of its outworking. Boredom prevails in the end; jading carries the day, and with it aimlessness, agential paralysis, and depression. The argument of *Either/Or*, one might say, is that the road to stable joy is the road to character.[6] And the road to character is by way of incorporating the real time of one's finite life into a connection with the eternal and the infinite.

Categories Governing the Aesthetic Sphere

Throughout Kierkegaard's writings, the various styles of human existence (living) are presented in terms of the thoughts (concepts, categories, ideas) that are "internal" to each way of life. They are thoughts by reference to which the person living the ethical, the religious, or the aesthetic life evaluates himself, makes choices, and responds (say, emotionally, or by acting) to features of situations and of himself. The categories are definitive of each way of life, distinguishing that way from the alternatives, and setting the parameters of that way of life and the personality-constitution that it implies. (See chapter 6 on passion and thought for a more complicated story about the relation between thinking and existing.) I note also that one or several stages within the aesthetic stage center on "immediate" (unmediated by reflection) pursuit of erotic pleasure. Don Giovanni, as depicted in Mozart's opera, is a chief exemplar of this kind of aestheticism.[7] But because of Kierkegaard's interest in the light that the aesthetic stage casts on the concept of character, his main interest (and ours) is in the reflective forms of the stage.

The chief categories of the ethical sphere are *good*, *right*, *duty*, *character*, and the various virtues that go to make up character (for example, *courage*, *bold confidence*, *honesty/truthfulness*, *being an individual*, *purity of heart*, *earnestness, neighbor-love*, and so forth), and their opposites or absences (for example, *characterlessness*, *dishonesty*, *doublemindedness*, *self-love*). Some of the chief categories governing the mind and heart of a person who lives the Christian life are *God*, *faith*, *hope*, *the neighbor*, *obedience*, *atonement*, and *sin*. These are the concepts or thoughts of which Kierkegaard explores the "dialectic" in his upbuilding discourses and other religious writings. An affectively integrated understanding of such concepts might be called practical wisdom, and Kierkegaard seeks to inculcate such wisdom, through his writings, in himself and his readers. Analogously, the chief categories of the aesthetic life are *pleasant*, *beautiful*, *interesting*, and *amusing,* which can be summarized as (aesthetic) *joy*, and their opposites—above all, *boring*. "I assume that it is man's destiny to amuse himself" (EO 1:290). But joy is ambiguous, in that it occurs in all the stages, in existentially differentiated kinds: aesthetic, ethical, and religious. Kierkegaard calls the poet "the prophet of joy" (WL, 63), but goes on to say that "heaven not only rejoices, more than any poet, with the joyful; heaven not only sorrows with the sorrowing—no, heaven has a new, has a more blessed, joy in readiness for the sorrowing" (WL, 64). We'll go more deeply into this fact about joy in chapter 8.

The Aesthete's Life-Project

The pseudonymous editor of *Either/Or*, Victor Eremita, refers to the supposed author of the essays and other items in volume 1 simply as "A." I will call this person "the aesthete" and will take him to represent a type of person and thinker that I will also call "the aesthete." Since "A" is highly reflective and is my model, I will also call him "the reflective aesthete" to distinguish him from the likes of Don Giovanni, who is quite unreflective.

In his essay, "Rotation of Crops," the aesthete notes that boredom is a root of all evil (EO 1:285) and laments that, while we might well dismiss a nanny for failure to amuse the children, we wouldn't call on a king to abdicate the throne or prescribe a life sentence for a journalist just because they bored us. How unfortunate, thinks the aesthete, for this discrimination fails to note what is truly essential in the valuation of the world and the correction of evil. How is evil to be rooted out by people who can't even recognize its root? So the aesthete proposes

in this essay some expedients of "social prudence" that address evil at its most fundamental. Despite starting "with the principle that all men are boring" (EO 1:285), the drift of the aesthete's essay is that boredom is never the fault of the object, never due ultimately to the "boring" situation. Instead, it is to be traced to the voluntary attitude or mental stance of the bored person. If you're bored, it's your own fault. For example, the aesthete once had to deal with a man whose chatter bored him almost to the point of despair. But then he noticed that the man perspired profusely when he talked.

> This perspiration now absorbed my attention. I watched how the pearls of perspiration collected on his forehead, then united in a rivulet, slid down his nose, and ended in a quivering globule that remained suspended at the end of his nose. From that moment on, everything was changed; I could even have the delight of encouraging him to commence his philosophical instruction just in order to watch the perspiration on his brow and on his nose. (EO 1:299)

We human beings have a natural appetite for amusement, in the broad sense of stimuli that draw and hold our attention.[8] So the aesthete is right when he says, "I assume that it is man's destiny to amuse himself" (EO 1:290). We like to be "interested," captivated by this or that. We sometimes read simply because it entertains us. But some things that hold our interest are not mere entertainments. In fact, for many of us, *mere* entertainment doesn't hold our attention for very long. More than a little bit bores us. And so we need meaningful work, challenging projects; and such may hold our attention for a lifetime. But my present point is that we have a natural *appetite* for amusement in this broad sense, and boredom is the feeling of frustration when our appetite is high but we are unable to engage with anything that satisfies it by holding our attention.

Since amusement in this broad sense is a generic human need, a kind of nonbodily natural appetite, the experience of it being satisfied, whether by absorption in profoundly meaningful work or by the most asinine co-option of our attention, is a kind of joy. Amusement is emotional pleasure. As I noted, the concepts governing the aesthetic life are *pleasant*, *beautiful*, *interesting*, and *amusing*. If the fundamental passion or concern of the aesthetic life is the appetite for amusement, it stands to reason that the fundamental evil, according to that philosophy of life, will be boredom. Boredom is the frustration of the appetite for amusement *as such*, without further specification. We can clarify this point by contrasting boredom with an emotion of which it is a specific variant, namely, *impatience*.

The young wife who wants to have a baby but is unsuccessful in her attempts

to get pregnant is impatient, but not bored. A husband missing his wife who is away caring for her sick mother may be impatient to have her back, but he is not necessarily bored. Soldiers encamped week after week expecting a battle without the battle's coming may be either impatient or bored. If they are primarily concerned specifically *to do battle*, they are impatient; but if they are just looking for something, little matter what, to divert them, and want the battle for this reason, then they are bored.

Impatience is a frustration with the flow of time. You expect or hope for something in the near future, and the frustration is that it's taking too long to come about. You "can't wait" for it to happen, yet you must wait. The range of things that can be impatiently expected or hoped for is as broad as the category of things that human beings look forward to. You may be impatient to see your child who is coming home from college; you may be impatient to get your first real paying job; you may be impatient for the coming of God's kingdom; you may be impatient for the death of your rich uncle; you may be impatient with the slowness of your progress in the spiritual life; you may be impatient for something interesting to happen. Clearly, the varieties of impatience also vary in their moral worth. It is despicable to be impatient for the death of your rich uncle; your impatience to see your homecoming child can be a symptom of your love for her; your impatience about your spiritual growth indicates a healthy concern for spiritual growth. Impatience, thus, can be an index of character.

If you are simply impatient for something interesting to happen, or to have something interesting to do, *no matter what*, then your impatience is boredom. What species of character does such impatience indicate? Well, it indicates that you are human, that you have the concern to be amused in the broad sense that I have sketched. To that extent, it doesn't indicate a particular state of character at all. The question to raise is about the place of boredom in your life. If it is for you a root of *all* evil, a singular enemy of the good, then you are an aesthete, a person for whom amusement in the broad sense is the meaning of life, the *summum bonum*, and that you have no "serious" concerns such as would make for the kinds of impatience that indicate good traits of character. Presumably, you don't have any that indicate bad traits of character, either. Anti-Climacus might say that you have no self.

Norman Malcolm complained that the Second World War was boring, and Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote this in a letter to him:

> I want to say something about the war being a "boredom." If a boy said that school was an intense boredom one might answer him that, if he only could get himself to learn what can really be learned

there, he would not find it *so* boring. Now forgive me for saying that I can't help believing that an enormous lot can be learnt about human beings in this war—*if* you keep your eyes open. And the better you are at thinking the more you'll get out of what you see. For thinking is *digestion*. If I'm writing in a preaching tone I'm just an ass! but the fact remains that if you're bored a lot it means that your mental digestion isn't what it should be. I think a good remedy for this is sometimes opening your eyes wider.[9]

Wittgenstein seems to be commending an ethical approach to boredom: replace the frivolous concern to be amused with the serious business of understanding human beings, and the war won't bore you. It may be true that humans poorly tolerate being unengaged, but to expect this engagement to come from the *world*, rather than from our *own* engagement with it, is immature. If you want the "boring" situation to be more interesting, more fascinating, you must work at finding something intrinsically interesting in it. What he calls "digestion" is a serious inquiring interest in things—in this case, humanity.

Using the aesthete's language in "Rotation of Crops," we might label Wittgenstein's advice for avoiding boredom a piece of "social prudence." Wittgenstein agrees with the aesthete that it is unwise to blame the world for your boredom. If you're bored, it's your own fault. But Wittgenstein's social prudence differs from the aesthete's. In fact, we might want to call Wittgenstein's advice an argument for the "aesthetic validity of the ethical," or "the aesthetic validity of the pursuit of wisdom." If you want to keep your life interesting, set your mind on things with real significance, like understanding people. What is the shape of the aesthete's social prudence?

The Discipline of Forgetting and Remembering

Wittgenstein's social prudence involves searching the "boring" situation for what is important in it, and thus presupposes a dispositional interest in what is ethically important. Since the aesthete doesn't think anything is important in that "objective" sense, his social prudence involves manipulating his own perception so as always to be able to experience the world as fresh and new, and thus amusing. According to the aesthete, boredom takes possession of a person's mind as a result of what we might call "jading." Jading is a process by which experiences go stale and lose interest by becoming old hat. No matter how interesting an experience is at first occurrence, as it is repeated over and over again, it loses its freshness and so ceases to inspire aesthetic joy.

The aesthete compares his defensive strategy with the agricultural practice of

crop rotation. Intensive rotation contrasts with extensive. Just as farmers in Guatemala sometimes grow crops on a piece of land until its nutrients are depleted, then move on to *another* piece of land, and so forth, so as always to have a fresh, undepleted field in which to plant, so the unsophisticated aesthete varies his women, wines, and songs (that is, the *objects* of his interests and pleasures) to keep his experience fresh and interesting. In agriculture, intensive rotation, by contrast, takes the *same* field and changes the cultivation of it by sequentially planting, for example, corn one year, then soybeans the next, then alfalfa, because the specific nutrient that one crop removes, the next crop replenishes, while removing a different one, and so forth. The reflective aesthete, similarly, doesn't depend on changing girlfriends, for example, to keep his pleasures fresh, but changes the mode of cultivation of his *consciousness*. Instead of swapping out the objects of his pleasures, he changes the subject (namely, his own mind); and the device of this cultivation is a discipline that he calls "recollecting and forgetting." "The more resourceful one can be in changing the method of cultivation, the better, but every particular change still falls under the universal rule of the relation between *recollecting* and *forgetting*" (EO 1:192, italics original). This discipline aims at limiting the subjective significance or intensity of any experience. An experience (say, a pleasure) that is very intense can spoil other pleasures, making the rest of your experience pale by comparison, or it can cast you into a mode of vainly and painfully longing for a repetition. Social prudence here consists in realizing the dulling or disappointing effect that any past experience can have on subsequent experiences, and modifying present experiences in such a way that, when they are past, they will not have those effects on their successors. This is why the reflective aesthete pursues intensive, rather than extensive, rotation: given the fact of time, you can maintain excitement, interest, and freshness only so far with extensive aesthetic rotation. After a while, serial girlfriends, serial restaurants, serial concerts, or whatever fund of serial objects you draw on for ever-fresh titillation and excitement begin to lose their luster. They can't be unlike enough to sustain freshness indefinitely in a person with a normal memory. The aesthete's problem of jading, thinks he, must be tackled at its root. And its root is temporality itself.

The aesthete comments:

> Forgetting … is a quiet pursuit and ought to be related to the pleasant just as much as to the unpleasant. Furthermore, the pleasant as a bygone, specifically as a bygone, has an intrinsic unpleasantness with which it can awaken a sense of loss;[10] this unpleasantness is canceled by forgetting. (EO 1:294)

He notes, "It is a singular feeling when in the midst of enjoyment one looks at it in order to recollect it" (EO 1:293–94). Imagine a particularly delicious and hilarious outing with friends. Your aesthete's social prudence sounds the alarm at the very intensity of your enjoyment: *if I let it totally grip me, I'm going to be frustrated at my inability to reproduce this experience*. And so, right there amidst the hilarity, you defensively un-immerse yourself in it, stepping out of the moment and reconstruing the present experience as a past experience, so that it takes on, right now, the character of a memory. That dreamy quality will be the "singularity" of this feeling.

Similarly, you will want to live without robust, headlong hopes, because such hopes will get you stuck in reality and time.

> Forgetting is an art that must be practiced beforehand. Being able to forget depends always on how one remembers, but how one remembers depends in turn on how one experiences reality. The person who sticks fast in [reality] with the momentum of hope will remember in a way that makes him unable to forget. *Nil admirari* [to wonder at nothing] is therefore the real wisdom of life. Every life-situation must possess no more importance than that one can forget it whenever one wants to; each single life-situation should have enough importance, however, for one to be able at any time to remember it.[11]

When he speaks about "practicing beforehand," the aesthete isn't talking about getting ready for the real performance. He means that the practice of "forgetting" involves pulling back from hope. You anticipate your anticipation of the future and cancel it. You look *into* the future, but you don't look *forward* to it. "Forward" here denotes positive passion or desire, the interested anticipation of pleasure in reality. (We don't speak of looking forward to having a tooth pulled, even though we anticipate the operation—maybe with fear.) Hope is moving into the future with momentum, *plunging* passionately into the future; but if we do this, the experiences we have in that future will be satisfactions or disappointments, and that is the trap that reality sets for us. To plunge into the future in that way is to court the disaster of jading and boredom, as well as disappointment. *Nil admirari* (to be captivated, charmed, turned on, touched, by nothing) is a piece of social prudence reminiscent of Epicurus. *Admirari* denotes enthusiastic absorption or immersion in the experience—so the advice is, from every experience (but especially the most fetching ones), keep your emotional distance! Guard your heart! Hoping for something invests the future event with more importance than the aesthete can afford. He tries to meet experiences as they come, but he doesn't anticipate them with enthusiasm.

Is this social prudence the same as Meursault's? Meursault seems to satisfy

the aesthetic ideal (his emotional ties to the past are weak, and he doesn't anticipate the future with enthusiasm—he has no ambition), but he also seems to do so without trying, whereas Kierkegaard's aesthete has a program. The reflective aesthete energetically pursues forgetting-remembering and not-hoping, but Meursault just drifts along on the currents of his environment. In contrast, Kierkegaard's reflective aesthete is like Kierkegaard himself in the intensity of his concern for self-cultivation. The difference between the two is the direction of their thought and programs with respect to the phenomenon of character: with Judge William (the "author" of *Either/Or* 2), Kierkegaard moves toward character, while the reflective aesthete flees from it.

The Discipline of Poetization

Among the aesthete's papers that Victor Eremita edits and presents in the first volume of *Either/Or*, two are rhapsodic lectures addressed to a society of aesthetes called the Symparanekromenoi. The name of this society is a concocted Greek word meaning something like Those Who Tarry among the Dead. If the fresh and the new, as the contrary of boredom, are the dominant categories in "Rotation of Crops," transfiguring beauty, as a mitigation of sorrow, grief, and dread, is the dominant category in the addresses to the Symparanekromenoi. If in "Rotation of Crops" the manufactured pleasure comes in the form of the Interesting, the pleasure promoted to the Symparanekromenoi comes in the form of the Beautiful. Both the interesting and the beautiful, as modes of experience, are joys.[12] The forgetting-recollecting tactic existentially avoids character in its temporal aspect—that of continuity or constancy. That is because it works especially on the temporal modes of mindfulness. The discipline of poetization, in its turn, undermines the realistic sense of self and the world that character involves. These are obviously related, since being realistic about the world and oneself includes being realistic about time.

I'll focus this section on the essay called "Shadowgraphs,"[13] but before doing that, consider the first of the series of aphorisms that Victor Eremita has labeled "Diapsalmata"[14] and placed at the beginning of the reflective aesthete's papers.

> What is a poet? An unhappy person who conceals profound anguish in his heart but whose lips are so formed that as sighs and cries pass over them, they sound like beautiful music. It is with him as with the poor wretches in Phalaris's[15] bronze bull, who were slowly tortured over a slow fire; their screams could not reach the tyrant's ears to terrify him; to him they sounded like sweet music. And people crowd around the poet and say to him, "Sing again soon"—in other words, "May new

> sufferings torture your soul, and may your lips continue to be formed as before, because your screams would only alarm us, but the music is charming." (EO 1:43)

The poet himself is perhaps the greatest beneficiary of his lovely music, of which he himself is audience member #1. He doesn't anaesthetize himself to his anguish and his sorrow, as he might through drugs or alcohol, but rather *aesthetizes* himself by turning his groans and moans into gems of lyric. In this process he may literally write poetry, but that's not essential to the mindset of the aesthetic sphere. Essential to the aesthetic *existence* is the transformation of emotional distress into some kind of pleasure. In the present case, the pleasure is *about* the original distress, or, rather, it is pleasure *in* the lyrical gems that express the distress. By this poetic move, the aesthete is able to take up a perspective on the distress that is not itself the distressed viewpoint. He is diverted from the direct experience of the distress to the beauty of the thought that expresses the distress, thus to a less direct experience of the distress, which has also been transfigured into a thing of beauty. The reflective aesthete is an adept in what psychologists call dissociation. Perhaps it is useful to compare the aesthete's brand of dissociation with a couple of others.

Dissociation is a psychological process, which may be voluntary or involuntary, by which a person creates a "distance" between herself and a current actual experience, whether that experience be one of sensory perception, memory, emotion, or action. She dissociates her experiencing self from that experience so that, in a way, it is not quite *hers*. I say "not quite" because she does continue to have the experience in this mitigated form: the experience is hers, *and* it isn't. The Lamaze method of pain control (say, in childbirth) is an illustration. It works by distraction, by diversion of attention. When the contractions begin, the mother concentrates her attention on a spot on the wall or something else, and she breathes in an intentional way that requires attention to the activity of breathing. If she can hold her attention on these things, resisting the pain's urgent appeal for attention, she will experience the pain in a mitigated way. Apparently, the ability to do this is a skill and can be acquired with practice.

We can think of the self, on the one hand, as the attention-giver, the subject of attention, the one who attends, and, on the other, the self as the one that experiences (for example, physical pain). Attention selects from the experiential field, tracking part of it selectively in "preference" to other parts, and is partially in our voluntary control. We are constantly selecting from our experiential field, attending to some parts and more or less shutting out others. Some experiences, like physical pain and personal sorrow, can be particularly insistent and

attention-demanding. We speak of dissociation when a rift is created between attention and a particularly insistent experience.

I've said that Lamaze works by way of distraction, and this claim is justified by its not mattering much *what* the object of attention is, or the particular *way* of attending to the distractor; the important thing is to take attention *off* the pain. We could say that Lamaze is worldview-neutral; it doesn't prescribe any particular way of attending to the world. More sophisticated dissociation strategies work not by simple distraction, but by conceptually rich and specific modes of attention, with the attention not turned *away* from the painful experience, but trained *on* it in such a way that the experience is transfigured into something positively good. And this mode of transfiguration may be worldview-specific, drawing on the worldview's conception of the good. In each case, the worldview framework will be deployed in the transfiguration of the "negative" experience into an instance of something good. We will see this strategy or "dialectic" at work in Kierkegaard's Christian discourses on joy (see chapter 8). In these cases, the dissociation is not from the suffering as such, but from the suffering as being purely negative and to be avoided.

We can imagine a worldview-bound analogue of the Lamaze method of natural childbirth that worked not by distraction, but by reframing each contraction as one step closer to the joy of holding the baby in one's arms. This worldview is one in which motherhood and the having of children is a high good, something to be sought and cherished. Such a resource for dissociation from the pains of childbirth would belong to what Kierkegaard calls the ethical stage, though it has "aesthetic" import. Kierkegaard thinks that the ethical, when properly understood, will be seen to have "aesthetic validity."[16] The person who reframes her pains as steps to the joy of motherhood thereby simultaneously expresses her ethical character as a person who loves children and reaps the aesthetic advantage of getting some distance from her pain, not to speak of the aesthetic advantage of savoring the hope of motherhood.

Another example of a worldview-bound dissociation from distress is the practice of Stoicism. The Stoic attempts to reframe his personal sorrows by taking the perspective of the universe on them. The losses and gains of individuals are simply parts of the larger, harmonious system of causal connections that constitutes the working of the universe. The good is the working of the whole, and each event that happens, including all the losses that individuals undergo, contributes to that good. In construing his own loss as a contribution to this good, the Stoic frees himself, to some extent, from the pain.

But he also does something profoundly right, from the Stoic perspective, insofar as he is touching and drawing on the good as the Stoic understands it—the universe as a harmonious whole. The Stoic would think the Lamaze method metaphysically superficial: mere distraction from your pain doesn't connect you with any transcendent good—something belonging to what Kierkegaard calls "the eternal."

The reflective aesthete's program is this: turn every emotion, every action, every bit of life, into a work of art, or at least something to be contemplated and enjoyed. In this way you get distance from it.

My quotation from the diapsalma near the beginning of this section leaves off part of the aphorism, which ends with this coda:

> And the reviewers step up and say, "That is right; so it must be according to the rules of aesthetics." Now of course a reviewer resembles a poet to a hair, except that he does not have the anguish in his heart, or the music on his lips. Therefore, I would rather be a swineherd out on Amager and be understood by swine than be a poet and be misunderstood by people. (EO 1:19)

The poet—and more broadly, the aesthete—is a person who is *living a human life in a certain way*, not a person who merely produces poems. He or she occupies an *existence*-sphere, and this is more than a world*view*. He is a person actively struggling to *be* a human being, according to the lights of his sphere. No doubt, Kierkegaard thinks the aesthete deeply misguided, and thus malformed as a human being, but the poet's contempt expressed in the last sentence is Kierkegaard's. And the irony in saying that a critic resembles a poet to a hair *except* for his lack of seriousness about living his life, is also Kierkegaard's: the difference between the two is "infinite," as Kierkegaard would say. To note that the aesthete is an adept at dissociation is not to say that he turns his back on existing, as he implies the critic does; dissociation is his *way* of existing. A later pseudonym, Johannes Climacus, who is more preoccupied with philosophers and professors than with reviewers of poetry, will complain that the people in his age have "forgotten what it means to exist."[17] In the coda to the first diapsalma, the reflective aesthete makes a similar point about critics. In fact, the critic doesn't resemble the poet at all, and the appearance that the two are dealing with the same things is an illusion.

Let us turn now to the Symparanekromenos and his address on shadowgraphs of three characters' reflective sorrow. The aesthete's presentation of the lecturer and his lecture, which is a fiction by the fictional aesthetic writer, is meant (by the aesthete) as an aesthetic lesson in dealing with personal sorrows.

It is thus, in its own aesthetic way, a work of cultivating the soul, a work of "edification."

A shadowgraph is an object that can be used along with a light source to cast on a wall a shadow representing something in silhouette.[18] The object itself may not look like much, but it reveals its nature when used as a projective device. Similarly, says the lecturer, the outward mien of a woman afflicted with reflective sorrow may reveal little on its own about what she is feeling, but a skilled psychologist can see much about her inner state by looking *through* her outward demeanor—no doubt, aided by knowing the history of her misfortune. The analogue of the projection of a shadowgraph is the psychological skill of a person who dwells reflectively in the darker regions of human existence, as do the Symparanekromenoi. The lecturer's "shadowgraphs" are conceptual rather than visual. They are artistic verbal meditations on the reflective sorrow of three literary characters, Marie Beaumarchais from Goethe's *Clavigo*, Elvira from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, and Margrete from Goethe's *Faust*. Each of these women sorrows as a result of betrayal by her lover, and her sorrow is "reflective." The lecturer has no literal visual image of the women, only a work of his imagination in the "light" of the story.

Reflective sorrow contrasts with immediate or simple sorrow. If an elderly loved one dies, the sorrow may be intense, but the identity of the loved one and his attitude toward the bereaved person may be straightforward and not at all in question. Reflective sorrow, by contrast, is marked by unfinished business, compulsive questioning, and mulling over who the departed person was and what his or her attitude was (or is) toward the bereaved. It may be due either to the psychological nature of the sorrower (that she has a bent for anxious reflection), or the nature of the situation over which she is sorrowing (that one or another crucial aspect of the situation is ambiguous). Such reflectiveness will be more typical of cases of romantic betrayal: My beloved is gone from me, but—Who was he, really? What was his character, really? How did I lose him? What did I do wrong? Must it have been so? I can't believe that he's a bad person, but … ? How might things have gone otherwise? Is he really gone forever, or may I hope for his return? And so forth.

Here, in extreme brevity, is the gist of the three meditations:

MARIE: She has a supportive environment. Because she was not seduced, but only engaged, Marie has identified less with Clavigo than the other two women have with their seducers. Her reflectiveness consists in her ruminations about whether she was deceived, because her love for him makes it difficult for her really to believe that he has abandoned her.

ELVIRA: Don Giovanni was interested only in the excitement of a sexual encounter. Elvira has no supportive environment. Unlike Margrete, Elvira retains a spiritual individuality over against Don Giovanni, and so can hate him for his betrayal, even if not consistently. Unlike Marie, she has experienced union with her lover (and so his betrayal is less ambiguous than Clavigo's), but the union has a superficiality that Margrete's with Faust does not. Since she cannot go back to the convent, and yet needs to find some basis for her life, she must stay in love with Don Giovanni. Motivated by this concern, she cannot regard him simply as a deceiver. She needs him, and yet she cannot outright deny that he has betrayed her; so she goes through many contradictory thoughts about him, and so finds no stable object for her sorrow.

MARGRETE: Faust, who is in a despair of religious doubt, is interested in a sexual encounter only as a way of deriving vitality from Margrete's immediate faith. He expounds the faith to her, realizing that she will not catch the irony of his exposition, and so in a sense he becomes her creator and confirmer; but his greatness calls forth such respect in her that she comes to worship him rather than God. Thus Faust is himself Margrete's most significant environment. She can't decide whether he was a deceiver, because her spiritual identity is so tied up with him that to take him to be a deceiver is to lose her ability to judge him to be a deceiver. And yet he is a deceiver, and she knows it.

Reflective sorrow is turned inward in the sense that it is not expressive; it is not demonstrative in verbal, facial, and gestural terms. This is why it cannot be depicted in visual art. It is not that reflective sorrow has no outward indication at all, but it is "intimated" with great ambiguity by such things as an "outward pallor." Thus the title of the piece: a shadowgraph is an object used to cast a shadow in the likeness of something, but the visible thing itself looks very little like what it represents, so one gets little out of examining it itself. The lecturer offers another visual analogy to help us understand the analogy of the shadowgraph: "If I look at a sheet of paper, it perhaps has nothing remarkable about it for immediate inspection, but as soon as I hold it up to the light of day and look through it, I discover the subtle interior picture, too psychical, as it were, to be seen immediately" (EO 1:173). The aesthete seems to be talking about the paper's watermark. Kierkegaard later uses this analogy far more deeply in his thinking about Christian love:

> The neighbor is eternity's mark—on every human being. Take many sheets of paper, write something different on each one; then no one will be like another. But then again take each single sheet; do not let yourself be confused by the diverse inscriptions, hold it up to the light, and you will see a common watermark on all of them. In the same way the neighbor is the common watermark, but you see it only by means of eternity's light when it shines through the dissimilarity. (WL, 89)

The shadowgraphs of this address are meant to be "existential" communication, that is, to encourage the hearer (reader) to use his or her own reflective sorrow as a device of personal transformation in the aesthete's poeticizing escape from character, the death of the self as a synthesis of the

eternal with the *temporal*, a de-realization or volatilization of the hearer's personality. Whether the Symparanekromenoi (the fictional audience of the lecture) are *also* to be thought of as making existential use of the shadowgraphs is debatable. For them, the lecture may be little more than "entertainment," as the lecture's subtitle announces. They are so deeply cultivated already in the culture of death, darkness, and night as to be invulnerable to the kind of concerns on which the grief of the three heroines is based. "The arrow in a woman's eye does not wound our hardened breasts, and the cheery smiles of happy maidens do not move us, but rather the secret hint of grief" (EO 1:173). They are aesthetes all right, but their joy seems to derive less from poetizing their own grief than from a voyeuristic, artistic pleasure in the contemplation of other people's griefs. They are *observers*, though not in the contemptible way of the critic in the first diapsalma. They are rather sages of the aesthetic way of life, their existence already so thoroughly cultivated in it as to be beyond its disciplines. By their intercourse with death and darkness, they have disembodied themselves, passionally. They retain a voyeuristic interest in others' passions, but they possess none on their own behalf. Their "existential" vantage point is that of death, darkness, and shadows. Thus they are not real persons but mere projectors of realities, like a slide projector that does not occupy an existential vantage point vis-à-vis the thing "projected," but whose projections can be seen by existing persons who can assimilate the projections into their own lives. The agonies of some of the diapsalmata may lead us to conclude that the Symparanekromenoi are unrealizable idealizations of the aesthetic "stage."

But for the aesthete author of the writings collected in *Either/Or* 1, the entertainment has a serious purpose, and that is the poetization of his own emotional pain. The Symparanekromenoi are figments of his imagination, not real people; but *he* is a real person, struggling to make emotional "sense" of his own existence, as he writes the works of imagination that make up *Either/Or* 1. Many of the diapsalmata are autobiographical in form. Though the fictional lecturer of "Shadowgraphs" is not a flesh-and-blood person seeking to deal aesthetically with his own griefs in the avoidance of character, the reflective aesthete who supposedly wrote the lecture is, and so too is the supposed reader if he or she is an aesthete. For him or her, the lyrical observational stance that the lecturer celebrates in contemplating the griefs of the three heroines is to function as a model and "upbuilding" encouragement.

The aesthete reader will be interested in sorrow because it is an important enemy of the aesthetic life as a life of joy, so it will be well to understand it and

have strategies for dealing with it. Artistic representations of sorrow are an important part of such strategies, and the shadowgraph is an example of such a representation. It is a representation in words, rather than in pictorial art ("shadowgraph" is a metaphor), but it is supposed to have the ambiguity that calls forth aesthetic creativity (see EO 1:172). The reflective aesthete doesn't wait for sorrow to take its toll on him, but takes on sorrow proactively, doing aesthetic battle with it by poetizing it, by artistically transfiguring it into an object of beauty. In this way, he simultaneously dissociates himself from it and makes it into something of beauty and thus of pleasure. He is interested in *reflective* sorrow because it is deeper, more agonizing, more interesting, more hidden than simple or "immediate" sorrow. It is more distressing and thus more quintessentially *sorrow*. It is the kind of sorrow the aesthete-lecturer himself would have, were he any longer able to feel sorrow. The reflective aesthete is a "poet" who finds his joys in thoughts rather than sensations. The unreflective sorrower doesn't have the resources for poetizing—or, at least, doesn't put them to work.

Failure

We have examined two interrelated disciplines of the aesthetic sphere of existence, forgetting and recollecting, and poetization. The former, as a defense against boredom, scrambles the modes of natural human temporality, so that the distinctions among past, present, and future, which make possible the continuity essential to being a person of character, are weakened or lost in the interest of keeping experiences fresh and interesting. Forgetting and recollecting resists or rebels against human nature as a synthesis to which the temporal is essential. Poetization dissociates the self from his or her uncomfortable emotions (sorrow, grief, dread) by transfiguring them into works of beauty. The transfiguration is a transformation of something real (real sorrow, for example) into something almost fictional. This discipline, too, is an assault on the nature of the self as real or substantial and as living in the environment of a real finite world. We might also say that each of these self-transformations is the application of a pseudo-eternity to the self, an escape from temporality and finitude rather than an honest infusion of them with faith in God.

The Diapsalmata with which Victor Eremita precedes the papers of the aesthete are effusions of a variety of moods: playfulness, exaltation, and despair. We will best serve our purposes here by concentrating on a few of the darker

sayings, which will especially bring out the liabilities of the aesthetic sphere of existence as a way to live a truly human life. The aesthete complains, "Life has become a bitter drink, and yet it must be taken in drops, slowly, counting" (EO 1:26). In this statement the aesthete seems to be aware of time, but all times seem the same to him, and the lack of variety among them makes them wearisome. His success has been his undoing. Because he has mitigated past and future, he has failed to keep his moments "fresh," as the discipline of forgetting and remembering aims to do. Time, as a dimension of our very human nature, seems to have successfully resisted the aesthete's efforts to reduce the repetition that it records.

In a saying that seems contrary to the last quotation, yet whose gist is similar, he also says, "Time passes, life is a stream, etc., so people say. That is not what I find: time stands still, and so do I. All the plans I project fly straight back at me; when I want to spit, I spit in my own face" (EO 1:26). He has succeeded beyond his dreams in his project of confusing the temporal modes. Through "limitation" (EO 1:292) he has learned to mitigate his present experiences in such a way as to put himself on the infinitesimal edge that separates remembering from hoping. He is conscious only of an "eternal" present, one with neither past nor future. Yet that present weighs on him with a force that can only be due to the passage of time, as we see from the first passage just quoted. This "eternal" offers no comfort, no consolation, no fulfillment. The aesthete has devalued life for himself. In a way, he has accomplished exactly what he set out to accomplish with his existence-disciplines; but he thought they would improve his life and make it more enjoyable, and his success has proven a disastrous disappointment.

Poetization is a discipline that aims to de-realize the aesthete's existence in the world, that is, to reduce the subject's own sense of the reality of his self and world so as to get relief from and a buffer against painful emotions. The following diapsalma suggests that our aesthete has succeeded also in bringing about this change in his outlook.

> Ask me what you wish; just do not ask me for reasons. A young girl is excused for not being able to state reasons; she lives in her feelings, it is said. It is different with me. Ordinarily I have so many and most often mutually contradictory reasons that for this reason it is impossible for me to state reasons. It also seems to me that with cause and effect the relation does not hold together properly. Sometimes enormous and *gewaltige* [powerful] causes produce a very *klein* [small] and insignificant little effect, sometimes none at all; sometimes a nimble little cause produces a colossal effect. (EO 1:25)

The ability to discern and give correct reasons for one's actions and states of

mind is generally thought to be a feature of a mature human being. Compare a person who regularly rationalizes her motives, being genuinely ignorant of why she does what she does. Not only is she in the dark about her motives, and therefore also herself; but she undermines her own agency. Similarly, the ability to assess accurately the effects that events in the world, including one's own actions, are likely to have is an important ability for anyone living in the finite world. It is certainly basic for having properly synthesized the finite and the infinite of which one's existence is made up. Through concerted poetization of his self and world, the aesthete has disabled himself in these fundamental ways of human maturity.

We could devote an entire chapter of this book to explaining exegetically how the darker sayings of the Diapsalmata express the aesthete's successful assault on his human nature, thus undermining his happiness, well-being, and excellence as a person. But that would be tedious, and I will let these three notes suffice to indicate the deep failure of the aesthetic project as a sphere of human existence. To show its failure as a way of *existing* is not at all to indict beauty or fun, or aesthetics as a field of inquiry. In this broader sense of "aesthetic," Kierkegaard's writings, even the most religiously serious and character-oriented among them (*Works of Love*, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, *Christian Discourses*, *Practice in Christianity*), have an aesthetic character. They are beautifully written. Many passages in them are "poetic" in Kierkegaard's broad sense of the term. But in them he integrates the poetic with "the dialectical"—conceptual rigor of psychological and ethical-theological thought—for the effect that he calls "the upbuilding" or "the edifying." And what *this* species of the poetic aims to build up is *character*—exactly what the aesthetic as an existence sphere seeks to avoid.

In the next chapter we will return to the concept of character, with special attention to the traits of which character consists, the traits known traditionally as virtues.

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1. This is from Alastair Hannay's translation of Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 43.

2. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2007), 242.

3. C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 68.

4. These activities all tend to be associated with emotional pleasures when experienced by human beings. Indeed, one might go so far as to say that they are always mixed with emotions that either enhance (joy) or

detract from (guilt, anxiety) the pleasure. So to speak of the pleasures of touch is to abstract from actual experience. When the joys are good (say, the joys of marital love or friendship), they are expressions of the ethical life. But they can be evil, say, when the pleasure of sex is enhanced by the joy of domination.

5. To this extent, Don Giovanni's underlying concern is that of domination rather than lust.

6. See David Brooks, *The Road to Character* (New York: Random House, 2015).

7. See "The Immediate Erotic Stages, or The Musical Erotic" in EO 1:45–135.

8. "Amusement" can be taken as the emotion that is the characteristic response to what is funny or humorous. It may also suggest response to frivolous objects of interest. My present use of the word includes these kinds of cases but is much broader.

9. Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 41, italics original.

10. We may regret that the experience is past, wishing forlornly that it were present. This sense of privation (regret, disappointment, grief) is not the same dysphoria as boredom.

11. This is Hannay's translation of Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 234 (p. 293 in the Hong translation).

12. See my "Joys: A Brief Moral and Christian Geography," *Faith and Philosophy* 36 (2019): 195–222, doi: 10.5840/faithphil2019430120.

13. It seems to me that Hannay's translation of the title as "Shadowgraphs" is preferable to the Hongs', who translate it "Silhouettes."

14. Greek translation of the plural of the Hebrew *selah*, which is an instruction found in the psalms of David. Hannay (Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 610n4) says that it suggests refrain or repetition. *Psalma* means "a tune for a stringed instrument" (H. G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*, 7th ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1889]).

15. Hannay explains: "Phalaris, ruler of Agrigentum in Sicily from about 570 to 564 BC, is said to have kept a brazen bull in which he burnt his victims alive, the first being the bull's inventor. Reeds were placed in the nostrils of the bull to turn the cries into music" (Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 611n2).

16. See Judge William's letter to the aesthete in *Either/Or* 2 titled "The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage."

17. See, for example, CUP 1:249.

18. This is why "Shadowgraphs" is a better translation of the title than "Silhouettes."

4 VIRTUES

> *It is also wretched … to have an abundance of intentions and a poverty of action, to be rich in truths and poor in virtues.*
>
> *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, 349–50

VIRTUE, CHARACTER, AND THE SELF

In chapter 1, we saw that Kierkegaard thinks human nature to be marked by the polarities of the eternal and the temporal, the infinite and the finite, and freedom and "necessity." And we saw that this human nature, as merely "given" (a nature we're born with, so to speak), doesn't yet constitute a human self, but that each of us has to *achieve* our selfhood by actively synthesizing or integrating these elements of our nature. We need to make something of ourselves if we are to be fully formed human persons. In chapter 2, we saw that over the course of Kierkegaard's authorship, he thought of this active synthesis as a matter of acquiring moral and spiritual character. Character is achieved when a person infuses the finite, temporal, and nonnegotiable finite features of his own existence with an eternal and infinite purpose in obedience under God's governance, in a way that has reliable continuity over time. In chapter 3, we saw that a reflective aesthete has a very different and opposed notion of the good life. He wants to keep life entertaining, fun, and interesting. And so, in fear of boredom and dullness, the natural enemies of a fun, interesting, and entertaining life, the aesthete undertakes to confuse his sense of continuity and duration (his temporality) and to undermine his sense of his own concrete reality and the definite reality of his world (his finitude) by "poetizing" them, transfiguring them into beautiful fictions. And we saw that Kierkegaard suggests, in the aesthete's own words (for example in the Diapsalmata), that these efforts to escape from the real features of one's existence result in psychological disaster. A better way to achieve happiness, including an appropriately engaging and interesting life, is to become a person of character by integrating the eternal, the infinite, and freedom in one's nature with its temporal, finite, and inevitable aspects.

In the present chapter, I return to Kierkegaard's notion of character,

discussing it this time not in the global terms of chapter 3, but a bit more analytically in terms of the *parts* of character. Good character is unified, but not monolithic. Like a mosaic in which the differently colored and shaped tiles fit together to make a coherent and beautiful picture, good character is made up of a diversity of somewhat specialized traits or qualities that contribute in their diverse ways to the overall good functioning of creatures such as we are. Such parts of a good character or personality or self (these terms all have similar meanings in Kierkegaard's writings) have traditionally been called *virtues*.

The Greek word that we translate "virtue" is *aretē*, and it simply means "excellence." A human virtue is a personal excellence, an excellence in the realm of being a person. The Latin word from which our "virtue" comes goes back to *vir* for "man" and *virtus* for "manliness" (think "virile") and thus means "strength" or "excellence." We'll ignore the sexist pedigree and take a virtue to be simply an excellence in being a human person. (That is more or less the sense the word has in current "virtue ethics.") I say that this chapter will treat character "a bit more" analytically, because in part 2 of this book I will treat it even more analytically, devoting whole chapters to particular virtues or pairs of virtues, somewhat in the way Kierkegaard himself often does. For example, *Fear and Trembling* is about faith, *Works of Love* is all about Christian love, and the seventh discourse in part 3 of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* is about bold confidence, to give just three out of many examples.

Some Features of Virtues According to Judge William

Despite pervasive reference to traits of good character, Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms seldom use the word "virtue" (*Dyd*). But the passages in which the word does occur are interesting, and it will be useful to look at some of them. Two pertinent passages are found in the letters of Judge William, the pseudonymous author of the second volume of *Either/Or*, who discusses virtues a couple of times in the course of advocating an ethical life-view in his criticism of the views of the reflective aesthete in volume 1.

Temporality and the Virtues

The first of these passages occurs toward the end of the judge's first letter, titled "The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage." He stresses the temporal character of marriage: "Married love, then, has its enemy in time, its victory in time, its

eternity in time—therefore, even if I were to imagine away all its so-called outer and inner trials, it would always have its task" (EO 2:139). That task would be *to persevere in love*. He notes that marriage does face external challenges—finances, in-laws, obstreperous children, erotic temptations, poor health, and so forth,[1]—but to understand them *as challenges to marriage* requires noting that they are always mediated by "inward factors," namely, the emotional effects they have on the married person's relationship with the spouse. Furthermore, these factors, mediated by emotions, always contain a temporal aspect. No matter what the external trial to marriage may be, the emotion that mediates it tends to threaten the continuity of marital love, and so all the externally triggered emotional obstacles must be seen as obstacles to perseverance. Judge William invites his reader to

> consider the predicates applicable to married love. It is faithful, constant, humble, patient, forbearing, indulgent, sincere, contented, observant, persistent, willing, joyful. All these virtues have the property of being inward specifications of the individual. The individual does not fight external enemies; it is with itself and its love that it fights it out, of its own accord. And they have a temporal qualification, for their truth consists not in applying once and for all, but all the time. And nothing else is acquired by means of these virtues, just the self.[2]

Note the similarity between the judge's "inward specification" and "temporal qualification" and what Kierkegaard says in *Works of Love*: "The requirement of the Law must be twofold—namely, partly a requirement of inwardness and partly a requirement of continuance" (WL, 130). He also strikes the continuance theme when he says that "perseverance (in contrast to the flaring illusion of the moment) is the true virtue" (BA, 164).

Several of the virtues in the judge's list are defined by *extended temporality*: faithful, constant, patient, forbearing, persistent. But these virtues of temporal extension, as we might call them, are all adverbial qualifiers of the other virtues. Thus the moral person is steadfastly, patiently, and faithfully loving, generous, dutiful, humble, and so forth. Mere temporal protraction is not virtuous; it is morally important *what* is protracted. A person who can be relied on to lie when the truth is inconvenient may be constant in some sense, but he isn't a person of character. His "constancy" is not a virtue. And virtues of moral substance, as we might call them—compassion, truthfulness, justice, respect—supply the *what* in which the virtuous person reliably persists. On the other hand, none of these substantive virtues will be "true" unless it reliably extends across the appropriate stretch of time—in the case of marriage, until the death of one of the partners. Impulsive, flaring "generosity," for example, wouldn't have the "truth" of virtue.

So the virtues seem to be divisible into two broad groups: the ones that explicitly supply extended temporality and those that specify what needs to be temporally extended. But sometimes the concept of the virtue gestures toward substance by indicating a particular kind of obstacle to continuity. For example, forbearance addresses the obstacle of irritating qualities in the partner; patience manages the burden of waiting; persistence or perseverance resists the arduousness of a task; faithfulness applies where loyalty is tested.

To be a person of good character—of overall virtue—requires both kinds of virtues. The constancy of a person of character has to be a constancy *of something*; if his character is to be good character, what he is constant *in* needs to be good. And the converse is also true. As Judge William says, the "truth" of marital virtues like humility, indulgence, and sincerity "consists not in applying once and for all, but all the time." Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms often speak of "truth" and "true" not as a property of sentences, but as a property of a person's life or existence, and it consists in correspondence not to a state of affairs but to an ideal of genuine humanity. The virtues make a *person* true in this sense (truly a person), and one of the criteria of their truth is duration through time. So the virtues of temporal continuity become *virtues* only when qualified by moral substance; and the virtues of moral substance are truly *virtues* only when qualified by temporal continuity. You can see how the tiles of the mosaic of character are made to fit into one another.

Speaking of all the virtues in his list together, Judge William notes that "nothing else is acquired by means of these virtues, just the self." Of course, it wouldn't be surprising if your possession of all these virtues resulted in your having a happy husband or wife and a good marriage! But I think Judge William is talking about how a person should think of the virtues, and his or her motivation in acting virtuously. The virtuous person will not think of his virtues as means for acquiring goods external to the virtues. Imagine a husband who, by his faithfulness and humility, sought to change his wife's bad habits. If something like that is his purpose, then the "inner" quality that he is practicing is not quite a virtue,[3] and it's not in the loving spirit of marriage. If, in being truthful with my wife, I have the thought, "This will come in handy in case she hears the same thing from another source," then I haven't told the truth in the spirit of truthfulness. To tell it in the spirit of truthfulness it to tell it out of love and respect for her and because it is true. These considerations belong to what Kierkegaard calls "the eternal" and "the infinite." Judge William chides his aesthete friend, "Therefore, marital love is simultaneously commonplace—as you

have often mockingly called it—and also divine (in the Greek sense), and it is divine by virtue of being commonplace" (EO 2:140).[4] And in combining the everyday and the divine, or honoring the divine in the everyday, I am being a person of character; I am being, normatively, a human self.

What is the relation between the countless daily *exemplifications* of the marital virtues, and the virtues as *features* of ethical personality or character? One writer on Kierkegaard as a character ethicist writes of the virtues in Judge William's list as "acquired through the constant, daily acquisition of those qualities that characterize the true ideality of marital love" and as "continuous in coming into existence."[5] When we exemplify our virtues in the episodes of action, emotion, and thought that are marks of those virtues, the episodes contribute something in the way of forming the virtues. Other things being equal, the episodes increase, to some extent, the depth of the trait. Living in time, we are constantly evolving, for better or worse. When our episodes of action, emotion, and thought are virtuous, we tend to evolve in the direction of greater virtue; just as, when those episodes are vicious, we tend to confirm the vices in ourselves. Our moral episodes have accretions, and these are our virtues and vices. This is the modest sense in which we are creating ourselves as we go along the road of life.

In chapter 2, however, we saw that according to the mainline existentialist interpretation represented by Sartre and Camus, authentically we are *nothing but* the episodes of our lives. When we start living by "habit" or thinking of ourselves in terms of our traits, we have lost our humanity. We have descended from human authenticity into a personally inauthentic kind of thinghood. We who are rightly radical *subjects* of actions, emotions, and thoughts have betrayed our nature by becoming pseudo-*objects* there in the world. To be authentic, those actions, emotions, and thoughts must arise out of pure spontaneity. Thus the existentialist, a bit like the reflective aesthete of *Either/Or*, sees character and virtues as a threat to personhood, a disease of the human spirit, a lapse into subhumanity. This is not Kierkegaard. We saw in chapter 2 that he thinks of character as something etched, as if in a hard substance that resists both eroding erasure and deepened etching. Thus the deepened etching of which we, in our freedom, are capable, is arduous and slow. And character is not an enemy of human authenticity and fulfillment, but a necessary condition of it.

So what is the relation between virtuous episodes (actions, emotions, thoughts) and virtues as character traits? I have acknowledged the phenomenon of daily acquisition and continuous coming into existence, but it seems to me

that an equally primary relation is that of *expression*. Mature character is stable, as long as the environment doesn't put dramatic erosive pressure on it (even the most virtuous human beings are not moral superpersons). The actions, emotions, and thoughts of the virtuous person are expressions of her virtues. That is, the virtues are there in the being of the agent, and when she acts, her virtuous deed can be explained, in part, as emerging *from* her virtue. But supposing a virtuous act or emotion expresses a disposition in the bosom of the agent, the next question is: What *kind* of expression is it?

One answer that may come to mind (and this answer lends some plausibility to the existentialist picture of inauthenticity) is that virtues are *habits*, and that virtuous actions, emotions, and judgments are expressions of those habits. This answer may come to mind because of the extensive and influential writings of Thomas Aquinas on the virtues (for example, in his *Summa theologiae*). English translators have translated Aquinas's word *habitus* with the English word "habit." But a *habitus* is not what we call a habit, and if you're reading a translation of Aquinas that translates this way, you'll need to do some intellectual gymnastics to track his thought.

When an architect carefully lays out the rooms in a building she is designing, she is expressing her architectural *habitus*—her trained skill and taste in architectural design. Her mind and heart have been cultivated in ways that result in an *understanding*, and a *sense* of proportion, a *feeling for* architectural beauty and functionality. Through the training of her natural gifts, this architectural *habitus* has become a facet of her mind; it is characteristic of *her*, a dimension of her soul. Each building she designs is an expression of this *habitus*, yet the buildings may differ greatly from one another, each carefully and intelligently adapted to the diverse and particular needs that buildings serve and the settings they occupy. If someone exclaims, in admiration of one of her designs, "How does she do it?," it will not do to say, "She does it by habit." In English, "habit" suggests a disposition that is rather mindless, doesn't require a lot of attention, is routinized and produces look-alike, undistinctive outcomes and products. But if you were speaking Latin, it would make perfectly good sense to answer the admiring exclamation, "How does she do it?" by saying, "She does it by her architectural *habitus*," that is, by her architectural skill and refinement, her architectural heart.

So when Judge William says, "All these virtues have the property of being inward specifications of the individual," he is speaking the language of *habitus*, but not of habit. The virtues of the husband finely tune his emotions and

thoughts in relation to his wife's changing moods and needs, and they make his actions creatively resourceful and sensitively adaptive. In a word, the virtues of a husband are forms of social intelligence—a long distance from mere habits. Depending on which kind of virtue is in view, they are either aspects of, or in support of, wise marital love. Judge William's view seems to be that the actions, emotions, and thoughts of the virtuous husband regarding his wife are *expressions* of the various complementary dimensions of his intelligent mature human agency.

Earnestness

But Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms, with their notion of earnestness, add something perhaps new to Aristotle and Aquinas. At least it is a new emphasis and insistence. Kierkegaard is especially alert to the danger of spiritual dullness that can set in to a virtuous person with repetition over the course of time. To use the classical language, we might say that, with repetition, *habitus* is liable to degenerate into habit. For example, the words of the liturgy may be said with deep emotional engagement, yet over time a person may come to "repeat" them without that serious engagement of mind and heart. The expression of genuine religious worship has degenerated into mere habit. (Notice the similarity of this concern to that of the aesthete about keeping his experiences fresh.) Earnestness is an alertness to this danger and a serious readiness to combat it with renewed efforts of will.

An English word that covers both *habitus* and habit is "disposition." Both the architect's excellence at designing buildings and my habit of tying my right shoe first are dispositions, as are inborn personality traits like extraversion and introversion. All of these are kinds of ingrained readiness to perform or operate in a specific way in specific circumstances. They may be learned or innate. Indeed, "disposition" is so general a term that we can even apply it to inanimate things: the glass has a disposition to shatter when dropped from a certain height onto concrete. In discussions, we frequently refer to virtues as dispositions, to make the point that virtues are not events or episodes, like emotions, actions, and thoughts, that occur at certain moments and then cease. The virtue of justice is not an action that one performs on an occasion, but it is the disposition to perform such actions when appropriate and to be upset at seeing injustice done. It's an ongoing quality of the person, just as brittleness is an ongoing quality of the glass, a quality that the person has even when he is asleep or otherwise not

exemplifying the virtue.

Vigilius Haufniensis, the pseudonymous author of *The Concept of Anxiety*, seems to be making the point that earnestness is a very special kind of disposition when he says,

> Earnestness (*Alvor*) and disposition (*Gemyt*) correspond to each other in such a way that earnestness is a higher as well as the deepest expression for what [fully human?] disposition (*Gemyt*) is. Disposition is a determinant of immediacy, while earnestness, on the other hand, is the acquired originality (*Oprindelighed*) of disposition, its originality preserved in the responsibility of freedom and its originality affirmed in the enjoyment of blessedness. In its historical development, the originality of disposition marks precisely the eternal in earnestness, for which reason earnestness can never become habit (*Vane*)…. Habit arises as soon as the eternal disappears from repetition (*Gjentagelse*). (CA, 148–49)

I think we need a paraphrase. The following paraphrase of this difficult paragraph is extreme, but it seems to me to be the gist of what Vigilius is saying:

> Earnestness is a kind of disposition and is a higher and the deepest of human dispositions. Disposition as such is not mediated by choice, while earnestness is a kind of disposition that is accumulated through free responsible actions and continues as a dispositional base from which one performs free responsible actions and enjoys the glory of being a fully human agent. If, in the repeated performance of actions, a person ceases to be engaged as a responsible agent, earnestness degenerates into habit, and one loses touch with the eternal in oneself.

The paraphrase refers to choice, and the quotation from *The Concept of Anxiety* doesn't. But the repeated use of "originality" (*Oprindelighed*) is reminiscent of Aristotle's comments about choice: "The origin (*archē*) of action—its efficient, not its final cause—is choice (*proairesis*), and that of choice is desire and reasoning with a view to an end…. Choice is desiderative reason or ratiocinative desire, and *such an origin (archē) is a human being*" (NE 6.2, translation slightly modified, italics added). Aristotle is saying that a human is a being in whom desire is full of thought and reasoning is full of desire (these two integrations being equivalent), and who therefore can *originate* actions. That is, actions are events for which human beings are responsible. Because of the way our souls combine desire and rational thought, *we* cause such events, and so we can be *held accountable* for them. It is part of ethical instruction and wisdom to notice this amazing fact about ourselves and take it to heart. Choosing, according to Aristotle and Kierkegaard, is a creative (originative) power peculiar to human beings. Kierkegaard sees it as an aspect of the eternal in a human being. The virtue of earnestness is the disposition to keep this human "originality" engaged in such a way that your repetition of actions of a certain kind (say, acts of kindness, or intercessory prayers) doesn't fall into being merely habitual but

retains the freshness of thoughtful desire/passionate thinking. Failing that, not only have you ceased to act earnestly, but you have ceased to perform acts *of kindness*, really to intercede on others' behalf, and so forth. The spirit has gone out of your actions. They have lost their humanity. Vigilius continues a little farther down the page,

> Every Sunday, a clergyman must recite the prescribed common prayer, and every Sunday he baptizes several children. Now let him be enthusiastic etc. The fire burns out, he will stir and move people etc., but at one time more and at another time less. Earnestness alone is capable of returning regularly every Sunday with the same originality to the same thing. (CA, 149)

Kierkegaard saw himself as called to renew the vitality of a Christian community that had become demoralized, secularized, and complacent, largely without realizing it. So he was especially interested in the processes by which the individual loses touch with the eternal in himself and outside himself—the developmental processes of God-forsakenness. A difference between Aristotle on ethics and Kierkegaard on ethics is Kierkegaard's keen worry about the possibility of losing our humanity. We human beings are prone to a moral laziness in which we rest on our dispositional laurels, skating on the smooth surface of our "character" already hardened, but in doing so we degenerate imperceptibly in our being as originators. Unlike Paul, who forgot what lay behind and strained forward to what lay ahead, pressing on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call (Phil. 3:13–14), we may ride comfortably in grooves cut by past actions, only to find that they grow ever shallower with repetition. As Davenport notes, "Only through earnest willing in the face of alternative possibilities, which involves cultivating our own entrenched dispositions of freedom, can we become thoroughly devoted to the goods we are meant and required by moral ideals to pursue."[6] Aristotle doesn't identify and expound a virtue of earnestness because, apparently, he doesn't have this worry. In our next passage from Judge William's ethical letters we will see another way that Kierkegaard differs from Aristotle.

Virtues and World-Outlooks

In a fairly long passage (twelve or so pages) in Judge William's second massive letter on the ethical life, the judge compares his ethical outlook with three other outlooks that posit human virtues. I will call these Stoicism, classical paganism, and mysticism. The first William calls simply "a Greek view," but his

descriptions seem to me to fit Stoicism better than any other view, even if they don't quite fit all historical Stoics. (For example, some Stoics were more involved in politics than the people William describes.) What he calls "paganism" is, I take it, mainline classical Greek ethics—that of Plato and Aristotle—in which the virtues are primarily "civic," governing human relationships within the community (city-state). The civic virtues contrast with the virtues in "Stoicism," which William calls "personal." These virtues are personal in the sense that they are cultivated solely for the sake of the individual who is seeking to acquire them. What he calls "mysticism" again doesn't quite fit some Christian mystics. (He hints that he may have "Indian" mysticism in mind.) For our purposes, the importance of these twelve pages is not their historical prototypes, but what they reveal about Judge William's understanding of virtues.

The comparison of William's own ethical outlook with these three other outlooks is instructive in a way that supplements our insights from the passage in the first letter. It highlights the outlook-bound character of virtues and lists of virtues. By "outlook-bound" I mean that the particular traits that an outlook regards as virtues and the more particular profiles of the individual virtues in the list are implied in the character of the broader outlook, whether that outlook be the Christian, the ethical, the Stoic, classical Greek ethics, or what William here calls "the mystical."

He notes that the Stoic views personal being "within the categories of necessity" (EO 2:239), downplaying the importance of freedom and individual choice. Historically, Stoics tended to be determinists, people who thought that for everything that happens there is a set of antecedent conditions such that, under those conditions, whatever happens, including human actions, could not have been otherwise than it is. Thus the Stoic disagrees with Judge William, for whom the inevitable ("necessary") parts of a person's life must be put in real, interactive dialogue with the individual's freedom. A person performs free actions within the limits of what he can do nothing about. The Stoic allows for just enough freedom to undertake the Stoic discipline of conforming his mind to nature, but the discipline itself consists in seeing what happens in nature—including the events of the Stoic's own life and the actions of other people—as inevitable, as a deterministic system of causes and effects. In thus choosing necessity, so to speak, the Stoic isolates himself spiritually. In a certain sense, he doesn't interact with other people because they are for him just part of the deterministic furniture of his world. He may be surrounded by other people, and he may belong to a political order, but he sees them and that order only as an

arena of necessity to which he must conform his own will. To his inwardness, that is their meaning. His goal is to stand invulnerably and self-sufficiently, as one who sees all that happens around him as alien to the true life of his mind, just because his mind mirrors perfectly the order that, as he sees it, cannot be otherwise than it is.

This view has implications for the nature of the virtues. "So the virtues the individual developed were not civic virtues (as the virtues in paganism really were, corresponding to the religious virtues in Christianity), they were the personal virtues: courage, perseverance, temperance, moderation, etc."[7] The virtues in the "Stoic" list are all virtues of self-mastery, thus virtues that are about the "Stoic's" own self. The ordinary, non-Stoic person wants many things about his own life to be different from what they are. For example, he might wish that his family didn't have a genetic predisposition to early fatal heart attacks, or he might wish that his country was not ruled by a cruel dictator. But such contrary-to-reality desires are sources of emotional disturbance (frustration, anger, sadness, regret), and the Stoic aims to be tranquil and imperturbable. So his virtues are all about himself in that they are all ways in which the Stoic, by contemplating the fixed order of the universe, prevents himself from desiring that it be different, in some detail, from what it is. The effect of this prevention, which each of his virtues achieves in its own way, is to "detach" the Stoic emotionally, to prevent his personally caring about what he cannot control (namely, pretty much everything). And this, in turn, has implications for the Stoic's relationships with other people, which would be largely made up of caring about how things go for himself and others. To the extent that the Stoic *succeeds* in the use of his virtues, he will not care, as of first importance,[8] about what happens to others or their projects, and to the extent that he actively *practices* these virtues as matters of self-control, he will need the others to present him temptations (say, to care about what happens to his child) for his virtues to overcome. An example from Epictetus: "If you kiss your child, or your wife, say that you only kiss things which are human, and thus you will not be disturbed if either of them dies."[9] In his mental isolation, he reduces other people, as well as the rest of "nature," to disciplinary foils, sources of challenge or temptation in relation to which he exercises his self-mastery.

By contrast, mainline Greek paganism, as represented by Plato and Aristotle, made civic virtues—virtues that governed personal interactions and relationships—central to their lists. They included temperance and courage, to be sure, but

justice, liberality (generosity), and friendship were the central virtues. The virtues of self-mastery were in the service of a good civic life. Plato's *Republic*, a three-hundred-page dialogue, centers on the topic of justice in both the city-state and the soul, and in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* justice gets an entire book (book 5), second in length of treatment only to friendship (which, Aristotle points out, makes justice superfluous to relations between friends). Judge William notes that these civic virtues "correspond to the religious virtues in Christianity." The apostle Paul's list in Colossians 3 bears out the Judge's observation:

> As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forbearance, forgivingness, peace, gratitude, love, and the wisdom in which these virtues are understood and passed on from Christian to Christian in the church all bear directly on interpersonal relationships. These are not the same virtues as we find in classical paganism: humility, forgiveness, and love (*agapē*), to mention three, are absent from the pagan lists. But for classical paganism, as for Christianity and Judge William's ethical outlook, relations between the virtuous individual and other people are far more than occasions for self-mastery: they are the central substance of the ethical life.

William appears to regard his ethical view as a kind of Christianity, but Johannes Climacus will dispute whether it really is that, and he will distinguish Christianity from Judge William's outlook. The central virtues in Christianity—the "theological" virtues of faith, hope, and love (love of God and neighbor-love)—are also social, inasmuch as they constitute a personal relationship between the believer and God. None of them appear in the lists of Plato and Aristotle. Neither are they, in their most distinctively Christian form, present in Judge William's outlook. While God and "the Savior" are certainly in the picture of Judge William's ethics, he seems to have little appreciation of the astounding "paradoxical" idea that God became incarnate in a single individual and that each person's eternal happiness depends on his or her relationship with the incarnate God. And so, though Judge William's ethical thought includes an important notion of repentance, he does not have a concept of sin as such (see

chapter 5).

William says that repentance serves both to bring out the crucial importance of freedom (it would make no sense to repent of an evil for which you didn't take responsibility) and to secure your moral solidarity with your ancestors and the whole human race. William's practice of repentance is parallel, in a way, to the Stoic's practice of detachment. An especially apt occasion for Stoic detachment—especially in the earlier stages of moral growth—is some kind of misery. Even the neophyte can see the point of learning not to care, in a very personal way, about whatever she is miserable about, because that very personal caring about it is what makes it hurt so much. So the discipline is to depersonalize it, to tell yourself that misfortunes like the one you're undergoing at the moment are just the ordinary stuff of the universe, part of what makes the world go 'round. In depersonalizing the misfortune, you take the teeth out of the suffering and achieve an equanimity about it. Later on, perhaps the Stoic can detach herself from pleasant experiences in the same way, but that's more challenging, because she has no natural aversion to pleasant experiences; they invite attachment rather than detachment. Similarly (up to a point), William recommends the use of distressing experiences as a point of departure for repentance (which he identifies with choosing yourself, another parallel with Stoic detachment). The distressing experience doesn't have to be something for which you are obviously responsible, but it's helpful if it lends itself naturally to interpretation as something for which *somebody* is responsible. Repentance then involves seeing yourself as in personal solidarity with whoever may have been involved and thus identifying, responsibility-wise, with the others who are responsible. It is plausible that whatever I happen to be suffering from at the moment is a result of actions of people very much like me, and that were I in the circumstances in which they bequeathed me this suffering, I would do something like what they did. Besides this kind of connection, I am often connected to other people in a family sort of way. Maybe my father did something of which I am ashamed, and I am rightly ashamed of his action because he is my father and his action is therefore *our* action. To be ashamed of something your father did, but without that sense of your own moral continuity with your father, is a bad kind of alienation and should be resisted. Repentance is the mode of resistance.

This repentance has two notable consequences: it puts me into intimate personal connection with fellow human beings, and it makes direct appeal to my (our) freedom of agency. So repentance is a practice of selfhood in synthesizing the "necessary" (the nonnegotiable fact that I am one human being *among and*

linked with others) with my freedom (that I can repent and thus freely *own* my link with others). But Judge William doesn't have a concept of sin as such, because he doesn't appreciate the paradox of the God-man. Because Christianity includes sin and repentance in its categories and practices, the Christian view enlivens the natural concern for freedom and provides a framework for its exercise. It also encourages the virtue of ethical courage to "posit" the needed freedom. That courage is relevant suggests that the freedom of the self is not obvious or philosophically inevitable; being essentially contestable, it needs to be "posited" in an act of moral courage.

But human nature, if understood existentially, *motivates* such an act. In the *Sickness unto Death* (39–40), Anti-Climacus likens the self's being without possibility to the experience of being unable to breathe. He connects this to believing that with God all things are possible. "To pray is also to breathe, and possibility is for the self what oxygen is for breathing" (40). Philosophers who treat freedom as little more than an interesting puzzle or hypothesis don't notice that, as persons, they are suffocating, because they are so passionless, so little in touch with their humanity, their "existence." Determinists, the judge seems to be saying, are persons of insufficient ethical resolve, people out of touch with their own humanity. A person who understands himself sees that it takes ethical resolve to reject the plausibility of determinism and assert his own freedom. Compatibilism (the view that free will and determinism don't exclude one another) is the existential coward's way out, and is really just a dishonest capitulation to determinism. The person with ethical courage sees that he cannot live without existential freedom—and chooses life.

If the happiness of the Stoic is a "lonely self-contentment, … the life of a mystic," says Judge William, "is far deeper."[10] This greater depth is due to the mystic's social self-constitution. She is in love with God. But the mystic falls short of complete selfhood because her relationship with God abstracts from human relationships and from the created world in which God has placed her—thus abstracting from the temporal and the finite. She repents all right, but her remorse is simply that she has waited so long to relate herself to God; it doesn't express her solidarity with fellow human beings, and so is different from an ethical life.

> [Her] inner action consists not, then, in the acquisition of the personal virtues but in the development of the religious or contemplative virtues. Yet even this is too ethical an expression for [her] life, and [her] real life is therefore prayer. That prayer is also part of an ethical life I will not deny, but the more ethically a [person] lives, the more the prayer has the character of an intention,

> so that there is an element of intention even in the prayer of thanksgiving. With the mystic's prayer it is otherwise. For [her] prayer means all the more the more erotic it is, the more it is inflamed by a burning love. The prayer is the expression of [her] love, the only language in which [she] can address the Deity with whom [she] has fallen in love. As in earthly life the lovers long for the moment when they can breathe their love to one another, let their souls fuse in a soft whisper, so the mystic longs for the moment when in [her] prayer [she] can, as it were, steal into the presence of God. As the lovers experience in that whisper their greatest bliss when really they have nothing at all to talk about, so the mystic in [her] prayer is all the more blessed, [her] love all the more happy, the less content there is in it, the more nearly in [her] sigh [she] vanishes from before [her] own very eyes.[11]

Though Judge William refers, almost in passing, to "the contemplative virtues," he doesn't name any of them, and he immediately weakens the assertion by saying that this is "too ethical an expression," suggesting a contrast between virtue and prayer. Prayer is an important part of an ethical life, but in this case is a personal relating that undermines itself by getting lost in the identity of the beloved. This would explain why William says that the mystic's life lacks development and continuity (EO 2:242). In a sense, it lacks the self. The mystic, like the reflective aesthete but with a rather different strategy, escapes from her concrete finite and temporal self. Virtues are traits of a concrete, and therefore finite and temporal, person who develops over time and acquires a stability of character. But the mystic's intense identification with God in prayer verges on being a loss of self-identity. Ethical prayer has "content"—that is, it is about something, and this aboutness connects the praying individual with the world by way of intentions. If you seriously pray for someone, you imply a readiness to help the person in a way related to the content of your prayer. If you pray for God's aid in some endeavor, you imply a readiness to contribute effort in that endeavor. And if you thank God for some blessing in your life, even then your prayer will have implications for how you use and enhance that blessing. The mystic's prayer, by contrast, is not *about* anything.

The main lesson I want us to take from these passages from Judge William is how lists of virtues, and the natures of the particular virtues within a list, are affected by the existential outlooks to which the virtues belong. The deterministic and individually self-focused character of the Stoic outlook, for example, makes its virtues individualistic in a way that neither the Christian outlook nor mainline Greek paganism is. In later chapters we will explore how Christian virtues differ from other virtues even in outlooks that are heavily civic or social. Let us turn now to a passage that indicates what Kierkegaard takes virtues to be made of, so to speak.

An Incisive Comment by Johannes Climacus

In his usual ironic tone Johannes Climacus remarks that, unlike the people who are free to devote themselves to "the future of world history" because they have already achieved personal moral excellence, he has "to sit at home and mourn over [him]self." Like Socrates, he finds that in matters of moral character he still has a long way to go, "though I would undeniably prefer to go to Frederiksberg and deal with world history." Socratically, he assumes that the obviously proper order of priorities would be, first achieve moral perfection, then figure out the future of world history. Speaking for himself Climacus says that "in strong passions and the like, I have material enough, and therefore pain enough in forming something good out of it with the aid of reason." Then in a footnote attached to this last sentence, he comments, "With these words I wish to call to mind Plutarch's splendid definition of virtue: 'Ethical virtue has the passions for its material, reason for its form.' See his little book on the virtues" (CUP 1:161–62).[12] Plutarch's splendid definition is a nice summary of the classic tradition, especially in its mainline, Greek variant. It fits both Plato and Aristotle. The ordinary unformed human being is a bundle of concerns—acquisitive, sensual, narcissistic, vengeful, self-defensive, and so forth, and the emotions that arise from such concerns. The task of becoming mature is to transform these passions into something orderly and good: love of the good and hatred of evil, joy in what is good and distress at what is evil, and unconcern about reputation, wealth, vengeance, and winning petty quarrels. I commend to you the series of seven discourses in Kierkegaard's *Christian Discourses* called "The Anxieties of the Heathen" as an example of reflections about such a formation of the passions. The standards of "orderly and good" can be summarized as "reason"—to rejoice in the good and grieve at the evil is *reasonable* (isn't that obvious?). The bundle of unruly concerns needs to be corralled and trained to the standards of wisdom, justice, truth, compassion, obedience to God, and the love of neighbor. These are the standards of reason in its practical dimension. This project of transformation, says Climacus, is personally all he can manage, leaving him no time to pursue world history.

A contrasting case is the Kantian and Stoic branch of the classical ethics tradition, which tends to be suspicious of passions, not just particular ones like anger and envy, but passions as such. Rather than undertake to shape the passions in accordance with moral standards, this branch wants to root out the passions, and in *that* way make the moral personality more purely "rational."

Kierkegaard's concept of character in *Two Ages*, to which passion is central, belongs in the mainline classic tradition of Plato and Aristotle. We will look at that discussion in chapter 6.

Plutarch's saying is square in the mainline classical virtue tradition. But note that the formula is formal and doesn't rule between pagan and Christian virtues. Virtues can have the passion-shaped-by-reason form, and yet they can be very different from and even incompatible with one another because they admit of different understandings of what "reason" prescribes. Reason, or the reasonable, is to some extent a contested concept.[13] As the apostle Paul points out, the world, in its wisdom, regards the gospel of Jesus Christ as foolishness, and God, in his wisdom, has made foolish the wisdom of the world (see 1 Cor. 1:18–30). Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms use "reason" in diverse ways that would be mutually incompatible if taken always to mean the same thing. Climacus's endorsement of Plutarch's definition lines up nicely with Kierkegaard's self-description as a "poet-dialectician" and Climacus's description of the task of becoming a Christian as pathetic-dialectic, that is, as the task of shaping a person's passions in accordance with the "dialectic" (the logic or wisdom) embodied in Christian tradition.

Wisdom[14]

Mental concepts such as "thought," "reflection," "understanding," "subjectivity," "inwardness," "imagination," "reason," "recollection," "conscience," and "sagacity" or "shrewdness" are pervasive in Kierkegaard's writings. These all have a broadly moral or spiritual application, and all of them can serve both virtuous and vicious functions, some more the one and others more the other. Later chapters will focus intensely on some of these ambiguous concepts. But here, while thinking about Kierkegaard and the virtues, I want to say a few words about sagacity or shrewdness in its connection with wisdom, which is traditionally one of the virtues, but one with a unique role to play in the mosaic of character. In the majority of Kierkegaard's usage, *Klogskab* has the sense of "self-serving shrewdness," "devious cunning," or "worldly wisdom." It is not ethical or spiritual wisdom; it is the kind of advantage-calculating rationality associated with "rational choice" theory (seeking maximal profit for yourself at minimal costs to yourself). It is investor wisdom. It is skill at estimating probabilities in the context of self-promotion, self-protection, and material profit. Here are a few examples.

At the end of *The Concept of Anxiety*, Vigilius Haufniensis speaks about how anxiety, an emotion that the human imagination generates by thinking about "infinite" possibilities, can function as a part of a cure for shrewdness:

> When shrewdness has completed its innumerable calculations, when the game is won—then anxiety comes, even before the game in actuality has been lost or won, and anxiety makes the sign of the cross against the devil, and shrewdness becomes helpless and its most clever combinations vanish like a witticism compared with the case that anxiety forms with the omnipotence of possibility. (CA, 160–61)

One thinks, for example, of Jesus's parable of the farmer who builds extra barns to fill with the fruit of his labors in anticipation of a long, pleasant, and easy retirement (Luke 12:23–31), or a modern analogue of this, perhaps a person who through careful investing has accumulated a nice fat stock portfolio that will allow an early, *very* comfortable retirement. Jesus's parable invites our imagination to make it plain to ourselves that despite the shrewdest, most ingenious possible planning, *we can't be sure* of our future. If we really confront this uncertainty—in the first person singular, so to speak—we will *feel* it in the form of anxiety. This anxiety is a kind of "existential" understanding that dissolves our shrewdness in a *perspective* on it. In this anxiety we "see" our shrewdness and its field of operation for the vanity it is, and we achieve a sort of detachment from it. This understanding prepares us to entrust ourselves to God, thus resolving our anxiety in the embrace of Someone who is a match for "the omnipotence of possibility."

In *The Sickness unto Death* Anti-Climacus notes that "practically all the proverbs … are nothing more than rules of prudence (*Klogskabsregler*)" (SUD, 34), and his example is the saying that you regret ten times having spoken for every one time you regret having kept silent. The thought is that more inconvenience and annoyance is brought on by speaking than by holding your "peace" (as the spirit of self-protection also puts it): speaking makes you vulnerable to criticism and other backlash. All this is worldliness, but spiritually, keeping silent "is the most dangerous of all," because in not letting yourself be vulnerable on account of your ethical and spiritual commitments, you fail to act "in character"—that is, as a person of character—with the result that you actually weaken your character or confirm yourself in weakness of character. Courage of self-expression is a virtue that protects other parts of your character against degeneration.

These two examples are typical of Kierkegaard's use of "shrewd" or "sagacious" (*klog*). But he sometimes uses it in a more standard way (my little

Danish-English dictionary says that *klog* means "wise, prudent, clever, intelligent"). In the following passage, sagacity is a kind of practical wisdom directed at becoming or maintaining oneself as a person of character.

> It is true and always will be true that virtue is the highest sagacity (*Klogskab*). It is also certain that the sensate person is eager to be sagacious (*klog*) and aspires to sagacity, but even if someone, in order to win him, were to expound this, he still would never win him to virtue; if that is to happen, the sensate person's conception of sagacity would first have to be completely altered. (EUD, 380)

Let's say that to be sagacious is to understand how best to achieve what is good for yourself. This formula is neutral between ethical outlooks (see the earlier discussion of Judge William on Stoicism, classical paganism, Christianity, and so forth), which can differ pretty widely about what is good for oneself. It seems that every human being has some such understanding, even if we think that many people have a poor understanding of it or that their understanding is really a misunderstanding. To have some sagacity or other, then, is to have some notion of what's good for yourself *and* some idea of how to come by that good. And not only do we have some such understanding, but we all think it's a good thing to have it: everybody is "eager to be sagacious." Most of us, anyway, would jump at the opportunity to improve our sagacity—thus to be better than we are at getting what is good for us.

In the passage I quoted, Kierkegaard distinguishes two kinds of sagacity: the highest sagacity and sagacity according to the sensate person. The highest sagacity—this will be a *true* understanding of what is good for yourself—is the understanding that virtue is the best way to live and that living virtuously is the way to do it. As a Christian, Kierkegaard thinks that the virtue in question is faith, hope, and love, and all the other virtues of the Christian life. Now imagine that a person with *this* sagacity tries to explain it to a person with a sensate conception of sagacity to "win him to virtue." He wants to help the sensate person to have a better life, to live a life that is truly good for him. But the sensate person thinks that what is good for him is to have lots of money, to live in the lap of luxury, to eat in the best restaurants, to be famous and popular, to have power over others and always win in contests with others, to have maximal sexual experiences with the most attractive possible partners, to be able to get sweet revenge on his enemies, and so forth. And Kierkegaard points out that no explanation, no argument the Christian can give the person with the sensate conception of sagacity, will communicate to him the true conception of sagacity unless the sensate person's conception of what is good for him is "completely

altered."

A theme that is basic to Kierkegaard's psychology of character is that ethical/spiritual understanding cannot be detached from a person's passions—what the person cares about. Caring *is* a kind of understanding—for better or worse. If the pattern of your cares reflects a sensate formation of mind and character, you will be unable to understand the Christian or the ethical person when she expounds her conception of sagacity to you. Oh yes, you could perhaps pass a true-false test on it, or even write an essay in which you describe it accurately; but a sense will remain in which you really don't "get" it—you won't appreciate with your heart the goodness of the Christian's good. And appreciation with your heart is what you need if you are to come into possession of Christian sagacity. If Christianity is true, the sensate person is more or less locked into a misconception of what is in his own best interest. This is why Kierkegaard's writings are not standard Christian apologetics, but seek by many rhetorical devices to get inside the hearts of his sensate and quasi-sensate readers to find points of leverage by which to shift the weights of passion within their character.

One of those points of leverage is sagacity itself. In the discourse sometimes known as "Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing" (part 1 of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*) Kierkegaard plays on the ambiguity, in his own thought, of the concept of sagacity. The ambiguity is that sagacity can be specifically sensate or worldly wisdom, but it can also be true wisdom, and the latter works by exploiting the thought patterns of the former in the interest of the true good. "Only that sagacity is true that helps a person to make every sacrifice in order to will the good in truth. Therefore the person who wills the good in truth uses sagacity *against evasions*" (UDVS, 94, italics original). A person who has some true wisdom can use his knowledge of the devices and desires of the false wisdom to undermine and circumvent it. He turns this knowledge on himself, for example, when he anticipates that, if he performs a certain loving act in a publicly visible way, his love of the good will be subtly converted into love of being applauded for his love of the good. And he wisely uses this insight into his own false sagacity as a motive for performing the act of love in secret rather than in a publicly visible way. Kierkegaard says,

> The person who in truth wills the good also uses sagacity *outwardly*. It is no disgrace to be sagacious—it is a good thing; it is no disgrace that the authorities are sagacious, that they sagaciously know how to track down the criminal's secret path in order to arrest him and disarm him. Being sagacious, the good person is informed about the way the world wants to have the good falsely made attractive,

> how the crowd wants to be won over, the dreaded crowd that "wants the teacher to tremble before his audience and flatter them." (UDVS, 95)

These two applications of sagacity about sagacity—the knowledge of one's own sleaziness of heart and the knowledge of other people's sleaziness of heart—are essential devices in the struggle to become and remain a person of character.

Kierkegaard's writings—all, amazingly, produced when he was in his mid-to-late thirties—are a repository of detailed explorations of the human heart, in its corruption, in its healing, and in its ideal perfection. A major part of this work is a fetchingly artful tour of the emotional logic of the virtues, Christian and more broadly spiritual. The most apt general term for this extraordinary achievement seems to me to be "wisdom."[15]

Not Virtue but Faith

The following passage from *The Sickness unto Death* is puzzling in light of Kierkegaard's thinking about character and excellence of character:[16]

> Very often … it is overlooked that the opposite of sin is by no means virtue. In part, this is a pagan view, which is satisfied with a merely human criterion and simply does not know what sin is, that all sin is before God. No, the opposite of sin is faith, as it says in Romans 14:23: "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." And this is one of the most decisive definitions for all Christianity—that the opposite of sin is not virtue but faith. (SUD, 82)

If we've been conceiving faith in the way *The Sickness unto Death* encourages us to do, we'll be puzzled, thinking: But isn't faith itself a virtue? After all, the sentence just preceding the quotation is, "Faith is: that the self in being itself and in willing to be itself rests transparently in God." Here faith is a formation of the self, and an excellent one. It is symmetrical with the malformation of the self that Anti-Climacus calls despair: in despair not to will to be oneself. Despair is sin. That's why faith is the opposite of sin—that is, faith is the absence of sin and its good counterpart. So why does Anti-Climacus say that the opposite of sin is not virtue, but *instead* faith? He must have in mind a *kind* of faith that isn't a virtue.

A journal entry from the year in which Kierkegaard published *The Sickness unto Death* may throw light on the puzzling passage:

> Luther says, It is not good works that make a good man, but a good man who does good works, i.e. the man is what has become habitual (*habituelle*), something more than all individual actions. And, indeed, according to Luther, one becomes a good man through faith. Thus, first comes faith. It is not through a virtuous life, good works, and the like, that one attains faith. No, it is faith that causes one

truly to do good works.[17]

When Luther says that "the man is what has become habitual," he is saying that the good man's character has become such that he is *disposed* to perform good actions. This disposition is more than just the sum of all his particular actions; instead, it is their source. This is what is ordinarily called the man's virtues. This disposition stands in contrast with faith, which in this case is not a disposition, not a virtue. Faith here seems to be the initiating event of coming to trust in Jesus, "the hour I first believed," rather than an ongoing trait that constitutes one's being a person of faith. Faith is the miracle we intone when we sing,

> 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
> And grace my fears relieved;
> How precious did that grace appear
> The hour I first believed!
>
> Verse 2 of "Amazing Grace"

You've heard the words of grace before, maybe many times, but all in a moment a new perception supervenes, out of nowhere as it seems: how precious does that grace appear! And it teaches your heart an unprecedented fear, while relieving the fears that have burdened you. This is not an action you performed, much less a virtue! It is an event that *happens to* you. But it is the initial event in becoming "a good [person] who does good works," a person who "habitually" rests transparently in God and seeks to do God's will—that is, a person with the virtue of faith. Luther and Kierkegaard are at pains to insist that our rescue from sin is not to be attributed to anything we are or do—not our virtues or our good works—but wholly to God's grace. The good things that we are and do are consequences of the rescue, and not vice-versa.

Another way to explain Anti-Climacus's denial that faith is a virtue is to suppose that he is thinking of faith as a relationship, something like friendship. In *Philosophical Fragments*, Johannes Climacus represents faith as a very special relationship of dependence and love with the "Teacher." At the beginning of Aristotle's long discussion of friendship, he notes that friendship "is a virtue, or implies virtue" (NE 8.1). Aristotle hesitates to say that friendship is a virtue because a friendship is a relationship with a particular other person, while virtues are, among other things, *potentials* for friendship and other relationships, but not actual relationships. Still, as the negative symmetrical counterpart of dispositional despair, faith is a good attribute of a person, and that is what a

virtue is. What Anti-Climacus has in mind in this passage remains somewhat mysterious.[18]

The Question of "Virtue Ethics"

When the topic of Kierkegaard on virtues comes up, some people ask whether he should be considered a "virtue ethicist." The issue of what it takes to be a virtue ethicist hasn't yet been settled to everyone's satisfaction. People use "virtue ethics" to describe different activities, and it's anachronistic when applied to historically earlier ethics. During most of its history, ethics was the study of virtues, so that the phrase "virtue ethics" was not needed as a label to distinguish it from other activities of ethical thinking. I propose here to use the phrase very broadly to designate any conceptual ethical inquiry that focuses on virtues, and then to distinguish various kinds of virtue ethics.[19]

Using the term this broadly, we can say that virtually all of ancient ethics, at least in the Western tradition, was a kind of virtue ethics. Socrates went about asking for the definitions of concepts like *wisdom*, *courage*, *temperance*, *piety*, *justice*, and *love*, and said, about his own career as a "gadfly" probing whoever would engage him in conversation about such matters, that he was trying "to persuade you, both young and old, not to care for your bodies or your monies first, and to care more exceedingly for the soul, to make it as good as possible; and I tell you that virtue [excellence] comes not from money, but from virtue comes both money and all other good things for mankind, both in private and in public."[20] Socrates's stated purpose of ethical inquiry was typical of ancient ethics, or even of all ancient philosophy—metaphysics, cosmology, and epistemology included—according to Pierre Hadot.[21] That purpose was the formation of human beings. Philosophy was the project of making raw, unbaked human beings into excellent specimens of the species through reflection. It aimed to make us wise, and thus to give the souls of its practitioners the shape of justice, temperance, piety, and all the other virtues. Kierkegaard, with his purpose of "awakening" the reader to her humanity, prodding and pulling her to aspire to be all that she can be by expounding the virtues of the ethical and spiritual life, follows the ancient pattern in both philosophy and theology.[22]

Alasdair MacIntyre is often labeled as a virtue ethicist, though to my knowledge he doesn't use the label of himself. In *After Virtue*, first published in 1981, he deployed the concept of a virtue to solve a very general problem in

modern ethics. In medieval Europe a consensus prevailed according to which ethical norms for what is good and what is obligatory for human beings are based on the nature and will of God. But in the modern period, starting, say, with the Protestant Reformation, this consensus unraveled. Beliefs about the nature and will of God could no longer be assumed, and so it seemed as though the very foundations of ethics no longer had the kind of bedrock certainty and reliability that ethics requires. Modern ethical theory is an enterprise that aims to find a replacement for the earlier theological foundation.

Various proposals have been made. One is the social contract, the idea that human beings need some agreed-upon rules to live by, because if people do just whatever they want to do, conflicts arise that make life generally miserable and dangerous. So people, perhaps implicitly, but sometimes explicitly, devise some rules of conduct (say, governing private property) and agree with one another that each will follow the rules in exchange for everybody else doing so. Thus, the foundation of ethics is a "social contract," an (implicit) agreement. Another theory—utilitarianism—holds that the foundation of ethics is the principle that the good is the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. Every ethical concept can be explained in terms of this principle, according to utilitarians. For example, if you want to know whether an action is obligatory for you, you ask: Is this the option that maximizes happiness for people in general? If you want to know whether a trait is a virtue, you ask whether it is one that tends to maximize the happiness of its possessor and of those whose lives the possessor touches. Yet another theory designed to offer a nontheological foundation for ethics is Immanuel Kant's "deontology" (theory of obligation). According to this theory, an action is permissible just in case an agent can will that the action in question be the fulfillment of a universal law. If you want to do something, you can test it by asking whether you can will that there be a law permitting everybody in your circumstances to do the thing that you want to do. If you cannot will that everybody in the circumstances perform this action, then it's morally prohibited, according to the categorical imperative. For example, Kant thinks that if you're considering whether to lie to another person to secure a personal advantage or to avoid a disadvantage, you can't will that the action fulfill a universal law. The reason is that if everybody lied when it's advantageous to them, trust would break down and nobody could lie, because the practice of lying depends on trust. Thus, willing that the action express a universal law results in a sort of contradiction: it is shown to be contrary, in a way, to "practical reason." Here it is not human happiness or a social contract that is the

foundation of ethics, but practical reason.

According to MacIntyre, these various efforts to replace God and his will as the foundation for ethics have failed to secure a foundation for ethics, because agreement among the theorists hasn't been achieved. The modern theories have resulted in endless rounds of disagreement about the very foundations, as well as about the permissibility of particular kinds of actions, so that modern people are in a state of ethical confusion.

This is where the concept of virtue comes in. In a modification of Aristotle, MacIntyre proposes that we may achieve ethical consensus if we use three interrelated concepts, the concept of practices with goods internal to them, the narrative unity of a human life, and the virtues that support the required unity and are required and acquired by the practices.[23] A good that's internal to a practice is a good for which a rational person might engage in the practice even if it yielded no "external" good such as money, fame, or comfort. A whole human life has narrative unity just in case the actions and events of that life make a meaningful and coherent story. Such a life will be marked by activities with internal goods—activities, therefore, that require the virtues. Virtues, then, have a necessary role in human life, given that people want to have a good life. Since the virtues contain the ethical substance—the rules of which the modern ethical theories were supposed to supply the foundation—the virtues become a kind of ethical normative foundation.

Several other philosophers have boarded the virtue ethics bandwagon to try out making the concept of a virtue the naturalistic foundation of ethics. These theories are simpler, less rich, less historical, and less plausible than MacIntyre's theory. This is not the place for a review, or even much of a critique, of these theories.[24] My main point in discussing modern virtue ethics at all is to draw a contrast with how Kierkegaard treats the idea of a trait of excellent character. All these versions of virtue ethics focus on the problem of how to "ground" ethics now that a theological foundation seems implausible, and they all experiment with the idea of grounding ethics in the notion of good traits of human character (virtues). That is not Kierkegaard's project. His focus is the upbuilding or edification of his reader as part of a broad effort to "reintroduce Christianity to Christendom." His project is like that of Socrates, whom he revered, who might be said to have been about reintroducing morality to Athens. Kierkegaard's purpose is analogous to that of the Socratic virtue ethics of ancient Greece and Rome, which was also to "build up" the practitioner in wisdom and in the virtues that come with wisdom—to promote human maturity. But before ending this

chapter, I will consider a variant of virtue ethics, one proposed by John Davenport, that is an effort to combine the two kinds I have identified.[25]

Existential Virtue Ethics

Davenport proposes to blend MacIntyre with Kierkegaard in an account that he calls "existential virtue ethics." He is clear that Kierkegaard is not responding to the modern problem of the foundation of ethics, and he criticizes MacIntyre for assimilating Kierkegaard to this project, but he also dissociates Kierkegaard from ancient ethics, commenting that existentialist ethics has a different "telos" (aim, goal) from ancient ethics. In connection with the nature of an ethics, according to Davenport, we must distinguish two kinds of "aim"—an *investigative* aim, what questions the inquiry aims to answer; and a *practical* aim, what kind of effect the writing aims to have in society or in the life of individual readers. Ancient ethics had both kinds of aim, while in general philosophical ethics in our time is silent or noncommittal about the practical kind.

Ancient ethics was an inquiry into human flourishing or well-being (*eudaimonia*). The question was: What does it take for a human being to have a good life? And a big part of the answer for most of the ancient thinkers was that a person cannot live well as a human being without having the virtues. So the "telos" or aim of reflection about the virtues was to understand the good life, the life of *eudaimonia*, and at least part of this understanding would be an understanding of the virtues. This inquiry also had a practical telos, and that was that members of the community would actually *live* that good life, the life of virtue. But the relation between the thought generated by the inquiry and the practical outcome of people living the good life was less direct than Kierkegaard conceived it to be. Practically, ancient ethics was a source of reflection for those educating the young and those designing polities (an assumption being that city-states would form the character of human beings who would live in them). By contrast, when Kierkegaard writes his upbuilding discourses, the discourse itself is the instrument of ethical transformation; and when he writes in the personae of his pseudonyms, the writing itself is the wedge designed to loosen the reader from the life-view in which the reader may be stuck.

Existential virtue ethics, says Davenport, doesn't aim at the good life. "In place of the classical notion of eudaimonia as the human telos, existential virtue ethics puts authenticity, understood as practical coherence among earnestly willed projects that can give narrative shape and enduring meaning to a human

life."[26] But authenticity is not the good life, because a bad life can have coherence among earnestly willed ground projects. That is, a life can be "authentic" but evil. As Davenport says, "Thus, in Kierkegaard's sense of authenticity, it is possible in principle to be an authentic torturer, as long as one is attuned to and can take seriously the wrongness of one's actions…. In this sense, it is possible to pursue evil ground projects authentically, in the full recognition of their evil" (296).

Let me say three things. First, it is clear that Kierkegaard has a concept of authenticity, and that it is very important to him. It is expressed in his notion of existential truth, in the thought that "to think is one thing, and to exist in what has been thought is something else" (CUP 1:254). But his word for it is "truth," not "authenticity." I've never seen the word "authenticity" in Kierkegaard's writings, just as I have never seen "existentialism" or "existentialist."[27] Second, Kierkegaard's writings *are* explorations of the good life for human beings. Johannes Climacus considers the goal of a human life to be an "eternal happiness," and both the judge and the aesthete in *Either/Or* seek to describe the good life as they see it. That's what they're debating about. And Kierkegaard writes extensively about joy (see chapter 8). He would regard a life that was "authentic" but evil as a human disaster and not the sort of thing that "ethics" would seek to promote. And third, it seems obvious to me that Kierkegaard, with his "upbuilding" discourses, his project of "reintroducing Christianity to Christendom," and reminding his readers "what it means to exist" aims, with his writings, actually to promote the good life for human beings, the life of such virtues as faith, hope, love, patience, humility, courage, and gratitude.

Davenport's distinction between inquiry and practical effect is well taken. It applies to Socrates as well as to Kierkegaard, and in both thinkers it is one and the same thought that is deployed to both purposes. Socrates's style of inquiry into virtue concepts was itself "upbuilding" in aim. Kierkegaard's writings are inquiries in the sense that he is exploring the "dialectic" of such concepts as self, despair, anxiety, envy, hope, faith, love, the individual, earnestness, subjectivity, inwardness, character, gratitude, and so on in an impressively rigorous way. But this inquiry, like that of Socrates, is not pursued for its own sake, to satisfy existentially idle curiosity or a purely "academic" philosophical interest, but is deployed in the interest of forming human beings, including both Kierkegaard and his reader, according to the ethical and spiritual ideal that the concepts embody. Thus, for Socrates and Kierkegaard, philosophical and theological "style" is inseparable from ethical inquiry. In chapter 7 we will explore this question of literary style and its relation to the kind of understanding that

pertains to virtues and character.

In chapter 2 and this chapter we have considered some of Kierkegaard's thinking about good character and the virtues of which good character is a mosaic, and we have seen that he belongs in the broad tradition of classical ethics. That is the orientation of his project of reintroducing Christianity to Christendom. But Christians believe that we are sinners, one and all. So it must be possible to be a virtuous sinner. How does Kierkegaard think this is possible?

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1. The examples are mine, not Judge William's.

2. Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*, trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 463 (2:139–40 in the Hong translation).

3. Here we see a second sense in which a virtue needs to be "true." Just as a proposition is true only if what it asserts is the case, so a virtue concept is true only if what it denotes is really a virtue. A main purpose of Kierkegaard's practice of "dialectic" is to assure that the virtue concepts are true in this sense.

4. *Either/Or*, which Kierkegaard treats as his first real book, already reflects the view expressed in the later *Sickness unto Death*, that the human self is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal. And here we have an indication how that conception of human nature is related to the particular virtues.

5. Sylvia Walsh, *Kierkegaard and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 63.

6. John Davenport, "Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics: Kierkegaard and MacIntyre," in *Kierkegaard after MacIntyre: Essays on Freedom, Narrative, and Virtue*, ed. John Davenport and Anthony Rudd (Chicago: Open Court, 2001), 305.

7. Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, trans. Hannay, 534–35. The Hongs (EO 2:240) translate this list, "courage, gallantry, abstinence, contentment." The Danish is "*Mod*, *Tapperhed*, *Afholdenhed*, *Nøisomhed*." Hannay's "perseverance" for *Tapperhed* fits better the pattern of the other virtues in the list than does the Hongs' "gallantry," as does Hannay's "moderation" for *Nøisomhed*. My dictionary translates *Tapperhed* as "courage," but that was already taken for *Mod*. Gallantry, as I would understand it, is a weak social virtue, something more like politeness, and its inclusion would confuse Judge William's point. Gallantry is not a virtue of self-management, though of course if you are ungallant by nature, it might require some self-managing for you to practice it.

8. Stoics allow that the sage may care about things he can't control to the extent of having "preferences" regarding them; but if he is more attached than that, he has fallen short of the Stoic ideality.

9. Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, section 3, *The Internet Classics Archive*, http://classics.mit.edu/Epictetus/epicench.html.

10. Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, trans. Hannay, 535; see EO 2:241.

11. Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, trans. Hannay, 536–37; see EO 2:242–43.

12. According to the Hongs, the reference is to Plutarch's "On Moral Virtue" in his *Moralia* 6, trans. W. C. Helmbold, Loeb Classical Library 337 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939), 18–19.

13. See Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1991), 85–104; and C. Stephen Evans, *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's "Philosophical Fragments"* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992). I survey the historical diversities of conceiving greatness of soul, the virtue of "magnanimity," in "Greatness of Soul Across the Ages," in *The Measure of Greatness: Philosophers on Magnanimity*, ed. Sophia Vasalou (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

2019), 292–318.

14. Discussion of the wisdom of the years and the wisdom of eternity, UDVS, 8–12.

15. "Without the eternal, one lives with the help of habit, sagacity, aping, experience, custom, and usage. Indeed, take all this, put it all together, cook it over the slow or the merely earthly blazing fire of passions, and you will see that you will get all kinds of things out of it, a variously concocted tough slime that is called practical sagacity. But no one ever got possibility out of it, possibility, this marvelous thing that is so infinitely fragile (the most delicate shoot of spring is not so fragile!), so infinitely frail (the finest woven linen is not so frail!), and yet, brought into being and shaped with the help of the eternal, stronger than anything else, if it is the possibility of the good!" (WL, 251).

16. Sylvia Walsh makes heavy use of this passage in her resistance to the project represented by the present book. See Walsh, *Kierkegaard and Religion*, 96–102.

17. Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, vol. 6, *Journals NB11–NB14*, ed. Bruce H. Kirmmse et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 373. I was alerted to this journal passage by Pieter Vos, "A Human Being's Highest Perfection: The Grammar and Vocabulary of Virtue in Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses" *Faith and Philosophy* 33 (2016): 311–32, https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol33/iss3/4.

18. In personal communication, Steve Evans noted that in the late eighteenth century, in the aftermath of Kant, the word "virtue" (*Tugend*, *Dyd*) had almost lost its ancient resonance and meant *respect for the moral law*. He also noted that Kierkegaard had less than happy memories of attending, as a child, the "School for Citizen Virtue," whose name suggested the formation of its patrons in solid bourgeois respectability.

19. See my "Varieties of Virtue Ethics," in *Varieties of Virtue Ethics*, ed. James Arthur, David Carr, and Kristján Kristjánsson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 17–34.

20. See Plato, *Apology*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 29d–30b, pp. 27–28.

21. Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2004).

22. On the pastoral purpose of theology in the church fathers, see Ellen Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

23. In Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), MacIntyre gives up his earlier opposition to Aristotle's "metaphysical biology" and makes the distinctively human kind of animality basic to the practices with internal goods that require the virtues.

24. Some of the main contributors are Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999; Michael Slote, *Morals from Motives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Gary Watson, "On the Primacy of Character," in *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology*, ed. Owen Flanagan and Amélie Rorty (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 449–69. I have offered some critical thoughts on this kind of virtue ethics in chapter 1 of *Emotions in the Moral Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

25. Davenport, "Toward an Existential Virtue Ethics," 265–309.

26. Davenport, "Toward an Existential Virtue Ethics," 265.

27. In chapter 2 I pointed out that authenticity is an aspect of character. It is *one* of the kinds of existential truth.

5 Sin

> *Only the consciousness of sin is absolute respect. And just because Christianity insists on having absolute respect, from any other perspective Christianity must and will appear as madness or horror simply in order that the qualitative infinite emphasis can fall upon the fact that the consciousness of sin is the only admittance, is the view that, by being absolute respect, is able to see the gentleness and love and compassion of Christianity.*
>
> *Practice in Christianity*, 68

A Pattern of Thought in Kierkegaard's Writings

In some of Kierkegaard's writings we see a recurrent pattern. A concept that is accessible simply by careful ethical observation plus exploration of the structures of thought within the area of that observation is developed in considerable "dialectical" (conceptual) detail as it applies to a person who undertakes to realize a related ethical ideal. The development then leads up to a point at which a "breach"—a break or logical leap—may be executed, on the other side of which is Christianity, which according to Kierkegaard and several of his pseudonyms cannot be reached in any other way than by accepting the revelation. That is, you can't, simply by making naturalistic observations and using your intelligence, arrive at Christianity; yet the naturalistic observations and progress of personal thinking about them lead in the *direction* of Christianity. Also, crucially, following the thoughts as a guide to your own self-understanding *prepares the way* for a deep personal ("existential") understanding of Christianity. If this understanding comes by a "leap," the prior pattern of thought provides an ideal vantage point from which to execute the leap. In a way, it narrows the gap between the naturalistic observations and Christianity.

In its subtitle *The Sickness unto Death* declares itself to be "for upbuilding and awakening." That means that it is designed to be read in earnest application to ourselves. It takes us on a journey of self-discovery. The vehicle for that journey is the idea of despair, which is the sickness unto death. In part 1 (pp. 12–75) Anti-Climacus elaborates this idea in detail and at length, and if we've cooperated by reading it for our upbuilding, we will have become (more) aware of our own despair, and consequently of ourselves as spiritual beings. Part 1 does

not presuppose the Christian revelation. The idea of God as the power that established each of us, and the idea of ourselves as spirit, and the insight that we are in despair, are accessible just by thinking hard about ourselves. But part 2 introduces an idea that we cannot arrive at in this way: the idea of sin. Our despair that we've become increasingly aware of through reading part 1 turns out, in the light of the Christian revelation, to be sin. By way of this revelation, we come to see that our despair is *before God*, either a weak or a defiant unwillingness to be what God created us to be. So unanticipated is this new understanding of ourselves that it is as though our despair, as experienced under the description of the Power that gave us our existence, was not an experience of ourselves as before *God* (even though in part 1 Anti-Climacus repeatedly calls that Power God). We have broken with "immanence" (the eternal in ourselves) and now see God as the Redeemer who became incarnate for our sake out of love for us and died a horrible sacrificial death in Palestine for us. Before *that* God our despair, in weakness or defiance, is *sin*. Unlike the experience of ourselves that was facilitated by part 1, this experience of being sinners requires a leap beyond anything that we might have observed or thought up by ourselves.

This pattern of immanental exploration up the point of a break with immanence by virtue of the Christian revelation is especially characteristic of Johannes Climacus—John Climber—who is a lover of dialectical ladders.[1] In *Philosophical Fragments*, Climacus performs a thought experiment in which he tries to derive the idea of a "teacher" who in all main respects is unlike Socrates. If Socrates, as a midwife who only helps disciples discover the ideas that are already in them, is personally inessential to what he "teaches," the non-Socratic teacher will be one whose individual identity cannot be separated from his "teaching." If Socrates's disciples can go their own way once Socrates has helped them give birth to their ideas, the non-Socratic teacher is one to whom the disciple must eternally cling on pain of losing the "teaching." If Socrates's disciples need just a bit of prodding and pulling to bring forth by "recollection" the life that is already in them, the non-Socratic teacher will need, by his presence, to raise his disciples from the dead. And so forth. Thus by simply thinking through the idea of a non-Socratic teacher, Climacus prepares his reader to understand Christ, in a way, though actually having a relationship with Christ requires responding to a historical proclamation that cannot be arrived at simply by thinking.[2]

Fragments is not a psychological work. We might call it a work of conceptual grammar. It aims to sort out the difference in conceptual order between an

immanent ethics (in which error and guilt figure) and a revealed one (that includes the concept of sin). By contrast, the large *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* to that short book works in a more psychological way its "ladder" effect for approaching sin: it addresses the problem of *becoming* a Christian, conceived as coming into a proper relationship with God as incarnate, and therefore as paradoxically historical, that is, the eternal as appearing in time. Though Climacus frames the problem as that of becoming a Christian, he construes it as the goal of achieving an "eternal happiness," a goal that does not presuppose a revelation, but depends only on a universally available idea of the divine.[3] This goal belongs firmly to "religiousness A," or natural, "Socratic" religiousness. It is immediately plausible that some kind of happiness is an individual's personal "absolute telos."[4] What value is fame without happiness? Or what value wealth? Or success in some venture? Even a life of pleasure is empty without happiness. And if, as also seems plausible, the human breast has an eternal or divine impulse, attraction, and point of contact in it, what some thinkers have called the *sensus divinitatis* or affective awareness of divinity,[5] then this happiness would need to be qualified by a harmonious relation to that high element in human nature and its object; true human happiness would need to be an "eternal" happiness.

On the basis of some such thoughts, Climacus traces a spiritual progress whose aim is to "relate absolutely to the absolute telos and relatively to all relative ends." What could be more reasonable than devoting yourself with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength to the ultimate goal of your life and, by consequence, only provisionally to all other, subordinate goals? The development, as Climacus tracks it, progresses across three stages of "existential pathos," of personal self-transformative concern. The "initial expression" (CUP 1:387–431) is the actual undertaking of this personal project. Climacus contrasts existential pathos with aesthetic pathos. If your effort involves merely thinking about this goal and picturing with admiration how wonderful and beautiful it would be for somebody to undertake and realize it, your pathos is not "existential," and in reality you have not undertaken the project. To undertake the goal is *actually* to *transform* your *character*. It is for the pursuit of the goal to be manifested in *action*. The person who earnestly undertakes the goal of relating absolutely to the absolute telos and relatively to all relative ends transitions to the "essential expression" (CUP 1:431–525) of existential pathos: suffering. This suffering has two sides. First, it is frustration. You test yourself with respect to relative ends (your comforts, your security, your social acceptability, your conveniences, your

control over your life, and so forth), asking whether you will give them up for the sake of your God relationship, and you are appalled by the resistance that these lower ends put up. You seriously want to relate absolutely to the absolute end, but the grip of "immediacy" on your life constantly frustrates you. And second, to the extent that you do manage to give up the lower ends in practice, you find that you miss them and yearn for them, and so, again, your heart has sadly not been transformed by the project. The "decisive expression" (CUP 1:525–55) is guilt. At this stage it becomes crystal clear that the active nature of existential pathos, affirmed already in its initial expression, implies that the failure of the project is not just unfortunate but is to be attributed to the responsibility of the person who undertook it. That is, your failure is *your fault*. This transformation deepens the pain and elevates the stakes in the project. It is of interest to our own project of sketching Kierkegaard's psychology of character that existential pathos is not just momentary anguish, but much more like a *trait* that characterizes the *whole* person *consistently* over time:

> The eternal recollecting of guilt-consciousness is its decisive expression, but the strongest expression of despair in the moment is not existential pathos. To relate oneself existentially with pathos to an eternal happiness is never a matter of occasionally making a huge effort but is constancy in the relation, the constancy with which it is joined together with everything. The whole existence-art consists in this, and in this, perhaps most of all, human beings fall short. (CUP 1:535)

As Climacus remarks ruefully at the beginning of this subsection, "the dialectical reader[6] will readily see that this investigation is going backward instead of forward" (CUP 1:525). It is going backward in the sense that your situation is looking more and more hopeless and the pain about yourself is growing deeper and more intense. But it is actually moving forward in the sense that you are getting morally and spiritually clearer about yourself and readier to appreciate and appropriate the good news about the eternal in time, the saving incarnation of God.

Coming into the relationship of faith to the God in time, to God incarnate, Christianity calls *rebirth*. To be born a second time is to come into existence as a different person. The consciousness of sin

> is the expression for the paradoxical transformation of existence. Sin is the new existence-medium. "To exist [*existere*]" generally signifies only that by having come into existence the individual does exist [*er til*] and is becoming; [but] now it signifies that by having come into existence he has become a sinner. (CUP 1:583)

I think it will help us understand this (to the extent that it can be understood) if

we return for a moment to *The Sickness unto Death*, where Anti-Climacus comments on the relational character of a self:

> A cattleman who (if this were possible) is a self directly before his cattle is a very low self, and, similarly, a master who is a self directly before his slaves is actually no self—for in both cases a criterion is lacking. The child who previously has had only his parents as a criterion becomes a self as an adult by getting the state as a criterion, but what an infinite accent falls on the self by having God as the criterion! The criterion for the self is always: that directly before which it is a self. (SUD, 79)

Every self is the self that it is by existing "before" some other being or beings, and the kind of self it is will depend on the nature of the being before whom it is a self. I think that any being before which you become a self of any sort must also be a person or quasi-person. (There is no such thing as being a self before a concrete wall, for example, or even before a great work of architecture—though the latter, as a human creation, has a reminiscence of the personal about it.) This, I think, is because the "before" is evaluative: it is a relation to a *criterion*. The person or quasi-person before whom you have your identity as a self is a being that can approve or disapprove of you, and your awareness of yourself is your awareness of that being's approval or disapproval. So a person who is a self only before his cattle is a person whose criterion is his cattle's approval or disapproval of him, and the young child whose self is only before her parents is one whose criterion is her parents' approval or disapproval of her, and so forth.

Now the self who, as a pagan, has traversed the three expressions of existential pathos — undertaking to relate himself absolutely to an eternal happiness before God and relatively to all subordinate ends, finding the undertaking frustrating and painful, and ultimately feeling total and constant guilt-consciousness for his shortcoming—hears and accepts the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is that God so loved the world that he became incarnate and dwelt among us teaching and healing, in response to which we killed him as a criminal, his ignominious and painful death serving as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. The redescription of God that this story involves entails also a revision of the identity of the self that is "before" this God. The believer who has been prepared in guilt by cultivation in the pagan discipline of existential pathos now becomes aware of himself as complicit in the death of his God. This is a new and extreme potentiation of guilt. Let's call it sin. At the same time, he becomes aware that the God before whom he exists is not just the eternal but also his loving Savior whose suffering at the believer's hands expresses a love that covers the multitude of the believer's sins.

The picture is paradoxical in two ways: that it depicts the eternal God as

having become temporal, and that the same event that shows the believer to be guiltier than he could have imagined is the event in which his guilt is forgiven and he experiences being loved. Climacus remarks that "in the totality of guilt-consciousness, existence asserts itself as strongly as possible within immanence, but the consciousness of sin is the break" (CUP 1:583). As we have seen, "existence" in Kierkegaard's vocabulary means personal existence. In this sense of the word, only persons "exist." So Climacus is saying that the most personal kind of existence apart from that produced by the Christian revelation is "the totality of guilt-consciousness." This is so because *agency before God* is definitive of persons, and guilt-consciousness resulting from earnestly traversing the stages of existential pathos is the most intense awareness of being a person in this sense. But the consciousness of sin is the break with that kind of self-awareness, and it is a still more intense awareness of being a person.

The Christian consciousness of sin is a break with pagan guilt-consciousness in that a new concept of God yields a qualitatively new self-consciousness. Climacus points out that the progress in self-knowledge that culminates in consciousness of your guilt is something that *you* can achieve, because throughout the progress you retain your identity. But the transition to consciousness of your sin is not within your power to achieve because it involves a change in your identity: you become a different person. This change must be wrought by God: "The consciousness of sin … is a change of the subject himself, which shows that outside the individual there must be the power that makes clear to him that he has become a person other than he was by coming into existence, that he has become a sinner. This power is the god in time" (CUP 1:584). But we must not let the breach deter us from seeing the relevance of the discipline of existential pathos to the consciousness of sin. The God who is the Father of Jesus Christ is also the God who demands absolute devotion and offers eternal happiness to those who love him with all their heart and mind and strength. The person who knows herself to be a sinner for whom Christ died is no less called to relate herself absolutely to the absolute end and relatively to all relative ends. Indeed, that is the form of the Christian calling and the discipline within which the Christian deepens her understanding of being a redeemed sinner.

"An Occasional Discourse," which forms part 1 of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, is another example of the pattern that we're noticing. In *The Sickness unto Death*, Anti-Climacus starts with the universally accessible idea of despair and then leaps to the revealed concept of sin, all the while carrying

through with the idea of despair (now despair is sin). Johannes Climacus starts with the universally available idea of relating absolutely to an eternal happiness and relatively to all relative ends, getting as far as the totality of guilt-consciousness, and then leaps to the concept of sin that is revealed by the coming of the God in time. In "An Occasional Discourse" Kierkegaard himself leads us through nearly 150 pages of exploring the "dialectic" (conceptual order) of the universally accessible idea of willing the good in truth as preparing the reader for the Lutheran office of confession in which the believer will confess her sins in Christian penitence and seek reconciliation with God. He reminds the reader/listener that willing the good in truth (the virtue of purity of heart) is to will *one* thing in a way that precludes willing anything else except provided that it accords with that one thing. That one thing is no doubt the will of God, the ultimate and final good. To will it *in truth* is to will it earnestly and wholeheartedly and without the kind of evasions and self-deceptions and rationalizations that so much mark human moral concerns, interests, and motives. In these 150 pages Kierkegaard names and explores a multitude of these evasions, self-deceptions, and rationalizations, closing off treacherous escape routes one-by-one so that the honest reader is ready by the end to throw herself on the mercy of the God in time and so be conscious of herself as a sinner.

Sin and Psychology

The subtitle of the present book is *The Psychological Wisdom of Søren Kierkegaard*, and the present chapter is about sin. The concept of sin is crucial to my effort to understand Kierkegaard's psychology of character. In the Christian framework, everyone who aspires to virtues is and remains a sinner. So the idea of a virtuous sinner needs to be coherent, despite its paradoxical sound. How can this be? Addressing this question in the context of Kierkegaard's writings requires that we explore the concept of sin. So it seems that I'm discussing Kierkegaard's concept of sin in a book on psychology. Kierkegaard wrote three books under pseudonyms that claim in their subtitles to be about psychology.[7] Two of them are about sin. And yet both books deny that sin can be treated in psychology.

In *The Concept of Anxiety* Vigilius Haufniensis notes that "whenever the issue of sin[8] is dealt with, one can observe by the very mood [*Stemning*] whether the concept is the correct one. For instance, whenever sin is spoken of as a

disease, an abnormality, a poison, or a disharmony, the concept is falsified" (CA, 15–16).[9] And "sin … is no subject for psychological concern, and only by submitting to the service of a misplaced brilliance could it be dealt with psychologically" (CA, 14), because

> if sin is dealt with in psychology, the mood becomes that of persistent observation, like the fearlessness of a secret agent, but not that of the victorious flight of earnestness out of sin…. The mood of psychology would be antipathetic curiosity, whereas the proper mood is earnestness expressed in courageous resistance. (CA, 15)

The "mood" of a conversation, the attitude that the parties take to the topic, can determine whether they understand what they are talking about. If someone refers to a humanitarian disaster in a lighthearted, bantering way, someone who grasps the gravity of the event and the suffering it involves may correctly judge that the other doesn't understand or properly appreciate what he's referring to. Vigilius is saying that to speak of sin in a mood of "antipathetic curiosity," like someone who can't take his eyes off some putrid slime that repulses him, is to distort the concept of sin. A person who has the concept of sin right—that is, really understands what he's talking about—will do so in a "mood of earnestness in courageous resistance."[10] This is the mood proper to a sermon but not to a psychological investigation. *The Concept of Anxiety* is thus not a psychological investigation of sin, but a "psychologically *orienting* deliberation" that directs attention to *anxiety* as a predisposing factor for sin, because anxiety is something of an explanation of how we may we inherit sin from our forebears. Presumably, you can investigate *anxiety* in the mood of persistent observation or curiosity without distorting the concept, so that concept is a proper one for psychology.

Vigilius says that earnestness is the attitude that befits sin, and he seems to allow that the "science" of ethics has the right attitude. But ethics has another problem: properly understood, ethics is unachievable.

> What is said of the law is also true of ethics: it is a disciplinarian that demands, and by its demands only judges but does not bring forth life…. Sin, then, belongs to ethics only insofar as upon this concept [ethics] is shipwrecked with the aid of repentance…. A category that is entirely beyond [ethics'] reach has appeared. (CA, 16, 18, 19)

By "ethics" Vigilius seems to have in mind something like the project that we saw in the *Postscript* of relating oneself absolutely to the absolute end and relatively to all relative ends. At the end of this chapter we'll discuss another kind of ethics that Vigilius acknowledges—what he calls "the second ethics." It is a kind of ethics that incorporates the concepts of sin and atonement.

Kierkegaard's other psychological book about sin—*The Sickness unto Death*—was published about five years after *The Concept of Anxiety*—a rather long time by the standard of Kierkegaard's publishing schedule. *Sickness* seems to allow that psychology might have an edifying tone or mood: the subtitle is *A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*. If we think that spiritual upbuilding involving discussion of sin would encourage earnest flight from it and courageous resistance to it, and that such a task is compatible with psychology's job description, then we will think that "psychology" is broader and more flexible than Vigilius would have it. That, indeed, seems to be an implication of the notion of a Christian psychology suggested in the subtitle of *The Sickness unto Death*.

Anti-Climacus does say, almost in passing, something that seems to agree with Vigilius's rejection of Christian psychology. Referring to the second part of *Sickness*, the part that presupposes the Christian revelation and thus the Christian concept of God and the insight that despair is sin, he says,

> Although there is no room or place for a psychological delineation in this part, least of all in section A, reference may be made at this point to the most dialectical frontier between despair and sin, to what could be called a poet-existence verging on the religious, an existence that has something in common with the despair of resignation, except that the concept of God is present. (SUD, 77)

This religious poet (Johannes Climacus is perhaps such a poet) is almost a Christian, but he holds back in despair some aspect of his suffering that he is unwilling to yield to God. He has the concept of God, all right, but instead of ruthlessly accepting himself before God, he weakens his impression of God by "poetizing" God, thus putting some aesthetic distance between himself and God. All this, despite the fact that "he loves God above all, God who is his only consolation in his secret anguish" (SUD, 77).

It seems to me that what Anti-Climacus says here about the poet-existence verging on the religious has the mood of earnestness that Vigilius prescribes for true discussion of sin (it is "upbuilding" as Anti-Climacus says *Sickness* is supposed to be), it depicts the poet-existence as conscious of being before God, it reproaches him mildly for his despair and seriously laments it, and it is *also* a "psychological delineation" of that character-type, as Anti-Climacus suggests with the concessive "although" at the beginning of the previous block quotation.

Three objections to a psychology of sin have emerged. The first seems cognate with the distinction between religiousness A and religiousness B, and it may not be quite explicit in the texts. It is that psychology is a "naturalistic"

orientation and thus excludes premises taken from revelation. Sin, according to Anti-Climacus, is known only by revelation, so psychology cannot treat of sin. But this objection has an arbitrary or stipulative character. Why not just expand the idea of psychology to include premises from revelation? Anti-Climacus seems to allow such a discipline by speaking of "Christian psychology" in his subtitle; and much of part 2 of *The Sickness unto Death* would seem to be psychology that presupposes revelation.

The second objection is that the "mood" of psychology, or the attitude that it takes toward its subject matter, distorts the concept of sin, thus ruling out a psychological treatment of sin. This objection also seems artificial, and some of Kierkegaard's own work provides a counterexample to it, in particular *Sickness*, which he advertises as psychological and as meant to be upbuilding. Much of Kierkegaard's writing is broadly psychological, if not always so in name (for example, the discussion of existential pathos in *Postscript*), and where it treats of sin it is often nonetheless so. In a later section of this chapter I will address the third objection—that to treat of sin in psychology would be falsely to turn it into a "state."

All three of these objections, properly understood, can be converted into standards by which to measure the genuineness of a Christian psychology.

Sin, Despair, and Anxiety

Kierkegaard's two psychological books that deal with sin—*Sickness* and *Anxiety*—are about despair and anxiety, respectively. These two emotions differ from one another in the ways they relate to sin. Each book offers a taxonomy of a dizzying variety of kinds of anxiety and despair, further complicating the relations to sin. In the present section I will sketch some of the main and representative ways that anxiety and despair relate to sin and, for contrast, some despairs and anxieties that are remote from sin.

Despair

Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms have more than one concept (or perhaps better, more than one *application* of the concept) of despair. In all despair, you set aside some possibility as not possible for yourself. That impossible possibility is ordinarily something you consciously desire, or would desire, were it possible, though Kierkegaard speaks of cases in which the good possibility is not

consciously desired because of immaturity of character. Here is a conscious case. You wish you could be a concert guitarist but realize that no one who starts learning to play at thirty years of age ever makes it to the concert circuit, so you despair of being a concert guitarist. Conscious despair is often thought to be a bad thing, and it can indeed be very painful. But your despair of being a concert guitarist could be a good thing, inasmuch as you don't waste time in a hopeless effort, and so may turn your talents to a more realistic goal.

Judge William advises his aesthete friend to despair as part of a remedy for his aestheticism. William notes that the aesthete gets his sense of self from being superior to others in one way or another, however trivial that point of pride may be from a larger perspective. Perhaps he prides himself on his taste in wines, or the beauty with which he writes, or his ability to diagnose an internal combustion engine just by listening to it run. The issue is not that he can do these admittedly good things better than some other people, but that he conditions his sense of self on being better at them than some others. His concept of self is comparative, and thus subtly invidious. William speaks of despair as a remedy for this distorted sense of self. Here despair is specifically despair *of comparison as a basis of self-approbation*; you might say that despair is seeing that such comparison is "hopeless" as a grounding for the self, and to see this is to reject comparison as such a basis. This despair, then, is an improving adjustment of character.

The aesthete responds to Judge William that to despair of what his very sense of self-approval is based on would be a "break" in his personality. William answers that it is not a break, but a transfiguration in which the self's pride is removed from invidious comparison and placed in what is sympathetically universally human. This despair removes something that is both inessential to being human and positively detrimental to it. By despairing of a key feature of the aesthetic life, the self has moved toward becoming ethical (see EO 2:228–29).[11] Clearly, this despair is not sin, but a contrary of sin.

By contrast, the despair that Anti-Climacus explores is mortal sickness and ultimately sin because it is a resistance to/denial of/objection to/rejection of/rebellion against/obliviousness of being what God has made you to be. I noted that what you despair of you set aside as impossible for yourself. The despair that Judge William commends to his friend is despair of a false self, and thus a progress toward the real self; the kind that Anti-Climacus explores is despair of your real self, a failure to become the self you essentially are. Thus it is self-rejection and at the same time rejection of God in one or another gradation of

severity according to how clear your conception of God—and thus of your self—is. Here despair is "hopelessness" about being the self that you essentially are: a self who wills to be yourself—finite and infinite, temporal and eternal—"resting" in God who has created you and in Christ who has redeemed you. To reject being *that* is the essence of sin and the state of soul from which every sinful action springs.

Anxiety

The Concept of Anxiety, by Vigilius Haufniensis, addresses the problem: How did (does) sin (guilt) come to be? How is innocence lost—by the biblical Adam, or by anybody else? Vigilius's answer: the innocent feel anxiety, and from it they act, and so become guilty. What is anxiety?

In anxiety a person experiences a situation as threatening, but in a way that is not very well defined or specified. Vigilius distinguishes anxiety from fear (though I think that anxiety is a kind of fear, and on pp. 53 and 103 we find him writing as though it is a kind of fear). When traveling abroad, I may fear *to have my passport stolen* or *to have my flight canceled*; if so, what I fear is pretty well-defined. But if I'm anxious rather than fearful, it will be less clear to me what the emotion is about. The object of my anxiety is "something" that may happen or that I may do. It is about relatively undefined possibilities. If I'm anxious on the occasion of taking a trip, my anxiety is *somewhat* defined: it is about what may happen or I may do *on my trip*. But at least one kind of anxiety that Vigilius has in mind is more indefinite than this; in fact, it is as indefinite as can be. His most extreme and paradoxical way of putting it is that this anxiety is about Nothing (CA, 41). But he also says, more helpfully, that it is about "the possibility of possibility," that is, possibility in general.

> The concept of anxiety is almost never treated in psychology. Therefore, I must point out that it is altogether different from fear and similar concepts that refer to something definite, whereas anxiety is freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility. For this reason, anxiety is not found in the beast, precisely because by nature the beast is not qualified as spirit. (CA, 42)

Even in "dreaming innocence," a state of little self-awareness, there is this (vague) awareness of possibility. This shows that the being in question is "spirit"—a being with practical freedom, a being capable of moral awareness (having a conscience), a responsible being, a being capable of standing before God. It is as this kind of being, and out of the alluring discomfort of this anxiety,

that the innocent one "falls" into guilt by his own action. But the particular action by which he falls requires that the anxiety acquire a somewhat more definite object, and in Adam's case this more definite possibility is occasioned by the prohibition: You shall not eat of the tree in the midst of the garden (Gen. 3:3). "The prohibition induces anxiety in him, for the prohibition awakens in him freedom's possibility. What passed by innocence as the nothing of anxiety has now entered into Adam, and here again it is a nothing—the anxious possibility of *being able*" (CA, 44). Yet it seems that in this case it is not just a *bare* and completely *general* "being able"; the prohibition awakens in him an awareness of being able *to eat of the tree in the midst of the garden*, and in so doing *to disobey God*. The very prohibition suggests the possibility of violating *it* —the felt possibility that *I*, *Adam*, may violate it.

That the object of anxiety is not sheer abstract possibility, but instead possibility that is less defined than that of specific fear, is evident from examples of Vigilius's own references to anxiety. For example, he refers to "anxiety about sin" (CA, 52) and a person's "anxiety about himself" (54), "anxiety about men and about finitudes" (57), "anxiety about the good" and "anxiety about evil" (136), and "anxiety about faith" (144). "Anxiety about himself" is reminiscent of "the anxieties [*Bekymringer*] of the heathen" (CD, part 1), which are about (one's own) poverty, wealth, status, and so forth. Indeed, it is hard to see how the species of anxiety could be differentiated from one another if not by differences in what the anxieties are about.

It seems that the various possibilities about which we can be anxious must all be possibilities that *matter* to us. Not just any possibility evokes anxiety in us. For example, the possibility that a certain star in a distant galaxy will become a supernova in the next millennium, or the possibility that a certain migratory bird species will fly north a little early this year, are not likely to make us anxious, and if by chance they do, we would expect that in some way these possibilities impinge on what we care about. It seems that all species of anxiety stem from a human concern for *security*—reliable safety. But what we want to be safe *from* can differ widely. I won't be anxious about travel misadventures if I don't travel. Jesus's perfect concern for moral goodness makes him vulnerable to the anxiety he expresses when he says to Judas, "What you are going to do, do quickly" (John 13:27, see CA, 155). And in a moment we'll see that the demonic person is anxious about the possibility that he become good, that he be saved. Because of the shape of his concerns, this possibility strikes him as threatening. The kinds of anxiety that Vigilius distinguishes are all based on a concern for security, but

they differ by species according to what is taken to threaten that security. Both Vigilius and Anti-Climacus speak of faith as a kind of "resting" (*hvile*, *grunde*[12]), and this rest can be helpfully seen as a satisfaction of the concern for security in the good (God) on which anxiety is based (see CA, 162 and SUD, 132). Thus faith is a kind of self-possession in the quieting of our anxiety, a trusting in God.

Fear, I take it, is a "negative" or repellant emotion. It is an impulse to avoid whatever we're afraid of. Anxiety might be thought to escape being a kind of fear in not being wholly "negative." Vigilius notes that *Angest* has a mixed valence. It is "a sympathetic antipathy and antipathetic sympathy" (CA, 42); it "ensnaringly disquiets [*ængster*] with its sweet anxiousness [*Beængstelse*]" (CA, 61). This might be a way that *Angest* differs from *Bekymring*, at least in Kierkegaard's thought. The anxiety you experience at the possibility that you are socially inferior, or that you may lack the wherewithal to feed your children next week, has nothing fetching or sweet about it, I think. It is unambiguously unpleasant, and it seems natural to think of it as a somewhat diffuse kind of fear. By contrast, the anxiety that a teenager feels when she boards a roller-coaster for the first time does have that double valence: it is anxiety all right (a kind of fear), but it's "exciting" as well. Adam's anxiety in response to the prohibition is like that: the possibility of violating the command is scary, but the danger offers also the enticing prospect of adventure into the unknown and the supposedly freer exercise of agency. But I'm not sure that *all Angest* has the double valence.

The anxiety of Adam and of every other person before he or she sins is not sinful. Each person "leaps" (or falls, or leaps and so falls, as into a precipice) from the state of innocence into the state of guilt, and the explanatory element in the state that precedes sin is anxiety (*Angest*). Anxiety doesn't *cause* the fall, but merely predisposes it. If it *caused* the fall—if it were the whole explanation of the transition—the "fall" would not be into sin; *sin* is a category of agency, and so must be caused by the agent in his or her agency. Sin is something that the agent does, and that fact must be central to the causal story. At any rate, anxiety in this context is not sin; indeed, it is no kind of dysfunction or impropriety, but on the contrary is naturally implied by being "spirit." And to be spirit is a glory of the human being (UDVS, part 2). Vigilius notes that "the more profoundly [a man] is in anxiety, the greater is the man" (CA, 155). He says this in the context of discussing the anxiety that Jesus expresses when he tells Judas to do quickly what he is going to do (John 13:27).

By contrast, the anxieties (*Bekymringer*) of the pagans are failures of humanity; they are variants of the failure that becomes excruciatingly plain to

whoever undertakes the ethical discipline of relating absolutely to our absolute end and relatively to all relative ends, and the other disciplines discussed in the first section of this chapter. But Kierkegaard's seven discourses on the anxieties of the heathens in *Christian Discourses* are not really about the classical heathens (so to speak), but about the heathens in Christendom, so-called Christians who, despite having access to the categories of the Christian revelation, live in heathen categories, expressing heathen interests, concerns, and anxieties—in short, a kind of heathen character. The discourses are ironical in attributing the anxieties therein described to the pagans in *contrast* to us Christians: in fact, they are our anxieties. If we apply to these discourses the distinction between guilt and sin drawn in *Postscript* and *Sickness*, we might say that the anxieties here described are guilt when found in real or classic pagans, but they are sin when found among Christians. But Kierkegaard notes that in Christendom many people's *grasp* of the decisive Christian concepts is so tenuous that our character malformation does not even rise to the title of sinfulness.

> The life of Christian paganism is neither guilty nor not guilty. It really knows no distinction between the present, the past, the future, and the eternal. Its life and its history go on crabbedly like the writing in ancient manuscripts, without any punctuation marks, one word, one sentence after the other. From an esthetic point of view, this is very comical, for while it is beautiful to listen to a brook running murmuring through life, it is nevertheless comical that a sum of rational creatures is transformed into a perpetual muttering without meaning. (CA, 93–94)

Historically, the great punctuation mark (or chapter division) is the incarnation of God in Christ. It marks the end of an era and the beginning of the possibility of sin consciousness.

Vigilius distinguishes the demonic from bondage to sin. The demonic is anxiety about or in face of the good, while bondage to sin is anxiety in face of the evil.[13] "If this [distinction] is not held fast, nothing can be explained" (CA, 135). The biblical stories of Jesus's interactions with demons depict them as alarmed and fearful when they encounter Jesus. They want to have nothing to do with him; they wish to be left alone in their perdition. They are shut up (closed minded) in their godlessness and will have it no other way. By contrast, to be in bondage to sin is to be anxious in face of one's own evil, and this implies an alliance of sorts—a sympathy—with the good. You can't be anxious in face of the evil in you (thus repelled by it) without having at least a foothold in the good. As I noted a moment ago, anxiety, like other emotions, is based on a concern. The concern that's definitive for anxiety in general is the desire for security, and anxieties differ from one another in what the security is security *from*: financial

disaster, travel misadventures, sin, salvation, and so forth. The difference between bondage to sin and the demonic is that the former is based on a concern for security from evil (your own sin), while the latter is based on a concern for security against salvation (the good, Jesus). The demonic is the completest unfreedom, whereas bondage to sin is free to the extent that it involves having a foothold in the good (sympathy with it). Both are kinds of unfreedom, but bondage to sin is like being a prisoner who wants to get out of prison, while the demonic is like being a prisoner who is "at home" in prison and hates the idea of leaving. The weakness in this analogy is that prisons can be good in some respects, whereas the demonic is "at home" in sheer absence of good.

Anxiety is essentially about personal possibility: what is possible in a person's life. This is why anxiety is essentially about the future. In themselves, events that are past are "set in stone," so to speak.

> If I am anxious because of a past offense, it is because I have not placed it in an essential relation to myself as past and have in some deceitful way or another prevented it from being past. If indeed it is actually past, then I cannot be anxious but only repentant. If I do not repent, I have allowed myself to make my relation to the offense dialectical, and by this the offense itself has become a possibility and not something past. (CA, 91–92)

To make my relation to a (past and accomplished) offense "dialectical" is to treat it as a paradigm with a conditional status: *if* this or that, I *would* do it again. In that case, I'm not really treating it as past. The demonic is puzzling in this way: as anxiety in face of the good, it seems to be seeing the good as a personal possibility, a possibility for oneself; but this anxiety's strategy is to foreclose that possibility, to shut oneself up against it, that is, to treat it as though it is *not* personally possible. The demonic is thus a confused state of mind, which seems to require different strata of consciousness: it forecloses the possibility of good to assuage its anxious distress at being confronted with the possibility of the good. It is self-imposed unfreedom.

Vigilius notes that whether the demonic dominates a personality or is like a mere speck on an otherwise virtuous character, the demonic aspect (even the "speck") will be fully demonic. In either case, it will be anxiety in face of the good (CA, 134–35). It will be a nervous defensiveness against purity of heart, sacrificial love, heroic courage, humble faith, or whatever form the good may take. The paradigm case of this defensiveness is the offense at Jesus Christ that Christ himself warns against (for example, Luke 7:22–23) and Kierkegaard discusses at many points in his writings (for example, SUD, 82–87, 112–124; PC, 123–44). If the demonic is anxiety in face of the good, it seems as though nearly all people

have a bit of the demonic in them. It can express itself in a variety of ways: "as indolence that postpones thinking, as curiosity that never becomes more than curiosity, as dishonest self-deception, as effeminate weakness that constantly relies on others, as superior negligence, as stupid busyness, etc." (CA, 138). Indeed, the only person who would not have at least a speck of the demonic in his constitution would be the person of perfected faith.

Two features of the passage at CA, 134–35 are relevant to our discussion of character. The first is that, as regards the personality or character as a whole, sin is not an all-or-nothing matter. The demonic can either encompass a personality, or it can occupy a tiny fraction of it. It can wholly cover it or be a mere speck on it. And presumably intermediate distributions are also possible. This will mean that, as Kierkegaard understands it, virtues can cohabit with sin in a person; it is not contradictory to speak of a virtuous sinner. The second is that the demonic in a virtuous sinner is fully demonic; it is not mitigated sin, as though the sins of a virtuous person are not as bad as those of a more thoroughgoing sinner. The virtuous person's sin is just as deplorable as anybody's.

We are reminded of Luther's *simul iustus et peccator* (at once righteous and a sinner), but because of Kierkegaard's much stronger emphasis on character, we are reminded even more of the apostle Paul with his notion of the two selves that typically coexist in Christians: the inner or new self (*anthrōpos*; Eph. 2:15; 4:24; Col. 3.10; Rom. 7:22; Eph. 3:16) lives simultaneously with the flesh (Rom. 7:5, 18; 8:9; 13:14; Gal. 5:16–24), the body of sin (Rom. 6:6), the body of flesh (Col. 2:11), the old self (again *anthrōpos*; Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9). This old and sinful self, Paul tells us, died with Christ on the cross (Rom. 6:6) and was buried with him by baptism (Rom. 6:4), though it continues disturbingly to live on, a more or less remnant- or shadow-existence, in most of us. The new self would be the seat of the Christian virtues, the old self the seat of a variety of vices.

How is despair related to anxiety? "Despair is sin" declares the heading of *The Sickness unto Death*, part 2. Despair is sin because it is unwillingness (either "weak" or defiant) to accept yourself as the one God created you to be. It is wanting, however implicitly, to be something you are not, or wanting not to be something that you are. In this way despair is a disorder in your cares. If anxiety is a universal human experience, it is such because we humans universally want (need) security; and yet, in our despair, we seek that security in ways that systematically fail to achieve it—by being a member of "the crowd," as Kierkegaard repeatedly points out, by being wealthy, by being superior to this person or that. In that state of disrelation to yourself and to God you will be

anxious about many things. You will have the anxieties of the heathen—anxieties about your comparative status vis-à-vis fellow human beings, about your wealth or poverty, and so forth. These anxieties are indicative or symptomatic of your despair—your unwillingness to accept yourself as you are before God, your depending on what is undependable. Faith, then, which is "resting" transparently in God, is the eradication of despair and of the anxiety that is its symptom. You are at *rest* because you are no longer insisting on being what you are not, and so are no longer feeling the insecurity that such insistence breeds in you; you are resting *transparently* because you are now able honestly to look yourself in the mirror and stand, without hiding or deception, in the presence of God.

Anti-Climacus culminates his discussion of despair in part 1 of *Sickness* with comments about "inclosing reserve" (*Indesluttethed*). This is the despair of the person who is most intensely conscious of being in despair. It is called "inclosing" because of its defensive posture. The contrary of "inclosed" will be "open," "communicative." The despair of inclosing reserve has two subspecies: a weak variety and a defiant one. His descriptions of both characters are colorful.

The exemplar of the weak or passive form is ashamed of himself for his spiritual slackness and passive unwillingness to live up to his ideal of himself, but he has benign contempt for people who wear their souls on their sleeves, blabbing volubly about what is on their minds and how they feel, displaying thus their similar weakness. He loathes himself for his weak unwillingness to live in purity of heart before the eternal, but unlike the blabbers, in secret haughtiness he prides himself on keeping his despair to himself. In the pure case he has no human confidant. He suffers in silence. Even one confidant would be an enormous mitigation of this kind of despair; a person with similar inclosing reserve except for a single confidant "is moderated by one whole tone in comparison with one who is fully inclosed" (SUD, 65). He may recognize that his sense of his own spiritual weakness is a sin of pride, but he will soon dismiss this idea because, after all, he despairs of his *weakness*! This secretively withdrawn person has a "natural good nature and sense of duty" (SUD, 64) and an ordinary respectable exterior:

> He is a university graduate, husband, father, even an exceptionally competent public officeholder, a respectable father, pleasant company, very gentle to his wife, solicitude personified to his children. And Christian?—Well, yes, he is that, too, but prefers not to talk about it, although with a certain wistful joy he likes to see that his wife is occupied with religion to her upbuilding. He rarely attends church, because he feels that most pastors really do not know what they are talking about. He makes an exception of one particular pastor and admits that he knows what he is talking about, but he has another reason for not wanting to listen to him, since he fears being led too far out. (SUD, 63)

The last clause makes a connection to spiritual anxiety, in particular, anxiety in face of the good. This man admits that the superior pastor knows what he's talking about when he speaks of the soul, the God relationship, the Christian virtues, and the life of faith, but that very success in speaking about the spiritual good makes this respectable father nervous. It repels him. In that pastor's preaching the kingdom of God comes a little too close for comfort. In despair like that of the demons that fled as Jesus approached, this man shuns exposure to the good. Anti-Climacus ends his account of the weak or passive form by saying, "If this inclosing reserve is maintained completely, … then his greatest danger is suicide" (SUD, 65).

The suicidal urge, in an attitude of weak desperation to be rid of yourself, is absent from the strong form of inclosing reserve. In this despair you defiantly will to be yourself. In a perverse sense, you love yourself just as you are in your despair. Because of this strong self-assertion, Anti-Climacus marks this kind as "despair through the aid of the eternal, the despairing misuse of the eternal within the self" (SUD, 67). In this "strength" it resembles the high self-respect and sense of agency of the truly spiritual person. But unlike the truly spiritual person, this "self in despair wants to be master of itself or to create itself, to make his self into the self he wants to be, to determine what he will have or not have in his concrete self" (SUD, 68). You want nothing to do with a God who would require worship from you. Instead, *you* want to be god. Anti-Climacus points out that this aspiration rules out a person's having the virtue of earnestness (*Alvor*), because earnestness is being true to the thought that God pays attention to you (SUD, 68).

There is an unreality about all of the defiant despairer's aspirations because you can't be earnest about them. You cannot really be steadfast in the construction of your ideal self, since nothing grounds the pursuit but the pursuit itself. Being the supposed source of all your standards, you can abandon them at will—which implies that your "standards" are toothless. Anti-Climacus expresses this by saying that as an acting self, you constantly relate yourself to yourself "only by way of imaginary constructions" (SUD, 68). "In the very moment when it seems that the self is closest to having the building completed, it can arbitrarily dissolve the whole thing into nothing" (SUD, 69). "All these imaginatively constructed virtues make it look splendid; like oriental poetry, they fascinate for a moment; such self-command, such imperturbability, such ataraxia,[14] etc. practically border on the fabulous. Yes, they really do, and the basis of the whole thing is nothing" (SUD, 69).

The fact that you as this individual do not have godlike control of the course of your life means that you are subject to adverse events and conditions—illness, ostracism, the failure of some pivotal project. When one of these first comes upon you, you try, in your supposed omnipotence, to deny or ignore it; but you prove unable. If it persists and seems irremediable, you deny yourself the option of hoping in God for its removal or receiving solace from God. Instead, "[you] take it as an occasion to be offended at all existence" (SUD, 70). As god, it would be quite a comedown to seek help with your problem, either from God or from a fellow human being. To avoid such humiliation, you "own" your torment, incorporate it into your individualistic self-conception, cling to it, and in demonic rage resent the whole of existence on its account.

> This eventually becomes such a fixation that for an extremely strange reason [this demoniac] is afraid of eternity, afraid that it will separate him from his, demonically understood, infinite superiority over other men, his justification, demonically understood, for being what he is…. The thought that most infuriates him is that eternity could get the notion to deprive him of his misery. (SUD, 72)

Here again we see a connection of despair with anxiety in face of the good. Like the demons who became anxious as Jesus drew near, this demoniac is terrified that the good will deprive him of the precious resentful suffering on which he grounds his hatred of existence. But in the last stage, this anxiety in the face of the good resolves into sheer spite and the demonic individual wants to force himself on existence, tightly clinging to it in jeering reproach. Anti-Climacus concludes part 1 of *Sickness* with an imaginary analogy:

> It is as if an error slipped into an author's writing and the error became conscious of itself as an error—perhaps it actually was not a mistake but in a much higher sense an essential part of the whole production—and now this error wants to mutiny against the author, out of hatred toward him, forbidding him to correct it and in maniacal defiance saying to him: No, I refuse to be erased; I will stand as a witness against you, a witness that you are a second-rate author. (SUD, 76)

Sin and Sinfulness

Vigilius distinguishes sins as *episodes* that are or express failure to will to be your true self both before God and resting (grounded) in God, and sin as a kind of *state* (*Tilstand*), that is, a character trait, a tendency or readiness to sin, a formation of a person's agency. What is agency? Your agency is your power and readiness to act. Thus, features of your agency will be your passions (what you characteristically care about and seek, including what you abhor and avoid) and

the associated characteristic patterns of thought (that is, how you think about what you care about, both pro and con; your way of thinking about what you care about both shapes and is shaped by what you care about). It also includes dispositions to deliberate in preparation for overt action. Sinning expresses sinful caring and implements sinful thinking; sinning makes you sinful and sinfulness predisposes you to sin.

Repeatedly in this book we've seen that character is psychological continuity, personal sameness across time. Such sameness can be good or bad. Anti-Climacus comments about people who are unaware of their sinfulness because they think only in terms of episodes and not in terms of psychological continuity or character. But episodic thinking is itself a consequence of sinfulness. He notes that

> eternity is the essential continuity and demands this of the person or that he be conscious as spirit and have faith. The sinner, however, is so much in the power of sin that he has no idea of its wholly encompassing nature, that he is lost and on the way to destruction. He takes into account only each particular new sin that seems to give him new impetus on the road to destruction, just as if he were not proceeding along that way the moment before with all the impetus of his previous sins. Sin has become so natural to him, or sin has become so much his second nature, that he finds the daily everyday to be entirely in order, and he himself pauses only for a moment each time he perceives new impetus, so to speak, from new sin. In his lostness, he is blind to the fact that his life has the continuity of sin instead of the essential continuity of the eternal through being before God in faith. (SUD, 105)

Sins leave behind them a personal residue of corruption that is more and deeper saturated than the inertia that yielded the immediately preceding sinful act. Each sinful act contributes its bit to this residual sinfulness, and each act of genuine repentance thins it back a little. Thus, states of character are *reflexively causal* in the sense that expressions of them tend to confirm and deepen them. Both sinfulness and virtue, as states of character, are deepened, respectively, by sins and virtuous actions. And the development of either sinfulness or virtue can be halted and reversed by episodes of its opposite. Repentance, for example, which is the expression of the virtue of contrition, can halt the progress of sinfulness, and even reverse it. Genuine repentance (as distinguished from regret about being found out, for example) is an alliance with virtue in the sense that it is motivated by a concern for the good. But, less auspiciously, sinful actions can halt and even reverse progress in virtue.

To adopt the language of classical ethics, sinfulness is what Aristotle would call a *hexis*,[15] and Aquinas a *habitus*. Terence Irwin, in his translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, translates *hexis* with "state," paralleling

Kierkegaard's designation of sinfulness as a *Tilstand* (state).[16] For Aristotle, justice, courage, temperance, and all the virtues are "states" of character. We noted in chapter 4 that older translations of Aquinas translate *habitus* as "habit," but that this translation is deficient inasmuch as habits are automatic or semiautomatic behavioral dispositions, whereas *habitus* (Greek *hexeis*) are dispositions to full agentic engagement (thought, motivation, intention, imaginative inventiveness). Sinfulness, as a state, is similarly a disposition to agentic engagement: intentional actions motivated by concerns that are shaped by ways of thinking about the objects of the concerns. Consider a case of being sinfully angry. An important person has criticized my handling of a matter of high public concern. I think of his criticism as an attack on my person (it isn't) because I care more about my reputation than about public well-being and truth. Being in a position of power, I fire my critic and demean him. According to Kierkegaard, all of this stems ultimately from my unwillingness to be the creature that God created me to be, and to be such as before God and resting in God. My sinful anger and my vengeful action are not just automatic, reflexive, and thoughtless (habitual) behaviors, but *actions* in which my (perverted) thoughts and (perverted) passions are fully engaged. And they arise out of a state (*hexis*, *habitus*) of my soul.

Let us return to anxiety for a moment. We've seen that anxiety about something is based on a concern for security with respect to that something. One of the kinds of anxiety is anxiety about sin—or, rather, about the possibility of sinning. If you have this anxiety, you are worried about the possibility that *you* might sin. So the concern on which this anxiety is based is the concern for virtue or righteousness, and in anxiety you perceive the real possibility that it is endangered by your own possible actions. On the educative power of anxiety, Vigilius says,

> It is told of one Indian hermit who for two years lived on dew that he once came to the city, tasted wine, and became addicted to drink…. The individuality who is educated by possibility needs but one such story. In that very moment, he is absolutely identified with the unfortunate man; he knows no finite evasion by which he may escape. (CA, 158)

It's the story of an unanticipated fall. He comes to the city feeling secure of his ascetic identity, and *bang!*—out of the blue finds himself knocked back on his moral heels, destroyed by his own act. The person who is educated by possibility takes such a story fully to heart, seeing in himself a perfect analogy to the hermit: That could be me! And in anxious imagination he anticipates on his own

account what the hermit apparently failed to anticipate on his. Vigilius also notes,

> No matter how deep an individual has sunk, he can sink still deeper, and this "can" is the object of anxiety. The more relaxed anxiety becomes at this point, the more it signifies that the consequence of sin has entered the individual *in succum et sanguinem* [in flesh and blood] and that sin has obtained a domicile in [the] individuality. (CA, 113–14)

The sinner realizes that he's not safe from sinking even deeper into sin, and so, being concerned to avoid that nasty prospect, feels anxiety. To relax it is to become less sensitive to the danger, and that, says Vigilius, means that sinfulness (which is the consequence of sin) is feeling at home in its own skin. Such a habitat for sinfulness is a state in the sense of *habitus*. That's not a good thing. In anxiety, the person of virtue will keep his sinfulness as homeless as possible.

Sinfulness has a history in the history of the human race. It can be, and is, passed from generation to generation and can be picked up from the company you habitually keep. It is a matter of culture. People and generations and social pockets of people can vary in their degrees of sinfulness. But each individual brings sin into the world by actually sinning, making his or her contribution to both his own sinfulness and the world's—as Vigilius puts it, "by a qualitative leap." Sins are not fundamentally kinds of behavior—say, cursing others, treating people contemptuously, cheating, committing adultery, lying, and so forth—but are the episodes of attitude that drive and allow such behaviors.

Given our interest in Kierkegaard's psychology of character, we might wonder what he has to say about vices—traits of bad character. He almost never uses the word "vice" (*Last*) except in connection with the claim, often attributed to Augustine, that the virtues of the pagans are glittering vices.[17] But his discourses and other writings are peppered with references to the traits that have been classically called vices. Pride, vanity, wrath, defiance, rashness, envy (CA, 116), cowardice, stinginess, dishonesty, hypocrisy (CA, 145), quarreling, malice, anger, litigation, discord, factionalism (EUD, 61). "The first sickness [not fearing what one ought to fear] is defiance and obstinacy and self-willfulness; the second [fearing what one ought not to fear] is cravenness and servility and hypocrisy" (UDVS, 46).

Just as the attitudes (despair of the true self and its consequent anxiety about the good) that constitute the core of sin give rise to sinful actions (lies, cheatings, debaucheries, hypocritical and cowardly actions, and so forth), they give rise to the particular vices as well. Or perhaps we should say that the vices are

specifications or specializations of sinfulness. Words like "pride," "wrath," "defiance," "envy," and the others denote intermediate dispositions—intermediate between the basic sinful attitudes and the particular sinful actions.

Sin and Virtues

We've seen that Kierkegaard wrote two deep books about sin. In addition, sin and guilt are topics that necessarily arise, implicitly or explicitly, throughout his authorship. Christian character cannot be properly explored except against a constant background awareness of sin. But it is also true that sin cannot have the last word in a project as widely exploratory of, and thoroughly devoted to, good ethical and spiritual character and "the upbuilding" as Kierkegaard's authorship is.

You will remember that the introduction to *The Concept of Anxiety* discusses the capacities and deficiencies of the various "sciences"—metaphysics, psychology, ethics, dogmatics, the sermon—for keeping straight the concept of sin. Ethics is superior to psychology and metaphysics in this regard, because it has the mood of earnestness. Vigilius says, "Ethics points to ideality as a task and assumes that every man possesses the requisite conditions" (CA, 16) and "all ancient ethics was based on the presupposition that virtue can be realized" (CA, 19). That assumption is the problem with traditional ethics. The combination of sin and taking with full seriousness the upward call of ethics is that "ethics develops a contradiction, inasmuch as it makes clear both the difficulty and the impossibility" (CA, 16).

> The more ethics remains in its ideality, and never becomes so inhuman as to lose sight of actuality, but corresponds to actuality by presenting itself as the task for every man in such a way that it will make him the true and the whole man, the man *kat' exochēn* [in an eminent sense], the more it increases the tension of the difficulty.[18] In the struggle to actualize the task of ethics, sin shows itself not as something that belongs only accidentally to the accidental individual, but as something that withdraws deeper and deeper as a deeper and deeper presupposition, as a presupposition that goes beyond the individual. (CA, 18–19)

Traditional ethics simply describes the ideal of perfected humanity—having the virtues of justice, temperance, courage, and wisdom, say—and then, in its naïveté about sin, says, "Now become that, and all will be well with you."

If, on the other hand, traditional ethics attempts to give frank and full credence to sin, "its ideality comes to an end" (CA, 18), that is, ethics is seen to be a hopeless enterprise, one with a literally unrealizable goal. Vigilius calls this

traditional ethics "the first ethics" and distinguishes it from "the second ethics," which embraces the revelation of human sinfulness in all its tenacity and depth, along with the revelation that in Jesus Christ God has made atonement for human sin. The second ethics is also an ideal "science," and in its own way accepts the task of making human beings true and whole in virtues, human *kat' exochēn*. But now its ideal is qualified by the dogmatic acceptance of sin's reality. The second ethics

> finds its place as the science that has as a task for actuality *the dogmatic consciousness of actuality*. This ethics does not ignore sin, and it does not have its ideality in making ideal demands; rather, it has its ideality in *the penetrating consciousness of actuality*, [including] of the actuality of sin, but note carefully, not with metaphysical light-mindedness or with psychological concupiscence. (CA, 20, italics added)

What in the world is the penetrating dogmatic consciousness of actuality?

Dogmatics is Christian teaching, especially the parts that require revelation, of which the paradigm cases are sin and atonement. Actuality (*Virkelighed*) is an important concept in Kierkegaard's thought.[19] The word means something like "the real world," and it refers to both the actual "existing" human subject and the actual social world in which that subject (you or I) must act. The contrast is usually with aesthetic fantasizing or intellectual detachment, but here is an example from Kierkegaard's journal that is not quite either of those, but a sort of play acting:

> Patience, faith, humility, etc., in short, all the Christian virtues in non-actual dangers (for example, when a person shirks making the right decisions, refuses to take the shower bath of actuality so that he is actually scoffed at, is actually destitute, is actually hated by the world, etc.) are like heroism in peacetime. It is as if a soldier on the drill ground in a peaceful military exercise to capture a peewit-house assumed a martial air like that of Daniel Rantzau in battle. What is comical about it is the martial air—and the danger is pure nonsense, make-believe, a stage setting. Children play soldier, in peacetime men play war, and most men play at religion. (JP 1:941)

The comical here is the incongruity of exercising the Christian virtues outside of "actuality"—that is, outside the real world to which they belong. So the ideal in the second ethics is a consciousness of actuality, as opposed to fantasy, make-believe, day-dreaming, reverie, or seminar-objectivity, and this is a consciousness that is "dogmatic," thus shaped by Christian teaching.[20]

The word "consciousness" may seem a little odd as an ethical ideal. Vigilius speaks of "penetrating" consciousness. I think the penetration goes both of two ways: the person who approximates the Christian ideal sees deep into the world, construing it in terms of sin and atonement. That is, she is wise about the world.

But she has this wisdom because the Christian teachings have taken deep root in her consciousness (what the New Testament calls her "heart" [*kardia*] but also her "mind" [*nous*]): they have shaped her sense of what is important and unimportant, of what is beautiful and ugly, of what is good and bad. And this "sense" is not just a matter of narrowly intellectual insight but is a mode of motivation—of caring about what is good, and thus being moved to pursue it. We may be reminded of Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds (*noos*), so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect." Penetrating dogmatic consciousness is thus a fundamental mode of being a person, of having character. It is a summary way of speaking of faith, hope, love, patience, courage, humility, gratitude, generosity, and any other virtues that may have the shape of the gospel of Jesus Christ.



Each of these virtues is, in its own way, a psychological formation—a formation of personality or character—contingent on digesting, as we go, the doctrines of sin and atonement. In the next two chapters, one on passions and thought and one on understanding and rhetoric, I hope to achieve a somewhat deeper grasp of penetrating consciousness as character. After that, we'll be ready to take a deeper look at some particular Christian virtues.

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1. See *Johannes Climacus, or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est: A Narrative*, in PF.

2. For more on this, see my *Faith, Reason, and History: Rereading Kierkegaard's "Philosophical Fragments"* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986).

3. See CUP 1:385–561.

4. In the first book of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues that some kind of happiness is the ultimate goal of human life.

5. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.3, pp. 43–44; Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1983), 15–93.

6. That is, the reader who has followed the argument.

7. *Repetition: A Venture in Experimenting Psychology*, by Constantin Constantius; *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, by Vigilius Haufniensis; and *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, by Anti-Climacus.

8. In discussing hereditary sin, Vigilius does not use the stricter conception of sin as distinct from guilt that we find in *Postscript* and *Sickness*. Surely when Adam brought sin into the world, or indeed when anyone first brings sin into his life, what he commits is not sin in the stricter sense.

9. Interestingly, *Sickness* treats sin as a sickness and a disharmony of the self with itself.

10. “That the time of dogmatics and ethics, as well as one’s own time, has often been wasted by pondering what might have happened had Adam not sinned merely proves that one brings along an incorrect mood, and consequently an incorrect concept” (CA, 36).

11. This is my paraphrase.

12. The Princeton translations of CA and SUD translate both of these verbs as “rest,” whereas Hannay translates the second as “be grounded.” The Hannay translation is more literal, but the Princeton translation of SUD may convey better the sense of security.

13. “About” is not quite the right preposition. Kierkegaard’s Danish is *for*, which would ordinarily be translated “before” (“he stood before the King”). But in current English “before” bends strongly toward a temporal meaning, which is not correct in the present context. So where the Princeton translation has “about,” I will use “in face of.”

14. Note the Stoic character of the virtues in this list. But I don’t think that historical Stoicism was the same outlook as that of the defiant despair.

15. Though, as we have seen, Aristotle doesn’t have the concept of sin.

16. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985). For example, “If, then, the virtues are neither feelings nor capacities, the remaining possibility is that they are states (*hexeis*). And so we have said what the genus of virtue is” (NE 2.5, 1106a10, p. 42). Ross translates the word “states of character.”

17. For example, SUD, 46, 82. See Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Whitney Oates (New York: Random House, 1948), 19.25, p. 504, *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102.iv.XIX.25.html.

18. Christian ethics not only acknowledges sin in its pervasiveness, tenacity, and depth, thus ruling out hope that perfect virtue can be “realized” in this life, but it raises the standards for what it is to be “the true and the whole man.”

19. See PC, “The Invitation and the Inviter,” where “actuality” gets a lot of use.

20. “Emotion that is Christian is controlled by conceptual definitions, and when deep emotion is transformed into or expressed in words in order to be communicated, this transformation must continually take place within the conceptual definitions” (BA, 113).

6 Passions and Thoughts

> *Whereas objective thinking is indifferent to the thinking subject and his existence, the subjective thinker as existing is essentially interested in his own thinking, is existing in it. Therefore, his thinking has another kind of reflection, specifically, that of inwardness, of possession.*
>
> *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 72–73

Thinking and Living

When Johannes Climacus says that the subjective thinker is "essentially interested in his own thinking," he doesn't mean that he is curious about how he thinks, as though he wanted a lesson in the neuroscience of logical thought, or even the specifics of his own brain. And "in" (*i*) means not "about," as though he's seeking information about his mind. "Interested" (*interesseret*) here means passionate and "in" means "in the course of" or "in the exercise of," that is, he deploys his thinking *in the pursuit* of his own well-being. His thinking is self-interested, not in the way an investor in the stock market is typically self-interested, but "essentially," that is, as to what really and ultimately matters about himself. Expressed in terms of the focus of this book, Climacus is talking about thinking that participates in a life that pursues and expresses moral character. In chapter 4 I quoted his citation of Plutarch's "splendid definition of virtue": that "ethical virtue has the passions for its material, reason for its form" (CUP 1:161–62). Plutarch's summary suggests that we are beings who think and feel, beings whose thinking is revealed in our feelings and whose feelings are shaped by our thinking. Thought and emotion are fundamental human functions, and excellence in being human is a matter of their right interaction. I ended chapter 5 with a brief discussion of Vigilius Haufniensis's claim that the character ideal of the "second ethics" (Christianity) is the "penetrating dogmatic consciousness of actuality." In the present chapter we will go deeper into Kierkegaard's understanding of that consciousness. Doing so will involve exploring the nature and variety of passions in his thinking and the complicated ways they are shaped and qualified by "reason" or thought. Ultimately, the penetrating dogmatic consciousness of actuality—Christian character—*is* a kind of passion, namely passion that incorporates distinctively Christian thought.

I will make considerable use of the word "emotion" in the following discussion, but Kierkegaard speaks the older language of passions and feelings. His main words are *Lidenskab* (passion), *Pathos* (passion), and *Følelse* (feeling). "Emotion" shows up occasionally in the translations. In the *Book on Adler* he speaks of *Grebethed* (being gripped), and the Hongs translate the word with "emotion." He also occasionally uses *Rørelse* (being "stirred") and the Hongs translate it also with "emotion." But mostly Kierkegaard writes of passion and feeling.

We can derive a number of observations about the nature of emotions from Kierkegaard's writings. First, emotions are based on concerns (interests, passions, enthusiasms) that, as we have begun to see, are constitutive of character. This implies that emotions themselves (episodes of emotion), like actions, are or can be indices or manifestations of character. Second, emotions depend on thought. Being envious of someone for something depends on your thinking of the person as a rival and of the something as what your rivalry is about. The thought dependency of emotions has several implications. One is that they can depend on spiritual outlook: thus we can have aesthetic emotions, ethical emotions, Christian emotions, depending on what thoughts are shaping the emotion. Another implication is that emotions are susceptible to the will; by choosing to think in a certain way about our situation, rather than another way, we can to some extent choose our emotions. However, since emotions are not identical with thoughts, there is no guarantee in any given instance that by thinking in a certain way about our life or the world we can make our emotions more virtuous. Yet another implication of emotions' dependency on thought is that they have a logic or dialectic or grammar, the mastery of which is a kind of moral wisdom. Kierkegaard's writings consist, to a large degree, in explorations of this emotion dialectic, a dialectic of existence or dialectic of character. A third observation is that, in addition to being based on concerns and shaped by thinking, emotions are perceptual states of a certain sort, and so give epistemic access to the moral and spiritual qualities of the situations they are about. It is because emotions are thought-dependent and concern-based *perceptual* states, not *merely* thoughts, that thinking in certain terms cannot guarantee the production or inhibition of emotions. For the emotion to arise or change, the thought must become a way of "seeing"—yourself, your neighbor, God, or the lilies of the field. Fourth, the moral and spiritual emotions have simulacra, which we might call "mere feelings," which can easily deceive a person into regarding himself as more virtuous than he is. Fifth, we can dissociate from our emotions.

Our concerns are sufficiently complex and mixed that we can take up an emotional stance toward our own emotions, a stance in which we critically evaluate and distance ourselves from some of them. We can, as it were, say of one of our own emotions, "what is manifested there is not really *me*." This need not be false denial; it may be resolute tactical dissociation. And sixth, we can deploy this power of self-dissociation evasively, so that by a certain self-subversive use of deliberation we avoid engaging passionately in ways that our worldview would prescribe. The task of this chapter is to see how this complex psychology of emotions is embodied in Kierkegaard's thought.

Passions as Concerns and Passions as Emotions

In English, as in Kierkegaard's Danish, "passion" (*Lidenskab*) can be used in two ways. It can substitute for "emotion" ("feeling"), or for "concern" (caring, loving, being attached to, being interested in, wanting, desiring). In earlier English, "passion" was the standard word for what we call emotions.[1] For example, book 2 of David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* is titled "Of the Passions" and is about emotions like shame, grief, joy, fear, and pride. We no longer use the word as broadly as that, but we can still say of somebody who is very angry that he is in a passion or flew into a passion. More commonly, we use the word for strong loves, interests, or attachments—matters of caring intensely about something. Thus we can speak of somebody as having a passion for antique automobiles, or photography, or fancy desserts, or justice for the poor and oppressed.

Having or feeling emotions about something is strongly related to caring or being concerned about it, but they are clearly not the same thing. Notice how a range of quite different emotions can be based on the same concern. Consider somebody who is deeply involved in the business that she has created, a specialty bookbinding workshop. We could say that she is "attached" to her work, that her work is a major "concern" of her life, that her shop is her "passion." We could say that she is "interested" in her work, though this sounds a little pale; that she is "enthusiastic" about her shop. To say such things is to say something that importantly characterizes *her*; but it is not yet to say that she is in any one emotional state or other. If the shop is flourishing, then on the basis of her concern for it, she will be *glad* (happy, joyful, contented). If it is not quite thriving but she notes signs of its beginning to do so, she will feel *hopeful*. If business is going badly, and she is aware of the prospect of having to close the shop, we can expect her to be *anxious*. If the shop fails and irrevocably closes, but

she continues to care about it as before, she will experience *grief*. If a friend of hers takes difficult or heroic action to keep the shop solvent in time of need, she will feel *grateful* to him. If someone intentionally or through negligence undermines the business, she may be *angry*. And so on. She would have none of these emotional responses if she didn't care about the shop.

What I am calling emotions are particular states based on one concern or another, mental states such as joy, hopefulness, anxiety, grief, resentment, gratitude, anger, pride, guilt, shame, nostalgia, and so forth. These mental states vary with the circumstances or, more precisely, they vary with the subject's construal of her circumstances, how she "sees" them.[2] But virtually any concern (passion, caring, interest, enthusiasm, attachment, involvement) can give rise to any or all of the whole range of emotions, depending on how the subject views the circumstances in so far as they impinge on what the concern is about.

In English, the word "emotion" doesn't do natural service as a synonym for "concern" in the sense I attach to it in the above paragraph. But the words "passion" and "concern" do double service. For example, we can not only say that the individual has a passion for her shop, but also that when she found out that her competitor had been rumoring about that she uses low-grade leather in her fancy bindings, she flew into a passion and started yelling. And we can not only say that she has an ongoing concern for everything relating to her shop, but also that when business slows up, she begins to get concerned (that is, worried or anxious: a particular emotion). Thus "passion" sometimes doubles for "anger," and "concern" often doubles for "anxiety" or "worry." In an earlier vocabulary, "passion" was a generic term for emotions, as well as for related states such as desires and aversions and love (which in one central usage is not an emotion but an attachment or passion; if you love somebody, you'll be vulnerable to sadness and anxiety as well as joy and pride). For example, much of what Descartes calls "passions" in *The Passions of the Soul* and Thomas Aquinas writes about in *Summa theologiae* 1-2ae, 22–48, under the name of *passiones* are what we call emotions. Many of what Aristotle, in his *Rhetoric*, calls *pathē* are emotions. *Lidenskab* as Kierkegaard uses it often refers to emotion; but perhaps even more often it does not.

In the *Point of View*, Kierkegaard speaks of the difficulty of communicating with an angry man (PV, 45); Lowrie translates "a man who is passionately angry," but Kierkegaard's text reads *et Menneske i Lidenskab* ("a man in a passion"). In the following passage from Kierkegaard's journal it is clear that *Lidenskab* designates some emotion, though whether it is annoyance, envy,

anger, or something else is not entirely clear:

> It is rather odd how men whom I generally regard as good-natured and who generally are not unfriendly toward me, when they get into a passion [*komme i Lidenskab*] are then able to lie to the high heaven and scarcely be aware of it themselves. Passion [*Lidenskaben*] does have a strange power, and therefore how foolish all this modern thing about systems and systems, as if there were help in them; no, passion [*Lidenskaben*] must be purified. (JP 3:3128)

That is, not much moral change is to be expected from the quarter of standard philosophizing; the kind of change that is needed is a change of the dispositions to emotional response. If, instead of becoming angry or envious in response to Kierkegaard, the "generally good-natured" began to feel appropriate contrition, they would neither lie nor be obscure to themselves, but would both speak and perceive the truth. This would be a purification of the "passions" (note: *not* an elimination of them). We can see that such a change of emotion would in all likelihood signal a change of concern. The concern on which their present emotional response is based is (probably) a concern to seem justified, morally and spiritually; the concern that contrition would show forth would be the purer concern for righteousness itself (see Matt. 5:6).

Thus a couple of passages in which *Lidenskab* quite clearly refers to the kind of state that we usually call emotion—a response to particular features (as the subject sees it) of the subject's world. On the other hand, *Lidenskab* often designates the concern on which such responses are contingent.[3] For example, immediately following the passage I just referred to from the *Point of View*, Kierkegaard calls a romantic attachment a *Lidenskab* (throughout his writings, this kind of attachment is a favorite example of passion). A romantic attachment is clearly not an emotion, but instead the ground of a whole range of quite various emotions that the lovers may feel, depending on how they take things to be going in their relationship—joy, anxiety, sadness, hopefulness, disappointment, anger, and so forth. Toward the beginning of the *Postscript*, Climacus uses "passion" in close juxtaposition, indeed interchangeably, with the word "interest" (see CUP 1:16, 21, 27). In such passages it seems clear that *Lidenskab* refers to a caring, an enthusiasm, a yearning. Climacus contrasts an interest in scholarly results with the yearning for an eternal happiness. He says that this latter interest or passion is "the possibility of faith and then faith" (CUP 1:27). I take this to say that at first a person yearns for an eternal happiness, without having found it. At this stage, depending on what the individual believes and how deeply she involves herself in the search for an eternal happiness, she may have a number of emotions, such as frustration, disappointment, guilt, or

possibly hopefulness. A person would not have such emotions if she lacked the infinite interest, but the emotions are not the same as the infinite interest; they are manifestations of it. But faith is more than just the yearning and striving for an eternal happiness; it is a resting in it, a having found it. Then the dominant emotions, based on the same interest, will be joy and gratitude. Thus, when Climacus calls faith a "happy passion" (*lykkelige Lidenskab*—PF, 54), he has in mind a *satisfaction* of the interest in an eternal happiness—in terms of the *Sickness unto Death*, a willingness to be oneself before God and a resting in God.

Sometimes both senses of *Lidenskab*—passion as emotion and passion as interest or concern—occur in the same passage. For example, in his journal, Kierkegaard writes,

> It is often pointed out … that it takes just a little trifle to arouse the greatest passion [*Lidenskab*]. In my opinion this can be explained by the fact that there is an unsound or half-demented relationship between passion and object; once passion has arisen, it is inflamed by the senselessness that the whole thing revolves around a mere trifle.
>
> If, as an example … of how a trifle sets the strongest passion in motion, reference is made to the fact that partisan or schismatic disputes, religious disputes, and civil wars always are the most violent —and this despite the fact that the contenders are so close to each other that it must indeed be a trifle which most often disunites them—it must be pointed out that here the matter is altogether different, because at the root of this disunity lies all the passion [*Lidenskab*] which also had expected or desired unity. At the root of controversy or enmity between strangers lies indifference—at the root of the other controversy lies friendship [*Venskab*], a spirit of solidarity [*Sammenhold*]. (JP 3:3131)

In the first four occurrences of "passion" in this passage, Kierkegaard clearly has reference to the emotions of communal strife: anger, resentment, bitterness, perhaps envy, and the like. He is trying to explain why such emotions reach a higher pitch of intensity, and require less to provoke them, among family, friends, and compatriots than among persons who are not so connected. His answer is that in the background of the strife of those who are connected is a passion—now in the sense of a concern or interest (see the last occurrence of "passion" in the passage)—namely the passion of friendship (which is not an emotion, but a basis for any number of different emotions). Irritations among the connected flame up more readily and more hotly because these people notice, dimly no doubt, that the attitudes and behavior characteristic of strife "senselessly" undercut the concern for harmony and for one another that is basic to their friendship. Thus a secondary set of emotions—embarrassment, shame, anxiety about the relationship and their undercutting of it—arise and exacerbate the emotions of strife. It is not clear from the text *how* the secondary emotions aggravate the emotions of strife, but perhaps some thesis about defense could

supply the connection: the intensity of the anger somehow reassures or justifies the parties, giving them a sense of being in the right, thus defending them against their self-perception as in the wrong that they perceive in their embarrassment, shame, and anxiety about senselessly undercutting the relationships that they care about. This explanation requires us to posit yet another passion in the sense of a concern or interest, namely, a rather intense interest in being in the right. In any case, it is clear that, while Kierkegaard doesn't theorize about the distinction I am pressing, it is to be found in his use of *Lidenskab*, and the distinction is a significant contribution to the understanding of his psychology of character.

Emotions as Shaped by Thought

Following a line of thought about the emotions that goes back at least to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and is much traded on by the Stoics and other Hellenistic schools,[4] Kierkegaard stresses the connection between emotions and thoughts. The problem of becoming a Christian is "pathos-filled *and* dialectical" (CUP 1:555, italics added).[5] As a problem of developing the character of an actual individual human being, it is at once the task of developing a certain pattern of emotional receptivity, and of thinking about oneself, God, and the world in certain definite ways, expressible in propositions. The propositional characteristic of emotions is especially evident in the series of discourses "States of Mind in the Strife of Suffering" (CD, part 2) in which each of the seven discourses is devoted to a consideration—for example, "that what you lose temporally you gain eternally" (discourse 5) or "that the weaker you become the stronger God becomes in you" (discourse 4)—which when understood and taken to heart yields distinctively Christian joy. Getting your emotions right and getting your thoughts right are intimately connected. Climacus makes fun of the "turbulent religious address" that neglects its conceptual p's and q's and ends up "at times a jumbled, noisy pathos of all sorts, esthetics, ethics, Religiousness A, and Christianity" (CUP 1:555) and thus makes itself existentially undigestible.

Kierkegaard faults Adler, a Lutheran pastor who was defrocked for heresy and claimed to be the beneficiary of a personal revelation of Jesus Christ, for using the language of Christianity but not the concepts, with the result that the emotions (*Grebetheden*: "grippings") he tries to pass off as Christian are in fact not specifically Christian (see BA, 118–65). Kierkegaard comments:

> Now, if from an earlier time and from a rigorous and earnest schooling in concepts Adler had had an

> unconditional veneration for the Christian qualitative dogmatic concept "a revelation," he would have had something with which to resist, something to hold on to, something that might prevent the rash expression. But Adler, unfortunately enough, is a Hegelian. (BA, 118)

The *Christian* concept of a revelation, says Kierkegaard, is the concept of an event in which an objective truth about God is made known; but all that had happened to Adler was a subjective feeling of being emotionally "gripped." Kierkegaard blames Adler's Hegelian philosophy for this confusion. The Hegelian philosophy was an elaborate and obscure argument that at a universal level the commonsense distinction between subject (mind) and object (what the mind encounters or grasps) breaks down so that objectivity becomes subjective and subjectivity objective. Adler had so swallowed and digested this doctrine that the Christian concept of a revelation became inaccessible to him. Even when Adler used the Christian words, they had the Hegelian meaning (that is, they collapsed the objective revelation into something merely subjective), and so were incapable of giving shape to Christian character.

I cannot help being reminded here of the way Christian concepts and Christian experience have been deformed in more recent times by existentialism (Heideggerian theology), process philosophy (Whitehead), and by the various psychotherapeutic systems of concepts (for example, the Jungian and Rogerian, among many others). I have commented on such things in *Rudolf Bultmann's Theology* and *Taking the Word to Heart*.[6] The ways that these various conceptions of humanity distort Christian concepts vary from philosophy to philosophy and need to be studied one by one. Speaking of an observation of Johannes de Silentio, the author of *Fear and Trembling*, Merold Westphal comments,

> There is a theology that accepts the Hegelian offer of tutelage, or, more generally, that seeks to become scientific and intellectually respectable by giving hermeneutical hegemony to some contemporary philosophy. Putting delicacy aside, Silentio does not merely accuse it of being too timid to think for itself out of its own resources. He calls it a whore.[7]

When Kierkegaard speaks of a "rigorous and earnest schooling in concepts" that might have shaped Adler in "an unconditional veneration" for the Christian dogmatic concept of a revelation, he identifies two inseparable aspects of a proper Christian emotional education: (1) a rigorous schooling in concepts that is (2) earnest enough to inculcate unconditional veneration for what the concepts are about. The first part gives the conceptual structure of the Christian emotions, the second part the concern, the caring, the passion on which those emotions are

to be based.

In his upbuilding discourses Kierkegaard repeatedly instructs us on how to *think* so as to have, or not to have, a given emotion. The key to getting free from the heathen anxiety (*Bekymring*) of abundance—the anxiety that we might lose our wealth—is not to change our physical and social circumstances (which before reflection may seem to be the source of our anxiety), but to change how we think about our situation. "But is there not something that can take abundance and wealth away from [a rich man] so that it is taken away without his becoming one of the formerly rich? Yes, there is such a thing! What power is it, then? It is thought and the power of thought" (CD, 26). A crucial difference between the emotional life of the heathen and that of the Christian is in the leading thoughts by which they conceptualize their goods: The rich heathen's mind is shaped by "the thought of *possession* … the thought that he owns and possesses this wealth and abundance as *his*" (CD, 26; Kierkegaard's italics). The Christian, by contrast, avoids the anxiety of riches and abundance, "bearing in mind" (CD, 25) that he is a *traveler* through this life, like a man who sits down on benches that are not his, sleeps in hotel rooms that are not his, and eats in dining rooms that are not his. The rich Christian is like the heathen in taking joy in his possessions, but with the difference that he thinks of those possessions in distinctively Christian terms: as *gifts of his heavenly Father*, and as *resources for doing good for others and serving God* (see CD, 32).

In another place (UDVS, part 3, discourse 5) Kierkegaard counsels his reader how to experience a distinctively religious joy. This joy is not ordinary; it takes tribulation as its object. The natural person experiences joy on *recovering* from an illness, *avoiding* tribulation, and when hardship comes is more likely to feel sorrow, self-pity, or resentment. But joy in suffering is possible because of the Christian teaching that "hardship is the road" (that is, it is the normal way to enter the kingdom of God—Acts 14:22; 1 Thess. 3:3; James 2:2–4). Imagine someone who is crippled for life in an accident. The natural thoughts about this circumstance are that his life is spoiled, that he is confronting an obstacle to fulfillment, that he is unfortunate. But with the help of the thought that tribulation is the way, the disability is seen not as spoiling his life but as enhancing it, not as an obstacle but as a special path, not as a misfortune but as a peculiar sort of blessing.

Thus religious thoughts are the basis for a very different configuration of emotional responses than the "ordinary" or "natural" ones. Where the heathen responds with anxiety, the Christian responds with calm trust; where the heathen

becomes resentful and self-pitying, the Christian experiences joy. And these patterns of response, if they become stable dispositions of the personality rather than flashes of feeling tied to very special circumstances (say, formal worship services or the high rhetoric of the religious address) are a significant dimension of the religious virtues. They exemplify well-formed "existence," "inwardness," "subjectivity," "character."

In light of these considerations, let us return to Plutarch's saying that "virtue has the passions for its material, reason for its form." Kierkegaard's idea would be that in human beings emotions are given their particular identity by the "reasons" that can be given for them—that is, by the thoughts in consideration of which the subject feels emotionally as he does. Some of these thoughts are false or unreasonable. For example, a thought may ascribe great importance to things that have little importance or may misidentify its objects or fail to consider important objects or aspects of objects. Goods may be identified as permanent possessions, sufferings as unmitigated catastrophes. In this kind of case the resultant passions don't provide the "material" of virtue. In other cases, the thoughts are right and reasonable. Ascriptions of normative rationality are, as Kierkegaard never tires of pointing out, contestable in matters of ethics and religion.[8] But whatever emotion-shaping propositions are taken to be correct will, within a given spiritual outlook, be taken by the adherents of that outlook to be normative, and in that sense reflective of "reason." In the upbuilding discourses from which I am illustrating Kierkegaard's treatment of emotions, certain propositions about possessions, social status, tribulations, and so forth are taken to be true and therefore reflective of reason in the last mentioned sense. When those norms are exemplified in a person's habitual emotional responses, the responses are the "material" of the virtues. Emotions are the ways the virtues are about what they are about.

The reader may wonder how the emotional suffering that *exemplifies* the religious personality, which Johannes Climacus discusses in *Postscript*, 385–555, relates to the suffering whose *absence* exemplifies the religious personality, which we find discussed in some of the upbuilding discourses. The former suffering is composed of emotions that overlap in type with the emotions that are overcome by the thought that tribulation is the way. For example, frustration, disappointment and anger may belong to the suffering of the person at the second stage of existential pathos (CUP 1:431–525), just as frustration, disappointment and anger are the nonreligious person's characteristic responses to tribulation. But the former exemplify the religious personality while the latter

do not, not only because of the different thoughts that shape these different frustrations, disappointments, and angers, but also because of the different concerns on which they are based. The religious person suffers as a result of a frustrated desire to relate absolutely to her absolute telos, while the nonreligious person suffering as a cripple suffers from a frustrated desire to function as normal limbs allow. The fact that a person experiences an emotion of a given *type* (say, joy, disappointment, hope, or anger) tells us next to nothing about the individual's character. It begins to do so only if we know what concern the emotion is based on and the patterns of thought that shape it—that is, what the emotion is *about*.

The reader may also wonder about the relationship between the concern or concerns on which an emotion is based, and the thoughts that shape it. The answer, I think, is that the concern belongs to the world of the thoughts, so that the thoughts can impinge on the concern. The concern to relate absolutely to your absolute telos, for example, can become a conscious commitment only if you have some thought of the absolute telos, and the concept of an absolute end is of course utilized in the thought *I am backsliding from my absolute end* or *I find myself absolutely committed to relative ends*—thoughts that impinge on the concern to relate absolutely to your absolute telos and provide the shape for such emotions of "religious suffering" (CUP 1:431–525) as self-directed anger, frustration, and sorrow over your religious failures. This reference to the "world of the thoughts" that shape an emotion leads us to the first of three implications, found in Kierkegaard's writings, of the fact that emotions depend on thoughts.

(a) I have already quoted Climacus's remark about the sentimental preacher's "jumbled, noisy pathos of all sorts, esthetics, ethics, Religiousness A, and Christianity" (CUP 1:555).[9] The comment suggests that emotions, and the character traits (virtues and vices) they express are always indexable to one or another existence sphere or "stage." Joy or anxiety, for example, may come in a number of sorts, depending on the sphere identity of the concerns and thoughts involved. There is aesthetic joy (say, the joy of romantic love, not yet transfigured by a sense of marital duty), ethical joy (say, a joy in some act *as* a fulfillment of duty), religiousness A joy (say, Socrates's joy in his own independence of the temporal world as he drinks the hemlock) and Christian joy (a joy in being received by Jesus Christ, the God-man). Each existence sphere has its characteristic concerns and interests, as well as its characteristic ways of thinking about the issues of life; and these generate sphere-distinctive versions of pretty much the whole range of emotion types. Episodes of these emotions are

distinctive manifestations of the kinds of inwardness or character that belong to each of the spheres.

(b) If emotions depend on thoughts, then, to the extent that we can voluntarily direct our thoughts in one way or another, emotions are to some extent within the command of the will. In a communion discourse on Luke 22:15, "I have longed with all my heart to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (CD, 251–61), Kierkegaard talks about what is in effect the active promotion of Christian emotions, especially ones associated with the sacrament of Holy Communion. Longing comes and goes like the Holy Spirit. It is a gift of God. But moments of longing for the eternal can be voluntarily exploited to our spiritual benefit by thinking certain kinds of thoughts, in particular, thoughts about the insecurity of our finite life, and thoughts about our sinfulness.

Or think of a lily growing on an ancient dunghill out of sight behind a ruined chicken coop.

> "It is hard, it is unendurable, when one is a lily and is as lovely as a lily, then to be assigned a place in such a location, to have to bloom there, in surroundings that are as unfavorable as possible, that are as if calculated to annihilate the impression of one's loveliness. No, it is unendurable. It is of course a self-contradiction on the part of the Creator!" That is how a human being, or we human beings, would certainly think and speak if we were in the lily's place, and then we would wither from grief. But the lily thinks differently, it thinks as follows: "Of course, I myself cannot determine the location and the circumstances; this is thus not my affair in the least way; that I stand where I stand is God's will." (LFBA, 52)

Because of its way of thinking, the lily experiences no vexation, no despair; its life expresses perfect obedience. By choosing to think like a lily, someone, a brilliant philosopher, say, consigned to a crushing workload in a second-rate university, may be able to manage her frustration and discontent, turning them into calm trust and joy. Kierkegaard is aware that what comes naturally to the lily takes laborious, long-term, strenuous self-discipline for a human being. It is one thing for the philosopher, as an adept with ideas, to think the thought, "God is in control; God is wise; what matters is not that I show my brilliance and affect with admiration my generation's intellectual élite, but that I submit to God's will and find my happiness there; for that is the way of happiness," and quite another for this thought to take root in the philosopher's emotions in a way that yields experienced calm trust and joy.

When we say that, because of their dependency on thoughts, emotions are partially subject to the will, we do not ascribe to Kierkegaard any simplistic identification of thinking and feeling or any automatic causal connection

between them. Nevertheless, given a certain stage of character cultivation, a person will be able sometimes to choose her emotions by choosing how she thinks about her emotions' objects. Not just any philosopher in a second-rate institution can think her way clear of emotions of professional frustration. But one who, through habitual active obedience to God, has gained the power actually to perceive her world in terms of the thought of God will often have it within her power to "yield" emotionally to that thought *or* to its emotional rival. After a period of spiritual digestion in which such thought becomes second nature, the will can commandeer the thought to bring on voluntarily those Christian emotions.

(c) A third implication of emotions' dependency on thought is that they have a grammar or dialectic which to know is an important part of practical wisdom. Kierkegaard describes himself as a dialectician of existence, and we have seen that this means he is an explorer of possibilities of human character, and that this is in large measure an exploration of possible patterns of emotional responsiveness. The possibility of this wisdom rests directly on the "dialectical" character of emotions, and thus on the dialectical character of the traits that are composed largely of dispositions to those emotions. But in the spirit of Kierkegaard we must distinguish a truly "existential" or *practical* wisdom from a merely philosophical or "theoretical" wisdom with the same content.

The chief difference between these is in the power or readiness of application ("practice"). The person of merely philosophical wisdom has facility with the concepts in question—for example, is able to diagnose the anxiety of poverty, talk coherently about the cure of it, explain the feelings of people under its grip, and so forth (in other words, has the knowledge of a competent therapist)—but this knowledge may not make much difference in his life. He himself may be in the grip of one of the anxieties of the heathen. He may be committed to the truth of Kierkegaard's account of this anxiety, able to diagnose it in himself and other people, but without being able or willing to put this knowledge to the practical work of relieving his own anxiety and improving his character. Instead, he lectures on the topic or writes articles.

Emotions as Aspect Perceptions

Following the theme of the bird, which is ignorant of its poverty or its abundance, as the case may be, and so is not anxious about these, Kierkegaard depicts the Christian too as "ignorant" of his earthly poverty or riches (CD,

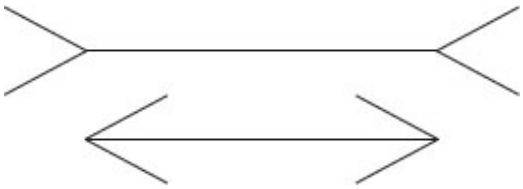
discourses 1 and 2). No doubt, the bird is literally ignorant. The concepts *wealth* and *poverty* are not available to it, so it can't be anxious about holding onto its wealth. But in the human case, "ignorant" must have a metaphorical sense. A spiritual Christian does typically know about her poverty or abundance. Kierkegaard's point is that these don't conscript her attention. They aren't salient in her thinking about her identity. If asked about the state of her bank account, she can probably come up with an answer, but mostly, she pays little attention to it. Instead, she is absorbed by God and his kingdom, hungers and thirsts for righteousness, labors and is heavy laden under the burden of her sin; these are the principles of saliency in her attention.

Such concerns and saliencies are not so much bases of knowledge and ignorance as they are of perception and imperception of a certain sort. Particular emotions in which the concerns of the poor and rich heathen come out are anxiety (*Bekymring*) for what they will eat and put on, and anxiety to retain what they have, respectively. In these anxieties they don't merely "know" that they lack or have wealth, but are preoccupied with the fact; it "impresses" them. It obtrudes on their consciousness with a perception-like immediacy. These folks are *in touch* with their poverty or wealth; they feel it. While the poor and rich Christian *know about* their poverty or wealth, they are not *impressed with* their condition.

While emotions are shaped by thoughts, the fact that they focus specific kinds of features of the situations they are about, and do so in terms of the concerns on which they are based, makes them more like perceptions than like *mere* thoughts. We are reminded of Wittgenstein's comment (about some experiences that have a much more salient *sense* perceptual aspect than the present cases) that "the lighting up of an aspect seems half visual experience, half thought."[10] That emotions are impressions of the situations they are about, shaped by the situations' personal importance for us, qualifies emotions as mental states of central importance for our "existence" (subjectivity, inwardness, character).

It is this perception-like experience that fails to be achieved in cases where a person tries to change her emotion by changing her way of thinking about something, but fails. However assiduously she may rehearse to herself the thought that, say, it is more important to serve God gladly in Fort Hays than to be showered with fame and prestige in New Haven, and no matter how sincerely she may believe this, the rival view of things keeps *impressing* her, or impressing itself on her in the form of resentment, discontent, disappointment, regret. The

unhealthy thought, rather than the healthy one, shapes the perceptions of her heart. It is the spiritual analog of a sense-perceptual illusion. No matter how convinced you may be that the two lines of the Müller-Lyer illusion are of equal length, for most people one line continues to *look* longer than the other.



But at other times, our perception of the situation changes when we think of it in different terms. In speaking of emotional change, Kierkegaard frequently uses sense-perceptual imagery. For example, the person who believes that he has gained his life by following Jesus is

> a blind man; his eyes are blinded by the brightness of everything he gains; he can see nothing of the everything in which the world has its life and its pleasure; he can see nothing of this everything, because he has seen that it is nothing…. the believer is likewise a deaf man; his ears ring with the gloriousness of the everything that he gains; he can hear nothing of the everything in which the world has its life and its pleasure. (CD, 147–48)

The worldly person and the spiritual person differ in what they "see" and "hear."

To see, we look. Seeing happens *to* us or *in* us; looking is something we *do*. Yet it is often by looking that we see; if we didn't look, we wouldn't see. Further, to the extent that we are looking *for something*, our looking is always guided by our thinking. When we look, we have something—however indefinite it may be—"in mind." I'm looking for my keys, and because I'm looking for *them*, it is they that my sight picks out from among the jumble on my dresser. And since I was concerned to see them, my seeing them is a tiny burst of joy (relief). The spiritual person "looks" and "sees" using religious thoughts, such as that *what one loses temporally one gains eternally*.

> The one who in truth wants to save his soul looks at what ought to be looked at, and just by looking at that he simultaneously discovers the joy, that what one loses temporally one gains eternally. Alas, just as the teacher's strictness is necessary at times, not to punish [*straffe*] inattention but … to get [*skaffe*] attention, … to constrain the pupil to look at that which ought to be looked at instead of sitting distracted and being cheated by looking at all sorts of things—so also the fear of perdition must help the sufferer to look at that which ought to be looked at and thereby help him to discover the joy of it. (CD, 142)

To someone who doubts that joy is to be found in the thought that the weaker you become, the stronger God becomes in you, Kierkegaard answers that "as in

all these discourses, everything depends on how the situation is viewed." It depends on whether the thought is used in such a way that the beauty in the situation is made perceptible and striking. To experience the joy is to see the situation in its "joyful aspect [*glædeligere Side*]." To "stare fixedly upon [*stirre paa*]" one's own weakness is to be "despondent, low-spirited, perhaps in despair." If the persecuted one "fix[es] his gaze on [*stirre paa*]" his oppressors' strength rather than on God's sustaining of him, "it is merely an error of vision [*Feilsyn*] on the part of the sufferer" (CD, 126).[11] The person whose "error of vision" entails that he is despondent rather than joyful about his weakness is that he fails to recruit the thought that God's strength becomes evident in our weakness.

To summarize, for Kierkegaard the thoughts that enter into and shape the life of an individual in a "stage" are not mere thoughts. After all, it is not much trouble to think after Kierkegaard the thoughts that he explores in most of his upbuilding discourses and other writings. Any intelligent and moderately patient reader can do that. But it's quite another thing to "exist" in these thoughts—for them to become the thoughts that shape your character. I am suggesting that for Kierkegaard, to "exist" in these thoughts is in large part for the thoughts to shape your emotional responses, and that such responses, in turn, are a kind of immediate impression of the way things are (the way God is, the way you are, the way the world is), the most natural metaphor for which is sense perception.

Deceptive Feelings and Feelings without Depth

My argument is that for Kierkegaard, episodes of emotions are activations of our concerns, in much the way our actions are. As such, they indicate and activate our moral and spiritual character, for better or worse. For example, our anger may be an expression of our egoism and trivial selfish concern—or our concern that the downtrodden receive justice and that the people be told the truth. Emotions indicate the quality of our character, inwardness, subjectivity, and existential depth.

But the reader may have followed my argument with an uneasiness whose magnetic center is the word "emotion." A subtheme in Kierkegaard's writings about emotion and character affirms the uneasiness. We have seen (chapter 1) how central the faculty of imagination is in Kierkegaard's psychology. Our imagination gives us rich access, not only to the eternal and the ideals of ethics and spirituality, but also to fictive worlds. If it makes possible the Christian life, it

also makes possible the life of the aesthete. If it enables us to take on the project of relating absolutely to our absolute end and relatively to all relative ends, it also enables us to feel emotions that seem to indicate virtues that they don't in fact indicate.

A cautionary theme in Kierkegaard's writings centers in the concept of *feeling* (*Følelse*). Like its English counterpart, *Følelse* is a word of ranging use. It can refer to a physical sensation (SUD, 31), say of heat or cold (pleasant or unpleasant or neither). It can refer to a sort of intuitive awareness or judgment—e.g., a feeling that something is about to happen or that someone is upset—or to the sensitivity or power of intuition by which such judgments are made. It translates some senses of "sense"—e.g., a sense of duty, "a feeling of one's own lowliness" (CD, 54). In one important use it translates the English "emotion" or "feeling" (where "emotion" and "feeling" are more or less interchangeable). Thus Johannes Climacus speaks of his mixed feelings of admiration and despondency as he contemplated the work of historical scholars (CUP 1:11). Sometimes *Følelse* is used to commend emotion as morally and spiritually important, as *Lidenskab* and *Pathos* typically are used. A subjective thinker requires "imagination, feeling, and dialectics in impassioned existence-inwardness" (CUP 1:350). Though no one can kill God, people can kill the thought of God in themselves, along with "every feeling and mood that like his emissaries bring him to mind" (CD, 66). But more often *Følelse* occurs in passages where Kierkegaard is voicing criticisms and suspicions of emotions—pointing out that these can be morally and spiritually superficial and/or deceptive.

Like "feeling," *Følelse* strongly suggests the *awareness* of something (very often, but not always, a state of the self). You can have an emotion (say, anger or fear) that you don't feel, but you can't have a feeling you don't feel. An emotional *Følelse*, we might say, is an awareness of oneself as in one emotional state or another. Thus it can be veridical, or in one degree or another inaccurate, artificial, or misleading. In this way emotional *Følelse* is like other kinds of perception: it can be *experientially* very real, while being unreliable as representing the state of your self that it seems to indicate.

Note that our inaccurate perceptions don't always deceive us. Consider again the Müller-Lyer illusion. If we measure the horizontal lines, we know that they are of equal length. So when we see them as of different lengths, we realize that our own perception is unreliable. Sometimes we know that we are not seeing things as they are. The same is true of the emotional feelings that Kierkegaard subjects to suspicion and criticism: sometimes they deceive or half-deceive us,

and at other times we are clearly aware that they are not good indicators of our character. Our ability to spot our own false feelings is a spiritually important ability.

The chief aesthete of *Either/Or* is not much deceived about himself by his feelings; at least he is not deceived about their artificiality and lack of connection to a solid self. I have argued in chapter 3 that poetization, which abounds with feelings, is a strategy for avoiding becoming a person of character. By the strategy of poetization the aesthete intentionally turns his emotional states into "productions" from which he dissociates him"self" by a distance of aesthetic contemplation. Anti-Climacus comments about the consequences for character or selfhood:

> When feeling [*Følelsen*] becomes fantastic in this way, the self becomes only more and more volatilized and finally comes to be a kind of abstract sentimentality [*Følsomhed*] that inhumanly belongs to no human being but inhumanly combines sentimentally [*følsomt*], as it were, with some abstract fate—for example, humanity *in abstracto*. Just as the rheumatic is not master of his physical sensations [*sandselige Følelse*], which are so subject to the wind and weather that he involuntarily detects any change in the weather etc., so also the person whose feeling [*Følelse*] has become fantastic is in a way infinitized, but not in such a manner that he becomes more and more himself, for he loses himself more and more. (SUD, 31)

If emotions when genuine exemplify character, it is not surprising that a vaporized self should be exemplified in fantastic, dissociated emotions. The extreme of personality development to which Anti-Climacus refers is that of someone who feels emotions only when they are not his own. He feels emotions only in the theater, or when reading novels, or when thinking about his own remote childhood (or somebody else's), or when watching a documentary about suffering persons halfway around the globe. Or if he does feel compassion for people in his immediate surroundings, this feeling too is "fantastic," that is, it works by converting the present sufferer into a merely poetic, merely "possible" reality, with respect to which no action needs to be taken. I think Dostoevsky's underground man is an example of what Anti-Climacus has in mind:

> And do you know, gentlemen, what was the chief point about my spitefulness? Well, the whole point of it, I mean, the whole nasty, disgusting part of it was that all the time I was shamefully conscious—even at the moments of my greatest exasperation—that I was not at all a spiteful or even an exasperated man, but that I was merely frightening sparrows for no reason in the world, and being hugely amused by this pastime.[12]

Throughout Dostoevsky's story, this psychological wreck has disconnected emotions, the artificiality of which he nearly always recognizes. Like the aesthete,

he experiences his most satisfying emotions about things he reads about in books, and he experiences the victimization by emotion suggested by Anti-Climacus's comparison with the rheumatic's physical sensations and shown in some of the diapsalmata of *Either/Or* (see, for example, EO 1:23, 24, 31–32, 34).

But sometimes false feelings do deceive or half-deceive the one who feels them. A rich discussion of unrealistic *Følelse* in which self-deception figures more prominently is at UDVS, 68–72.[13] The double-minded person is led by his feelings to think that he has the virtue of faith:

> So, then, perhaps the double-minded person has *a feeling (Følelse) for the good,* a vivid feeling. If someone speaks about the good, especially in a poetic way, he is quickly moved (*bevæget*), easily prompted to dissolve in emotion (*hensmelte i Rørelse*). If the world goes against him a little and then someone tells him that God is love, that his love passes all understanding, that God in his providence embraces even the sparrow, which does not fall to the ground without his will—if someone would speak about this, especially in a poetic way, he is gripped (*greben*) by it, grasps for faith as one grasps for a wish, and with faith he grasps for the help wished for. Thus in the faith belonging to the wish he has a feeling (*Følelse*) for the good. (UDVS, 68–69, italics original)

But then, says Kierkegaard, help for his own suffering fails to come, but someone else comes to him in need of help. Instead of giving the help, however, this person with the feeling for the good tells the other that he's not, right now, in the mood for helping people, because he himself has adversities. "Yet he thinks that he has faith, faith that there is a loving providence who helps the sufferer, a providence who also uses human beings for his instruments" (UDVS, 69). A minor adversity and a touching image of a loving providence arouse in him "a feeling for the good," which tenuously induces the idea of faith in God (a virtue, a character trait) in this double-minded person. But the test of character is the test of action: Will he act, in the actual situation of another's need, on the belief in a good providence to whom he can be a useful instrument? Failure at this test shows that the passion of faith is not at the basis of his emotion (feeling). This double-minded person might be said to will the good *in a way*, namely, in his imagination, much as he would if he were daydreaming of the possibility of having faith or composing poems about faith. But he doesn't will the good *in truth*, where "in truth" denotes *in actuality*, as a matter of *character* or *existence*.

The immediate feeling tricks the unwise into attributing to himself a character trait that he doesn't have. Kierkegaard's disillusioning writing here is "upbuilding" in the sense that it arms the reader with a caution against this trick that he may play on himself, exploiting the possibility of using his imagination to put himself in a "fantastic" state of feeling. Being so armed makes the reader

wiser, more suspicious of himself, more fit to become a person of real faith. It supplies him a criterion: that faith as a character trait is a disposition to loving action. Continuity of reliable action, especially in situations that present obstacles, is the chief indicator of character.

Thought against Passion

We have seen the intimate importance of thought to passion—both passion as interest, concern, enthusiasm, caring *and* passion as emotion. Thought enables passion in both senses to be about something. To be actively concerned with something requires that it be on our mind, that we be thinking about it; and to be angry or joyful about something requires that we be thinking about it in one way or another. Both passions and emotions get their identity from what they are about, and it is by way of thought that they get to be about something. So much by way of review.

In a long philosophical review of Thomasine Gyllembourg's novel *Two Ages*, Kierkegaard discusses the relationships between passion and a kind of thought that he calls "reflection" (Danish *Reflexion*). Reflection is the activity of contemplating something or deliberating about it, thus active thinking in contrast with the kind of thinking that is embedded in perception or desire. (Reflection may or may not precede the embedded kind of thought that gives form and content to passions and emotions.)

In *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age, A Literary Review*, Kierkegaard's chief diagnostic theses are that the present age is "without passion" and that it is "reflective." The theses correlate: the present age is passionless because it is so reflective, and it uses reflection to avoid passion.

"Reflection" (to be distinguished in the Hong translation from "reflexion" [TA, ix]) is ambiguous. Roughly, it seems to have three different meanings in Kierkegaard's text. First, it is sometimes approximately a synonym for "deliberation"—that is, thinking about what to do (though it can also be thinking so as to evaluate what has already been done). Thus "reflection is not the evil" (TA, 96) means, I take it, that deliberation is not a bad thing *per se*. Second, the word sometimes means the misuse of deliberation as a strategy for avoiding decisive action. For example, Kierkegaard completes the sentence above, "but the state of reflection, stagnation in refection, is the abuse and corruption that occasion retrogression by transforming prerequisites into evasions" (TA, 96). Third, "reflection" denotes an ethos, or group spirit, or social inertia, in which

this stagnation is accepted as normal, a group spirit that threatens subtle sanctions against individuals who would undertake energetic action: "Reflection is a snare in which one is trapped" (TA, 89). Let us try to see (1) how deliberation can lead to reflection in the sense of stagnation or inertia in reflection or getting stuck in reflection; (2) how stagnation in reflection causes passionlessness; (3) how reflection as a social ethos can grow out of reflection as a snare; and (4) how reflection as a social ethos can support and further motivate stagnation in reflection.

(1) Passions (in the sense of interests or concerns) are motivations par excellence—that is, motivations to actions. But actions don't always issue directly from passions. Often they are chosen from a pool of possible actions according to their merits, in the view of the agent, as satisfactions of the passion in question. So if I have a passion for tennis, and thus on a particular afternoon in spring I desire to play tennis and there are five sets of courts within a reasonable distance, I will choose a course of action by the criterion of how well it satisfies my passion. I reject one court because it's likely to be crowded, another because it has cracks, and so forth until I come to a decision and set out for the chosen court. This process of evaluatively reflecting on available options is deliberation, a necessary background for rational action. (This is not to say that every rational action must be deliberated; we do many actions for routine reasons, without going through any extended process of considering options.)

If I am passionate, deliberation will be only a necessary step toward action. My eye will be on the goal that my passion projects for it, and I will quickly traverse the necessary deliberations on my way. But if my passion is weak, I may dally along the way of my deliberations, much as a boy who knows that unpleasant chores await him dallies on his way home from school. Just as the reluctantly homeward-bound schoolboy may see importance in things to which he usually pays little heed, so I may become fastidious in my deliberations, checking and rechecking to see that I have entertained all my options, weighing and reweighing the reasons for and against each, calling on authorities, reading books, and chewing the matter over with friends. When Kierkegaard says that his age is devoid of passion and that reflection is partly to blame, he has in mind chiefly ethical (including religious) passions, a rare kind of passion in any age. In most of us our attachment to the kind of ideals that make for ethical passion is sufficiently tenuous that we welcome the sit-tight escape provided by deliberation.

Theological reflection is a case in point. People are typically ambivalent about

God. We do yearn to trust and obey, to yield ourselves to our Maker in happy love. But we also resist, fearing to let God get too close, anxious concerning changes God may require and concerning the light God may shed on our soul. And so we sometimes run into a student who went to seminary intent on learning how to serve God, but who gets bogged down in theological reflection. (Theological reflection can be seen as elaborate deliberations about what to believe and how to carry on one's religious life.) Instead of clarifying his thoughts and his life, the theological reflection casts him into a sea of hitherto unimagined theological options in which to swim about aimlessly, and thus provides a high-minded excuse for not settling down to serve God. Theology becomes a handy device for religious stalling.

It may even happen that a person who was originally attracted to Kierkegaard's writings because of their decisiveness, their edifying quality, their passion—that is, because of their power to foster our God relationship—slides imperceptibly from this use of them into a concern with "the problems of Kierkegaard authorship." That is, he starts out with a certain tentative passion for God, but finding an extremely long, challenging, noble, and fascinating deliberative detour, he ends up with a passion for Kierkegaard scholarship instead. Persons who are really impassioned for their God relationship don't get lost on this detour.

(2) So passionlessness begets reflection in the sense of the evasive abuse of deliberation. But reflection also deepens passionlessness. The problem is this: human beings live in time, and so, for better or worse, they are constantly developing. Action and deliberation have a natural rhythm from the point of view of the development and maintenance of ethical personality, making for a developmentally propitious time for action. Impetuous action is not good for the personality, because it means the individual has missed one of the opportunities to "soak up" the action mentally, to integrate it into his life-view, to make it contribute fully to the maturing of the passion within him. Also, impetuous actions are sometimes psychologically misconceived in that they entail consequences that discourage (dishearten, disimpassion) the individual with respect to the passion that motivated the action. But indecisiveness and prolonged deliberation are just as unhealthy, because the passion will go stale after a while—and one thing a passion can't abide is being stale. Actions in accordance with a passion tend to keep the passion alive. As Kierkegaard says, "We know clever ways of avoiding decision, and if this keeps on for a time, we are finally captured; we are like girls who have been engaged for too long a time,

which is rarely propitious for a marriage" (TA, 76).

A passion is like a momentum, and actions in accordance with it are like thrusts that replenish the momentum: as in bicycle riding, if you go too long without peddling you fall over, so in life if you go too long without acting. Actions nourish passions. If opportunity to act on a concern offers, and adequate deliberation has been taken to convince the individual that he should act, then not to act has the tendency to starve the concern.

(3) How does the state of evasive reflection in individuals lead to the "reflection" that is an ethos, a subtle social phenomenon with sanctions of its own? Kierkegaard explains this transition with the help of three concepts—admiration, envy, and characterless envy. The ethically passionate individual is a hero, an outstanding character deserving admiration. Admiration, which is a frank, cheerful, and humble recognition of excellence, is the most appropriate emotion with which to perceive the ethically passionate individual. Indeed, it betokens a sort of reduplication in the admirer of the passion that is at the foundation of the excellence of the admired. The cheerful frankness of admiration is fostered by a social atmosphere in which distinctions among people (rich-poor, talented-untalented, noble-common, and so forth) are frankly acknowledged and willingly accepted. In a democratic society, by contrast, we are taught that we are all equal, and this may lead us to think that all of us are really equally capable of greatness. And so we become less inclined to recognize the distance between us and the hero. Thus if, by virtue of our love of excellence, we are struck by the hero's excellence, our emotion is more likely to be envy than admiration.

Envy, says Kierkegaard, is the unhappy recognition of excellence. The envious person, assuming a basic equality between himself and the ethically impassioned hero, recognizes the hero's excellence but resents it because it isn't his own. Note that the envious person is still a lover of excellence, though an unhappy one. But envy, being unhappy, is an emotion we tend to avoid. And so, in a reflective age, "reflection" in a sense very close to that of the evasive abuse of deliberation tends to be called in to rescue the sufferer from envy. The sufferer finds he has plenty of resources for rationalizing away the excellence of the hero: attending a little to his human defects and to the thought that any of us might be as great as he, had we been born in the right circumstances, if only our psychological development had been like his, and so forth—and generally reducing ethics out by a deterministic psychologizing reflection—will cut the hero down to average human size, thus enabling us not to see the excellence in

him that makes us unhappy. With this expedient of "reflection" we now have characterless envy.

Characterless envy is but the shadow of real envy, for what it lacks is precisely the ethical passion for excellence that is the basis of real envy's unhappiness. "Reflection" in the second sense has dispelled it. Characterless envy has deceitfully convinced itself that there really is no such thing as excellence. But like all self-deceit, it also believes the denial of what it has deceived itself into believing, and so it is threatened down deep by the existence of what it perceives to be real excellence. Thus, it is convenient for characterlessly envious people to find *objective* ways to discourage excellence. And when we get a society of people who are interested in preventing excellence from rearing its ugly head, it is understandable that an "objective spirit" subtly opposed to excellence will develop: a poisonous mist that floats out on the social air the message that impassioned persons are not acceptable, that decisive and extraordinary actions in the ethical sphere will be greeted with the condescension deserved by crusaders and juvenile enthusiasts, or with the scorn appropriate to infantile stupidities, impetuousness, and conclusion-jumping—that only deliberation, and not action, will be greeted with approval. "If one person eventually were to surmount his own reflection and act, a thousand reflections from outside would immediately create opposition to him, because only a proposal to consider the matter further is received with rising enthusiasm, and a proposal for action is met with indolence" (TA, 104). So reflection as ethos and social sanctions arises as a result of the self-deceit that is characterless envy. It is the social sanctioning of reflection as the abuse of deliberation, with the purpose of suppressing the excellence that characterlessly envious persons subconsciously fear.

(4) Of "reflection" as a sanctioning ethos Kierkegaard says, "The single individual … has not fomented enough passion in himself to tear himself out of the web of reflection and the seductive ambiguity of reflection" (TA, 69). Let's consider a little further how "reflection" in this sense works by thinking about the two metaphors contained in this sentence.

Reflection is like a spider's web. The individual, who in a weak sense would like to act on conscience and becomes self-conscious enough to realize this, feels like a fly caught in this gossamer trap. Every time he tries to be himself and fly away on his own, to do what he knows to be his duty, he is able to create nothing more than a little motion in place: he is bound by the ethos that whispers in his ear, as it were, "Don't act yet; you have not yet thoroughly considered the consequences. Consider whom you might hurt by doing such a thing, or what

kind of future actions this might encourage persons less wise than yourself to take. Indeed, simply consider the fact that you do not know what such a daring action might lead to." Like flies that were *born* in a spider's web, however, most people are quite unaware that they are even caught in the web of reflection: they can, after all, flutter their wings a bit in deliberation as well as make minor very domestic and socially acceptable leg movements.

Reflection has "seductive ambiguity." An ambiguous statement is one that may be interpreted in two or more ways, and so can't be more definitely understood. Analogously, an ambiguous command is one to which no single definite act corresponds. An ambiguous command doesn't tie you down to a particular course of action, but it gives you room for choice. For example, a child is told to do his homework, but not told when to do it. This command has a little ambiguity, namely, the ambiguity as to when he is to do the job. Now if the child has a passion for doing his homework or for doing his parents' will, the ambiguity in the command won't matter. He will do his homework. But if he doesn't want to do the job, he will welcome the ambiguity, and it will seduce him into procrastination. This is something that a less ambiguous command wouldn't have done to him, and so it happens that wise parents in possession of a child short on passion for his homework issue commands that are not ambiguous, and so not seductive. Then as the child learns to act decisively, the parents can give their commands again a certain ambiguity without seducing the child into inaction; and at that point the child is beginning to become an individual.

Ethical action often requires sacrifice, suffering, danger, difficulty, and so a very strong passion for it is a rarity. Like the child, we don't very much want to know what our duty is. So we welcome a command that leaves it open for us not to do the ethical thing. According to Kierkegaard, such ambiguity is to be found in the social air one breathes in his age, for there people speak of high ideals, but since no one acts on them, sacrifices or suffers for them, or even thinks with decisive clarity about them, the "command" comes across ambiguously. It doesn't say simply and clearly, "This is your duty." To such an ambiguity a person doesn't usually say, "Get behind me, Satan. I wish to know clearly what my ethical duty is." No, this is just what I wanted to hear, I who really would enjoy the self-admiration attaching to speaking ethically while not feeling under pressure to sacrifice something. The ethos of reflection offers me a deceptive substitute for ethical self-complacency while allowing me to remain inactive. I am susceptible of this seduction in the first place because I'm short on ethical passion. If I had it, I would see through the ambiguity and refuse to be seduced.

But once I am seduced, I am all the less likely to develop ethical passion, because I have been made comfortable with myself.

In this chapter we have noted that Kierkegaard thinks of passions as both concerns and emotions, have explored how passions as emotions are based on passions as concerns, and have seen that passions as concerns are largely constitutive of moral and spiritual character. We have seen that for Kierkegaard passions in both senses depend crucially on thoughts and ways of thinking, and that the identity of any concern or emotion is determined by the thought that shapes it. We have also seen that emotions are not mere thoughts, but a kind of concerned perceptual state that embodies them. In the last two sections of the chapter, we have looked at some pitfalls of emotions and thoughts: at deceptive and shallow feelings, on the one hand, and some liabilities of thought in the form of deliberation, on the other. Through his very distinctive writings Kierkegaard attempts to combat such threats to the development of character. That is the topic of the next chapter.

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1. For an interesting history of the development of emotion concepts that culminates in our current use of the word "emotion," see Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

2. I work out this view of emotions in detail in *Emotions in the Moral Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), chapters 3–5.

3. "Concern" seems to me the best generic word for the interest or yearning that is basic to emotions. Other words, such as "interest," "passion," "yearning," "attachment," seem to have more specialized connections. Kierkegaard sometimes uses "concern" as a substitute for "passion." See CUP 1:201, where Climacus speaks of a person as being "infinitely concerned" (*uendelig bekymret*). *Bekymring* has the same dual sense as "concern." It can mean either concern in the sense of caring, or concern in the sense of anxiety. The same can be said of "cares" (noun).

4. See Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). On the issue of emotions and virtues Kierkegaard is more nearly Aristotelian than he is like any of the other Hellenistic schools, since he has a strong sense of *proper*, as well as improper emotions; while the other schools were all, in their various ways, suspicious of emotions and intent on limiting or extirpating them *as such*. Nussbaum brings out this contrast vividly.

5. Division 2 of chapter 4 of *Postscript* is divided into two parts—A: Pathos, and B: Dialectic. Since the A also corresponds to Religiousness A (generic or "Socratic" religiousness) and B corresponds to Religiousness B (Christianity), one might get the impression that Christianity is dialectical and Religiousness A is not. This would be a false impression, for as Climacus remarks, "Religiousness A is by no means undialectical, but it is not paradoxically dialectical" (CUP 1:556). In a footnote (BA, 112) Kierkegaard distinguishes being dialectical in first place from being dialectical in second place and says that these ways of being dialectical are represented in religiousness A and religiousness B respectively. In the present subsection I am pointing out that all the stages, insofar as they are stages of existence, are pathetic-dialectic, since they are all marked by distinctive patterns of emotional response shaped by characteristic ways of thinking.

6. Robert C. Roberts, *Rudolf Bultmann's Theology: A Critical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) and *Taking the Word to Heart: Self and Other in an Age of Therapies* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

7. Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*, Kierkegaard as a Christian Thinker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 30.

8. For deft discussions of Kierkegaard's concept of reason, see Merold Westphal's *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1991) and C. Stephen Evans's *Passionate Reason* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

9. See Kierkegaard's reference to "emotion [*Grebetheden*] [that] is of a specific qualitative kind, is Christian emotion [*christelige Grebethed*]," which is tied to a language of the heart that results from "proficiency and schooling in the Christian conceptual definitions" (BA, 114).

10. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), "Philosophy of Psychology: A Fragment" (earlier known as Part II, 207e. This section of the *Investigations* has many examples of the kind of visual experience to which I am likening emotions.

11. Søren Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), 131.

12. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*, trans. David Magarshack (New York: Modern Library, no date), 108–9. It is also interesting that the underground man several times contrasts his own personality constitution with that of "the man of action and character."

13. I have discussed the nature and origin of nonveridical feelings of emotion, and offered criteria of veridicality, in chapter 4 of Robert C. Roberts, *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

7 Understanding and Rhetoric

> *The important thing in reasoning is to see the part within the whole. Most people never actually enjoy a tragedy; it falls into separate pieces for them—nothing but monologues—and an opera into arias etc. The same sort of thing happens in the physical world when, for example, I walk along a road parallel to two other roads with interspersed strips of ground; most people would only see the road, the strip of ground, and then the road but would be unable to see the whole as being like a piece of striped cloth.*
>
> JP 2:2245 (January 7, 1836)

Kierkegaard as an Essential Author

In his introduction to *The Book on Adler*, Kierkegaard distinguishes premise-authors from essential authors. Premise-authors

> are at your service in every way with ever new tasks, proposals, hints, suggestions, indications, projects—in short, with everything that by merely being a beginning stimulates impatience because it does not seem to contain any demand for perseverance, which is always necessary if there is to be any question of arriving at a conclusion. (BA, 9)

Some premise-authors are talented writers while others are hacks. But, he says, they all have one thing in common: they are not really authors. He writes,

> They can best be compared to sulphur matches, which are sold by the bunch. One takes an author like that, on whose head, just as on matches, a phosphorescent substance has been placed: a proposal for a project, a suggestion; one takes him by the legs and strikes him on a newspaper, and then there are three or four columns. And premises without conclusions actually have a striking resemblance to phosphorescence—both go off in a puff. (BA, 10)

Such authors are eager to be read, to have a wide influence in society, to be the momentary talk of the town, but they lack a consistent life-view, an understanding or consistent outlook that their "premises" are serving. They have only the beginning of a syllogism. The virtue of perseverance finds nothing to apply to, since their writings are not going anywhere. A premise is an element in an *argument*. It combines with other premises to entail a *conclusion*. In a way, the conclusion is the reason for the premise's existence. A premise that is not pointing to a conclusion is a "premise" without a point (actually, not a *premise* at all, since by definition a premise is an element in an argument). Premise-authors are writers who have nothing but "premises."

An essential author, by contrast, is one whose writings are joined together in the common service of a "conclusion"—what the author wants to say about the meaning of life.[1] An author, says Kierkegaard, is a teacher, so it's essential that he or she have something coherent to teach. Kierkegaard is superlatively an "essential author" in this sense. Despite its internal diversity, Kierkegaard's authorship is an impressively coherent project, a body of work with a single goal: to contribute to the formation of his reader's character (and Kierkegaard's own: "My writing is essentially my own development" [JP 6:6390]). And the shape of that envisioned character is equally determinate. It is "the original text of individual human existence-relationships, the familiar text handed down from the fathers" (CUP 1:630; for example, Augustine and Luther). It is an authoritative answer to the question, which arguably ought to be *anybody's* central question: "How do I become a real human being?" The writing of a person who has taken on the task of conveying the gist of that "original text" to people who seem to have lost track of its depth-grammar will have to go well beyond giving seminars.

Authorship as Christian Mission

Inevitably, Christian missionary work centers on communication, on a presentation of the Christian message in such a *way* that it is taken up, grasped, and appropriated by those to whom the missionary is sent. This appropriation is called "belief," and so the missionary aims, in presenting the message in the special *way*, to engender belief in his or her hearers. But in the Christian context "belief" has special depth. In ordinary English a person may be said to believe a statement merely on the grounds that he sincerely assents to it and has a minimal understanding of it. The minimal understanding is crucial, even if this is not often recognized. If the one who affirms the belief has no understanding *at all*—say, the statement is in a language he doesn't understand, and he assents to it only on the authority of a trustworthy speaker of that language—then I don't think it makes sense to say that *he* believes the *statement*. He identifies the statement, in a way (it's *that* one, whatever it was, that was just uttered in Russian), he thinks it's true, and may even have a good reason for thinking so, but he doesn't believe it. After all, he has no acquaintance whatsoever with the content of the belief. Belief is a relation of a person to a content (something believed), namely, the relation of assenting, either dispositionally or episodically, *to that content*, and that relation is not achieved if the person has no personal

intimacy or contact at all with that content. The intimacy I speak of comes by way of personally grasping or understanding what the belief is about. Such understanding doesn't have to be very profound or extensive; but the person must have some, on pain of not believing.

By the standard of ordinary English, a person might be said to believe that Jesus is his savior if only he understands Jesus to be somebody very important and powerful and has some vague notion of what it is to be saved. But the Christian missionary will aim at a deeper understanding, a deeper belief (let's call it faith) that involves a formation or transformation of the individual's entire attitude toward God, the world, and himself, a transformation of his joys and griefs, of his aims and hopes and loves. Ultimately, to believe, and thus to understand, that Jesus is one's savior is to have been shaped in this very personal way. The shape of character is required for the firmer grasp (now we might call it an embrace) that the Christian message calls for. A grasping tool must be shaped to accommodate the shape and character of what it grasps. Pliers, for example, typically have little ridges on the pinching faces that dig just a bit into whatever is being held to make the holding more secure; if the faces were very smooth, they wouldn't hold on as well. Similarly, the human mind must be shaped to embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus the missionary's task of communication is not just to get the hearers to believe in a minimal sense, but to shape their personal understanding by facilitating a transformation of their character.

We have noted more than once that Kierkegaard conceived his writing career, from beginning to end, as an endeavor in Christian missions. And so we find throughout his writings reflections on the nature of his authorship and on the nature of the kind of understanding that that authorship will foster if successful. In a journal entry from 1845 he says, "A new science must be introduced: the Christian art of speaking, to be constructed *admodum* [after the manner of] Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Dogmatics as a whole is a misunderstanding, especially as it now has been developed" (JP 1:627). That is, the form of discourse that is known as dogmatics (we would perhaps call it systematic theology) is such as not to encourage the kind of understanding that is required for faith, and even has potential to undermine or corrupt such understanding. Let us take a closer look at the concepts of knowledge and understanding in ordinary life and in Kierkegaard's thought, as a preliminary to appreciating his thought about rhetoric and his practice of communication.

Knowledge and Understanding

Knowledge and understanding are sometimes contrasted as follows: knowledge is justified true belief plus some condition that guarantees that the justification connects with the truth in the right way. The "right way" condition is meant to rule out "Gettier" cases, cases in which, despite the believer's being justified in believing the statement and the statement's being true, the belief doesn't amount to knowledge. One of Edmund Gettier's original cases was that of *Smith owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona*.[2] Smith, who is generally trustworthy, tells you that he owns a Ford and on the strength of his testimony you come to believe, somehow, that *Either Smith owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona*, though you have no reason to think that Brown is in Barcelona, and never find out whether he is. It turns out that Smith was pulling your leg. He doesn't own a Ford, but it just happens that Brown *is* in Barcelona. So the proposition you believe—that either Smith owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona—is true. You have a justified true belief. Is it knowledge? Most people feel that, despite your being justified in believing the proposition, and its being true, you still don't *know* that either Smith owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona. The justification doesn't hook up with the truth in the right way; you're justified in believing the disjunction because you are justified in believing the *first* disjunct, but the proposition turns out to be true in virtue of the *second* disjunct's being true. So knowledge must be something more than justified true belief. It turns out to be very difficult to specify this fourth condition, and a great deal of epistemology in the late twentieth century was devoted to figuring it out—without much success, some might think.

My point in mentioning this case is not the importance of the controversy over the nature of justification, but just to illustrate one kind of knowledge, which is indeed the kind that overwhelmingly occupied the talents of the best epistemologists of the late twentieth century. In ordinary discourse, we often use "know" in this way: "Did you know that Lincoln was the first Republican president?" "Everybody knows that water is H_2O." In such cases, the content of knowledge comprises individual propositions that are true and believed in a sense that requires only minimal understanding. For example, you might know that Lincoln was the first Republican president without having any understanding of what being a Republican meant in the context of mid-nineteenth-century American politics. Furthermore, this kind of knowledge is thought to be on-off rather than graded. That is, for any individual proposition,

you either know it or you don't; there's no in-between state, and further thought or inquiry will not increase or deepen your knowing of it. It may deepen your justification for believing the proposition, but if you reach the minimum of justification required for knowing it, you know it; and if you're under that threshold by a hair, you don't. Admittedly, it may be hard to locate that threshold precisely, so it may be hard in some cases to decide whether somebody knows something in this sense.

Understanding, in contrast with knowledge, comes in degrees. For relatively complex or subtle things that you understand, it is almost always possible that you—or somebody else—could understand them better. How shall we explain this difference? One explanation turns on the fact that knowledge (supposedly) can be of individual propositions. By contrast, understanding is often achieved by making *connections* among propositions—say, explaining one proposition by reference to another.[3] Jackson made that cutting remark *because* he took your remark as an insult. The explanation is an expression of understanding—seeing how one fact or proposition bears on another. You wondered why Jackson made that cutting remark, but now you "see," because you have an explanation. By virtue of seeing what "caused" Jackson's remark, not only do you know that he made it but you understand it. We also speak here of the *significance* or *meaning* or *point* of Jackson's remark, as though the remark points to its cause. These are all relational, connecting terms. Knowing why something is the case would appear to be a kind of understanding.

But not all understanding is about causes. We began with the apparently very simple example of someone understanding a sentence, and said that if you have no understanding at all of the sentence, you can't even believe it. But understanding a sentence is not a matter of seeing *causal* connections between its parts, but other kinds of connections—grammatical ones, and conceptual (logical, semantic) ones. When we hear a sentence that we understand, "You have mud on your face," we instantaneously *assemble* the concepts *you*, *mud*, *have*, *face*, *on*, in a grammatically ordered, sense-making way and we "grasp" what the interlocutor is saying. We see how mud is being claimed to relate to you and face, namely, it's *your* face and the mud is *on* it. We make a whole out of the sentence's parts and so grasp it. Similarly, understanding a piece of music is not a matter of making causal connections among the parts, but of making other kinds of connections—hearing this passage as an inversion of the opening theme, hearing this cadence as a resting point before departure in a new direction, and so on.

When the prophet Nathan tells King David the story (2 Sam. 12:1–4) about the rich man with many flocks who took his poor neighbor's only lamb, his cherished pet, and served it up to the rich man's guest, David immediately understands the rich man's action as monstrous and loathsome and responds with appropriate indignation. He puts together the elements of Nathan's narrative in such a way as to make a coherent story, a story with striking moral import; and the story's import contacts David's heart and arouses anger against the rich man, and a call for his punishment. So David grasps a lot of connections in the story. He understands it. But as we know, he doesn't yet make *the* connection that Nathan has in mind; he doesn't grasp the meaning of the story *for him*; he doesn't get the "point." He needs to understand the story *better*. Nathan helps David make that connection: "You are the man." Whereupon David has what a philosopher might call an *insight*: he is struck again, this time not with indignation, but with remorse. Those four words have the effect of connecting, by the relation of analogy, Nathan's story with actions of *David's* recent biography. David undergoes a powerful moral impression of himself and the situation.

Nathan is an astute rhetorician and philosopher of understanding. He knows that if he simply goes to David and denounces him, saying, "What you did with Uriah and his wife is reprehensible," he may not induce in David a very deep appreciation of his crime. By contrast, the story he tells creates a vivid concrete image of arrogant injustice and of the suffering of its victim, an image fraught with pathos and, since David doesn't make the application to himself right away, the story sneaks past his defenses and powerfully seizes his moral sensibilities.

The fact that it seizes those sensibilities by way of *emotion* is crucial for David's understanding. In one sense, a person might understand Nathan's story "disinterestedly." Such a person (imagine an intelligent psychopath) would correctly connect the poor man with the lamb and the rich man with the visit of the guest and with the action of butchering the poor man's lamb for his guest's dinner, and be able to pass an exam that asks him to make narrative connections like these. Perhaps he even sees the story's connection to his recent adultery and murder. But if he makes all these connections and so understands the story, but in a purely disinterested, unemotional way, then his understanding of the story will be morally deficient, because he will fail to grasp the outrageous injustice of the situation that the story depicts. He'll miss the "meaning" of the story. Deep and morally appropriate understanding here requires a sense for the moral import of the rich man's action, and that cannot be had without emotion. The

connection involved in this deeper, moral kind of understanding is with the *import* of the rich man's action, its significance, its bearing on what is important. In the case of Nathan's story the rich man's action bears on justice, on the rights and well-being of the poor man. David's indignation connects that action to those values by touching David's concern for justice and for the well-being of the poor man. The story wakens David's concerns. If David lacked these latent concerns (if they were not an aspect of his character), the story couldn't touch him as it does, and he would be deaf to its import even if, as in the case of the psychopath taking the school exam, he were master of the narrative. So Nathan's rhetorical skill as a facilitator of growth in character involves moral-psychological wisdom about his hearer's preexisting moral sensibilities. This is one way that Kierkegaard's rhetoric is after the manner of Aristotle's.[4]

As Nathan has calculated, David responds to the story with indignation, thus appreciating its moral import. But as I say, he doesn't yet get Nathan's point. He doesn't make the connection to himself. When David does make the application, it occasions a deep understanding of his crime. In a phrase with which Kierkegaard describes some of his own moral and spiritual efforts at rhetorical induction of understanding, Nathan's story is "a thought that wounds from behind, for edification" (CD, part 3).

Socrates on Moral Knowledge

I said that late twentieth-century analytic epistemology took knowledge, roughly, to be justified true belief, where the object of belief was individual propositions whose content was grasped in some minimal sense. At the end of that century, as virtue epistemology was coming into its own, epistemologists began to take an interest in understanding, conceived as quite different from knowledge, not directed at individual propositions, but at connections among things, including propositions. But I think the divide between knowledge and understanding, even where these are conceived as contemporary epistemology conceives them, is hard to maintain. Whatever plausibility it has depends on commitment to a rather thin and artificial conception of knowledge. I've already pointed out that even the simplest cases of propositional knowledge require that the subject understand the proposition in question, so it seems that even the simplest propositional knowledge requires understanding. Even the simplest knowledge is structured, and epistemic access to a structure requires grasping the relations among its parts. Conversely, it would be very odd for someone to understand

something without knowing anything about what he understood. You have to know *that* some things are the case to know *why* something is the case (notice the second use of "know" here for "understand"). Furthermore, if a person's knowing something requires that he be justified in believing it, then on at least an internalist understanding of justification,[5] the knower must understand the connection between the proposition that he knows and the consideration that justifies him in believing it. For example, if I know that I have mud on my face by my friend's testimony, I have to see the connection between my friend's telling me so and its being so. Or if I know it by looking in the mirror, I have to understand the relevance of the mirror image to my belief that I have mud on my face. In cases like these, then, I cannot know without understanding. Understanding comes into knowledge in at least two ways—in relation to the content of the belief, and in relation to its justification.

So knowledge implies understanding; understanding is a part of knowledge. Furthermore, when we say that a scholar "knows a lot about" something—say, the way traits depend on genes, or the history of the universe, or climate change—we don't just mean that she knows a pile of individual facts within her field; we are claiming that she knows how those facts bear on one another, that she can explain them, that she has a systematic mastery of the elements in the field. In other words, when we say she knows a lot, we are claiming that she understands a lot. And when we say, "Alfred knows what he believes in believing X," we are saying that he understands the content of his belief; he has the cognitive intimacy with it that I mentioned earlier. This kind of knowledge is compatible with saying that Alfred does not know X, but only believes it. He believes X without knowing X, but he knows what he believes in believing X.

What is true of knowledge in general seems even more obviously true of moral knowledge—that it is not so much a matter of knowing discrete facts, as of seeing their significance. The person who has only a school exam understanding of Nathan's story doesn't get its moral point, because he fails to construe the rich man's action in moral terms.

Socrates famously held that people never knowingly do evil or fail to do what they know to be good; when they do evil, it is always from ignorance of the good.[6] This thesis has come to be known as a "Socratic paradox." It is said to be paradoxical because we have all experienced what is called "weakness of will" or *akrasia*. My action is "akratic" when, knowing perfectly well that I ought to stop what I am so enjoyably doing and do something else that is morally demanding but perfectly within my power, I just keep on doing what I am so enjoyably

doing; or when, knowing that the greater good would be served by my doing X than by my doing Y, I do Y—because I'm in the habit, or because I prefer doing Y. We have all, supposedly, had this experience, so Socrates must be wrong to think that if I knew what was best to do, I would do it. Right?

Well, that depends on what you mean by "know." If you think that "Socrates knows it's better for him to do X than Y" entails Socrates's *understanding* why it's better for him to do X than Y, where "understand" includes an emotional grasp of the reasons that X is better for him to do than Y,[7] where that emotional grasp of the moral truth is like the understanding that King David had when he heard Nathan's narrative and made the connection of that narrative clear to himself by way of Nathan's "you are the man"—then it will seem much less paradoxical to think that if Socrates knows it's better for him to do X than Y, and it's within his power to do X rather than Y, he will do X. In other words, if "know" means *fully appreciate*, then Socrates's thesis is not a paradox. We, like Socrates's contemporaries, use "know" in more casual and less demanding ways than Socrates does, and the appearance of paradox results from this less rigorous usage.

Understanding as Intrinsic to Virtues

So far, I have discussed ethical knowledge in connection with actions to perform (or not perform). But this is only a simplifying expository tactic on my part. Kierkegaard's writings seldom address particular actions. The overall aim of Kierkegaard's authorship is to reintroduce Christianity to Christendom, and this means ultimately to "edify" or build up his readers, that is, to facilitate their growth in such Christian character traits as faith, love, hope, patience, humility, bold confidence, purity of heart, joy, earnestness, meekness, forgiveness, obedience, conscientiousness, contrition, and honesty, to mention those that are perhaps the most prominent. In some cases, a trait that is called by one of these names is found in outlooks other than Christianity, and so the word can be ambiguous. The most notable example is love, which can be found in the aesthetic and the ethical spheres, as well as in Christianity; and in each of these contexts it has a different meaning, a different psychological or characterological configuration. Love is expounded at length in both volumes of *Either/Or*, as well as in *Works of Love* and elsewhere, and in each of these places it has such different conceptual-psychological characteristics that it might well be thought of as three different traits. A major purpose of Kierkegaard's notion of the existence

spheres is to show the differences among traits that may go by the same name, yet belong to different spheres. His ultimate purpose in inviting comparison of worldviews and the corresponding possible shapes of human character is to clarify the distinctively Christian life, that is, to inculcate the understanding of self and world that belongs to the Christian virtues, to provide, through writing, something like an upbringing in Christianity.

Aristotle describes a number of virtues in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, but he thinks that one virtue, which he calls practical wisdom (*phronēsis*), pervades all the others. Each of the other virtues—justice, courage, temperance, gentleness, and so forth—partakes of an aspect of practical wisdom. For example, the virtue of justice partakes of the aspect having to do with the distribution of goods (honors, material goods) and evils (opprobrium and penalties). But the part of practical wisdom that belongs to justice is not separable from the part that belongs to courage and temperance, but links to those other parts in such a way as to constitute a consistent overall system of potential judgments about the practical good in human life, judgments that take into consideration the appeals of other virtues as situations demand. Thus, for Aristotle, practical wisdom is the overall evaluative understanding of human life. For him, as for Kierkegaard, real understanding of the human good intrinsically involves caring about, or personally aiming at, the human good. If caring and aiming were not psychologically involved (if practical "wisdom" were just used to spin theories about what is good for human beings), its deliberations wouldn't result in choices and actions, as they are meant to do. Aristotle's understanding of the demands of practical wisdom differs at least as much from Kierkegaard's Christian understanding of understanding as Christianity differs from the "ethical" sphere that some of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms present. They are different wisdoms, with different virtues and different understandings of human nature. Nevertheless, Kierkegaard's understanding of understanding *parallels* Aristotle's understanding of practical wisdom in that each of the Christian virtues occupies its own space of Christian thought about self, God, world, and others, that space being connected to the other parts of the larger space of Christian thought about the human good. Aristotle would have had as little patience as Kierkegaard with "premise-authors."

One aspect of understanding that comes out more forcefully in Kierkegaard and Plato than in Aristotle's ethics is imagination—the arena, we might think, of the poet. Plato's dialogues that focus on virtues are dialectical, with Socrates asking for definitions of concepts and then relentlessly sifting and resifting by

logical criticism what is offered, in search of the perfect formula, which he and his interlocutors often fail to attain. But these conceptual refinements are often interspersed and supplemented with myths and stories to arouse and cultivate the emotional imagination. Plato's Seventh Letter describes philosophical success in the following terms:

> There is no writing of mine about these matters, nor will there ever be one. For this knowledge is not something that can be put into words like other sciences; but after long-continued intercourse between teacher and pupil, in joint pursuit of the subject, suddenly, like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled, it is born in the soul and straightway nourishes itself. (341c)[8]

This is a strong statement of the idea of understanding as "insight." As my earlier discussion suggests, ordinary English for understanding often makes use of the idea of seeing. The idea is that understanding is sometimes not just an ability to manipulate the concepts, an ability, as Wittgenstein might say, to "go on," but is a disposition to be *impressed*, to have an inescapable impression of the rightness of a connection or an application of a word or idea. Such is often achieved by a story, a metaphor, a simile, an analogy, an example, an appeal to the reader's imagination, skillfully integrated into a conceptual discussion. An insight achieved on such a literary occasion can arguably lodge in a person's consciousness (unconscious) and so become a dimension of the appreciation that belongs to the virtues. Note also that if "this knowledge is not something that can be put into words," then the definitions that Socrates so doggedly pursues cannot be the final aim of dialectic. For Plato, as for Kierkegaard, its goal is a formation of the soul.

Because the Christian virtues, like the Aristotelian ones, integrate thought (conceptual clarity properly salted with imagination) and concern, the person who is eminently equipped to present not Christian doctrine (dogmatics, systematic theology) but a fully truthful ideal picture of what it is *to exist as a Christian* will need to combine the skills of a psychologist-logician and a poet. Kierkegaard describes his vocation as that of a poet-dialectician and the training in Christianity that he is called to supply for Christendom a pathetic-dialectical one. The dialectic of the psychologist-logician is neither the "speculative" dialectic that Hegel practiced nor what our contemporaries call logic; it is rather a discipline that, following Wittgenstein, we might call the grammar of the virtues (and the vices and related concepts such as choice and the various emotions). It is a study of the conceptual structure of the virtues, that is, an account of the thought that shapes the actions, emotions, and perceptions of the

person who exemplifies the virtues. Such an account will make use of contrasting comparison of the "grammar" of, say, the Christian virtue of love, with some analogous non-Christian virtue (say, that of the aesthete's romantic love or of secular friendship). But since the universal task of humanity, every human being's calling to become fully human, is the proper object of fundamental ("essential") passion, of seeking, aiming, striving, this psychological logic will need to be couched, for maximal effectiveness, in humanly fetching and warning terms.

It will not do for the mood of the discourse to be cold, scientific, disinterested, and academic, because such discourse would deny with its mood what it says with its concepts (see the introduction to *The Concept of Anxiety*). The beings to whom the discourse is addressed are not emotionless robotic calculators, even if what they are calculating is the psychological logic of the virtues. They have to be in the mood to think profitably about their lives in connection with the Christian ideal, and discourse that is properly edifying will assist them into the mood. This requires the empathic-imaginative powers of a "poet."

Kierkegaard's Rhetoric

All discourse, even the most pedestrian record keeping, is meant to bring about changes in people's minds—to inform, to remind, to convince, to enlighten, to amuse. Rhetorical discourse, however, aims to change *attitudes*, judgments and understanding about matters of value and practice. Edifying or upbuilding rhetorical discourse has the even more strenuous aim of bringing about deep and lasting change in the character of the reader or hearer. And for Kierkegaard, as for the classical tradition in ethics, character, with the understanding that is essential to it, is intimately tied up with passions and emotions. His task, then, in writing for edification, is to inculcate in his reader, as far as is possible through writing, deep dispositions of emotional understanding shaped by the conceptual framework of apostolic Christianity.

To examine Kierkegaard's rhetoric I'll focus on the seventh discourse in the third part of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, "The Gospel of Sufferings." The theme of the series of seven discourses is the joy that can be felt in the midst of sufferings; in each discourse Kierkegaard explores a thought that can make the suffering an occasion of joy. The seventh discourse is about the virtue of "bold confidence" (*Frimodighed*; in New Testament Greek, *parrhēsia*) and this virtue's

power to mediate joy in persecution, and thus for a certain kind of joy to be a mark of bold confidence. Kierkegaard's text is Acts 5:41, in which, after having been flogged by the authorities in Jerusalem for openly confessing Christ, the disciples go on their way "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name [of Christ]." As an upbuilding discourse it is designed to help the reader become boldly confident and thus experience joy in suffering for his convictions. In the terms of the earlier parts of this chapter, Kierkegaard aims to facilitate a deep understanding—something approaching the knowledge with which Socrates thinks it impossible not to do what is right—of the aspect of Christian character that is under discussion, namely, bold confidence. I'll proceed by identifying aspects of the writing that give it the "dialectic" and the "poetic" aspects of its rhetorical character. These aspects are of course artfully woven together into a single fabric in Kierkegaard's writing; I separate them only for the purpose of discussion.

The focus of Kierkegaard's upbuilding discourses is itself a rhetorical element, inasmuch as rhetorical discourse aims to affect the reader's emotions and values, and discussion of emotions (provided it's in the right mood) tends to engage the reader's emotions. As we saw in chapter 6, Kierkegaard knows that emotions are structured by thought (they are not irrational or nonrational by nature). For example, the theme of the discourse that precedes the one I'm discussing here is about the joy in the thought "that the happiness of eternity still outweighs even the heaviest temporal sufferings" (UDVS, 308). Furthermore, we respond emotionally to the names and descriptions of virtues and vices (*vices*, "presumption" [UDVS, 321], "lightmindedness," "thoughtlessness," "hypocrisy," "zeal without wisdom" [UDVS, 323], "arrogance" [UDVS, 325], "the spreading infection of the envious and pusillanimous small-mindedness of incessant comparison," "small-minded fear of people" [UDVS, 326], "brazenness" [UDVS, 329], "timorous sagacity" [UDVS, 333]; *virtues*: "faith" [UDVS, 322], "calmness," "self-control" [UDVS, 323], "bold confidence" [UDVS, 326 and *passim*], "pride," "earnestness," "humility," "thankfulness" [UDVS, 336]).[9] We are thus repelled by the vices and attracted by the virtues. It is true that virtues and emotions can be discussed in a "scientific" mood that saps them of their natural power to commandeer our moral attention. So the mood or tone of the discourse needs to be personal, serious, earnest, ethically "primitive." Kierkegaard achieves this mood by speaking directly as one ethically involved agent to another (his reader). Compare Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which is also about virtues and emotions but is composed much less in the conversational tones of one ethical

pilgrim to another.

Many of the above-mentioned references are brief, little more than passing. But it is fairly typical that Kierkegaard centers an edifying discourse on a single virtue concept. To induce synoptic understanding, he walks leisurely around it so as to give a rich sampling of its various aspects. In our seventh discourse, that concept is *bold confidence* (*Frimodighed*). Like the New Testament word *parrhēsia* (openness, frankness, boldness, confidence, assurance), *Frimodighed* embodies the notion of freedom from inhibition, especially inhibition by social pressure to conform to a standard alien from one's own.[10] Thus it fits nicely with Kierkegaard's positive notion of *the single individual* in complementarity with the negative notion of *the crowd*. A *frimodig* person is free from the oppressive "leveling" influence of the unspoken expectations of the social environment. We might think of the virtue as a kind of pride. Bold confidence is a self-assurance and independence of mind in action and feeling: a security in your own agency (patiency), not as independent of God, but precisely *in* your dependency on God, yet very much in *in*dependence from forces in the world that would induce a compromise of your integrity and God relationship. Relative to those forces it is a kind of "pride" that is premised on a deep humility before God (see UDVS, 336). Kierkegaard notes the relation between pride and humility in Christian character in the following characterization of the apostles' sense of their own independent agency: "Never has a human being lifted his head as proudly (*stolt*) in elevation over the world as did the first Christians in humility before God! … No, proud as they were in their humility before God, they said, 'It is not for us to hang back and dawdle along the way; we do not stop—until eternity' " (FSE, 87). But *Frimodighed* also laps over the virtue of courage, insofar as the inhibiting factor from which bold confidence is a freedom is fear of people. We can see, I think, how independence of mind serves courage, especially where courage faces up to the personal intimidations of other people.

This "defining" aspect of the discourse is its "dialectic." The "poetic" element is represented by parables, similes, metaphors, analogies, and narrative sketches. I will organize the rest of this discussion around seven instances of such devices in our discourse: the parable of the priceless dish (323–24); the metaphor of the evil spirit (327); the parable of the youth who knew the truth (328–30); the similes of the sleep walker (332), the joy of a girl on the day of her betrothal (337), and of dangerously strong medicine (340); and the parable of the burning house (341). These devices are given their larger point and structure by Kierkegaard's conceptual dialectic.

As a way of introducing the virtue of bold confidence, Kierkegaard begins the discourse by talking about confessing Christ in a pagan context, where the deterrent to doing so is a fear of people. Early Christians were treated as criminals. But a person with real faith would surmount that deterrent because the inwardness of his faith would be so strong that he couldn't do otherwise than give voice to it. Thus bold confidence would be an aspect of his faith, as it was of the apostles Peter and John, whose boldness (*parrhēsia*) in testifying to Christ made the members of the high priestly family wonder, because Peter and John "were uneducated and ordinary men" (Acts 4:13). And the church was aware of the importance of this virtue, for when the authorities had released Peter and John and they had reported their experience to the church, the church prayed, "And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness" (Acts 4:29).

But the situation in Kierkegaard's Denmark is different, because the overt opposition has disappeared through the Christianization of the society. As far as appearances go, it's now the non-Christians who are the oddballs. It is the appearance of Christianity, and the falsity of that appearance, that present the new situation in which confession of Christ must take place. To give a strong impression of the situation that most people show no sign of recognizing, Kierkegaard offers his comical parable of the priceless dish.

Imagine someone for whom a certain food is so wonderful that he feels a strong urge to tell others about its loveliness and to defend it against any detractors. (Think of lutefisk or haggis.) But then he notices that everybody around him is saying the same things that he feels an urge to say, except that when it comes to *eating* the lutefisk that they all praise to the skies, they avoid it in favor of other foods (maybe cheeseburgers and fries). If he now joined the chorus and testified to the wonderfulness of lutefisk, he would just sound like everybody else, and his testimony would be pointless, inasmuch as no one disagrees with him and he convinces no one—but also, nobody seems to share his enthusiasm.

This person's actual *liking* for lutefisk is an image of the situation of someone in Christendom who has something approaching a Socratic knowledge of the value of Christianity. Everyone is ready to praise Christianity, but most of these praisers don't seem to appreciate its excellence. They speak without the virtues and the understanding that they entail. What will such a Christian's testimony look like? Well, for one thing, he might tell such a parable as this one about the priceless dish to raise consciousness of the situation. That would promote at least

a beginning of some understanding. It conveys this beginning by its vivid ridiculousness, by the image-producing potency of the analogy.

In connection with the parable, Kierkegaard makes the more purely dialectical or conceptual point that confession of Christ, as the concept occurs in the New Testament and early Christian literature, presupposes opposition. Confession of Christ ceases to make sense where all are Christians, and it raises difficult questions about mission strategy where the missionary suspects that there are far fewer Christians in Christendom than appears. He also makes the conceptual point that confession is properly from the heart, out of love for the one confessed, and it is decidedly not made out of a selfish interest in currying favor with the one confessed, as though that one required adulation to shore up a tyrannical ego.

The topic of this discourse is not the confession of Christ, however, but the virtue of bold confidence, and Kierkegaard is interested in its more general application: "We call to mind the supreme example of fighting for a conviction [that Christ is Lord], so that from the highest we might learn for the lesser [say, any moral conviction]" (UDVS, 325). The virtue of bold confidence needs to be called to people's attention because people in the current culture are subjected to an insidious "evil spirit":

> The small-minded fear of people in relation to equals and the tyranny of the equal, this evil spirit, which we ourselves conjure up and which does not reside in any individual and is not any individual person but covertly sneaks around and seeks its prey,[11] insinuates itself into the relation among individuals—this evil spirit, which essentially wants to do away with every individual's relation to God. (UDVS, 327)

We ourselves have "conjured up" this evil spirit that saps our sense of human dignity, our self-confidence and self-respect,

> gradually with the spreading of a certain superficial culture and with the proliferating of peoples' various reciprocal interests, gradually with the spreading infection of the envious and pusillanimous small-mindedness of incessant comparison, it unfortunately seems as if everything is aimed at stifling people's bold confidence. At the same time that there are struggles to overthrow dominions and regimes, there seems to be a supreme effort to develop more and more the most dangerous slavery: the small-minded fear of people who are one's equals. (UDVS, 326)

In ringing the alarm that this "evil spirit" is in our midst and in offering exorcism through bold confidence, Kierkegaard is calling for a godly magnanimity or greatness of soul that befits and completes a creature made in the image of God. Instead of "comparing" ourselves "enviously" with one another—a policy that

only ends in our fearing one another—we ought to be measuring ourselves with God and thus be above and beyond that craven fear. The metaphor of the evil spirit for the socio-psychological fact of this corrupting, dehumanizing influence is rhetorically apt both because it is vividly alarming and because it captures the intensely spiritual character of the threat.

So much for the introduction to the discourse, which occupies its first third. Kierkegaard begins the actual exposition of the biblical text (Acts 5:41) with his parable of the youth who knew the truth. This parable is about knowledge or understanding and represents a distinction that Kierkegaard often alludes to, the conceptual distinction between "understanding and understanding"—that is, between knowing with a minimal grasp and a knowing of moral and spiritual truth that approaches more nearly the kind we have been calling "Socratic." This kind of knowledge or understanding will be crucial to the virtue of bold confidence.

Kierkegaard imagines "a youth who has been well instructed in the truth" (let's say he has been well catechized in Christianity), "but he is ignorant of and without experience of the conditions of actuality." He lacks a life context in relation to which to *appreciate* the *bearing* of the truth that he knows down pat. But he creates one for himself: "his immature but beautiful imagination then creates for him a picture that he calls the world, where what he has learned now unfolds before him as on a stage" (UDVS, 328). Kierkegaard briefly mentions two important insights that confront the youth as he becomes more intimately acquainted with the actual world: "the defectiveness and mediocrity and instability and small-mindedness" of people, and that "he himself is also subject to weakness" (Heb. 5:2). But Kierkegaard's particular interest here is in "a reverseness that may be called *brazenness*" (*Frækhed*, 329, italics original) which seems to be a vice counterpart or look-alike of the virtue of bold confidence. The well-instructed youth is horrified to find out about people who not only perform shameful actions, but actually "glory in their shame" (Phil. 3:19). Shameful actions are to be ashamed of, and the right objects of pride and glory are deeds of virtue; so to find, after his excellent upbringing, that some people "reverse the concepts" (UDVS, 329), priding themselves on their vicious actions and lifestyle, is to be pretty shaken in your moral mind.

If brazenness is the deplorable reverseness, a sublime reverse-analogy of brazenness is the disciples' reaction to their being flogged for the name of Christ —for they, too, glory in their shame. The conceptual difference between these two ways to glory in your shame is vast, but the unspoiled youth finds the

Christian reverseness almost as upsetting as the other: actions for the good like proclaiming the Savior deserve praise and gratitude, not anger and rejection and punishment. So what are the disciples doing *glorying* in their shame? Shouldn't they be lamenting that the good name of Jesus should provoke such vindictiveness? Well, they don't glory in the pagans' perverse actions, but in their own suffering. *Their* shame is their *suffering* (334), their being treated shamefully; the pagans' shame is their actions (such as treating others shamefully). In treating their mistreatment as something to glory in, they are displaying the positive, proud virtue of bold confidence. They are actively taking it upon themselves to own their suffering in its resemblance to Christ's. You could say they are taking pride in being despitefully used. Using the parable of the youth who knew the truth, Kierkegaard gives the reader an impression, through the unaccustomed horror-stricken eyes of the youth, of the extraordinary *activeness* of the disciples in reversing by God's grace the axiological order of the world—turning their shame into glory.

The simile of the sleepwalker treading "with assurance over the abyss, yet in an incomprehensible way" works similarly. We "shudder" at such a sight, as we do at "this apostolic assurance, which, at the height of madness, speaks in tongues with bold confidence" (UDVS, 332), saying that their bleeding stripes are joyous tokens of God's blessing. Apostles differ from ordinary enthusiasts in that they are not just willing to give up something good (money, reputation) for the sake of their favored cause, but count wealth, honor, and esteem as *loss* (Phil. 3:8) in comparison with the glory for which they strive. The bold confidence with which they rejoice in persecution "stamps the concepts [of gain and loss]" with the mark of the divine (UDVS, 333). The mark of the divine is the reversal of worldly values. The same mark can be seen on the apostolic concepts of *honor* and *danger*, where the apostle may wonder "whether it would not be too great an honor to be crucified" (UDVS, 338) and where the danger is the possibility of forsaking the crucified one for comforts and longevity (UDVS, 338–39).

Kierkegaard impresses on the reader the character of an apostle by inviting him or her to contemplate the irony of an apostle living the life of a prominent nineteenth-century Danish clergyman.

> Try it, imagine that he who was to proclaim to the world this message about the Holy One's being crucified as a criminal between two robbers, that this man was dressed in purple and glory, that this man possessed all the world's goods, this man who was to proclaim a crucified one's teaching that the kingdom was not of this world—try it, if you can just bear the attempt, if it is not out of the question because the mere thought of anything like this has the ring of a presumptuous mockery of an apostle. (UDVS, 338)

Three times Kierkegaard invites the reader to imagine such ironic scenarios involving an apostle (UDVS, 338–39).

To impress the reader that this apostolic joy, so strange to the ways of the world, is real joy, Kierkegaard likens it to a paradigm case of human gladness: "no girl has ever been more joyful on her betrothal day than the apostles were on the day of whipping and on every such day which for them was a day of betrothal with God" (UDVS, 337). But he also warns the reader that one must take this joy with full seriousness and bold confidence, ready "to become in dead earnest what an apostle became, 'scum in the world, a spectacle to the world' " (UDVS, 334): "This joyful thought is not like a so-called harmless remedy that can be used in any way without danger and can be used for a light cold, but it is like a strong medicine, the use of which involves some danger, but rightly used also delivers from a sickness unto death" (UDVS, 340).

The last of the imagination-rousing and -sharpening devices in this discourse that I'll mention is the parable of the burning house. The last two pages in the English translation conclude the discourse, and Kierkegaard there reminds the reader that he is speaking of a broader application of the virtue of bold confidence than the apostolic context of confessing Christ. Anyone who suffers for a conviction can and should do so with bold confidence, in the pride of honoring God, not depending on support from fellow human beings.

> A conviction is not something one should rush to bring out in the world. Alas, much confusion has been created and great harm done because an immature person has brought out an immature conviction. No, just allow the conviction to grow quietly, but let it grow together with bold confidence before God. (UDVS, 341)

Then, with the case of a house fire, he illustrates the overwhelming power of fully flowered bold confidence:

> A spark in some wood shavings is put out with a glass of water, but when a fire has had time to spread slowly through the whole house and then with a deep sigh … bursts into flames all at once—then the firemen say: There is nothing to be done here; here the fire is victorious. It is indeed sad when the firemen say that the fire is victorious, but it is joyful when it is the fire of conviction that is victorious and the enemies say: There is nothing to be done here. (341)

Again, the likening of bold confidence to the indomitable power of a house fire well underway fires the imagination with a kind of perceptual understanding that is more likely than merely conceptual discourse to be embraced by virtue formed in the reader.



I've attempted to describe Kierkegaard's recovery of a Socratic understanding of knowledge and understanding against a background of contemporary epistemological concepts and to illustrate some of his strategies for inculcating such understanding—or better, an approximation to it—among his readers in Christendom as an aspect of Christian virtues. Kierkegaard's missionary calling was writing which, though perhaps essential to missionary work in the modern world, requires great artfulness and is not the most promising of missionary strategies. His concept of understanding integrates conceptual rigor with vitality of imagination and intensity of passion. As a "poet-dialectician" he exploits the power of bold conceptual contrasts in combination with richly described narrative sketches that speak to primitive human concerns. By his enormous creativity and penetration in these regards he seeks to "edify," to build up—or better, contribute to the building up—of his reader's character.

In the second half of this book I turn to an exploratory exposition of some of the particular leading traits of character that Kierkegaard expounds in his contribution to the recovery of Christian character in the Denmark of his time.

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1. A conclusion is not just an ending of the argument, but a culmination, a meaningful gathering of the premises in a way that makes sense of them, showing their purpose. Kierkegaard is thinking here about humanistic writing, and a conclusion for such writing is a coherent outlook on human life. But the outlook is idle "speculation" or fantasy unless it is reflected in actual lives. So the premises of a genuine author aim at a "conclusion," not just in the sense of a life-vision, but ultimately in the sense of a *life*. A life-outlook aims at a life of character—concrete human personality—that reflects the contours of that life-outlook. For Kierkegaard that character is constituted of virtues such as faith, hope, love, patience, gratitude, and humility.

2. Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?," *Analysis* 23 (1963): 121–23.

3. "Understanding requires, but knowledge does not, an internal grasping or appreciation of how the various elements in a body of information are related to each other in terms of explanatory, logical, probabilistic, and other kinds of relations." Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 192–93.

4. See Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, trans. J. H. Freese, Loeb Classical Library 193 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 2.12–17, pp. 247–63.

5. An "internalist" understanding of justification says that, to be justified in believing a proposition, an individual has to see the connection between the proposition and what justifies it, whereas an "externalist" denies this, and thinks that the individual's justification may be outside his grasp.

6. Plato, *Protagoras* 358c.

7. See Julius M. E. Moravcsik, "Understanding and Knowledge in Plato's Philosophy," *Neue Hefte für Philosophie* 15/16 (1979): 53–69.

8. Plato, Seventh Letter, trans. Glenn R. Morrow, in *Plato*, 1659.

9. In this list I have changed some adjectives and adverbs into nouns for the sake of consistency.

10. Kierkegaard does not explicitly connect *Frimodighed* with *parrhēsia*, as far as I can tell, and Paul

doesn't include it in lists of Christian virtues such as we find in Gal. 5 and Col. 3.

11. This seems to be what Kierkegaard calls "reflection" in *Two Ages*. It would be reflection in the fourth sense—reflection as a disabling social ethos—that I distinguished in chapter 6 toward the end.

PART TWO

Features of Christian Character



8 Joy

I have had more joy from my relationship of obedience to God than from the thoughts I produced.

Point of View, 74

Joy and Virtue

Joy is not usually classified as a virtue, but Paul lists it among the fruits of the Holy Spirit, along with love, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22–23). As we will soon note, joy can be vicious as well as virtuous, but as "positive" affect, joy is a paramount way of perceiving what is good. So *veridical* joy—that is, joy about what is genuinely and importantly good—even if not exactly a virtue, is a mark of many virtues, including faith, hope, and love. We will often have occasion to note this in the chapters of part 2. Those comments can be taken as an exposition of Paul's inclusion of joy among the fruits of the Spirit. Another reason for giving joy pride of place among the emotions is that it encompasses all the so-called "positive" emotions, such as gratitude, relief, hopefulness, admiration, and pride. All these are kinds of joy, more specific as to what they rejoice *in* than joy simply as such.

"My" Reader

It is well known that Kierkegaard, "the melancholy Dane," fought something like depression all his life and wrote extensively about such somber emotions as anxiety and despair.[1] It is less well known that he testified to his own joy and wrote extensively about the joy of the gospel.

Repeatedly in the prefaces to his upbuilding discourses, Kierkegaard refers those discourses to "that single individual, whom I with joy and gratitude call *my* reader." He rejoices and feels gratitude on thinking of someone who reads his discourses—especially if that person reads slowly and meditatively, even aloud to himself, "break[ing] the spell on the letters, with his voice summon[ing] forth what the mute letters have on their lips … that favorably disposed person whom

I with joy and gratitude call *my* refuge, who by making my thoughts his own does more for me than I do for him" (EUD, 53, italics original). That reader accesses the discourse from an interest in his or her own spiritual improvement, reading thus in the same spirit in which the writer writes. This joy is a heartfelt fellowship that Kierkegaard feels himself to have with his reader. It is not the joy of getting adulating attention for himself by his brilliant writing, or even the admirable joy of successfully getting his ideas across to somebody, but the joy of camaraderie, of friendship and shared serious interest, the happiness of joint attention to something gloriously lovely.

The book of upbuilding discourses published August 9, 1844, "seeks that single individual whom I with joy and gratitude call *my* reader, in order to pay him a visit, indeed to stay with him, because one goes to the person one loves, makes one's home with him, and remains with him if this is allowed" (EUD, 295, italics original). So the book of discourses loves the reader in whom Kierkegaard rejoices, makes its home with him, remains with him. But surely it isn't the discourse alone that loves the reader, but Kierkegaard too, for otherwise, why would he rejoice so in him? When the beloved is propitiously circumstanced, the lover rejoices. Joy in the thriving of the beloved and the thriving of the one whom the beloved loves is a mark of love.

My reader. Kierkegaard italicizes "my" in this stock formula: it is not "my reader," but "*my* reader," *Kierkegaard's* reader. The *my* is reminiscent of Plato's *Republic*, book 5, where the Platonic Socrates prescribes that in his ideal city the lines of parental descent shall be confused in such a way that each citizen says indiscriminately of every other of the appropriate generation, *my* (my brother, my sister, father, mother, son, daughter). Socrates's purpose in this expedient is the "unity" of the city, the creation of a bond of fellowship that goes deeper than mere commonality of territory or culture.

Notice the difference that the joy and gratitude make to the relationship. They imply that Kierkegaard sees it as *something good* that the reader should follow Kierkegaard's thoughts with the same interest with which he writes them. He imagines what today would be called "shared" or "joint" attention with the reader. Imagine the attention of two woodworking enthusiasts as together they examine the figure in beautiful pieces of cherry lumber and discuss the fine points of how they are to be joined. Each takes joy in the beauty of the wood and savors the prospect of joining the pieces, but the joy of each in the project is enhanced by the awareness of the other's joyful attention to the object of their common love. What is each one joyful about? The object of their joy is a rich

combination of the beautiful wood and the attractive prospect of action, with the delight of the other's mind in these same things, the meeting of their minds in the encounter with the wood. Kierkegaard and his imagined reader are fellows in concern. The italicized "my" is evidence for the joy's being about the fellowship —for its being Kierkegaard's enthusiasm about the *reader* (as an individual), not just some unattached reader, but *his* reader. It's arguable that as he writes, his joy in this imagined fellowship in God helps him invest his writing with the personal, passionate interest that marks almost all his writings.

He thought a great deal about communication, especially about his own communication with his readers, and in this repeated note his expressions of joy and gratitude are about communication with his reader in his rich sense of the word. He says, "*In its concept, the good of the spirit is communication* [*Meddelelse*]*, its possession merciful* [*miskundelig*], *in itself communication*" (CD, 116, italics Kierkegaard's). The good of the spirit is the goodness of a human spirit that is in fellowship with the spirit of God in Christ; and the goodness of such a human spirit is faith in Christ, hope in God, and love of God and neighbor. It is obvious enough that love, as a good of the spirit, is a giving of oneself to the other and a glad receiving of what the other gives. But it is also true of faith and hope that they are shared in common with others and welcome the presence of others in their practices. Faith in God is faith in the God of love in whom you trust in hope. So the good of the spirit is essentially communication in the rich sense of communion or fellowship—what the New Testament calls *koinōnia*. This is Kierkegaard's attitude, his sense of vocation, as he writes about faith, love, and hope, as well as the other godly traits, affections, and thoughts that constitute the whole good of the spirit.

He sometimes uses the word "envy" as a synecdoche for anything that, being possessed by one person, cannot be possessed by some other, and is thus a fit object of selfish desire. He says, for example, the believer's

> having faith truly does not begrudge others anything; whereas the possession of money by the rich is a kind of envy that has taken it from the poor, who perhaps in turn envy the rich the money, because there is envy in both situations since earthly riches are in themselves envy. No, the believer has taken nothing from anyone, has in faith no begrudging; and no one should envy him it but instead every human being should be joyed by him. The believer has only what every human being can have, and to the degree that his faith is greater, to the same degree it is seen, but all the more clearly, that this glory and blessedness are possible as a common possession for all human beings. (CD, 116)

Similarly, "by acquiring hope you are not acquiring it only for yourself, but by your acquiring it (what blessed acquiring!) you are communicating, since even in

immediate possession eternity's hope is communication" (CD, 117). Also, "Here it holds true that one is all and all are one" (CD, 117). And "from this it follows, then, that all the time you spend on acquiring these goods, every moment you are rejoicing in their possession, you are so far removed from being selfishly occupied with yourself that you are immediately communicating" (CD, 118). The believer's possessing faith and hope is something about which any human being who understands these spiritual goods will rejoice. Thus, faithful writing about faith is itself a joyful activity without any hint of "envy," while writing or reading about money, commerce, trading, and the market belongs to the spiritual world of competition, winners, and losers, and thus not to the world of "communication."

Kierkegaard's joy in his reader is a joy of communion. At the same time and for the same reason, like Socrates, he is defensive about his relationship to his reader, or perhaps I should say, defensive on behalf of his reader. He insistently defends against the unequal relation of master and pupil and, given his genius, he is right to see this as a liability. He is on his guard against discipleship. His joy in communion would be spoiled were his reader to become his disciple. His concern illustrates how fine-tuned joy is in Kierkegaard's thought and practice. Were he susceptible to rejoice in having disciples, the interpersonal relation would be something quite other than he wants; it would become a power relation, and he would risk rejoicing, at least in part, over his superior position vis-à-vis the disciple. For this reason Kierkegaard balances the stress on "*my* reader" with disclaimers of the authority that makes one person a teacher in relation to another who is his disciple. For example, of one discourse he notes that it "can be called an occasional discourse, yet without having the occasion that makes the speaker and makes him an *authority* or the occasion that makes the reader and makes him a *learner*" (UDVS, 5, italics original). Another device he sometimes uses to reduce his authorial elevation over *his* reader is to personify the book or the discourse: "the discourse can avoid what the worried person loathes, that *another* person speaks to him about his worry—then the discourse can stay out in the field with the birds and speak about *the bird's worry*" (UDVS, 174, italics original). "Let us not forget that only out of respect for the worried one has the discourse let the wood-dove be the victim" (UDVS, 177).

The "Intentionality" of Joy

Joy is not just blank, undifferentiated pleasure or feeling good. It is always *about* something—gladness about this or that, for this or that reason. Like other emotions, joy is a way of "seeing" a situation. All joy has in common that what the joy is about appears good to the one who experiences joy about it. If I rejoice that my son has an interesting job, I see it as a good thing that he has an interesting job. And "seeing" here is *feeling*: I feel good about his job, because it is interesting. I don't just think that my son's having an interesting job is a good thing; by my joy it feels to me like a good thing; it has the savor of a good thing. So all joys are about (what appear to be) good things. But joys differ enormously from one another in *what* is felt to be good, and *why*.

As we saw in chapter 6, an emotion is a seamless combination of thinking (perceiving, believing) and caring. Both caring and thinking are about something: it's impossible to care without caring about something, or to think without thinking about something. Both dimensions are crucial in determining what an emotion such as joy is about. Consider two cases of joy from the New Testament, the chief priests' joy about Judas's offer to betray Jesus into their hands (Luke 22:5), and Rhoda's joy about hearing Peter's voice at the gate when he "should" have been in prison (Acts 12:14). The chief priests cared about getting rid of Jesus, and Judas's offer gave them to think they had a way to do so (so this joy is also hope); Rhoda cared about Peter's being present with the community, and hearing him at the gate made her realize (think) he was with the community.

One of these joys is ugly and evil (a murderous joy) while the other is beautiful and good (a joy of friendship). The enormous moral difference between the chief priests' evil joy and Rhoda's holy joy depends entirely on the difference in what their joys were about; and what their joys were about depends entirely on the combinations of what they cared about as a prelude to their experience of joy and their joy-constituting "thought" about what they cared about.

Spiritually, what a person's joy is about makes all the difference. Depending on what joys are about, they may be trivial or profound, evil or good. If a person's joys are all trivial, then the person is trivial of character. If a person rejoices in profoundly good things, then she has a deep and excellent character. A person's joys might be mostly, or all, about prevailing in competitions with others. "Winning" might be the joy of his life. By contrast, a person's signal joys might be about other people's moral excellence, or about the public good. Such joys would exemplify an excellent moral character. But we must also note that, since joys depend on caring, "negative" emotions like sadness, disappointment,

and regret will similarly express an excellent character when the good that the person cares about is defeated or reversed.

Joys can be nested, with one object of joy owing its vitality to a more fundamental object of joy. Imagine someone who rejoices in his success in a business deal because it allows him to fund his ministry of rescuing children from cycles of ignorance. This person's heart is not ultimately in money, but in the rescue of children. It's the ultimate object of joy that really indicates the status of a person's moral character.

Sadly, our worst joys are not just trivial, but downright evil. One important kind is *Schadenfreude*—literally, damage-joy: rejoicing about someone else's misfortune. A subclass of *Schadenfreude* is invidious joy: joy in the downfall of someone we envy, someone to whom we wish evil because his excellence seems to put us in a bad light. When we envy someone, we don't just write him off, says Kierkegaard; no, in a sense we cling to him, and our envy is

> on the go very early to assist in his downfall. And as soon as that is certain, envy hurries home to its murky hole and calls to its even more loathsome relative that goes by the name of *malice* [*Skadefryd*: *Fryd* = joy, delight] so that they are able to rejoice together—to their own detriment [*Skade*]. (WL, 257)

We've noted the malicious joy of the chief priests and officers of the temple police about Judas's offer to betray Christ to them. According to Mark 15:10, Pilate lacked enthusiasm for crucifying Jesus because he realized that it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over. If Pilate was right, the chief priests' joy originated in their concern for their own self-importance, which they saw Jesus as threatening to reduce. Another clinging evil joy is vengeful: joy in our successful effort to get revenge against someone who has offended us. (Joy in the *pro*spect of getting revenge is a version of hope.)

What makes the difference here? One person rejoices above all in winning, another in the flourishing of children, another rejoices in the destruction of a rival, yet another in getting revenge or the prospect of it. What is it about these people that accounts for these differences? Kierkegaard will say that they differ in their joys because they differ in what they *care about* and therefore in what they *attend to*. One person cares about money and it becomes a focal point of his awareness, another about the flourishing of children so that *that* holds his attention, and yet another cares about the kind of personal importance he (thinks he) gets from being superior to others in certain ways (prominence, popularity, wealth, beauty, power, etc.), with consequences about where his attention is directed. Kierkegaard rejoices in *his* reader because he cares deeply

about Christianity and the rich fellowship of those who together contemplate its glory.

Kierkegaard ends his discourse "The Care of Presumptuousness" (CD, 60–69) saying, "May there, then, be joy on earth over the lily and the bird who will as God wills and do as God wills; in heaven there is joy over the Christian who is satisfied with God's grace" (CD, 69). This is joy *about* spiritual excellence, the excellence of willing as God wills or of being satisfied with God's grace. Spiritual excellence is the object of this joy. There is also the joy that *indicates and embodies* spiritual excellence, namely, the joy of doing God's will or of accepting God's grace. But further, it is true that joy about spiritual excellence (a psychological feature of a person, say, the joy with which one beholds the person who does as God wills or is satisfied with God's grace) also embodies and indicates spiritual excellence, inasmuch as it is part of the spiritual good that such good be rejoiced in. But that psychological trait is a different part of the spiritual good than, say, the saving work of Jesus Christ or the prospect of the glory of God, or, as in the present case, the will of God. In particular, it is a dispositional response to the more primary kind of spiritual good and God's grace.

Kierkegaard follows his comment about the joy on earth and the joy in heaven by saying, "but there is anxiety both here and in the next world about the pagan who is presumptuous" (CD, 69). The anxiety over the pagan who presumptuously insists on doing as *he* wills without regard for God's will also embodies and indicates spiritual excellence, even as the pagan's presumptuous joy over his own willfulness indicates and embodies spiritual degradation, rottenness, corruption, and defilement. Were the pagan to feel anxiety over his presumption, his anxiety would indicate and embody a glimmer of spiritual goodness in him, a fissure in the continuity of evil within him, something that would warrant some rejoicing. But he may also feel anxiety, not about his presumption, but about other things stemming from his presumption—say, over whether he can carry through on this insistence to do without God. And this anxiety does not embody or indicate spiritual excellence, but the opposite, though we can imagine the pain of that anxiety leading, by some route, to his correction and reform.

Canonically Differentiated Kinds of Joy

I have said that all joy is a perception of something as good. The thing so

perceived may or may not actually *be* good, but in feeling joy about it, the person perceives it as good, because in some manner it satisfies a concern of his. The things that actually are good have many different ways of being good or aspects, and so the diversity of the objects of joy is great. Within that diversity, certain categories or aspects of goods have come, in languages like English and Danish, to be assigned special emotion categories. Thus we have triumphant joy (or triumph for short), which is joy in the good outcome of a struggle. Related to this we have relief,[2] which is the joy we feel when a "burden" has been lifted. We have gratitude, which is rejoicing in some benefit as coming from the intention of a benevolent benefactor. We have admiration, which is a kind of joyful wonder at the excellence of something to which we are inclined to assign a "grade." We have what Kierkegaard calls worship, which is a kind of adoring wonder at or admiration of the being of God. We have joyful obedience, which is joy in doing God's will (this is not canonized as an emotion type in English; I list it here because Kierkegaard treats it as though it were a canonical category). We have glory (New Testament and Septuagint *kauchāsthai*), which is a kind of pride or rejoicing in some good quality of oneself or the association of something good with oneself. And we have hope or hopefulness, which is joyful expectation of something good. In the next several subsections, I will say something about Kierkegaard's treatment of several of these categories of joy. I will say nothing about gratitude or hope, both of which are important to Kierkegaard, because two other chapters in this book discuss them. Then in the final section, I'll discuss Kierkegaard's therapeutic of joy, and will note, as we go, to which of the canonical categories, if any, the joys that he there describes belong.

Admiration

Admiration is a kind of joy because when we admire something we see it as excellent and its being excellent as a good thing. It is possible to see (in a sense) that something is excellent without feeling that that excellence is a good thing. This happens in envy: we see a rival as excelling us in some way that we regard as important, but since she rivals us with respect to such excellence, and we see losing in this rivalry as diminishing our personal worth, we don't see her excellence as a good thing. We are locked in a zero-sum competition with the rival for ascendancy and personal worth. The rival's excellence seems to belittle us, so we feel the pain of being the "loser." We wish she were less excellent. That is, we wish she didn't excel *us*, and may even undertake some action to degrade

her, at least in our eyes and the eyes of others. We "bad-talk" her, depicting her excellence as not really so excellent. By contrast, if we admire the other for her excellence we feel no envy, but rejoice in her excellence, seeing it without mitigation as a good thing.

This is not exactly what Kierkegaard says. Envy often provides the context for his discussions of admiration, and envy and admiration share a perception of the admired or envied object as excellent, even though envy is pained by the excellence and admiration rejoices in it. So Kierkegaard sometimes says that the envious person also admires the one of whom he is envious.

> Envy is secret admiration. An admirer who feels that he cannot become happy by abandoning himself to it chooses to be envious of that which he admires. So he speaks another language wherein that which he actually admires is a trifle, a rather stupid, insipid, peculiar, and exaggerated thing. Admiration is happy self-surrender; envy is unhappy self-assertion. (SUD, 86)

We might interpret this passage with a mini-narrative: a person starts out admiring someone (maybe he's looked up to her since childhood), but then he realizes, "Hey, her excellence reflects badly on me, for I fall short," and he believes that, having now grown up, he ought to be as excellent as she is. Now he feels put down by her excellence. He doesn't like this feeling, and considers that it comes from beholding her excellence. So in self-defense he belittles it as a rather stupid, insipid, and peculiar sort of thing. But he's lying to himself; he still knows that she is really excellent and that the belittling epithets are self-defense. Then, let us say, his honesty gets the upper hand and he humbly acknowledges that he's just reacting out of envy; she really is admirable. Thus he "surrenders" to her excellence—admits it to himself—and his admiration returns. On this reading, as long as our protagonist is fully in the grip of envy, he is no longer admiring the other for her excellence, even though he sees the excellence—but he doesn't see it as good, but as a threat. Submerged in his envy he still *knows* that she is excellent and admirable, but she doesn't *look* that way to him; so, if admiration is an emotion, he doesn't admire her. Our narrative interpretation separates the envy from the admiration.

Another consequence of Kierkegaard's pairing admiration with envy, indicated in the last quotation, is to suggest that admiration, like envy, is essentially comparative—that when we admire someone, we compare the other's excellence with our own place on the scale of such excellence, to our own disadvantage. When we admire someone for some excellence, we necessarily think ourselves less excellent in that respect.

> Admiration in itself is a duplexity, can be seen from two sides. Its first side is a feeling of weakness when the admiring one relates himself in admiration to superiority. But admiration is a happy (*lykkeligt*) relation to superiority, and therefore it is a blessed feeling; in true unanimity with oneself, it is perhaps more blessed to admire than to be the one admired. That admiration's first feeling is one of pain is seen in this, that if someone senses superiority but admits it reluctantly, not joyfully (*glad*), then he is far from being happy: on the contrary he is exceedingly unhappy, in the most distressing pain. But as soon as he yields to the superiority that he still basically but unhappily admires, and yields in admiration, then the joy of this is victorious in him. The more surrendered he is, the more unanimous with himself in admiring, the closer he is to almost becoming superior to the superiority. In his admiration he is indescribably happily freed from every pressure of superiority; he does not succumb to the superiority, but he is victorious in admiration. (CD, 130–31)

Here Kierkegaard seems to admit that the painful self-comparing perception of someone's superiority is not really admiration: "admiration is a *happy* relation to superiority." When a person ceases envying the one who is superior to himself, purifying himself of the narcissistic poison and bitterness of envy, then the other's excellence comes into clear free view as excellent and is felt as joy. This purity from envy Kierkegaard calls "unanimity with oneself." It is single-heartedness in the joyful perception of excellence. It is a purification, an eradication, of egoistic, self-comparative concern: "the admiring one *loses himself* in wonder over the far greater" (CD, 131, italics added). This liberating purity of heart could be seen as humility, since it is an abandonment of the struggle for interpersonal superiority.

Admiration, as a kind of joy in the excellence of the admired, differs from envy as a kind of emotional distress about the excellence of the envied. To admiration the excellence looks good; to envy it looks bad. They are starkly different ways of perceiving excellence. But this fact doesn't rule out emotional ambivalence about someone's excellence. We might feel both admiration and envy, perhaps together in a sort of confusion, or perhaps by turns. In my interpretive narrative, the subject begins with admiration, switches to envy, and then by a humble effort of honest self-correction returns to admiration. But we can easily imagine a crazier, more confused, sequence of quick alternations, punctuated by moments in which the two emotions overlap.

Just as gratitude motivates and is expressed by the action of thanking, admiration motivates and is expressed by the action of praising. When we admire something, we express our joy at its excellence by "talking it up," "singing its praises"—by *saying* how wonderfully excellent it is. And the expression in both cases tends to amplify the feeling. In thanking, we typically mention the benefit and the benefactor's kindness, generosity, good will, and the like; and it is unsurprising that making such inventory an explicit object of attention would

reinforce the originating construal. Likewise, when we sing the praises of what is wonderfully excellent, we typically give an explicit partial inventory of the qualities that make up such excellence, and thus hold up before ourselves and others those admirable qualities. Psalm 19, for example, sings the praises of God's law:

> The law of the LORD is perfect,
> reviving the soul;
> the decrees of the LORD are sure,
> making wise the simple;
> the precepts of the LORD are right,
> rejoicing the heart;
> the commandment of the LORD is clear,
> enlightening the eyes;
> the fear of the LORD is pure,
> enduring forever;
> the ordinances of the LORD are
> true and righteous altogether.
> More to be desired are they than gold,
> even much fine gold;
> sweeter also than honey,
> and drippings of the honeycomb.
>
> (Ps. 19:7–10)

So parading the excellences of what is admired tends to deepen, proliferate, and prolong our admiration. In this way praising the possessor of an excellence can be a strategy for mitigating or heading off envy of him. When we are envious, praising meets resistance because of the pain with which envy beholds the excellence. But if we meet that resistance head-on and praise the excellence anyway, it may come to be an expression of real admiration that assassinates the envy by exposure. This action could count as the "self-surrender" that Kierkegaard speaks of in the earlier quotation from *The Sickness unto Death*. This therapeutic action is an exercise in being joyful, because turning envy to admiration is always a gain in joy.

Worship

The word "worship" usually refers to an *activity* that a person performs, say, on Sundays, that consists in singing praises of God, listening receptively to readings from Scripture, receiving teaching about God, making offerings of your substance, confessing your sins, receiving consecrated bread and wine, and other

things. In the discourse that we're examining, Kierkegaard uses "worship" not to refer to an activity but as the name of an emotion strongly analogous to admiration. Just as we may feel admiration for certain outstanding people, so we may feel worship for God who is above all things in excellence, beauty, and holiness. Just as we praise things and people that are excellent, thus expressing our admiration for them, so we praise God, thus expressing our worship of him. We might even think of worship as a kind of admiration, namely, admiration of God; as such, it is also a kind of joy. As we'll see, worship is also a kind of happy wonder. Kierkegaard's discussion of envy and admiration is a way of clarifying what worship is. He tells his reader, "*Defiance* is in relation to worship what envy is in relation to admiration" (CD, 131, italics original).

Just as self-comparison is the barrier to free and joyful admiration of another human being's excellence, it is also a barrier to free and joyful worship of God. Kierkegaard notes that

> God is infinitely the strongest; basically everyone believes that and to that extent, willing or not, feels God's infinite superiority and his own nothingness. But as long as he only believes that God is the stronger one—and, to mention something terrible, believes it even as the devil also does—and trembles; as long as he only believes it in such a way that he shrinks from the admission, as long as he believes it only in such a way that he does not become joyful, the relationship is painful, unhappy, and his feeling of weakness is a tormenting sensation. (CD, 131)

Nobody actually *thinks* himself superior to God. That would require outright insanity. But some people, though not insane, *live* as though God is small and irrelevant by comparison with themselves. These people live in defiance of God, whether or not they feel this, and the more emotionally aware they become of God's superiority, the more painful to them the fact becomes. (The pain may be resentment, anger, anxiety, shame, and so on.) Thus their belief in God's superiority is unrealistic, in a way that is analogous to the envious person's belief in the greater excellence of the person she envies. In both cases, since the superiority is a superiority in excellence, it cannot be *rightly* perceived without joy. The person who "perceives" God's excellence defiantly doesn't see *as* good what *is* good. He doesn't relate to it as good, and so in a sense doesn't relate to *it*. He relates to it as something other than what it is—or, rather, his relation to it is a misrelation, an unfriendship. And in both the worship case and the admiration case, the right emotional relationship to the glorious one requires a humble abandonment of the insistence on rivalrous self-comparison.

> What is required of the human being, which is already suggested in the relationship of admiration (the admiring one loses himself in wonder over the far greater), is that he shall lose himself in

> wonder over God. If he does that with his whole heart, with all his strength, and with all his mind, then he is in a happy relationship with God as the strong one, then he worships. Never, never did any lover become as happy, never, never did the parched and drought-stricken earth sense the rain's refreshment as deliciously as the worshiper in his weakness blessedly senses God's strength. Now these two suit each other, God and the worshiper, happily and blissfully as lovers have never suited each other. (CD, 131–32)

Admiration of an excellent fellow human being makes perfectly good sense independently of the admired one's attitude toward the admirer. Admiration can be full without being reciprocal in any way. And this is one of the ways the analogy between admiration and worship breaks down. When the believer worships God she worships one who anticipated her worship by first loving her. So when she "loses herself in wonder over God," her Lord's loving attitude toward her has both facilitated the onset of her worship and made the relationship reciprocal in a way that would be rare for mere admiration. The worshiper does not merely admire God, but adores him, responding to God's compassion and desire for communion with his human creature. Such worship is the emotional culmination of the virtue of faith.

Pride or Glory

Pride is self-directed joy in excellence, joy in one's own excellence, that is, self-directed admiration. We are interested here in the kinds of joy, and pride as self-admiration is a kind of joy. You rejoice in your own excellence. But "pride" can also denote not an emotion but a kind of concern on which various types of emotion can be based. One such concern is a vice. Vanity, for example, is a kind of pride, but it is not itself a kind of joy. It can *produce* joy under some circumstances, in particular, when your vanity is gratified by others' admiration. When joy arises out of vanity, it manifests the vice; it is a vicious joy. To put the matter very roughly, the vice of vanity is a concern to be admired; in particular, it is an interest in being admired for the sake of your narcissistic enhancement (to serve your self-importance). As such, it can be the basis, not only for the joy of being admired, but also for the displeasure of being ignored or held in contempt. That is, vanity can be "wounded," and so, obviously, cannot itself be a kind of joy. But the pride that concerns us in this section is a kind of joy.

Unlike some Christian thinkers, who take pride to be vicious across the board, Kierkegaard regards some emotional pride as virtuous, and perfectly compatible with the virtue of humility. In an untitled discourse that the translators title "[How Glorious It Is to Be a Human Being]" (UDVS, 183–200),

Kierkegaard says,

> [Socrates] did not understand attributing everything to God, but he believed that it was the soul that, like a weaver, … itself wove the body, which is the human being's clothing. And now in utter wonder[3] he praised the ingenious creation of the human body and its glory, with which no plant or animal could sustain any comparison. (UDVS, 190)

Socrates, a member of the human race, praises the human race and thus himself for the glory of having an upright body. But his real point is about the soul that is reflected in this bodily uprightness. The upright stance of our body expresses the essential uprightness of the human mind or soul. Thus Socrates's thoughts were "upright"—oriented toward the high, the spiritually noble, the eternal—just as the characteristic bodily stance for human beings is to walk upright, pointing to the sky rather than along the surface of the earth like animals that walk on all fours. And Socrates feels proud of that generically human quality, his human glory, and commends it to others.

> This is also why in the beautiful native language of that man of wonder the human being is called the upright, yet in such a way as to suggest a double meaning—first, that the human frame is erect and upright like the straight tree trunk and, next, that the erect and upright being directs his vision upward. Even though the straight tree trunk rises higher, with the aid of vision the erect and upright one proudly lifts his head higher than the mountains. The human being, then, stands erect and—commanding; and this is why it seemed so glorious to that man of wonder that the human being is the only creature that has hands, for the ruler, after all, stretches out his hand when he commands. Thus in many ways that man of wonder knew how to speak gloriously about the human being's glorious clothing [that is, the human body]. (UDVS, 190–91)

The vision that here enables spiritual uprightness is more than eyesight, which, after all, we share with many other animals. It is the cognitive power that Kierkegaard calls "the eternal" in the human self. This vision is the ability to perceive what is noble, excellent, glorious, and thus to appreciate the gloriousness of being human.

What is glory? It is manifest excellence, evident great goodness and beauty. "Glory" suggests *radiance* of goodness, shining goodness, goodness that makes itself known by the very force of its goodness. But to say that something is glorious is not to say that everyone who encounters it will notice its goodness; this is radiance that requires a corresponding sensitivity to behold—and not just a faculty, but the attunement of the faculty that comes with character. When we "glorify" God, we make his excellence manifest by our praises, we highlight it, cast a light upon it. We don't, of course, increase its radiance in this way, but we do make it more visible by preparing the eyes of our hearts to pick up on its

radiant goodness. Similarly, Socrates's thought glorifies the human being by orienting the "eyes" of his interlocutors to the radiant inherent excellence of the human soul. Socrates gives the race reason for pride—not in something that one individual has and others lack, but something that all share, in virtue of being human.

So pride is sometimes vicious and sometimes virtuous. An important difference between these can be brought out by attending to what Kierkegaard has to say about *comparison*. Riffing on Jesus's parable of the lilies of the field, how they are clothed more gloriously than Solomon in all his glory (Matt. 6:28–30), Kierkegaard tells a parable (UDVS, 167–69) about a common lily and a naughty little bird. In the beginning of the story the common lily is content with being exactly what it is—a common lily—and wakes up joyously every morning to the beautiful sound of the brook that babbles nearby. But on its visits to the lily, the bird begins to cast a pall of comparison over the lily's self-awareness. "Instead of putting itself in the lily's place, instead of delighting in its loveliness and delighting in its innocent bliss, the bird would show off in its feeling of freedom by making the lily feel its lack of freedom" (UDVS, 167). Here we already see the evil kind of pride. The bird, provoking the lily to compare its own fixity in the soil with the bird's free flight from place to place, the bird evokes not only humiliation in the lily, but an invidiously comparative joy in its own breast. It says to itself, and at least implicitly to the lily, "Behold my excellence in movement compared to that of the stuck poor lily." The bird enjoys the lily's consciousness of inferiority because it enhances his sense of his own superiority. But worse is yet to come. The bird "befriends" the lily and returns daily to cultivate the lily's self-dissatisfaction, deepening in the lily "the restless mentality of comparison, which roams far and wide, fitfully and capriciously, and gleans the morbid knowledge of diversity" (UDVS, 169).

Diversity is a fact of life, about which nothing is intrinsically morbid. Without diversity, the world would cease to work. But for one with a taste for self-importance, the natural diversity of lilies and birds, of differential talents and gifts and appearance and circumstance among human beings, readily lends itself to a morbid harvest of pride and shame. Daily, the bird tweeted the praises of a much better and more beautiful place where the Crown Imperial lily blooms, and "the hope that with the change of place and with the new surroundings the lily might succeed in becoming a gorgeous lily in the company of all the others, or perhaps even a Crown Imperial, envied by all the others" (UDVS, 167–69). According to Kierkegaard's parable, the bird so succeeded in planting in the lily

seeds of vanity, conceit, snobbery, pretentiousness, and grandiosity that it convinced the lily to allow the bird to transplant it in the new place. Sadly, as the bird flew there with the uprooted lily tucked under its wing, the lily withered and died.

Deadly pride like that of the naughty bird and the foolish lily has in it a strong element of invidious comparison—the kind of comparison that involves winners (the joyful proud) and losers (the bitter and envious proud). This is the kind of comparison that degrades the consciousness of those who indulge in it and make their self-evaluations and evaluations of others on its basis. But this is not the only kind of comparison, or the only kind of pride. We have seen that Socrates, in commending himself (along with the rest of mankind) for admiration as standing spiritually erect, compares himself (along with the rest of mankind) with all the other animals that lack this particular glory. But here the point of Socrates's comparison is not to win in a competition with all the other animals, but just to highlight the glory of the human being. In a discourse that we have already considered to some extent, Kierkegaard brings out the glory of being human by comparing the human capacity to work with birds' lack of such capacity. Kierkegaard's comparison is across species, not within the human species.

> But out there with the bird the worried one knows how glorious it is to work and thereby how glorious it is to be a human being. What makes the difference is not whether one person works for riches and another for bread, whether one person works to pile up a superabundance, another to ward off poverty [such differences are ripe for invidious comparison]; no, what makes the difference is—that the bird cannot work. (UDVS, 200)

What is work, that only human beings can do it? The bird certainly puts forth effort in acquiring its food. Watch a robin pulling a worm out of the ground or a swallow in the sky diving and darting this this way and that after mosquitoes. But the bird doesn't plan the day's "work," doesn't conceive it as achievement, nor does it retrospectively evaluate its day's work and adjust the plan for the next day in light of success or failure. If all this is included in the concept of work, the bird doesn't work.

So glorious is the capacity to work, when seen in the right light, that Paul the apostle prides himself on having worked.

> If anyone at all might have wished the whole day to be twice as long—then certainly Paul; if anyone at all could have given every hour great meaning for many—then certainly Paul; if anyone at all could easily have been supported by the congregations—then certainly Paul; and yet he preferred to work with his own hands! Just as he humbly thanked God that he enjoyed the honor of being

> flogged, persecuted, and insulted, just as he, humble before God, proudly calls his chains a matter of personal honor [1 Cor. 9:18], so he also considered it an honor to work with his own hands. An honor, so that with regard to the Gospel he dared to say with a woman's beautiful and an apostle's holy sense of shame: I have not earned one penny by proclaiming the Word, I have not married money by becoming an apostle. An honor, so that with regard to the most insignificant person he dared to say: I have not been exempted from any arduousness of life, nor have I through preferential treatment been barred from any of its advantages—I, too, have had the honor of working with my own hands! (UDVS, 199–200)

In 2 Corinthians 10–12, Paul makes much use of the verb *kauchāsthai* that has the following meanings: boast, boast about, take pride in; rejoice, be glad.[4] It denotes a special kind of rejoicing that we might call "glorying," since it is a rejoicing in one's own excellence or excellent association. It can also be translated "boast," in the sense of declaring one's own excellence, commending oneself by pointing out some quality or association that enhances one. Thus to say, as Paul quotes Jeremiah as saying, "Let him who glories [*kauchōmenos*] glory in the Lord" (2 Cor. 10:17, quoting Jer. 9:24) is to say, "Let him who prides himself on something pride himself on his association with the Lord." Thinking comparatively, this might have overtones of polytheism, as if to say "I glory in the Lord" is to suggest that the Lord is particularly prestigious among the gods, to be proud of one's association with *the Lord*, as contrasted with any of the other gods. But even without polytheism, it suggests a special prestige that derives from association with the Lord. That association is a feather in your cap, a feather that you note with joy. It is to say, "My standing is enhanced because of my association with the Lord; *he* is *my* Lord." A distant analogy might be a child who is proud of her daddy. Such pride can be innocent and a part of love. Again, we see, in this connection, a suggestion of comparison, but the comparison avoids being invidious to the extent that it is conceived as one that anybody who desires it can have. It will be so conceived in the cases that approximate the ideal.

Kierkegaard's Therapeutic of Joy

Joy as an emotional embodiment of Christian character, as well as of other kinds of character, emerges pretty frequently in Kierkegaard's writings, but it gets especially concentrated treatment in two series of seven discourses each that appear in *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (part 3) and *Christian Discourses* (part 2). Both series concern joys that are paradoxical inasmuch as they are occasioned by circumstances that would seem, to someone not oriented by Christian thought, to be occasions for frustration, despair, sadness, anger, or

impatience. In this way they function as a kind of Christian therapy for sufferers and illustrate the contrasts between Christian and non-Christian ways of thinking and feeling about life and its adversities.

Kierkegaard's approach to cultivating joy is reminiscent of that suggested in Philippians 4:8, which could also be called a therapeutic of joy: "Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever honorable, whatever just, whatever pure, whatever lovely, whatever commendable, if anything is excellent and anything worthy of praise, turn your mind to such things."[5] On the view of emotions that I've attributed to Kierkegaard (chapter 6), this strategy will engender joy only in those who *love* what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, and worthy of praise. To rejoice in such things, your heart must be alive to their goodness. If you don't have a taste for them, if you don't care about them, if you don't find them impressively attractive, then attention to them, if you can manage it at all, will yield a dull boredom, not joy. Paul and Kierkegaard write for people who are not completely depraved—those who have at least a little sensitivity to the good and the beautiful. Kierkegaard's discourses appeal to that sensitivity and seek to waken it in people whose daily emotions suggest that the sensitivity is asleep.

Here are the titles of the discourses in *Christian Discourses*:

1. The Joy of It: That One Suffers Only Once but Is Victorious Eternally
2. The Joy of It: That Hardship Does Not Take Away but Procures Hope
3. The Joy of It: That the Poorer You Become the Richer You Are Able to Make Others
4. The Joy of It: That the Weaker You Become, the Stronger God Becomes in You
5. The Joy of It: That What You Lose Temporally You Gain Eternally
6. The Joy of It: That When I "Gain Everything" I Lose Nothing at All
7. The Joy of It: That Adversity Is Prosperity

As an illustration I will comment on the second of these discourses. All the time that hardship lasted in a person's life, says Kierkegaard, "it was working simply and solely to obtain hope for the suffering one" (CD, 106). This fact is intrinsically amazing; anyone who doesn't feel wonder (*Forundring*) in response to it doesn't fully appreciate it. Wonder is an emotion by which we recognize how extraordinary and unlikely something is, while at the same time recognizing that it actually *obtains*. All the truths of the gospel are like this, so an appreciation of their wondrousness is necessary to genuine faith, hope, and love: it is "unbelievable" what God has done for us in Christ; it is "unbelievable" what a weight of glory awaits those who believe; it is "unbelievable" what a beautiful

thing your neighbor is. And yet all three joyful things are so. Kierkegaard's discourse is an effort to awaken joyful wonder at the way adversity recruits spiritual hope among Christians.

He distinguishes three stages of human life, each with its own way of being "awake." The most mature is the spiritual person for whom to be awake is "to be turned inward eternally in inwardness" (the items in Paul's list at Phil. 4:8 are features of what Kierkegaard calls "the eternal"). The child is awake to sensory experience: it is "turned entirely outward" toward the world of things that can be seen and touched; therefore, in comparison with the spiritual person, the child is dreaming. The youth "is more inwardly turned, but in imagination; he is dreaming, or to him it is as if everything dreamed of him…. If there is nothing that awakens the youth, then this life continues into adulthood" (CD, 108). We might say that the mind of the youth is turned, in a way, toward the eternal goods, but more in the dreaming, fantasizing manner of the aesthete (see chapter 3). But if the dreams of youth continue in their unrealism into adulthood, they betoken a stunted, miscarried life. Like the spring blossoming in a tree's cycle, the dreams of youth are beautiful in their time; but the blossoms are supposed to give way to fruit. Because to be a self is essentially to be spirit, neither the child nor the youth is fully a self. Each is a kind of dreaming version of a self, a version whose awareness of reality, including its joys, doesn't make contact with what is most real. By contrast, the spiritual person is awake to reality (the eternal) while his lower nature, in which the child and the youth have their conscious life, is asleep.

The joyful role of hardship, says Kierkegaard, is to awaken the spirit in a person. It is to catalyze the transition from the dreaming consciousness of youth to the adult's awareness of a real hope.

> Hardship ruthlessly (yes, ruthlessly from the point of view of childishness) prevents him from obtaining any other help or relief whatever; hardship ruthlessly (yes, ruthlessly from the point of view of youthfulness) forces him to let go of everything else; hardship ruthlessly (yes, ruthlessly from the point of view of immaturity) takes him to task, takes him to task very effectually so that he must learn to grasp the eternal and to cling to the eternal. (CD, 110)

Hardship doesn't yield hope directly but dispels the finite hopes that stand in the way of mature hope. Hardship can occasion a despair of the finite that makes room for a hope in the eternal. People are generally not very successful at thinking their way out of their unrealistic expectations. But good, ruthless hardship can do the job.

The impulse to hope in the eternal is there in every human being and can be

triggered by ruthless hardship. But it seems that it can be triggered only with each person's consent: we need to affirm it, to will it:

> The only person hardship can depress is the person who refuses to be helped eternally; hardship presses into the heights the person who wants it. The only person from whom hardship can take away hope is the person who does not want to have the hope of eternity; for the person who wants this hope, hardship procures it. (CD, 113)

Hope as a virtue is a disposition to hopefulness as a kind of joy, and this discourse solicits a desire for hope by pointing out how hardship can be a spiritual blessing.



The reader will have noticed that in commenting on the canons of Christian joy we have anticipated virtues that I have yet to explore in detail: mostly, gratitude, humility, and hope. In identifying canonical Christian joy and distinguishing it from the lesser and contrary species of joy, I have had to cast in relief several virtues. But, like the other chapters in part 2 of this book, this one has only sampled from Kierkegaard's thoughts on its topic—the peculiar joys of persons with Christian character. Were we to explore those thoughts more comprehensively, we would no doubt have to begin the exploration of all the other Christian virtues as well. Virtues are not themselves emotions, but dispositions of that special kind that the classic tradition has called *hexeis* in Greek and *habitus* in Latin. And this goes for virtues, like hope and gratitude, whose names are also names of emotions. But the virtues of hope and gratitude are dispositions to feel the emotions of hopefulness and gratitude, and both of these are species of joy. The virtue of faith, as belief in the *good* news of Jesus Christ, is a disposition to rejoice at the thought of Christ's redeeming work. Love for God, as a disposition to worship him in the praise of his majesty, beauty, and compassion, is a kind of joy in his presence; and love of neighbor is a disposition, among other things, to appreciate the neighbor's creaturely beauty and thus to rejoice in it. Humility, as a purity of the mind from vanity, arrogance, and invidious pride, all of which dispose us to nasty kinds of joys, clears the way for the joys of the Christian life. And patience, as the calming of distress associated with long waiting, serves hope and so enables its joy. In Kierkegaard's reading "through solo, if possible in a more inward way, … the old familiar text handed down from the fathers" (CUP 1:630), he understands Christian character as pervaded by dispositions to joy.

1. Given Kierkegaard's astounding output of work, his dysphoria cannot have been what we call clinical depression, which is marked by listlessness, lack of interest, and low motivation. The Hongs translate *Tungsindig* as "depressed," but given our contemporary clinical terminology, Lowrie's "melancholy" seems to be a better choice. Compare, for example, PV, 62 with *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, ed. Benjamin Nelson, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 52.

2. I will treat triumph and relief in connection with Kierkegaard's therapy of joy in the last section of this chapter.

3. The Hongs cite Plato, *Phaedo* 87b–e.

4. According to the dictionary in Kurt Aland et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1975).

5. My translation.

9 Faith

> *Secret falling in love can be an image of faith, but the hidden person's incorruptible inwardness in faith is life itself.*
>
> *Works of Love*, 28

Three Kinds of Faith

This chapter treats faith as a virtue[1]—or better, as three virtues that are similar enough to go by a single name. To speak of the *virtue* of faith is to treat faith as a quality that you—the believer—can possess as a personal attribute. As a virtue, it is a feature that "completes" you, making you a mature and excellent specimen of the human kind (see chapters 2, 5, and 6). "Jennifer is a person of faith" is analogous, in one way, to "Jennifer is compassionate, courageous, generous, truthful, and so forth," something we might summarize as "Jennifer is a *real human being*!" It is to say that Jennifer is *reliably* faithful. She has been faithful in the past and can be counted on to be so in the future. Faith involves belief (say, the belief that with God all things are possible), but it is more than simply a willingness to say a sincere yes to that proposition. It is faith *in* … God or the eternal. As faith *in* …, it is a personal relationship analogous to friendship. Aristotle hesitates a little (NE 8.1) to classify friendship as a virtue,[2] apparently because, unlike paradigmatic virtues such as courage, liberality, and justice, it is more than a personal trait—a friendship is a relationship that one bears to a *particular* other person. You can have several friendships, but it makes no sense to talk about having several compassions or several truthfulnesses. In this way, friendship differs from liberality, justice, and other Aristotelian virtues. Faith is a stable relationship with God or the eternal, a personal quality that bears on your actions, emotions, and thoughts; thus it is a virtue *while* being a relationship with a particular other person or quasi-person. Other than friendship, the Aristotelian virtues are not relational in this way; but since faith is the form of all the Christian virtues, all the Christian virtues are forms of a particular relationship with God.

In chapter 5 we noted Kierkegaard's policy of distinguishing a "Socratic"

kind of religiousness from a distinctively Christian kind, and that in *The Sickness unto Death* Anti-Climacus uses the word "faith" for both the state of the person who has escaped from despair generically conceived (Socratic faith) and for the person who has escaped from despair understood as sin, that is, as revealed in the Christian revelation (Christian faith). These versions of faith differ because of the different concepts of the God before whom (or which) the person of faith wills to be himself or herself and in whom the individual rests transparently. Any moral outlook in which faith is central has a "relational" conception of the human self and its moral well-being.

Socratic faith and Christian faith are not the only kinds that Kierkegaard treats. In *Fear and Trembling* Johannes de Silentio discusses the faith of Abraham. Abraham's God is not merely "the eternal," the god of Socrates; but Abraham is not a Christian, either. Abrahamic faith is a third kind. God speaks to Abraham, both when he promises that Abraham will be the founding father of a mighty nation and when he orders Abraham to offer Isaac his son as a sacrifice. These communications are revelation in a sense that differs starkly from the "speaking" of the eternal in Socrates's conscience. So we have in Kierkegaard's writings three kinds of faith: Socratic, Abrahamic, and Christian. Some of the characteristics of faith to be discussed in this chapter will apply to more than one of the kinds, but some of them will be attributes of Christian faith only.

Faith as a Challenging Ideal

Fear and Trembling seeks, in a powerful "poetic" performance, to drive home the proposition that acquiring faith is the task of a lifetime.[3] It is not, as the Hegelians proposed, "the immediate"—the developmental place where everybody *starts*—but is a developmental *goal* so arduous and exalted that Silentio, in repeated expressions of amazement, can hardly get it into his head that Abraham achieved it. Yet Silentio passionately desires faith, and his passion is an important rhetorical element in communicating how consequential it is for us to understand what faith is. The super-challenging task of acquiring faith is especially marked by two features, according to Silentio: that in faith the believer believes by virtue of the absurd and that faith presupposes infinite resignation.

The word "faith" is sometimes used as a substitute for "trust." Thus people say, "My jalopy has 200k miles on it, but I have enough faith in it to drive it to California." Or we say, "All science is based on faith in sensory experience." The faith of Abraham is also a kind of trust, but what he trusts *in* and what he trusts

for make his kind of faith "existentially" momentous. That is, they justify the claim that Abraham's faith is a human virtue. Abraham trusts *God* to keep his promise that Abraham will be the founder of a great nation, a promise that depends on his son Isaac's living. Abraham's trust is tested when God commands him to take Isaac up Mount Moriah and make a burnt sacrifice of him. Thus to exemplify his trust in God to fulfill the promise, Abraham needs to perform a momentously difficult action that furthermore seems directly contrary to what he is trusting God for. Abraham's trust in God seems unwavering as he loads the firewood on a donkey and walks up the mountain with his precious young son, the apple of his eye, at his side, perfectly willing to make the appalling sacrifice and perfectly confident that God will keep his promise. The fear and trembling of the title appear to express the uncompromising earnestness of Silentio in his admiring empathic reading of the story, rather than any wavering of Abraham's faith.

In Jean-Paul Sartre's comments on "the anguish of Abraham" in *Fear and Trembling*, he attributes to "an angel" the command to Abraham to kill Isaac, while Genesis 22:1–2 clearly attributes it to God.[4] This mistake seems to be unmotivated, since it makes no difference for Sartre's interpretation. More importantly, Sartre misinterprets the anguish of Abraham. He makes that anguish out to be a result of Abraham's uncertainty whether the command is genuine: Is it really an angel—or perhaps a hallucination or a voice from hell or some psychological pathology? Sartre's point is that Abraham is thrown back on his own free responsibility to decide, for himself, whether the command is genuine—thus his anguish. But this is not at all the source of Abraham's anguish according to Silentio (not Kierkegaard, as Sartre also errs in saying). For all that Silentio says, Abraham's confidence that God has spoken to him is unwavering and he feels perfectly confident that Isaac and his own legacy are secure in God's providence. Abraham's anguish is about his inability to make Isaac and Sarah understand what he is doing. Abraham, as a knight of faith (not merely infinite resignation), cares very much about what happens in this world. The rationale for sacrificing Isaac lies so far outside the canons of ordinary moral rationality that if he told Isaac and Sarah what he is about to do, they wouldn't understand him. Another source of anguish for Abraham would of course be the actions associated with killing his son: the three-day journey to the mountain, preparing the sacrificial altar, pulling out the knife. Even if one is fully confident that God will take care of everything, these actions must be extremely hard for a loving father.

Silentio finds Abraham's mindset of faith—the confident expectation of finite goods from God all the while Abraham is seriously preparing to kill the child on whose continued life the fulfillment of these expectations depends—rationally impenetrable. Repeatedly he says that Abraham believes "by virtue of the absurd." That is the Lowrie and Hong translations of "*i Kraft af det Absurde*," literally "in the power of the absurd" (Hannay translates more transparently, "on the strength of the absurd"). What does absurdity have the power to do? Kierkegaard says it is "a negatively determined concept" (JP 1:7), by which he seems to mean that the power of the absurd is to call a halt to processes of explanation, efforts at understanding. Two responses to this halt are possible. In trivial matters, dismissiveness seems the right response: This doesn't make sense; just leave it and turn to things that do. But if the matter is not trivial—if the issue is as deep as God's promise and the survival of his beloved son are for Abraham's existence—the power of the absurd may be to elicit an act of intellectual humility in which one surrenders in defeat on behalf of the heroism of understanding, of intellectual penetration, while nevertheless believing God's promise that seems to human powers of penetration to make no sense. The power of the absurd is the power to elicit this humility in believing. The absurd by its power generates humility and humility enables belief. Abraham distinguishes himself by *not* insisting on understanding the present case. But "inside" Abraham's humility and faith, the absurdity of his belief doesn't seem offensive, as it does to the perspective of, say, Hegelian rationality, which presumptuously insists on understanding everything as a condition of believing. Infinite resignation, of which Silentio considers himself to be capable, doesn't involve believing by the power of the absurd, and it seems as though Silentio finds faith impossible for himself just because he cannot summon the power of the absurd so as to believe.

In this sense, Abrahamic faith is potentially (that is, given a test like the one Abraham was given) contrary to understanding. This is not to say that it is irrational. Believing without understanding may be the most rational choice, given the momentous sort of dilemma that Abraham faced. What amazes and humbles Silentio is not so much that Abraham believes something while unable to understand it (we believe many things without understanding how they are possible), but Abraham's character as expressed in his calmness, his joy in Isaac, his acceptance of God's will, and his happiness in expectation. Silentio is in awe of Abraham's virtue of faith.

The other feature of Abrahamic faith that makes it an enormous challenge is that it depends on a "movement" (*Bevægelse*) of infinite resignation.[5] In his

empathy, Silentio sees what it takes for Abraham to comport himself as he does. Under his cool deliberateness Abraham is a man who has subordinated all worldly attachments under his devotion to God. Yes, he wants to be the father-founder of the great nation that God has promised he will be—indeed, he desires it passionately. But his devotion to God comes first. Even apart from his faith, the achievement of his attitude toward everything finite makes Abraham a person of heroic character. If God did (contrary to everything that Abraham believes) withdraw his promise, Abraham would be just fine, because he would still have his God. If God did (contrary to everything that Abraham believes) take from him his beloved son Isaac, the child of the promise, Abraham would not despair, because he would remain in God's will. Silentio calls this necessary condition of Abraham's faith "infinite resignation" because it is the willingness to forsake *all* finite goods. But Abraham differs from other knights of infinite resignation in his passionate concern for certain finite goods: the continuing existence of Isaac and the mighty people of which God has promised that Abraham will be the father through Isaac. Abraham's faith consists in his happy expectation that God will keep his promise to make these finite goods a reality. His infinite resignation guarantees that it is *God* in whom he trusts, but it is his expectation of finite goods from God's hand that marks his faith.

What is resignation and how does faith depend on it? Resignation is giving up on the object of a significant desire. It is saying to myself, with respect to some desired good (G), "G, which means a lot to me, is not going to come to me." I can dispel the pain of disappointment by ceasing to care about G; but resignation requires that I continue to care about G. Otherwise my state of mind will not be resignation, but just a "change of mind (heart)" about what I want, a reorientation of my concern away from G. Still, resignation is in some sense an emotional *acceptance* that my desire will not be fulfilled. Thus, it is saying to myself, as it were, "G, which I want, is not going to come to me, *and that's all right*." The "that's all right" is a necessary element (Silentio calls it a "movement") of resignation. If I continue to be terribly frustrated that I am not getting what I want, then I am not resigned, but in despair. Resignation implies some kind of mental peace about not getting what I want. So the motivational structure of resignation requires an element of consolation. For example, a man who is deeply in love with a woman but for some reason cannot consummate his love might throw himself into a project of authorship. The project might function as a consolation for his frustrated love—a substitute that mitigates without fully compensating for his loss of the beloved. Such a consolation is

within the finite, a finite consolation for a finite resignation.

"Infinite" resignation is resignation of *all* hope of fulfilment in the finite. Accordingly, the consolation that is expressed in the "and that's all right" must come from outside the finite, namely, the eternal. Thus, the "knight of infinite resignation," as Silentio calls him, has a relationship with the eternal. This eternal doesn't have to be God, but may be something less theistic, something less personal, such as the god of Socrates, the eternal moral law, Stoic Nature, or Truth. But whatever this eternal or infinite is, it has to be such that the knight can love it and be devoted to it. So infinite resignation is infinite in two ways: it is a resignation of *all* hopes based in the finite; and it is consoled by a relationship with the infinite/eternal. Contrast this with the finite resignation of the man whose consolation in frustrated love is his authorship.

Kierkegaard's overall project in both the pseudonymous and his own writings is to re-introduce *Christianity* to Christendom. His concern with Abrahamic faith is thus ultimately a concern with Christian faith, a virtue with which it shares some features, as we will see in what follows.

Faith as a Resolution of Fundamental Despair and Anxiety

Abraham's calm confidence that God will fulfill his expectation of finite goods is a kind of resting in God. If, in *The Sickness unto Death*, despair is unwillingness to be myself before God, then faith is a kind of self-acceptance before God, a resting in God or the eternal. In faith I am glad to be the person that God has created me to be; as Abraham gratefully received Isaac back from God's hand, I gratefully receive myself from God. The self I accept combines the temporal and the eternal, the finite and the infinite, what I cannot but be and what I can choose to be or not to be. In the Socratic version of faith, I accept myself as this synthesis before the eternal and I rest in the eternal. That I, as a finite creature, do so before the eternal and resting in the eternal means that I am a knight of infinite resignation. (Think of Socrates's calm good humor as he drinks the hemlock, bidding farewell to the finite.) In this renunciation of the finite as a final resort and acceptance of the finite as part of my constitution, I declare my ultimate allegiance to the eternal Good and as a creature rejoice in it.

Kierkegaard thinks that this picture of faith, though beautiful, is unrealistic because it underestimates the depth, tenacity, and implacableness of human corruption.[6] Anyone who seriously and honestly undertakes to acquire faith of

the Socratic kind will suffer a "shipwreck" of life that is best explained by the Christian teaching about sin. Thus, in faith on a Christian understanding, I accept myself as *a sinner* before *God* the father and *Jesus Christ*, who has made atonement for my sins. Christian faith will never be a perfected virtue in this life. It is a virtue that harbors an honest assessment of its own imperfection. The life of the faithful Christian will oscillate between joyful trust and repentance for failure of trust; penitence—"infinite humiliation" (JP 1:993)—is normative in Christian ethics. This is not a return to the self-hatred of despair, though the distrust that occasions repentance is reminiscent of that. But the faithful Christian knows that however deep he may have sunk into alienation from God, the outstretched arms of Jesus graciously welcome him back. This is a point, it seems to me, where membership in the church as the body of Christ needs to be brought to the fore as a means of grace. Kierkegaard is abundantly justified in his suspicion of "the crowd" as a device of escape from individual responsibility. But he also recognizes grace as essential to Christian faith, and the church is a means of that grace. For, as an institution, the church embodies a memory of God's constant grace that the minds of individuals may not maintain with sufficient continuity. Kierkegaard's preoccupation with "the single individual" can seem to obscure the importance of the church. But his discourses at the Friday communion services offer something of a mitigation.[7]

Let us think about the notion of "resting" in God, a notion that features in the definitions of both Socratic and Christian faith in *The Sickness unto Death*. In chapter 1, we saw that despair comes in both conscious and unconscious versions. Despair is an opposition between what you are and what you are willing to be. Conscious despair is an experience of frustration, uneasiness, dissatisfaction, disquietude, restlessness. So when it is overcome in an experience of willingness to be the self that you are, you will experience relief, which is a kind of joy. But inasmuch as you are welcoming being yourself *from* God your creator, your experience will also be gratitude, which is yet another kind of joy. Faith's resting will not be a complete lack of agitation, but a potential agitation that is "positive," as when you sigh with relief, or jump for joy, or are moved and active in showing gratitude. Biblically, confident faith in God is expressed in shouting, singing hallelujahs, and dancing. Such joyful agitation is "rest."

The final chapter in *The Concept of Anxiety*, titled "Anxiety as Saving through Faith," is about the role of anxiety in the process of coming to faith. It is about religious education. We can learn something about the nature of faith by examining the role of anxiety in the process of its formation. One of the threats

that the anxiety of possibility makes immediately manifest is that of sinning in such a way as to be cut off definitively from God; this anxiety prepares me to appreciate the atonement, which is the assurance of God's victory over my sin.

Anxiety is an insecurity detector. It is the emotion by which we spot vague threats to what we care about. Since life is in fact insecure in various ways, anxiety is indispensable to living life well. It registers dangers and liabilities, and it registers them with a shot of discomfort that says a very primitive "*not good*."[8] Anxiety, properly applied, is a powerful sifter of securities. Haufniensis distinguishes "anxiety about men and about finitudes" (CA, 157) from "the anxiety of possibility" (CA, 77, 158). Anxiety is a response not to what already is, but to what might be. All anxiety is about the possibility of what is taken to be evil. Thus a person might be anxious about a possible diagnosis of cancer or the possible success of a rival. Once the bad event ceases being merely possible by becoming actual, the response will no longer be anxiety but instead sadness, disappointment, resentment, or something similar. (Of course, the regrettable new actuality may give rise to further possibilities of evil, in which case I can be anxious about *them*.) But if all anxiety is about possibility, what is the specific "anxiety of possibility"? Haufniensis says that for an individual to be

> thus educated absolutely and infinitely by the possibility, he must be honest toward possibility and have faith. By faith I understand here what Hegel somewhere in his way correctly calls the inner certainty that anticipates infinity. When the discoveries of possibility are honestly administered, [the anxiety of] possibility will discover all the finitudes, but it will idealize them in the form of infinity and in anxiety overwhelm the individual until he again overcomes them in the anticipation of faith. (CA, 157)

We human beings are innately concerned for our security, and anxiety is a frustration; it says, "You are *not* secure." Since anxiety is thus unpleasant, we sometimes respond to it dishonestly by minimizing, denying, or trying to ignore, the possibility. Anxiety about a finitude can sometimes be quieted by another finitude. For example, my anxiety about the cancer diagnosis may be dispelled by a negative result of tests. But the anxiety of possibility is infinitizing. When it is "honestly administered," it looks at the finitudes such as the possible diagnosis of cancer and *extrapolates*: for any possibility of evil that I may escape, the number of others that I wouldn't escape is indefinitely large. Here we see the functioning of the imagination of which Anti-Climacus speaks (SUD, 30) as the "infinitizing faculty." A characteristic of the bourgeois philistine, who has sunk "in the wretchedness of the finite" (CA, 160), "the shrewdness of finitude" (CA, 157, altered), is that he thinks about possibilities only in terms of probabilities. "Yes,

such-and-such an evil *could* befall me, but it probably won't." And then he treats this improbability as though it settles the matter against possibility; it's improbable, so it won't happen. So he feels secure. This is a dishonest administration of anxiety, because it artificially and prematurely forecloses the possibility of evil. Countless possible evils always attend us on our way through life, so the resort to improbability is willful blindness. By contrast, "whoever took possibility's course in misfortune lost all, all, as no one in actuality ever lost it" (CA, 158).

In chapter 5 we noted Haufniensis's story of an Indian hermit, an ascetic who for two years drank only dew, who then went to the big city, "tasted wine, and became addicted to drink" (CA, 158). Haufniensis says that the person who is educated by possibility in the practice of becoming human needs only one such story. This person identifies personally with the hermit, who then becomes for him an emblem of the general uncertainty of life, and especially of the unreliability of moral resolution. In this "honest administration" of anxiety the individual allows himself to be "overwhelmed" by the insecurity of his situation, being enabled to do so by "the anticipation of faith." Faith is not what is anticipated, but rather faith anticipates this infinitude of possible evils and finds security not in the dishonest calculation of probabilities, but in reliance on God. Faith is, so far, this conscious reliance on God in the strong consciousness of the insufficiency of everything finite to yield the security for which the human heart longs. Anxiety is the token of this universal human concern. That is why every human being needs to learn to be anxious so that "he may not perish either by never having been in anxiety or by succumbing in anxiety. Whoever has learned to be anxious in the right way has learned the ultimate" (155). To perish by never having experienced the right kind of anxiety is to be doomed to spiritlessness and "the wretchedness of the finite," while to perish by succumbing in anxiety is to have responded to the anxiety of possibility with despair rather than faith.

The goal of the anxiety of the possible is to eradicate anxiety by turning it into faith. A false stopping point in this development is the "discovery" of fate (determinism). If determinism is true, then possibility isn't infinite after all, but actually quite settled: what will be will be, and that's all that will be. So it seems I don't need faith; I can quell my anxiety with determinism.

> So when the individual through anxiety is educated unto faith, anxiety will eradicate precisely what it brings forth itself. Anxiety discovers fate, but just when the individual wants to put his trust in fate, anxiety turns around and takes fate away, because fate is like anxiety, and anxiety, like possibility, is a "magic" picture. (CA, 159)

A "magic" picture is a folded paper with "picture-segments of animals and people that recombine when folded and turned."[9] The idea is that of something that changes in the way it looks, depending on how you look at it. We might think of such gestalt figures as the duck-rabbit. Haufniensis is noting that when you look speculatively at the states of a deterministic system through the eyes of anxiety, they still look like possibilities, many of which are terrible from your individual perspective. The result is that determinism turns out not to be a way of resolving anxiety, which can be resolved only by a transformation of the person himself in his way of seeing reality. And, we might add, that way of seeing reality must be in terms of an underlying and ultimate stable goodness: the eternal or God. The dissociation of faith from the magic picture is a comment about the *character* of the person of faith, and thus of faith as a character trait.

The person of mature faith doesn't have a shifting perception of possibilities like someone perusing a magic picture, but has a *stable* vision of reality. "When the individuality is not thus transformed by himself in relation to fate, he will always retain a dialectical remnant[10] that no finitude can remove, just as no man will lose faith in the lottery if he does not lose it by himself but is supposed to lose it by continually losing when he gambles" (CA, 159–60). If the gambler depends on episodes of loss to convince himself that the lottery is a losing proposition, he never comes to that conclusion: it is always possible that the next gamble will be the winner. The only way to come to a stable conclusion that the lottery is a losing proposition and to put it decisively behind me is by a decision: stop gambling. Similarly, the anxious person might try to cure his anxiety by positing fate—the way things will be is determined by fate, and so possibility is not infinite—but the concept of fate will not serve this purpose, because what one takes to be fateful (determined) is indeterminate from the point of view of an existing individual. Thus fate, which was supposed to suppress possibility, turns into possibility. See CA, 160–61, for more of the same.

The drift of the entire chapter 5 of *The Concept of Anxiety* is that anxiety is essential to a deep religious education. Only in Jesus's atoning death does the individual, educated by anxiety, find the moral security for which his heart longs. And the person who, *without* being educated in moral anxiety, thinks of himself as depending on Jesus's atoning death for his salvation, has a shallow and uncertain grasp of that truth, at best a shallow faith. Psychologically, his personal ownership of that truth—its incorporation into his character—is shaky and weak.

Haufniensis notes that "If a human being were a beast or an angel, he could

not be in anxiety. Because he is a synthesis, he can be in anxiety; and the more profoundly he is in anxiety, the greater is the [person]" (CA, 155). The profundity of a person's anxiety has several dimensions. A superficial person will be anxious only about the most salient of threats from "men and finitudes," and a somewhat more profound person's anxiety will have a broader reach, without necessarily reaching as far as the infinitude of possibility as such. Haufniensis comments several times on how anxiety relies on the virtues of courage and honesty. Less profound people mitigate their anxiety by self-deception and, as we have seen, by reliance on probability. Use of these tactics is cowardly and dishonest; both vices betoken a shortfall of moral seriousness and thus of human depth. The most profound human being in history is said to have been "anxious unto death" (Matt. 26:38 [Gk. *perilypos*]; John 12:27 [*tarassein*]; CA, 155). Haufniensis speculates that Christ expressed profound anxiety when he said to Judas, on the night of his betrayal, "Do quickly what you are going to do." Moral seriousness—"earnestness"—in Kierkegaard's thought is primarily self-targeted: as we've noted often in this book, penitence is a main manifestation, though not in the case of Christ. But among sinful humanity, more profound people are interested, not just in safety from the many threats that the world poses—failure, poverty, illness, ostracism, death, and so forth—but also from their own moral corruption. Haufniensis speaks sarcastically of people who model their conception of human guilt on civil or criminal law:

> Whoever learns to know his guilt only from the finite is lost in the finite, and finitely the question of whether a man is guilty cannot be determined except in an external, juridical, and most imperfect sense. Whoever learns to know his guilt only by analogy to judgments of the police court and the supreme court never really understands that he is guilty, for if a man is guilty, he is infinitely guilty. (CA, 161)

David had it right: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight" (Ps. 51:4 KJV). So our anxiety of possibility—infinitized anxiety—is directed also, and *most* profoundly, to the possibility of our own moral failure before God. Only fools are confident of their character as security of their moral righteousness. This is why the last significant words of *The Concept of Anxiety* are: "Therefore he who in relation to guilt is educated by anxiety will rest only in the Atonement" (CA, 162). Nothing less than that will do as security against our moral fragility. The name of this rest is "faith."

Faith as Belonging to "The Dialectical"

In chapter 5 we briefly visited the last couple of hundred pages of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* where Johannes Climacus expounds three stages of "existential pathos"[11] followed by a section titled "The Dialectical" in which he expounds what he calls "dialectical pathos." Dialectical pathos is the emotional structure of Christian faith, the "happy passion" (PF, 54) by which the believer is related to Jesus Christ, the "Absolute Paradox." But before we get into that exposition, let's pause to remind ourselves about the idea of dialectic and the dialectical in Kierkegaard's thought (the earlier discussion is in the introduction).

"Dialectical," you will remember, comes from a Greek word meaning to have a conversation, a dialogue. But dialectic is not just chatting; it is rigorous thinking that involves a conversation-like exchange. Plato wrote dialogues, and their back-and-forth character was *oppositional* in a friendly way: someone would state a thesis and (usually) Socrates would undertake to examine it and raise concerns about it. His responses might evoke further opposition, and the process would go on until (ideally) the friends achieved clarity about the question at hand. So "dialectic" suggests struggle between opposing forces, intellectual combat. It can be a word for logic, but it is not logic in the sense of a static structure of rules such as we might see in a logic textbook; instead, it is a dynamic, moving logic, a *pro*gress of thinking. It is a living, embodied thinking. When Climacus says that religiousness A is dialectical in first place, and that it is a matter of pathos, he is pointing out that it is an emotional struggle that is guided by thought, a struggle between opposing concerns in the heart or subjectivity of an individual who is developing spiritually and ethically. It is a struggle between the claims of "immediacy" (comforts, ambitions, acclaim, status, survival) and the claims of an eternal happiness (God, purity, the good). Religiousness A is a serious personal commitment to give the latter the absolute priority that it is logically due and thus to demote the former to its properly incidental rank in one's choices, actions, emotions, and thoughts. Religiousness A is thus dialectical in its being guided by thought, in its having a "logic" or conceptual structure, in its being characterized by a struggle between the immediate and the absolute, and in its having a developmental trajectory (see CUP 1:385–555). Climacus and Kierkegaard think of Socrates as a paradigm of religiousness A.

So religiousness A is dialectical. But religiousness B is "*the* dialectical," or "dialectical in second place" (CUP 1:559). It is Christianity. Johannes Climacus begins the section headed "B. The Dialectical" (CUP 1:561) by noting that this was the topic of his *Philosophical Fragments*. As I noted in chapter 5, *Fragments*

is a very brief, compact book in which Climacus outlines a "thought experiment" in which, starting with the idea of a Socratic teacher, he deduces the idea of a radically *non*-Socratic teacher—a teacher who in every fundamental respect differs from Socrates, and thus in every way is the "dialectical" opposite of Socrates. But Socrates represents the highest in the natural or "immanent" order of teachers. He is the human teacher *par excellence*, the ideal human teacher, the finite teacher than whom no greater can be conceived. So the idea of a non-Socratic teacher is not just the idea of a teacher that is very different from Socrates; it is, instead, the idea of a genuine "teacher" that is nevertheless in conceptual or dialectical opposition to the very *ideal* of a human teacher. This teacher represents a "breach with immanence," a break with the whole natural order of teachers. In chapter 4 of *Fragments*, Climacus finally identifies the relationship that the learner bears to the non-Socratic teacher as *faith*. The name "Jesus" or "Christ" never comes up in *Fragments*. It purports to be merely a thought experiment. But in reality the book is an outline of the special logic, the special dialectic of Christianity as centered in the figure of the savior, the God-man Jesus Christ.

As the union of God and a single human being, of the eternal with the temporal, the non-Socratic teacher is the Absolute (unresolvable) Paradox. The object of faith, then, is the Absolute Paradox. The learner's relationship to the teacher thus involves abandoning and steadfastly opposing an impulse of human reason, namely, to resolve paradoxes in the interest of understanding. In faith, the learner embraces the teacher whose identity is so problematic—so "dialectical," so contentious with human reason. The person with the virtue of faith believes in the paradoxical identity of the teacher without trying to understand it in the sense of resolve it—though she perfectly understands that *what she believes is paradoxical*. Her emotional response to the teacher differs starkly from that of the unbeliever, who—also appreciating the paradoxicality of the teacher—takes "offense" at him. This opposition or contrast between the believer and the unbeliever in their emotional responses to the God-man is another reason for calling Christianity "the dialectical" in a special sense.

Let us now explore in somewhat more detail the "dialectical" pathos that constitutes the virtue of distinctively Christian—that is, Christ-centered—faith. This is the virtue that Climacus calls a "happy passion" (*lykkelige Lidenskab*; PF, 54) and "the passion of faith" [*Troens Lidenskab*] (CUP 1:563, 565). It is the religiousness characterized by "inward deepening … [which is] dialectical in second place" (556), wherein the individual relates himself or herself "to

something outside himself in order to find the upbuilding" (561), something that is "paradoxically repelling and giv[es] rise to new pathos" (556).

Since the emotional dimensions of this religiousness are sketched rather abstractly in *Fragments* and *Postscript*, I propose to interpret it (and them) in light of a more concretely exegetical work, *Practice in Christianity*. Even *Practice* is somewhat abstract in its discussion of emotions, grouping a number of distinguishable emotional responses to Jesus under the general heading of "offense," and leaving implicit several of the "positive" (happy) emotions characteristic of faith. I shall attempt to aid the analysis a bit by asking what more particular emotions are at issue in the scriptural passages that Anti-Climacus expounds, and in other, related passages. As instances of aspect perception (see chapter 6), emotions pick up (or pick out, or at least attribute) particular aspects of the situations they are about, and this idea will help us to be more concrete as we seek to analyze the virtue of faith along with its counterpart unbelieving state, offense.

Faith, in the present sense of the word, is a happy relationship with Jesus of Nazareth. As dialectical *pathos*, it will be marked by an emotional structure. Kierkegaard and the New Testament writers stress the emotional dimensions of the believer's relationship to Jesus Christ. Thus when we speak of a "relationship," we will have in mind a pattern (disposition) of emotional response to Jesus. That is a significant part of what the relationship amounts to. This relationship, above all others, will count as a virtue, an excellence of individual character, because it is not only a relationship with Christ, but is also a general virtuous orientation to God, creation, and the rest of humanity.

Emotional response is a crucial index of ordinary friendship, enmity, or indifference—that is, "relationship." A friend is, in significant part, someone who is glad to be in my presence, rejoices when I am blessed, is saddened by my decline and fall, angered by those who undermine me and grateful to those who help me, who hopes for my well-being and regrets having let me down. An enemy is one who finds my presence irksome, holds me in fear or contempt, rejoices in my downfall or hopes for it, who is saddened when I do well, angry at those who help me and grateful to those who undermine me. Someone who is neither an enemy nor a friend is marked by emotional indifference in all these respects. Faith, as Climacus and Anti-Climacus understand it, is like this: it is made up, in significant part, of dispositions of emotional response to the man Jesus of Nazareth. This is a friendship that is a virtue, a relationship-virtue. Ordinary virtues are important in large part because they affect our relationships,

but the virtues themselves are not particular relationships. However, Christian faith, as a virtue, is a particular relationship.

Calling faith a "happy passion" suggests that the emotions that constitute it are "positive" in two senses of that ambiguous word. They are positive *about Jesus*, in that they evaluate him positively. He is seen, in these emotions, in his aspects of goodness, glory, helpfulness, worthiness, divinity. They are also, on balance, *affectively* positive, that is, pleasant. They will tend to be kinds of joy: gratitude, hope, adoration, "glorying" in him—that is, "happy" emotions—though faith can also be exemplified in unpleasant emotions, notably contrition concerning our sins and grief about the way Jesus is viewed and treated by unbelievers. By contrast, the emotions of offense are "negative" about Jesus, seeing him as impediment, intruder, false claimant, degrading to ourselves, a threatening rival, foolish, and absurd. And they will be, on balance, unpleasant: anger, outrage, indignation, resentment, embarrassment, shame, dismay, repugnance, contempt, disappointment, and fear.

Throughout *Practice in Christianity*, Anti-Climacus is concerned with restoring a truthful perception of Christ. Just as Johannes Climacus wants to correct his contemporaries' impression of Christianity by making it "difficult to become a Christian, yet not more difficult than it is" (CUP 1:557), it is part of the reintroduction of Christianity to Christendom to correct a false and "soft" (sentimentalized, "fantastic," unrealistic) picture of Christ, and replace it with the representation of a Christ who can evoke the range of emotional responses that Jesus is reported to have elicited from his contemporaries. Central to Kierkegaard's enterprise is the concept of Christ as the paradox, the shocking unity of God with this particular man Jesus of Nazareth. As Anti-Climacus points out, most of the negative emotion that Jesus aroused in his contemporaries could be traced to the extraordinary claim that his words and actions make (usually somewhat indirectly) about his identity. In the invocation to *Practice*, Anti-Climacus prays,

> Would that we might see you as you are and were and will be until your second coming in glory, as the sign of offense and the object of faith, the lowly man, yet the Savior and Redeemer of the human race, who out of love came to earth to seek the lost, to suffer and die, and yet, alas, every step you took on earth, every time you called to the straying, every time you reached out your hand to do signs and wonders, and every time you defenselessly suffered the opposition of people without raising a hand—again and again in concern you had to repeat, "Blessed is the one who is not offended at me." Would that we might see you in this way and that we then might not be offended at you! (PC, 9–10)

A virtue that is defined as a relationship of a certain sort with a particular individual (an odd sort of virtue, in the context of the history of the virtues) is attended with peculiar challenges, not the least of which is to get the conception of the identity of that particular individual close enough to right to warrant the claim that one is indeed related in the required way to *that* individual. Faith, in the Christian tradition, is such a virtue. Kierkegaard and his personae are thus warranted in their concern to protect the possibility of offense—indeed a certain well-defined *kind* of offense—at Jesus Christ as a condition for faith. For in protecting that possibility they are protecting the identity of Jesus Christ as the object of faith, and so protecting the virtue of faith.

Offense and faith are two ways (or families of ways) of perceiving, with the "eyes of the heart" (Eph. 1:18), certain crucial features of Christ's person and activity: the reality of both his lowly condition and his claim to be God and the contrast between these; his assumption of our sin (need) and his claim to be able to remedy our sin; his offer to give us rest by way of our coming into a special relationship with him; his assumption of the equality of all sinners.

These features of Christ can be seen in two ways: with joy, gratitude, hope, contrition, or trust; or with anger, dismay, repugnance, contempt, disappointment, resentment, fear, shame, embarrassment, or anxiety. A response of emotional indifference, such as seems to Kierkegaard to mark "Christendom," is, by contrast, an indication of failure or refusal to notice these crucial features of the historical Jesus. But someone who can't notice these features can't come into relationship with the man who is so fundamentally marked by them, and thus cannot have the virtue that is that relationship. Of course, it is possible that someone might be angry at Jesus without having *these* features in view, in which case he would not have experienced what Anti-Climacus calls "*essential* offense." One might also respond to Jesus with joy and gratitude, yet without "seeing" the features that would give rise to the emotions of essential offense or what we might call essential joy. In that case the joy and gratitude would not exemplify the virtue of Christian faith. Neither person's subjectivity would be qualified by an encounter with the Christ himself. Both offense and faith, then, are sets of ways of noticing real features of Jesus Christ, and noticing them with one's heart, noticing them "existentially." It is a goal of *Practice in Christianity* to facilitate a vision of these features of the Christian story that gives rise to the possibilities of faith and offense.

All distinctively human emotions are dialectical in the basic sense of being shaped by thought: they are perceptions of their objects in one or more aspects

which can be identified only by way of concepts and thought. Hope has a different dialectic from anger, and both differ in their dialectic from envy. But the emotions that rightly represent Jesus Christ are dialectical in a second, narrower sense (CUP 1:557, 559): They are shaped by thoughts which, by their opposition, "offend" against deeply ingrained, comfortable and righteous patterns and forms of human thought. The idea of a man who is God himself (not just an instance of the humanity that is in some sense naturally "divine" or made in the image of God), who, alone among human beings has the authority to forgive sins against God, a man who can call all of humanity to *himself* for salvation—this is an idea that strains the entire fabric of human moral thought. But it is this thought that enters into the structure of the emotions of offense, as well as the emotions of faith. This thought shapes "dialectical pathos."

If Christ is who he claims to be, as Kierkegaard and his Climacus-personae believe he is, then only the emotions of faith, and *not* those of offense, are true perceptions of him. The eyes of the heart that rejoices in Jesus Christ perceive him as the redeemer of the human race; the eyes of the heart that is grateful to Jesus Christ see him as the gracious giver of life to those who were dead in their trespasses and sins; the eyes of the heart that hopes in Christ see him as the surety of a glorious future. In the emotions of faith Christ is seen not only in his paradoxicality, but also in his goodness. This is what is missed in the emotions of offense, for they all have in common that Christ is seen as *bad* in one way or another.[12] This is not only a misrepresentation of Christ as he is; it is a failure to have the virtue of faith that consists in loving and appreciating him. Offense and faith represent equally well the paradoxicality of the claims about Christ's identity that he makes through word and deed; but they are not equally accurate representations of Christ himself. The aspect perceptions that Kierkegaard calls offense clearly see one aspect, but not the other.

Indignation

Asked by emissaries from John the Baptist whether he is the one who is to come, Jesus refers to his miracles and preaching, and then says, "and blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me" (Matt. 11:6; see PC, 94). Given Jewish habits of mind and the claim implied by citing the passage from Isaiah, we may suppose that Jesus anticipates shocked outrage that he, in particular, should claim to be God's Messiah. Offense in this case is a distinctly Jewish indignation, based in the desire and expectation of the Messiah's glory, an indignation that this ordinary

fellow should claim to be the Messiah. The relevant aspects that the offended Jew will hear in the report are culpable arrogance, the evil of demeaning the Messiah, and Jesus's deserving to be punished or got out of the way. From the perspective of Christian faith all of these perceived predicates of Jesus are misperceptions, but they get something right, namely, the momentousness of Jesus's claim and the contrast of the humbleness of his person with current ideas about messiahship. The corresponding Christian perception is that of gladness that Messiah is here and that the news of this blessing is being shed abroad, and a new perception of messiahship in the light of this man's humility. Thus Jesus is not a malefactor but a benefactor, not a degrader of Jewish expectations but, in his odd way, a glorifier of them; he is not culpable, but credit and praise are due him. This concern-based impression is the dialectical pathos indicative of faith, and it appreciates, as well as the offense does, that an unnaturally momentous, even "paradoxical," claim is being made.

Contempt

Paul the apostle notes that to the nations the crucified Lord often appears to be foolishness (*mōria*; 1 Cor. 1:23). This is the heathen counterpart of Jewish being-offended (*skandalizesthai*). The emotion such heathen feel upon hearing the gospel is not indignation, but contempt. To them the announcement of a crucified Lord just seems stupid or crazy; it seems to fall below the threshold of serious discourse. This may not seem like a very good example of dialectical pathos, and probably it isn't an ideal one. But still, it is a way of perceiving the departure from natural ways of thinking that Paul's claim makes. Especially if the heathen does a lot of laughing and head-shaking, this emotion is a way of acknowledging, with the heart, that a shocking thing is being said, and as such it is, in the view of Climacus and Anti-Climacus, a more perceptive response by light years than Christendom's yawning, bored repetition of Chalcedonian Christology, processed by Hegelian demythologizing to keep it from exciting anybody.

Disappointment

In Matthew 26:31, 33 we read, "Then Jesus said to them, 'You will all become deserters of me this night, for it is written, "I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." ' … Peter said to him, 'Though all become

deserters because of you, I will never desert you.' " Jesus speaks these words at the Mount of Olives, after the Last Supper. He is predicting the disciples' emotional response to his being taken into custody and treated as a lamb led to slaughter or a criminal to execution. The behavior associated with offense in this case is fleeing (the Revised Standard Version translates *skandalisthēsesthe en emoi* with "fall away because of me"). The emotion in question differs from anger, outrage, indignation. Although fear is certainly present in the context, *skandalizesthai* doesn't refer to fear (the disciples are not "afraid in Christ" or "afraid of Christ"). The emotion is instead something like disappointment with Christ, disgust with him, despair of him, loss of confidence in him. Offense here is a perception of Christ against a background of high expectations—indeed an ascription of divinity or at least messiahship to him—that make the perception of his weakness and passivity, his abuse and suffering, an intolerable vexation, mortification, grief, or disappointment. The counterpart faith response, which we see later in some of the disciples, is a confidence in Christ despite persecution, a trust that he abides with us in the worst of troubles, indeed that persecution is a sign of his blessing (Acts 5:41) and an opportunity to participate in his work (Col. 1:24). In the joy of faith referred to in these passages, the suffering is perceived in an aspect opposite to that of the garden: instead of looking like defeat, it looks like just the proper order of Christian work for this world. This joy is "dialectical" inasmuch as it is shaped by a pattern of thinking that departs, in a striking way, from ordinary thinking about good and bad, taking its point of departure from the Christian story of the incarnation of God.

Shame

"I am not ashamed (*epaischynomai*) of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). Thus Paul identifies an emotion, sometimes experienced by Christians, that compromises the happy relationship with Jesus Christ. This emotion is the nagging vestige of existential heathenism in the Christian. In being ashamed of Jesus, the Christian sees him, as it were, through the contemptuous eyes of the Greeks or the angry eyes of the Jews, so that Jesus comes to look a little disreputable to the Christian herself. The Christian does not become an all-out unbeliever by this shame; it is in the dialectic of shame to construe as *belonging to oneself* whatever one is ashamed of. The heathen and the unconverted Jew cannot be ashamed of Jesus, because they don't claim him as their own. If, as is

likely, the Christian's reason for being ashamed of Christ is the oddness or absurdity of the claim that this lowly man is God or that God has condescended to incarnate himself in this lowly man, then this shame is a case of dialectical pathos. Its faith counterpart is a certain "ignorance" (CD, 35) of the way unbelievers view Jesus, a full-hearted love for Jesus that doesn't "understand" why others are not equally enthusiastic about him. I use scare quotes to indicate that I am speaking of a special, emotional kind of knowledge in which one is *unfavorably impressed* with the oddness or absurdity of the incarnation.[13] The Christian doesn't really cease to know that Jesus comes across to unbelievers as disreputable; but if her faith is completely healthy, then Jesus does not look at all disreputable to *her*, so she may have a hard time empathizing with the perceptual orientation of unbelief. Perfect faith has no place for being ashamed of Jesus, but only for rejoicing in him, hoping in him, being contrite before him, and grateful to him. In mature faith the aspect perceptions constituting these emotions will involve or be qualified by the oddness or "absurdity," as Kierkegaard's personae put it, of the incarnate Lord who is the object of the emotions. So the pathos is "dialectical in second place." But in this case, the impression of oddness or "absurdity" is *favorable* (to put it mildly). In the joy, hope, contrition, and gratitude that constitute the most mature and most aware Christian faith is an element of something—what shall we call it? astonishment? awe? wonder?[14]—that is expressed in the apostle's statement that "God has revealed to us through the Spirit":

> What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
> nor the heart of man conceived,
> what God has prepared for those who love him.
>
> (1 Cor. 2:9; from Isa. 64:4)

Under various pseudonyms and sometimes without pseudonym, Kierkegaard explores various dimensions and kinds of faith. He does not give us an overall systematic account of the virtue of faith in its various aspects and kinds. Instead, his accounts seem aimed at correcting particular distortions and deficiencies that undermine his and his contemporaries' ability to cultivate the virtue—to become faithful Christians. Examples include the Hegelian idea that faith is "immediate"—a spiritual place where everyone starts, rather than a challenging feature of human maturity of which most people fall far short; a dullness of self-awareness of the deep psychological need (ultimately, the tenacity of human

sinfulness) that is satisfied in the virtue of faith; and the domestication and trivializing of Jesus Christ the object of Christian faith. This chapter may seem to offer a systematic account, but to the extent that it does, it is not practical in the way that Kierkegaard intended his writing to be. In any case, it is only a sketch and far from being a thorough treatment of the topic. The virtue of faith is fundamental in Kierkegaard's psychology of character. No person of character, as understood by Kierkegaard, would be without some kind of faith, whether it be of the Socratic or of a more theistic kind. This ubiquity of faith among the virtues will show up in our other expositions of virtues. It is perhaps clearest in the case of hope, which in the Christian understanding is faith's hope.

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1. In chapter 4, we identified a kind of faith that is not a virtue, but an event of transformation that develops, if all goes well, into the virtue of faith.

2. Friendship "is a virtue, or implies virtue."

3. This is a major thesis of Merold Westphal in *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*, Kierkegaard as a Christian Thinker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

4. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism Is a Humanism," trans. Philip Mairet, in *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufman (New York: Meridian, 1989), 4, https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/complexity/people/students/dtc/students2011/maitland/philosophy/sarteih.pdf.

5. Silentio speaks repeatedly of the movement of faith and the movement of infinite resignation—107 times in all of *Fear and Trembling*. He says he can make the movement of infinite resignation, but cannot make the movement of faith, though he heartily admires those who can. What does he mean by "movement," and how does his concept of a movement comport with my stress on personality, character, and virtues? Movement is change, either in space or in some other medium—say, in the medium of personality. If infinite resignation is a "movement," then it is a change from non-resignation of this or that to resignation of such. This may be something like a choice or decision, or perhaps a person just *finds* that he has so changed, without making a decision. Either way, we would have a movement. Once the movement has been made, the change is in place, unless it is followed by a movement backward. The movement is then *to* another formation of personality, another trait or way of being as a person.

6. It remains a mystery to me that Kierkegaard seems never to depict Socrates as a sinner, or even as morally failing in any way.

7. Søren Kierkegaard, *Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, trans. Sylvia Walsh (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

8. Even when anxiety is exciting and attractive, the excitement and pleasure are a consequence of the (domesticated) *not good*.

9. Editor's note, CA, 254.

10. The dialectical remnant is an element of instability, a disposition of the imagination that is not yet under the control of faith.

11. Chapter 5, pp. 115–19.

12. Compare what Kierkegaard says about the relation between admiration and envy: as we saw in chapter 9, both emotions see excellence, but admiration sees the excellence as good and rejoices in it, while envy sees it as a threat and therefore bad for oneself. Admiration is thus a correct perception of excellence,

while envy falsifies and distorts it, despite, in its perverse way, noticing the excellence (SUD, 85–86).

13. A main point of Rick Anthony Furtak's *Knowing Emotions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) is that emotions can yield a kind of knowledge that is otherwise inaccessible.

14. See CD, 106–7, 127–32.

10 HOPE

To hope is composed of the eternal and the temporal, and this is why the expression for hope's task in the form of eternity is to hope all things, and in the form of temporality to hope always.

Works of Love, 249

HOPE AND HUMAN NATURE

Kierkegaard begins his deliberation titled "Love Hopes All Things—And Yet Is Never Put to Shame" (WL, 246–63) by pointing out that "in many metaphors and by many representations, Holy Scripture seeks in various ways to give, through the relationship to the eternal, festivity and solemnity to this earthly life of ours, to provide air and a prospect" (WL, 246). Festivity to lighten the heart and solemnity to lend it gravity, air for a spirit to breathe freely and a prospect by which to reckon wisely where you stand and where you're going. These are blessings to be enjoyed by people who live happily in finitude and temporality without being lost or drowning in it. For spiritual beings like us, disorientation and suffocation, whether felt or not, result from total and sustained immersion in the finite. We whose power of imagination can carry us well beyond the actual world need to keep our heads above water, at least periodically, to breathe spiritual air and find orientation in a space of greater expanse than the world of time. Because beings like us conceive eternity as the future (a temporal mode), our mental orientation to it takes the form of hope. It is analogous to our finite hopes that are realized or disappointed as time passes, but only analogous, inasmuch as eternal hope is never disappointed, but always, in its own way, realized.

Kierkegaard's accounts of the properly formed human being start from a conception of a nonnegotiable given human nature that lays down the parameters of development, dictating that some formations are proper and healthy, others not. The part of our makeup particularly pertinent to the virtue of hope is, most basically, the sense of the future, which Kierkegaard calls "the greatness of human beings, the demonstration of their divine origin" (EUD, 17). Our inevitable concern for our future is intimately tied to our occupation with the past and our power to be mentally outside the current moment. That our

present is qualified by our construal of the future distinguishes us from the animals, who are "in bondage … to the service of the moment" (EUD, 17).

But not just any orientation to the future satisfies or fulfills us. Only hope—the expectancy of what we construe to be *good*—is fulfilling. Like Stoics, we can bring ourselves to think we have found fulfillment without hope, but this is unnatural and possible only through self-deception:

> Even though in the world we hear at times of someone who expects nothing at all, even though such a person is sometimes thought to have attained the proper assurance, because he craftily made it impossible for himself to discern the loss, yet it is also admitted that this wisdom is of later origin and no one has it in early youth. (EUD, 220)

Originally, everybody lives on hope of one sort or another, and this feature of youth is an indication of something deep in human nature; so the price of resisting our need to hope is (*pace* Freud and Epicurus) always the degeneration of the person. The key to fulfillment is not to learn not to hope, but to learn a mature hope, to place our hope in what is worthy of a being with "spirit." So human nature demands that we be occupied with the future, and that we find the future to be good. But that is not all. Kierkegaard also thinks that the human spirit demands an assurance with respect to its future good, an absolute reliability across time, or transcending time. The future good that is adequate to a human spirit is one that will not let us down, one that is not temporary (temporal) but eternal.

> When the sailor is out on the ocean, when everything is changing all around him, when the waves are born and die, he does not stare down into the waves, because they are changing. He looks up at the stars. Why? Because they are faithful; they have the same location now that they had for our ancestors and will have for generations to come. By what means does he conquer the changeable? By the eternal. (EUD, 19)

In this aspect, the fulfilling hope is the eradication of anxiety, which is a sense of insecurity with regard to our future good. Anxiety is thus one of the indicators of the three aspects of nonnegotiable human nature relevant to the virtue of hope in Kierkegaard's thought: orientation to the future, the need for the future to be good, and the need for security ("rest") about the future.

Some may think they can escape from anxiety by simply immersing themselves in temporality, living what they call "the good life" so as to shut out anxious thoughts of the future. They wish, with respect to their extinction, to live as the nonhuman animals do, locked securely and blithely in the present moment. The heathen says, "Let us eat and drink, because tomorrow we shall

die." But in the very expression of this philosophy of blindness the pagan looks at the day of his annihilation with disquiet: "No, he really does not deceive Christianity, and neither does he succeed in deceiving himself. This very remark echoes with the anxiety about the next day, the day of annihilation, the anxiety that insanely is supposed to signify joy although it is a shriek from the abyss" (CD, 77). Human beings are not like the other creatures, for whose consciousness it does seem to be true that there is no real future but only the present moment qualified, to a more or less dim extent, by their past. Faith, hope, and love are all variants of the synthesis of the temporal and the eternal. They all involve qualification of the temporal by the eternal, and of the eternal by the temporal. This follows from the fact that they are to be exemplified in temporality and have temporal manifestations, while all three express a relationship with the eternal. To love my neighbor, for example, is to wish the eternal good for this particular finite, temporal being. But this is also hope, insofar as to will the eternal good *in temporality* is to expect and desire that the neighbor's future will be a good one, infused with God's grace.

In this chapter I will rely primarily on three discourses from *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, "The Expectancy of Faith," "Patience in Expectancy," and "The Expectancy of an Eternal Salvation"; the deliberation titled "Love Hopes all Things—and Yet Is Never Put to Shame" from *Works of Love*; and the discourse titled "The Joy of It That in Relation to God a Person Always Suffers as Guilty," from part 3 of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*.

The reader may be struck that while I treat the three discourses from *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* as about hope, Kierkegaard only rarely uses the word "hope" (*Haab*) in them, speaking instead of expectancy (*Forventning*). However, he is talking about hope in these discourses. He begins the main body of "The Expectancy of Faith" by commenting that "those who are expecting something are indeed the happy and fortunate ones" (EUD, 16). But somebody who was expecting failure, tragedy, disaster, degradation, and annihilation would not be described as happy and fortunate. Clearly, Kierkegaard can call the expectant one happy only if he is discussing the kind of expectancy that is hope —expectancy of something good. Only *joyful* expectancy is hope. In "The Expectancy of Faith" the object of the expectancy is "victory" (EUD, 19); in "Patience in Expectancy" his model is Anna the prophet, who is expecting Israel's messiah; and in "The Expectancy of Eternal Salvation" his model is the apostle Paul, who is expecting glorious eternal life. He points out that expectancy pure and simple can be of either good or evil, and that expectancy of the good is

hope, while expectancy of evil is fear (WL, 249). Someone might object, too, that "The Expectancy of Faith" is not about hope, but about faith. It is of course about the virtue of faith, but its focus is faith's *expectancy*, which is hope.

Kierkegaard distinguishes two radically different kinds of goods: temporal goods (wealth, honors, social status) and goods of the spirit (faith, hope, and love). This distinction may help us to understand what he means when he says that without the spiritual we will suffocate in the temporal (unable to "breathe") and deprive ourselves of a needed orientation and perspective on life (a "prospect"). Earthly goods, he says, are "begrudging." He points out that if I own a piece of property (say, real estate—this is my example), then necessarily, someone else does not own it. More invidiously, perhaps, I can possess social status only because there are people who have a lower status than mine. That's just the way status works. Furthermore, when I am working toward getting one of these earthly goods (for myself, of course, even if I plan to pass it on to others), then I am selfishly oriented. By contrast, if I possess faith, hope, and love, I possess goods that anyone may possess in like degree and simultaneously. In fact, in my very having of these goods I have them on behalf of others and stand as an inspiration and encouragement to others to possess them similarly, and in working to have these goods I am necessarily working for others to have them as well. Kierkegaard says, of these goods of the spirit, that they are by their very nature "communication" (CD, 118). Speaking of hope in particular he notes that

> If a person has *hope,* eternity's hope beyond all measure, he has not thereby in the slightest way taken anything away from anybody—on the contrary, he has thereby worked for all…. that there is one person who has hope, or every time there is a person who has hope, is decisive for all, that they are able to have it. Here it holds true that one is all and all are one. (CD, 117)

We might call this sentiment Kierkegaard's mysticism of community.

Hope as a Virtue

People sometimes think of youth as the hopeful stage in life. As the youth gets older, so the story goes, she becomes more realistic about life and the future, comes down to earth, and becomes much less of a dreamer. But Kierkegaard says that the so-called hoping of youth is not really hope (not the virtue of hope, as I would put it); it is wishing, perhaps a kind of passionate dreaming of possibilities (note the plural), an unstable fixing, perhaps, on one or another possibility, dreaming of this, then a couple of months later of that, and so on in a series of

hardly connected enthusiasms. Many people, as they age, give up this dreaming and get attuned to what they think of as "realism"—an expectation of little more than the daily grind, which devolves into mere habit, with no fresh imaginative and vital relation to the eternal (note the singular). But the virtue of hope is a mature relation to the eternal, which differs from both youthful wishing and the humdrum expectation of daily habit in which the future is conceived as tomorrow-which-will-be-much-like-today. Real hope is a vital, lively enthusiasm about eternity.

Kierkegaard thinks of hope's expectancy as a formed disposition of the person of faith—a trait of character—rather than as just a series of discrete acts of hoping. The person who expects an eternal salvation "accustoms himself to" it as a kind of regular nourishment for his soul (EUD, 263).[1] "The object of expectancy, the more glorious and precious it is, form[s] the expectant person in its own likeness, because a person resembles what he loves with his whole soul" (EUD, 219). Speaking of someone who expects something important and genuinely proper to himself, but in a thoughtless and rote way with a "deadened will" and as a matter of course, he says, "One who expects in this way is not educated by his expectancy, either—on the contrary, his nature degenerates" (EUD, 218). That Kierkegaard is talking about traits is also suggested by an expository device that he uses fairly frequently in *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, namely, his portrayal of characters.[2] For example, in "The Expectancy of Faith" (EUD, 19–23), he makes vivid the character of the person with genuine hope by juxtaposing him with four other characters that we might call the Youthful Optimist, the Defeatist, the Person of Experience, and the Discouraging Doubter. This small-scale device bears a certain resemblance to his grand-scale pseudonymous personae, which seem to me to be characters one and all, and the "stages" they represent, which are prescriptions for types of character (aesthetic, ethical, religious, or Christian).

Neither anxiety nor hope, insofar as they are episodes (rather than dispositions), is something the subject does, but something he undergoes. They are what Aristotle calls *pathē* (passions) and which Aristotle thinks to be one of the two kinds of things whose falling in a mean between extremes makes for the virtues (NE 4.5–6).[3] The idea is that the passivity or receptivity of the virtuous person is a *formed* receptivity. For example, in situations where hope of victory (see EUD, 19) is an issue—say, you are facing the failure of your life's project or the death of a loved one—the feeling of hope in the person with the virtue of

hope is a more or less spontaneous reaction. I say "more or less spontaneous" because we will count you as having the virtue of hope even if you need to remind yourself of your eternal hope, after initially feeling a wave of despair. The Christian tradition doesn't make it a requirement of virtues that they be perfected traits: Paul lists self-control among the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:23), and self-control presupposes something less than perfection that needs controlling. Even to be able to feel such hope after a reminder requires an impressive formation in this virtuous kind of receptivity. Much of Kierkegaard's writing can be seen as "reminders" for people who have "forgotten" what Christianity is, or even what it is to exist as a human being.

This quasi-spontaneity applies not only to emotions, but also to judgments. In a passage reminiscent of Aristotle's discussion of practical wisdom (NE 6), Kierkegaard asks what kind of person is most likely to make a good deliberator about "what [attitudinal] consequences the expectancy of an eternal salvation has for this earthly, troubled life" (EUD, 254). And his answer is that the best deliberator about this matter is a person who is himself deeply concerned about his eternal salvation. Just as, for sound judgment in civic matters, we do not consult "aliens and foreigners" or "loafers and irresponsible tramps" or "robbers and agitators" (see EUD, 255), but instead well-formed citizens who have a stake in the well-being of the country whose policy is being deliberated, so in questions about an eternal hope's impact on everyday life, we consult the person who has the virtue of hope. Such practical wisdom intertwines with the concern for an eternal salvation that is at the heart of such a virtue. Kierkegaard himself exemplifies, in his person and in the discourses we are considering, this interlocking passion and practical wisdom. I say that, with respect to the judgments he registers here, his hope is a "quasi-spontaneity," because he no doubt must make some effort to formulate the insights of the last two-thirds of "The Expectancy of an Eternal Salvation." And yet these insights have the stamp of originality, not in the sense that they have never been formulated before, but in the sense that they spring from the mind of one with firsthand experience.

Hope is especially pertinent in relation to our suffering. Suffering moves us to look around for ways out, or ways to make sense of it, and we look to the future for possibilities. The fourth discourse in part 3 of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* offers a reason for human hope: that in suffering we are always presented with essential human tasks; we can always *do* something humanly significant. That always having an essential human task is something to look forward to with joy seems to presuppose that we are fundamentally *agents*—

beings who find fulfillment in pursuing tasks. Kierkegaard imagines the horror of suffering and being able to *do nothing* (see UDVS, 275–76). And, furthermore, we need, for our fulfillment, that those tasks be "essentially human." Our life-fulfilling actions need to be ones that draw on what is ultimately good, the eternal. Trivial everyday tasks such as the work we do to make money are also a potential source of pleasure, but not of ultimate fulfillment.

When we suffer, the question arises, Why? The blessed answer, the answer that yields hope in the possibility of action, according to Kierkegaard, is that *we suffer as guilty*. The essential tasks that call forth our most human agency are ones that combat and speak to our guilt:

> The tasks of faith and hope and love and patience and humility and obedience—in short, all the human tasks, are based on the eternal certainty in which they have a place of resort and support, *the certainty that God is love*. If it had ever happened to a human being in relation to God that the fault lay with God, there would be no task; if this ever had happened to a single human being, there would be no tasks for the entire human race. (UDVS, 277, italics added)

If I suffer at the hands of another human being as, sadly, millions of people have done, I may suffer "innocently" in a sense. Imagine that I am a missionary who is tortured by a group of people to whom I am trying to bring the message of salvation. But even if I am innocent in this sense, in bringing on my suffering, I still suffer as an essential sinner, a person who has fallen short with respect to "faith and hope and love and patience and humility." You might say that, as a sinner, I deserve to suffer, even if I am innocent of any provocation that brought on my particular present woe. If, *per impossibile*, I suffered as a non-sinner and therefore as not guilty in any sense, my suffering would be an injustice in the government of the universe; or, to put the matter differently, God is the guilty party. In that case, two connected things seem to follow: that God is not love, and that I have no task with respect to my suffering. On both counts, I am without hope. I can't hope to remedy my condition (since I'm innocent, there's nothing wrong with me to remedy); my suffering is entirely out of my hands. And I cannot look to God for help, because he is the source of my innocent suffering.

To experience "the joy of it that in relation to God a person always suffers as guilty," which is the theme of the fourth discourse of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* part 3, requires a humble, penitential attitude, the contrary of the vice of pride. And further, note the nature of the tasks (*Opgaver*) that Kierkegaard cites for reason of which I have hope: faith, hope, love, patience, humility, obedience, "in short, all the human tasks." The tasks that yield hope in suffering are tasks of personal self-development, of becoming human, of

character reformation. These virtues are the *essential* human tasks, ones that are definitive of *human* agency.

But how is it that if I lack a task because my suffering is innocent, then *no one* has a task? The reason seems to be that one instance of an innocent sufferer is all it would take to show that God is not love, and if God is not love, then faith, hope, love, patience, "and all the human tasks" are not tasks of human development after all. Every one of these virtues presupposes that God is love, because all of them presuppose faith—the relationship of "rest" in God. If God is not love, none of these traits is really a virtue, and so it is not an essential human task. What does this imply about the virtues that play central roles in ancient and contemporary virtue ethics?

Excursus: Pagan Virtues

The virtues listed and explained in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* do not presuppose that God is love. They are not, like Christian virtues, dimensions of a relationship with God. While Kierkegaard thinks those traits are good for us as far as they go, he doesn't regard them as real virtues. In many parts of his writings he mentions the saying of some of the early church fathers, that the virtues of the pagans are "glittering vices." He offers various connected explanations of how this is so: "the heart of paganism was despair, … paganism was not conscious before God as spirit" (SUD, 45); they are personal traits in which the pagans took unethical pride: "The pagan was so proud and blind that he did not grasp this horror [of being in the right as against God]; he proudly boasted of 'his glittering vice' as a virtue" (UDVS, 272). What the pagans called "love" (e.g., friendship) was not love of the *other* by Christian standards, but self-love (WL, 53). Speaking of something like civic virtues—self-restraint from murder, stealing, fornication, and similar observance of the commandments—Anti-Climacus remarks that

> we so easily forget that, humanly speaking, all such things may be quite in order up to a point, and yet one's whole life may be sin, the familiar kind of sin: the glittering vices, the self-willfulness that either in spiritlessness or with effrontery goes on being or wants to be ignorant of the human self's far, far deeper obligation in obedience to God with regard to its every clandestine desire and thought, with regard to its readiness to hear and understand and its willingness to follow every least hint from God as to his will for this self. (SUD, 81)

Again, Kierkegaard notes that

> no one in paganism loved the neighbor; no one suspected that he existed. Therefore what paganism called love, as distinguished from self-love, was preference. But if passionate preference is essentially another form of self-love, then one sees here again the truth in the saying of the venerable fathers: "that the virtues of paganism are glittering vices." (WL, 53)

The pagan virtues involved more possessiveness than was compatible with true virtue:

> The person who loses his soul will gain it, but the distinction "*mine* and *yours*," or the "*yours* and *mine*" of erotic love and friendship, is a keeping of the soul. Only the spirit's love has the courage to will to have nothing at all, the courage to cancel entirely the distinction "*yours* and *mine*"; therefore it gains God—by losing its soul. Here again we see what the early fathers understood in saying that the virtues of paganism are glittering vices. (WL, 268–69)

To be a real virtue is to be a trait in which the most central features of our humanity are realized. And for Kierkegaard, what makes a human being "spirit" is his or her relationship with God.

It is striking how different are the virtues listed by the ancient Greeks from those treated by Kierkegaard (and those listed in the New Testament—for example, often toward the end of Paul's letters: faith, hope, love, compassion, forgivingness, gratitude, patience, humility, forbearance, wisdom, and so forth [see, for example, Col. 3:12–17; Gal. 5:22–23]). Of these, only wisdom occurs in Aristotle's list, and arguably it differs from what Paul has in mind. A version of wisdom will be intimately related to the other virtues that surround it: it will formulate and commend what those associated virtues commend. Aristotle is paradigmatic. He seems to follow the schema of the four cardinal virtues—justice (NE 5), courage (NE 3.6–9), temperance (NE 3.10–12), and practical wisdom (NE 6.5)—though he also treats, more briefly, several other "moral" virtues: liberality (NE 4.1), magnificence (NE 4.2), magnanimity (proper pride, NE 4.3), proper ambition (NE 4.4), good temper (NE 4.5), friendliness (NE 4.6), modesty (NE 4.7), and ready wit (NE 4.8). He treats self-control (NE 7.1) at some length, admitting that it's a good trait (better than weakness of will or intemperance!) but denies that it is a virtue since it presupposes some less-than-optimal urges that need to be controlled. Aristotle's self-control or continence is called *enkrateia*, as it is also in the New Testament, though Paul regards it as a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:23). In an earlier chapter I noted that this difference stems from Aristotle's "perfectionism," which is at odds with the Christian assumption of the persistence of sin. Other overlap in vocabulary is that Aristotle's good temper (4.5), which is the disposition to be properly angry, is called *praotēs*, as is the trait that the New Testament calls meekness (Matt. 5:5; Gal. 5:23). Although

we see courage impressively exemplified in the New Testament, by Jesus (Luke 9:51) and the apostles (Acts 5:27–32), it is absent from the lists.

Justice (*dikaiosynē*) is a central virtue in Aristotle's thought (it is the only virtue to occupy an entire book of *Nicomachean Ethics*). It is also an important social virtue in our contemporary life. It has to do with fair distributions of goods to people who have a claim on them, and with fair rewards and punishments for people who deserve them. A third-century Roman jurist named Ulpian summarized justice as everyone being given his or her due and the virtue of justice as a steady will to do so.[4] The word *dikaiosynē* (usually translated "righteousness") is prominent also in New Testament ethics, but arguably has a rather different meaning.[5] There it is a general uprightness of character (apparently including faith, hope, and love) to which a right relationship with God is crucial, as it is in all the New Testament virtues and the virtues that have prominence in Kierkegaard's writings.

We have seen something of Kierkegaard's attitude toward the classical virtues in his repeated invocation of their being glittering vices. But surely we can say more about them. Their apparent shortcoming is that they belong entirely to finitude or temporality and so cannot be fulfillments of human nature as a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal; they cannot be states of mature selfhood. But their behavioral and emotional structure serves to benefit humanity in our finitude: justice secures peace and social well-being, courage fits us to face threats with equanimity and so to act appropriately in threatening situations, temperance safeguards health as well as happiness and justice in marriage, and so forth for all the classical and civic virtues.

On Kierkegaard's understanding, all the true virtues center in a God relationship that is basically faith, hope, and love. The classical and civic virtues may all be "converted" into Christian virtues by giving the God relationship the status of rationale and motivation for the more mundane virtues. If my respect for human beings and insistence on their being treated fairly are expressions of my belief in God, love for God, and expectation of God's kingdom, then my disposition to act, think, and feel justly will be a full-fledged virtue. In that case, my justice will be a dimension of the synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, the finite and the infinite. And the same will go for temperance, courage, liberality, and any other classical and civic virtues.

On Aristotle's conception, justice, both distributive and retributive, is a matter of giving people their due. But that is not to say that anything is due to

human beings simply as such. For example, Aristotle believed that some people are naturally slaves. Such people have no right not to be enslaved. Nicholas Wolterstorff argues that the modern notion of justice as entailing that human beings, simply as such, have a set of rights (modes of treatment that are due them, so that relevant others have a duty to treat them so) derives from the Bible and particularly from the New Testament.[6] Especially in the teaching and example of Jesus, people have a common value that is independent of individual differences like race, moral uprightness, and physical wholeness. From the value of being created in the image of God that inheres in every human being derive the universal natural inherent human rights on which the notion of justice rests. To put the point in Kierkegaard's vocabulary, persons, as such and universally, have the rights that are presupposed by the modern justice imperative because persons have "something eternal" in them. It is for this theological reason that the demands of justice apply to every human being. To use the language of Kierkegaard, we temporal beings have temporal rights for an eternal reason.

So the concept of justice in its modern form derives historically from a theological understanding of persons. Each has a right to be treated with respect and in other ways given his or her due because each is a creature of God made in the image of God. Nevertheless, that I have an enthusiasm for justice in the modern universalist sense is not sufficient, on Kierkegaard's understanding, for me to have the *virtue* of justice. The virtue must be a synthesis of the temporal with the eternal, and though the concept of justice that governs my behavior, thought, and feeling properly *originated* in a theological concept, it doesn't follow that my *trait* has the theological character that it needs to be a virtue. Despite its eternal pedigree, my "virtue" may be a glittering vice. The Christian version of the virtue of justice would include the disposition to *see* the persons to whom justice is due *as* having this potential God relationship and to care about their having justice done them *because of* their being the kind of beings they are —made in the image of God. If justice is to be a full-fledged virtue in Kierkegaard's understanding, it must have this theological dimension; it must be allied to faith, hope, and love. And what is true of justice must be true of any of the other ancient and civic virtues that are worth retaining: their motive must be faith, hope, and love.[7]

The Affective Dialectic of Christian Hope

Let us note in a little more detail some of the emotional consequences that Kierkegaard identifies as marks of the virtue of hope. Ordinary hopes, for power, pleasure, wealth, and so forth—the hopes in which the "person of experience" trades—can be disappointed by unfulfillment, by late fulfillment, and by not turning out to be what they were cracked up to be. Kierkegaard stresses that genuine hope, by contrast, cannot be disappointed. The good—the resurrection of the dead, reunion with dead loved ones, a state of blessed understanding with God and with oneself—"never mocks a person" (EUD, 216). How is it that this expectation cannot disappoint? First, unlike finite hopes, it is bounded by no time limit, and so no one is ever justified in supposing that since it has not yet been fulfilled, it will not be fulfilled. For a similar reason there is no such thing as late fulfillment: no time limit can be set beyond which it could be legitimately thought that the kingdom of God had come too late. This dialectical fact is a criterion. If someone thinks she has the virtue of hope, but then succumbs to disappointment, she must conclude that her hope was not genuine.

Kierkegaard further explores the character of Christian hope by posing and answering an objection that we might call the "circle" objection. "An expectancy without a specified time and place is nothing but a deception; in that way one may always go on waiting; such an expectancy is a circle into which the soul is bewitched and from which it cannot escape" (EUD, 23). In other words, an expectancy that cannot be disappointed is not really an expectancy, in much the way that a proposition that cannot be falsified was once thought to be no real proposition, but just a string of words without meaning.[8] Kierkegaard answers by acknowledging that the expectancy of faith "remains in itself," not subjecting itself to empirical tests, but he denies that it follows from this feature that it is not real expectation. Its indefeasibility in the face of empirical changes is actually part of the glory of such expectation. That we are capable of it is an expression of the "infinite" and the "eternal" in us, our potential for transcending the vicissitudes of the changing, undependable temporal world and living in fellowship with God. The fact that this expectancy is predicated on belief in the God of Abraham and Jesus is crucial to its indefeasibility:

> But if you had faith in God, how then would your faith ever be changed into a beautiful fantasy you had better give up? Would he then be able to be changed, he in whom there is no change or shadow of variation? Would he not be faithful, he through whom every human being who is faithful is faithful; would he not be without guile, he through whom you yourself had faith? Would there ever be an explanation that could explain otherwise than that he is truthful and keeps his promises? And yet we see that people forget this. (EUD, 25)

Rather than insist that an undisappointable expectancy makes no sense, why not simply note that Christian hope is a different *kind* of expectancy from the everyday variety that calculates probabilities and stands or falls by the vicissitudes of temporality? To rule out such expectancy is to refuse, in revolt against our nature, to practice a kind of expectancy that entrusts everything to God.

So one emotional mark of a person with Christian hope is that he doesn't experience disappointment of that hope. But this is not to say that the person cannot be disappointed about transient expectations, as well as suffer other emotional afflictions. In "The Expectancy of an Eternal Salvation" Kierkegaard identifies two other kinds of emotional consequence of hope. One of these is that it makes affliction light. The biblical text for this discourse is 2 Corinthians 4:17–18, where the apostle says, "For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal." Kierkegaard points out that Paul's afflictions were anything but light when measured by the ordinary standards of human experience:

> That this man was halted on the road of offense and consequently was indeed tried in the mortal dangers of the soul, that he was caught up into the third heaven and consequently was indeed tempted to have a distaste for earthly life, that he witnessed with an enthusiasm that made him seem a raving man to his hearers, that for forty years he was knocked about in the world, without a fixed residence, outlawed and abandoned, to the Jews an offense, to the Greeks foolishness, rejected by the world, in mortal danger, in hunger, in nakedness, in prison, and that he finally was executed as a criminal. (EUD, 262)

Add to this that Paul was sometimes sorely disappointed "when the congregations went astray, when false teaching and human fickleness jumbled meanings together so that the way of truth became impassable" (EUD, 262), and the description of all this as a "slight momentary affliction" is seen to express an extraordinary, even paradoxical, formation of character. Though such afflictions stretch out over forty years, Paul can judge them slight and momentary because he experiences them in light of that expected "eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison."

The other emotional consequence of hope that Kierkegaard identifies in "The Expectancy of an Eternal Salvation" is that it makes you nonjudgmental toward your neighbor. In fact, your attitude toward your neighbor's salvation is a criterion of whether your hope is the virtue or a misleading fake. Frequently in

the history of the church people have sought observable signs of their own and others' salvation, "let these conditions be acts, specific conceptions, moods" (EUD, 269), by which they could assess themselves and others. Kierkegaard believes there are no such signs, since a person's salvation belongs to the infinite (it is God's business) and the signs are always finite (psychological facts of one sort or another). "Someone who is truly concerned [about his eternal salvation] surely grasps that there must be a condition, but he will never be able to fathom it finitely, since the concern will prevent a finite fathoming" (EUD, 268). The concern prevents finite penetration because of the object of the concern (which thus defines it as the concern that it is). The object of this concern is an eternal salvation conceived as it is conceived in Christian thought and life: the believer "expects eternal salvation *by the grace of God*" (EUD, 268, italics added). Thus the grace of God is the condition, and this condition cannot be fathomed by observing psychological states. The believer thus remains in a state of "uncertainty" with respect to both his own and anybody else's salvation.

The uncertainty that Kierkegaard speaks of here is compatible with being "altogether certain through grace—something we indeed wish for the single individual" (EUD, 269). This "uncertainty" is not some degree of doubt about one's salvation; instead, it seems to be a kind of epistemic or intellectual humility that refrains from drawing conclusions about people's salvation from psychological premises. And this humility is not only intellectual but also social: in refraining from "judging" another's salvation, you also refrain from putting yourself in the down-looking position characteristic of judges' benches. Such humility is prescribed by the dialectic of salvation as conceived in the Christian tradition. This is why the quality of the hope (the virtue) of those who occupy themselves with figuring out who is and who isn't saved is called into question by this activity: it misconceives the ground of that hope.

Kierkegaard commends this humility in another way. After denying that you can fathom the condition for salvation, he says, "but suppose also that there were particular conditions that could be expressed accurately in words and by means of which observant thought could test the state of the single individual" (EUD, 268–69). Even if such psychological marks of salvation existed, he says, a person who was properly concerned for his eternal salvation could never be *satisfied* with whatever degree of evidence such marks afforded. Mere probability will not satisfy the "infinite" need for certainty about your own salvation. And if you cannot even make a confident judgment about your own salvation on the basis of psychological marks, you will certainly refrain from making such judgments

about your fellow human beings. Thus again, the person who has genuine hope of eternal salvation does not judge his neighbors in this respect.

Not only does he, in humility, never conclude that his neighbor is forever lost; he is, in love, steadfast in his positive hope that the neighbor will enjoy ultimate happiness. This is the personal grace (generosity of spirit) that the virtue of love contributes to the virtue of hope. By way of your love, your hope of an eternal salvation reaches out to the neighbor and includes her or him in what is hoped for. In his deliberation on 1 Corinthians 13:7, "[Love] hopes all things," Kierkegaard notes that "love, which is greater than faith and hope, also takes upon itself the work of hope, or takes upon itself hope, hoping for others, as a work" (WL, 248).

To hope all things, says Kierkegaard, is always to hope, and always to hope is to be constantly in expectation of good, that is, to be looking to the eternal. What does this imply for your love of the neighbor? If you love your neighbor as yourself, and if to love yourself is to have unlimited hope of God's grace toward you, then love of your neighbor will entail unlimited hope of God's grace toward your neighbor. A person with the virtues of hope and love will never give up on the neighbor's good, regardless of how wretchedly depraved the neighbor (or enemy) may seem.

> No one can hope unless he is also loving; he cannot hope for himself without also being loving, because the good has an infinite connectedness; but if he is loving, he also hopes for others. In the same degree to which he hopes for others, he hopes for himself, because in the very same degree to which he hopes for others, he is one who loves. And in the very same degree to which he hopes for others, he hopes for himself, because this is the infinitely accurate, the eternal like for like that is in everything eternal. (WL, 255)

Possibility as such is neutral as regards good or evil. As far as mere possibility is concerned, the possibility of good is on a par with the possibility of evil; both are equally possible. We earlier saw that expectation has this value-neutrality: it can as well be expectation of evil (fear) as expectation of good (hope). But the person with the virtue of hope "continually holds possibility open *with an infinite partiality for the possibility of the good*" (WL, 253, italics added). Where evil and good are both possible, the hoping person gives preference, in contemplation, to the good.

This "partiality for the possibility of the good" is equally true of love. If you have a partiality for the good for yourself but for another no partiality for the good, your concept of the "good" is worldly, that is, not ultimately *good*; such worldly "good" is a "truth" for the outlook that Kierkegaard calls "sagacity" or

"shrewdness" (*Klogskab*). In contrast, the virtues of hope and love have the dialectic (the logic, the grammar) of the eternal, which is marked by a "like for like" or "infinite connectedness." There, partiality for the possibility of the good doesn't discriminate among persons but applies equally to oneself and to others. To love others is to love yourself, and to love yourself is to love others; to hope for yourself is to hope for others, and to hope for others is to hope for yourself. To worldliness or shrewdness belong "unloving passions," among them anger, bitterness, an evil eye, envy, malice [*Skadefryd*], cowardly, timorous small-mindedness, a worldly conceited mentality. Part of the discipline of hopefulness is vigilance of such unloving passions, with a view to quieting them:

> What is said by the one who loves is true, according to his understanding, that at the last moment there is still the possibility of the good, even for the most lost—therefore still hope. It is true, and it will be true for everyone in his relationship with other people if he will keep his powers of imagination quiet, undisturbed, and unbefuddled by unloving passions, with the eternal sight upon the reflection of the eternal in possibility. (WL, 256)

As I strain to think these thoughts after Kierkegaard and in some small way to implement them in myself, the United States is beset with a raging viral infection that is killing us by the tens and hundreds of thousands. European countries, which have done better than we at quelling the spread of disease, have started refusing to receive travelers from the United States for fear of reigniting the epidemic there. The greater severity of the plague in our country seems to be largely due to our myopically selfish person in leadership who, looking with alarm at the possibility of a depressed economy in the season of his reelection, chose to deny the reality of danger to his people and instead to kindle the resentments of white voters against the racial minorities in the country. I confess to feeling the "unloving passions" of anger and bitterness toward this person; I confess to schadenfreude on the decline of his poll numbers and joy at seeing his expressions of panic. To a worldly view, the prospect of his turning around and becoming a generous, sensitive, grateful, forgiving, patient, compassionate, and truthful person seems remote at best. Yet love hopes all things; if I am to be a loving person, I need to expect the best for him—the eternal best—which is that he become a generous, sensitive, grateful, forgiving, patient, compassionate, and truthful person. This is not impossible; with God, all good is possible. If I am to feel hope on his behalf, I must get beyond the befuddlement of anger and bitterness and schadenfreude. I must clear my mind of these confusions so that I can see him with the eyes of eternal hope.

Hope Is an Aspect of Well-being

We have repeatedly noted that in the mainline character tradition virtues are thought of, not just as dispositions to do what is right or as dispositions to promote good states of affairs, but also and primarily as aspects of personal and social well-being, health, strength, proper functioning, fulfillment, and happiness. This is true also of Kierkegaard's account of the Christian virtue of hope. We have seen that on his account, one of human nature's requirements is a kind of security or assurance about the goodness of the future. As long as you rely on the temporal future, only an unstable and deceitful semblance of such assurance is possible; "experience" can calculate the probabilities, but such calculations often yield discouraging indications, easily go wrong, and are always only probabilistic anyway. Thus he says that a person who expects only in temporal and probabilistic terms "wastes the power of his soul and the content of his life in calculations and the virulent unwholesomeness of probabilities" (EUD, 219).[9] Unwholesomeness is relative to the organism; for turkey vultures, rotting meat is healthy food, but it's not good for human beings. Similarly, thinks Kierkegaard, the human being is an organism that cannot, without being poisoned, or at any rate fatally undernourished, feed its need for future good on a sole diet of probabilities. In addition to this drive for security, the human self also has a basic need to have a life that makes some kind of ultimate sense. To make sense, a life needs "a goal and a criterion," but if we find our goals and criteria only in the finite, then this need is again fulfilled only deceitfully. Imagine someone who finds the goal of his life in being a prominent Kierkegaard scholar, and uses his standing in the community of Kierkegaard scholars as the criterion of his success in achieving the goal. Kierkegaard thinks that anyone who is clear about the needs of his heart, on the one hand, and the nature of this goal and criterion, on the other, will see that the latter is fundamentally inadequate to the former. The life of a person who tries to live in this way is really "without a goal and criterion" and is "inconsolable and disordered," and Kierkegaard describes it in metaphors of futility. Such a life "is only aimless running that becomes lost on the wrong path, is shadowboxing in the air that the wind blows away, writing in the sand that the sea erases" (EUD, 263). The human self is so constituted as to need an eternal placement as its goal and criterion, and the object of genuine hope is such a placement. Kierkegaard says that one who really experiences the futility of temporal goals "will no doubt seek a goal that is always valid, a criterion that is always valid" (EUD, 260). The language in which he describes a

human spirit's assimilation of such a goal and criterion is rich in metaphors of well-being. The expectancy of an eternal salvation is "a refuge in distress, a fortress that life cannot take by storm, an assignment that distress and sufferings cannot cancel; and life together with this conception is more nourishing for a person than mother's milk to the nursing child, and he returns from this conception strengthened" (EUD, 263).

Earlier we saw that Kierkegaard made it a condition of the virtue of hope that we not try to sort out the saved from the unsaved by appealing to psychological marks of being saved. But isn't this itself a psychological condition? Kierkegaard may seem to contradict himself in laying down a psychological condition for the genuineness of hope—namely, that the subject be not disposed to lay down psychological conditions for anybody's salvation. However, this would be a contradiction only if Christian hope were tantamount to salvation. But to make any of the virtues tantamount to salvation is a kind of salvation by works that Kierkegaard eschews in the final prayer of "The Expectancy of an Eternal Salvation": "Father in heaven, when I think about the matter of my salvation, I do not take out the accounting…. And I will not build my salvation on any work" (EUD, 272). Later in life, Kierkegaard becomes yet more decisive and clear about the primacy of the work of Christ in our salvation. Although in the following journal passage from 1852 he makes the point with respect to the work of imitating Christ, he could just as well have made it with respect to virtues like hope, patience, gratitude, humility, and love.

> No, the Atonement and grace are and remain definitive. All striving toward imitation, when the moment of death brings it to an end and one stands before God, will be sheer paltriness—therefore atonement and grace are needed. Furthermore, as long as there is striving, the Atonement will constantly be needed to prevent this striving from being transformed into agonizing anxiety in which a man is burned up, so to speak, and less than ever begins to strive. Finally, while there is striving, every other second a mistake is made, something is neglected, there is sin—therefore the Atonement is unconditionally needed. (JP 2:1909)

The person who passionately expects an eternal happiness for which he can take no credit himself, but for which all the credit goes to God, will be reconciled "with his neighbor, with his friend, and with his enemy in an understanding of the essential" (EUD, 265). In him, alienating emotions will be replaced with their reconciling opposites: judgmental anger with compassion and a contrite sense of solidarity with fellow sinners, contempt with a generous sense of the difficulty of achieving excellence and the paltriness of whatever excellence a person himself

may have achieved. We turn, in the next chapter, to some select aspects of Kierkegaard's Christian conception of love.

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1. The Hongs translate "to make it his wont."

2. This device is reminiscent of William Law's *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, which Samuel Johnson so much appreciated and imitated in his *Rambler* essays and elsewhere.

3. The other kind of thing that is to fall in a mean is actions.

4. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 22.

5. Though what Aristotle calls "general justice" (NE 5.1) has a similar moral generality; he says that justice in this sense is an attribute of a person who acts in the ways prescribed by all the virtue concepts (presumably without necessarily having the virtues; this would be a difference from New Testament righteousness).

6. See Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 19–132, 207–26.

7. There is a debate in the scholarship on Thomas Aquinas whether he makes it a necessary condition of a trait's being a genuine virtue that it be "theological." Eleonore Stump has argued that he does make it necessary, and therefore Aquinas's ethics is "non-Aristotelian." See her "The Non-Aristotelian Character of Aquinas's Ethics: Aquinas on the Passions," *Faith and Philosophy* 28 (2011): 29–43, https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol28/iss1/4. In a striking similarity to Kierkegaard, Aquinas makes the virtues a matter of passionate second-personal interactive relationship with God, according to Stump, though she does not connect Aquinas with Kierkegaard. Brandon Dahm has challenged Stump's thesis in "The Acquired Virtues are Real Virtues: A Response to Stump," *Faith and Philosophy* 32 (2015): 453–70, https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol32/iss4/8. For what it's worth, my opinion is that Aquinas is not quite clear on the question. See Richard Conrad, "Human Practice and God's Making-Good in Aquinas' Virtue Ethics," in *Varieties of Virtue Ethics*, ed. David Carr, James Arthur, and Kristján Kristjánsson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 163–79.

8. For example, Alfred J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1935), https://antilogicalism.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/language-truth-and-logic.pdf, chapters 1 and 9.

9. The Hongs translate the final phrase "the irascible [*hidsige*] unwholesomeness of probabilities," but "irascible" fits the context so poorly that I have ventured a different translation.

11 LOVE

The Christian may very well marry, may very well love his wife, especially in the way he ought to love her, may very well have a friend and love his native land; but yet in all this there must be a basic understanding between himself and God in the essentially Christian, and this is Christianity.

Works of Love, 145

WORKS

Kierkegaard wrote extensively and well on love in its many variants. See especially *Either/Or*, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, *Philosophical Fragments*, *Stages on Life's Way*, and *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*. But his most profound and comprehensive writing on the topic—and the one with best claim to be an account of the Christian virtue of love—is *Works of Love*. That book offers far more than can be packed into a chapter, so I will here select a few themes in an attempt to convey something of Kierkegaard's thought on the topic.

The book starts right out bearing down on the concept of a work, a fruit, a manifestation. Love is a state of inwardness, and so is hidden in a sense but, just as a plant can be recognized as harvest time draws near by the fruits it bears, so love is recognizable by the works that make it evident. Kierkegaard calls the discourses in this book "deliberations." We speak of deliberating when we are preparing to *act*. Deliberation (*Overveielse*) differs, as a thought process, from mere "academic" or "philosophical" reflection, whose ultimate purpose is to sort out our thoughts about something or determine what we think to be true or develop a theory. Deliberation, by contrast, is thinking aimed at deciding what to do or how to do something. The "how" is especially important in works of love. The love that we are commanded to embody toward our neighbor is a peculiar *kind* of love, different from our love for family members, a romantic partner, or a friend. If we are to know how to love our neighbors, we will need to know the special marks of this kind of love and how it differs from the other kinds. *Works of Love* is an extended exploration of the marks of Christian love, oriented to the practice, action, or work of loving people. But, as we learn from Deliberation I, the marks of love *are* its works.

Kierkegaard thought that one of the factors explaining the limpness of

spiritual life in the Danish Christendom of his day was Lutheran anxiety about "works righteousness." The fear of depending for salvation on anything but God's grace had drained the Christian life of the vitality and courage that it takes to *follow* Christ. Perhaps in Luther's day the church needed to be warned against pinning its hope of eternal happiness on the performance of human works, but now, in its moral and spiritual listlessness and drowsiness, it needs to be wakened by the apostle James's warning that faith is dead if not manifested in works. James had in mind works (*erga*) of love in a very straightforward sense: "If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,' and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (James 2:15–17). To bring it about from your own resources that the brother or sister has clothes to wear and food to eat is to perform an action with consequences that benefit the brother or sister. To my reading of James's words, he stresses the consequences: "the good of" acting so is that the brother or sister is clothed and fed! Yet James is talking about action *from* faith and love. If you feed the brother or sister ostentatiously or from enjoyment of dominance or to salve your guilty conscience, you don't perform the kind of "works" James has in mind, no matter how satisfied and snug the sister may end up being. The faith and love are the indispensable "how." Human actions are not externalities, but expressions of selfhood (character, inwardness, subjectivity), for better or worse.

Most assuredly for better if those actions are works of faith and love. Here are some examples of works (marks) of love from *Works of Love*: Mercifulness (*Barmhjertighed*, compassion) is a work of love "even if it can give nothing and can do nothing" (315); recollecting a dead person is a work of love (315); the act of praising love is a work of love (359); hiding a multitude of another's sins is a work of love (280); acting in such a way as not to "seek one's own" is a work of love (265).

Love—even Christian love—is sometimes said to be an emotion, but Kierkegaard says no:

> To say that love is a feeling and the like is really an un-Christian concept. This is the esthetic definition of love and therefore fits the erotic and everything of that nature. But from the Christian point of view love is the work of love. Christ's love was not intense feeling, a full heart, etc.; it was rather the work of love, which is his life. (JP 3:2423)[1]

Love of others and of God was Christ's life—his character as an active self—from which his works radiated. This is not to deny the role of emotions among the

expressions of love. We have seen (chapter 8) the major role of joy in Kierkegaard's psychology of character. Paul presumably has Christ's love in mind when he tells the Christians at Rome, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15). Such emotions, I would say, may also be works of love.[2] But if we say this, we must do so with great care—because not just any rejoicing with those who rejoice will be a work of Christian love. For example, rejoicing with those who rejoice invidiously or cruelly will not be a mark of Christian love. So it turns out that the marks of love themselves have marks (criteria) by which they can be measured. And the marks of the marks may have marks, and so forth.

> There is no work, not a single one, not even the best, about which we unconditionally dare to say: The one who does this unconditionally demonstrates love by it. It depends on how the work is done…. even giving to charity, visiting the widow, and clothing the naked do not truly demonstrate or make known a person's love, inasmuch as one can do works of love in an unloving, yes, even in a self-loving way … how, then, the work is done—this is decisive in determining and in recognizing love by its fruits. But here again it holds true that there is nothing, no "thus and so," that can unconditionally be said to demonstrate unconditionally the presence of love or to demonstrate unconditionally its absence. Yet it remains firm that love is to be known by its fruits. (WL, 13–14)

This is not a counsel of despair about knowing what Christian love is or understanding its concept. But it is to say that an exposition of it won't be simple and formulaic. Instead, it will be a flexible searching exploration of the connections and disconnections among the concepts that border and penetrate the idea of Christian love—concepts like *faith*, *hope*, *God*, *neighbor*, *duty*, *conscience*, *law*, *despair*, *friend*, *compassion*, *consolation*, *forgiveness*, *justice*, *self-interest*, *self-sacrifice*, *hope*, *honor*, *shame*, *joy*, *disappointment*, *deception*, and many others. Some of the concepts in the array are concepts of other virtues, such as faith, hope, humility, and patience. This interaction of concepts with *love* at its center is what Kierkegaard calls the "dialectic" of love, and what present-day philosophers might call love's logic or grammar. To master this dialectic is to be wise about the concept of love. I would venture to say that no other work in the history of Christian thought matches *Works of Love* for richness and depth in the exploration of the Christian concept of love.

This chapter will highlight a few aspects of Kierkegaard's exploration. But the exploration of Kierkegaard's concept of love in *Works of Love* goes well beyond what you will find in this chapter. The previous chapter on hope drew on the connection of hope to love, and the chapters on patience and humility will also connect to love; and as we will see, Christian love incorporates faith in

presupposing the God relationship.

Conscience and Love

I begin with Kierkegaard's discussion of conscience because of its special relevance to the topic of character and virtue. *Works of Love* is divided into two series of deliberations. The relation of Christian love to duty and the law of God dominates the first series, while the second series is about various "works" that love performs, with special attention to the clauses of 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. Deliberation III, B (WL, 135–53), titled "Love Is a Matter of Conscience," belongs to the series on law. The special relevance of conscience to our topic is that conscience is an *internalization* of the law, a way that the law resides in and gives form to the human self. It is thus natural to think of conscientiousness as a virtue intimately related to the law.

Kierkegaard's biblical text for the deliberation on conscience connects the commandment to Christian character: "But the sum of the commandment is love out of a pure heart and out of a good conscience and out of a sincere faith" (1 Tim. 1:5, quoted in WL, 135). These three states of the self—pure heart, good conscience,[3] and sincere faith—are all virtues or virtue-like ways that a person relates to God's mandate to love the neighbor. Kierkegaard treats all three in the deliberation, but the thesis that love is a matter of conscience (*Samvittighed*) gets most of the attention. Both the Danish *Samvittighed* and the English "conscience," as well as the Greek *syneidēsis* (Rom. 2:15) are compounds of a word for "with" or "together with" and a word for "knowledge." Following this lead would make conscience co-knowledge, shared knowledge. Shared with whom? For theists, conscience will be a human knowledge or reading of God's mind on moral matters; in other words, a personal knowledge of God's law, perhaps an inward enlightenment by God's Holy Spirit. In conscience, the law shows up not as an external imposition but as a voice within the self. Good conscience is a meeting of minds between the human self and God.

To say that you are a person of conscience is to say you have a *sense* of duty, a *sensitivity* to or awareness of your duty; and "awareness" here includes both a cognitive subtlety in applying the concept of your duty in the particular situations of life and a concern to honor and do your duty. A person "without a conscience" is not necessarily someone who doesn't *know* the difference between right and wrong, but rather someone for whom the demands of duty are not salient or not respected. Though he knows, in some sense, the difference between

right and wrong, he's not mentally "alive" to moral requirements; they don't speak to him appealingly in the situations of his life. This cognitive dullness will be connected with not caring to do his duty. The not-caring and the not-knowing have a reciprocity: You can't care about what you don't know about; and in the knowledge of values, you can't know, in the sense of fully appreciate,[4] what you don't care about. The concern basic to conscience explains its emotional character: a conscientious person feels with emotional pain (guilt, shame) her violation or neglect of duty's injunction and sometimes feels emotional satisfaction (relief, joy) when she complies with it, especially after a struggle.

Is conscience innate and universal, or is it learned and culture-specific? The answer seems to be "both." The law is specifically Jewish, but in Paul's letter to the Romans (2:14–16) he says,

> When the Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience (*syneidēseōs*) bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse, or perhaps excuse them, on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of people by Christ Jesus. (RSV)

To illustrate the independence of conscience from the Jewish law, Kierkegaard would no doubt cite Socrates the pagan saint who testifies that whenever he was about to do something wrong, he was deterred by a divine sign. Socrates therefore takes the absence of a hindering sign to mean that God approves of his going to his death at the hands of the Athenian court rather than obey the court and stop his public philosophizing.[5] Kierkegaard's belief that there is something eternal in the human self (see chapter 1) shows an openness to the idea that, independently of special revelation, people have access to moral truth through conscience. Some eighteenth-century British moral philosophers took conscience or "the moral sense" to be an innate part of the human constitution.[6]

But even if, in some sense, conscience is an innate faculty or configuration of faculties, it seems patent that it is subject to moral education and thus also to corruption. The conscience of Huckleberry Finn illustrates the point. Apparently, the conscience of terrorists sometimes tells them to commit what wiser people would call crimes against humanity. And even people who have had a correct upbringing will vary in the *strength* and the *particulars* of their conscience. Despite believing there is something eternal in the human self, Kierkegaard was painfully aware that many people's conscience gets co-opted by

"the crowd" and many become "spiritless." His efforts at upbuilding himself and his readers include efforts to awaken, strengthen, and refine their consciences.

In Deliberation III, B, Kierkegaard treats conscience not as a universal human faculty but as a virtue, and indeed, a Christian one that requires access to the specifically Christian law: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. In the earlier deliberations he drives home the point that essential elements of this commandment—the concept of a neighbor and the commanded character of Christian love—were not available in paganism. "No intimation" of love for the neighbor "is to be found in paganism" (WL, 44). Kierkegaard infuses this deliberation with references to what Christianity teaches, what the Christian mind is like, the miracle of Christianity (136), how Christianity transforms every relationship (137), Christianity's essential view of the human race (138), Christianity's changes (138), the essentially Christian (138, 139), Christianity's doctrine of love (140), conscientiousness "in the Christian sense" (143), true Christian inwardness (144), Christian love as the essential love (147), and so forth. He refers to Christianity and what is Christian 102 times in these eighteen pages, more than a fifth of the times that he refers to it in the 386 pages of *Works of Love*. Clearly, Kierkegaard here thinks of the content of conscience as supplied by revelation rather than by any natural endowment of the human mind and heart.

I want the reader to take away from this section that the works of love that Kierkegaard commends are expressions of a *formed heart*, a spiritual self determined in its psychological contours by a distinctive way of seeing the self, God, and the neighbor. In other words, Christian love, as a matter of conscience, is a trait of character, a virtue that has a "dialectic" (grammar, logic) derivative from the biblical picture of the world and in particular the teaching and example of Jesus of Nazareth. This virtue differs from other virtues like justice, generosity, or compassion which, at least in their secular version, are simple personal dispositions without special reference to any other person. All three of these virtues are, of course, modes of relating to other *persons*: justice is giving *others* their due, generosity is openness of heart and hands *to others*, compassion is concern for *others'* suffering. But, as I pointed out at the beginning of chapter 9, none of them is a relationship with another person, as friendship is. Christian love for the neighbor, by contrast, is a relationship with God. In this way it resembles a friendship. We might say that the secular virtues are modes of relating to others, while Christian love is a relationship with Another that is a mode of relating to others.

If Christian love, as a matter of conscience, is a virtue as I have been urging, it differs in this basic way from the Aristotelian virtues. Unlike them, it not only implies ways of relating to the neighbor, but it *is* a relationship with God. Kierkegaard describes this in various ways, one of which is to say that in Christian love God, or the love of God, is the "middle term."

> In erotic love and friendship, preferential love is the middle term; in love for the neighbor, God is the middle term. Love God above all else; then you also love the neighbor and in the neighbor every human being. Only by loving God above all else can one love the neighbor in the other human being. (WL, 58)

"Middle term" is a term in logic. The middle term is a concept (for example, *man*) that occurs in two premises in such a way that a conclusion follows from them. For example, in the syllogism

> Socrates is a man,
> All men are mortal,
> Therefore, Socrates is mortal,

"man" is the middle term, a bond or link between the two premises. It connects the premises in such a way that the conclusion follows from them. The middle term is invisible in the conclusion, but without it the premises would not entail the conclusion. Similarly, when a Christian loves her neighbor as herself, God is the "middle term" that connects the loving one with the one loved. The loving one loves the other *as* one whom God created and loves.

> I love God,
> God loves my neighbor,
> So I love my neighbor.

The point is not that this is a valid syllogism, but if you assume a Christian understanding of God—that God loves all persons without regard to the distinctions among them—and assume that to love God is to share God's interests, then you have the dialectic of Christian love. This is the implicit thinking guiding the mind of the Christian who loves her neighbor.

If the syllogism-like formula in the previous paragraph represents the dialectic of Christian love, then my love for my neighbor expresses the combination of my love for God and my understanding of the will of God (that God loves my neighbor). That understanding is thus an ongoing sensitivity to God's will, a reading of God's mind, that is born of my friendship with God. The loveliness of my neighbor, as I behold it in loving him, appears to me by way of

my attunement to the mind of God, who loves him. This is the ideal, but it is not quite the story of Christian conscience, which we have seen to be related to God's *law*. Conscience is also a mind reading, but it is less intimate. It is a reading of God's mind expressed as law. To love as a matter of conscience is to love another human being with a sense of individual accountability to God for that love.[7] The person with a well-developed Christian conscience is a constant *listener*—one who listens to the revealed command with loving and eager attention to the identity, presence, and love of the commander.

Self, Neighbor, and the Duty to Love

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). This law presupposes that you love yourself, and then admonishes you to love your neighbor in the same way. Some people take this presupposing to be God's stamp of approval on self-love. And so it is. But it should not be taken as commending a "prescriptive right" (WL, 17) to love yourself.

How do you love yourself? Perhaps you are vain, and like nothing better for yourself than a liberal dose of applause and adulation. Or maybe you're a control freak and satiate your ego with keeping everybody else in line. So, eschewing the "prescriptive right" and following the commandment to love your neighbor as you love yourself, you generously divert applause and adulation to the neighbor instead of to yourself; or you turn over control of others to your neighbor, thus relinquishing your own control to her. Now really, indulging yourself in applause and adulation was not a very good way of loving yourself: in fact, it's a kind of self-destruction.[8] The same goes for indulging your appetite for controlling others. And, of course, it's no better for the neighbor than it was for you, if the neighbor enjoys his self-"love" out of a concern that resembles your vanity or control-freakiness. But it's interesting that, starting with your perverse conception of self-love, and then forfeiting its satisfaction in the "interest" of the neighbor, you have set yourself on the path of proper self-love! In giving the neighbor what you mistakenly thought to be good for you, you really did love the neighbor as yourself. But loving your neighbor as yourself is what is *really* good for you; so in loving the neighbor as yourself, however perversely, you have learned real love for yourself—which is very different from indulging your appetite for applause and control. You have gone out of your "self" for the neighbor's sake, and thus shown a real love for yourself, without intending to.

The meaning of the law that requires you to love your neighbor as yourself is therefore, "You shall love yourself in the same way as you love your neighbor when you love him as yourself" (WL, 23). Love of self and love of other, when correctly understood, are "synonymous" (WL, 24).

I noted that adulation and control of others are no better for the neighbor than they are for you if she consumes them with an appetite of vanity and domination. But just as your handing over these delicious but poisonous gifts to the neighbor is love of yourself because it is really love, a real going out of yourself for the neighbor's sake, so the neighbor may be more taken by your love than by the questionable gifts in which it is expressed. And if so, she gets a glimpse of what Kierkegaard calls "eternity," as your love "builds up" (1 Cor. 8:1) your neighbor.

Kierkegaard makes much of the peculiarity of *commanding* love. "Love," he says, "had existed also in paganism, but this obligation to love is a change of eternity—and everything has become new" (WL, 25). "There at the boundary where human language halts and courage fails, there revelation breaks forth with divine origination and proclaims what is not difficult to understand in the sense of profundity or human parallels but which did not arise in any human being's heart" (WL, 24–25). The divine oddness of love as a duty is logically connected with the character of this love's object: the "neighbor." The neighbor is the person who happens to be nearby—the person who is at hand, whoever he or she may be. She may be your wife or child, but also she may be the one who delivers your mail or somebody you run into at a rest stop on the highway. The love that existed in paganism was a natural and spontaneous response to some distinguishing quality in the one loved. That distinction might be erotic attractiveness, but also it might be a quality that requires deep discernment. (Then it would be the "spontaneity" of deeply discerning people.) The highest kind of friendship, according to Aristotle, is the friendship of virtue (NE 8.3): the friends are attracted to one another for their fine and outstanding qualities of character.

The idea of loving any random individual who comes along, be he vicious or virtuous, ugly or gorgeous, stupid or brilliant, cantankerous or friendly, hostile or helpful, is very strange, and Kierkegaard makes it his business to impress the reader with this strangeness and even offensiveness of Christian ethics. Christian love is not a response to the attractiveness of the one who is to be loved, but a response to duty. Or if the neighbor is, after all, attractive to me in a special way begotten of my communion with God (see the previous section), it is by way of a

spiritual transformation that enables me to see the same glory (WL, 87–88) in everyone I meet, be he vicious or virtuous, ugly or gorgeous, and so on.

The pagan sees Christian love as a contradictory idea because he thinks of love as a matter of feelings, drives, and inclinations—not the sort of thing that can be commanded. Since the pagan views this play of immediate feelings as beautiful and something to be celebrated, a stroke of good luck in the one who experiences it, it appears to the pagan that by commanding love and commanding that one love *the neighbor* (how boring!), Christianity degrades love into something pedestrian, unworthy and common, if not downright impossible: to *command* a play of feelings, a drive. So the pagan has two objections to love as a duty: (1) the object of duty is nothing special, but the object of love is and ought to be special and exciting; and (2) anything that's a duty is not spontaneous but *undertaken*, and love is or ought to be spontaneous. In commanding love, Christianity commands what in principle cannot be commanded, and in so doing degrades and deprives love of its natural beauty.

Kierkegaard brings out these pagan objections to Christian love to highlight its distinctiveness and thus to raise the question in the reader's mind whether she herself understands and practices Christian love. In Christendom, Christian love has come to seem ordinary and not very interesting, and Kierkegaard wants to rouse the dispirited Christian to gratitude for Christianity's glorious originality in commanding love for the neighbor. A person who lacks such an awestruck appreciation for this stroke of divine grace will not be moved to practice love of her neighbor, precisely because such practice is not spontaneous for such a person but needs to be intentionally undertaken.

But now I must qualify what I have said about Christian love not being spontaneous and about its not being a play of feelings. Christian love, to the extent that it becomes a character trait, a deep personal quality *consequent on* intentionally undertaking to love the neighbor in response to the commandment, is a personal passion whose output *is* a spontaneous play of feelings (WL, 112) about the neighbor. Jesus presents the Good Samaritan of the parable as an icon of divinely commanded love, of being a neighbor to the injured man in the ditch. When the Samaritan saw his "neighbor" lying wounded, "he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds" (Luke 10:33–34 RSV). Luke's Greek word for compassion—*esplanchnisthē*—is colorful. Literally, it is something like, "he was touched in his gut." This is a specific feeling, a feeling of being afflicted at the apprehension of the pain of someone you love. Apparently, the Samaritan felt this pain spontaneously on seeing his wounded "neighbor."

The Samaritan expresses his love in the act of compassion, the act of binding the wounds and carrying the injured man to a place where he can rest and be restored to health. But it is important that these actions are acts *of compassion*, because that is what makes them acts of love. He might have done the "same" actions for a different reason—say, in hope of a reward. In a way, the emotion expresses the love more directly and more specifically than behavior does, because it immediately reflects the motive.

Obviously, compassion is not the only feeling we have toward people we love. It's specific to their being in distress or trouble. When someone we love is blessed with a conspicuous good, we rejoice—a very different feeling from compassion, but equally an expression of our love for the person. And depending on the circumstances in which the Christian "sees" the neighbor she loves, she will feel indignation, gratitude, anxiety, fear, and hope, among other possible emotions. This is why, although love is a matter of emotions, it is not right to identify it with any particular emotion. Instead, it is the caring or passion that may be expressed by any number of possible emotions, some of them "happy" and some "sad."

So, when love of neighbor becomes a character trait—a virtue—it does give rise to spontaneous feelings for the neighbor. But what about the nature of Christian love as commanded? It was this that the critic thought to be incompatible with love, and one of the features of Christian love that Kierkegaard regards as making it a shocking and consternating innovation in the field of love. If you're not already mature in Christian love, you won't have the "inwardness" to respond to the neighbor spontaneously. But will you have the psychological wherewithal to respond obediently to the command? How does a person go about obeying the command to love his neighbor?

I shall argue that you do so by acts of *attention* and *inattention*. We have seen that Kierkegaard lays great stress on the human power of using *concepts* to transform our "vision" of ourselves, our neighbor, and the world where we live. Concepts direct and shape our attention, and so become tools in the exercise of our attention. In examining an apple, for example, we can follow directions like "Consider its *color*, consider its *size*, consider its *fragrance*, consider its *hardness*, consider its *sheen*, consider its *flaws*," and so forth. In response to these concepts of qualities, we direct our attention to one aspect or another, and so consider that aspect.

People differ from one another in many ways—height, color, occupation, ethnicity, and so forth. Some of the differences can become barriers to loving one

another. This is especially true of differences that are easily taken to bear on a person's value as a person—differences that make people more or less important, such as social rank, power over others, intelligence, beauty, education, and the like. And such concepts of differences enter into our evaluation of our*selves* in *relation to* others. We may envy people who are wealthier or more powerful than we; or may slight or dismiss or even scorn people who are less educated, or intelligent, or creative, or socially polished, than we. We may dismiss as unworthy of our attention people of a different race or ethnicity than ourselves. To love our "neighbor" is to value him or her very highly, to respect and cherish her as a person of eminently great worth. And so we need to cut through all the qualities, in ourselves and in other people, that tend to promote our preferring some to others. And we need concepts that identify others as valuable irrespective of such differences. Kierkegaard speaks of the person who "devoutly concerns himself with permeating his dissimilarity with the sanctifying thought of Christian equality" (WL, 73). Another concept designed to aid and shape love's vision is the biblical concept of a neighbor. Like *equality*, the concept of *neighbor* binds me and the other in a relation (if he's my neighbor, I'm also his) that cuts through accidental differences between us that might make for distance, alienation, and relative devaluation. Another such concept, which makes only brief appearances in *Works of Love* (WL, 69, 75, 85) but strikes me as powerful, is *kin* (*kinship*).[9]

So how do we use concepts like *equality*, *neighbor*, and *kinship* to obey the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves? It's worth noting here that Christian thought, of which *Works of Love* is an eminent example, is designed to aid us in such obedience. It plants and prunes and trains and guides the thoughts by which we may choose to see and cherish the other as our neighbor, our sister or brother, a being completely on a par with ourselves. It empowers our obedience. Heretofore she may have appeared to us as an annoyance, a threat, or as a waste of our time. But these concepts are feelers by which we may direct preexisting concerns—concerns we have for our relatives, ourselves, our equals—to a new object.

A person's dissimilarity will be a quality by which he is *un*equal to some others. Relative to others it can make him high (social rank, intelligence, popularity), low (social rank, intelligence, popularity), or middling (just like most people in social rank, intelligence, and popularity).

> It is defilement if the lowly person shrinks because of his misery in such a way that he does not have the courage to want to be built up by the essentially Christian, but it is also defilement if the

> distinguished person wraps himself up in his high rank in such a way that he shrinks from being built up by the essentially Christian; and it is also defilement if someone whose dissimilarity is to be like the majority of people never emerges, in Christian elevation, from this dissimilarity. (WL, 74–75)

The mistake that undermines Christian love is that of taking such differences among people as defining them essentially. Thoughts like *equality*, *neighbor*, and *kinship*, as applicable to these people whom society ranks as better or worse, important or unimportant, us and them, good or bad, enable me not to define them as persons by those accidental qualities, but instead as individual spirits, each created by God for fellowship with me, exactly as important as I am. Love is not simply a matter of belief or unbelief, though the Christian who loves her neighbor will believe that the neighbor is not defined in his personal essence by his ethnicity or his level of competence or his social class, but by his relation to God, a relation just like the one by which I am related to God.

The Christian who is to love the neighbor must go beyond belief and achieve *vision of the heart* (Eph. 1:18). The person who merely believes that all persons are created equal before God and even has good arguments for that claim may still spontaneously see gypsies, or Black people, or people from "shithole countries" as essentially inferior to herself. The task is not to start *believing* that this ethnic janitor, say, is my brother; but it is to start seeing him as my brother with the eyes of my heart, and thus to love him with Christian love. And this conceptual transformation of our vision is a transformation of our emotional response, even a transformation of our love.

Concepts like *equality*, *neighbor*, and *kinship* afford you powers of attention and inattention to the other in relation to yourself. Notice that all three are relationship concepts. Attention is a mental power that is within the scope of the normal human will, albeit somewhat imperfectly. It is within the scope of your will to attend to the fact that the janitor is your brother, a human spirit equally beloved of God, and to ignore the fact that he is a janitor and you are a distinguished professor of whatever.

Advantages of Love as a Duty

Kierkegaard points out several advantages of love that is a response to duty as compared with spontaneous love: love that is a duty is secure against change into hatred, jealousy, or indifference; it is the only kind of love that is free; and it is protected against despair.

"*Only when it is a duty to love, only then is love eternally secured*" against change (WL, 32, italics original). If Anna loves Boris with spontaneous love, and Boris does not return Anna's love, then her love may turn into hate. If because of her love for Boris she continues to want Boris to love her, and Boris frustrates this desire by not responding, he can begin to look like an enemy to her. But if Anna's spontaneous love of Boris has undergone "the change of eternity by becoming duty" (WL, 32)—a response to the *commandment* that she love him—then his return of love is no longer a condition of Anna's love, and so her love is safe against turning into hate. Romantic love demands reciprocation. So Anna is interested in whether Boris loves her. But this interest, which can be more or less quiet, understated, or serene, can become anxious and preoccupied. Then Anna becomes very attentive to Boris's responses, always checking them with the question "Does he love me?" "Does he love me as much as I love him?" In this way love has changed to jealousy. But if Anna's love has undergone the change of eternity by being transformed into a duty, then her chief preoccupation is whether she is loving Boris, not whether he is loving her, and jealousy does not arise. Romantic love is a spontaneous enthusiasm, of which its subject is a more or less passive recipient. But just as I "fall" in love, and in a certain sense do not take charge but it just happens to me, it is equally possible that I just as passively fall *out* of love, losing my passion, becoming indifferent and lukewarm. This can happen in marriage. But to accept that love is a duty is to conceive it as something you *undertake*, the very opposite of the "habit" that you "fall" into or out of. Perhaps you "fell" into it originally, but if you now take it seriously as an obligation to God, you will not "fall" out of it.

"*Only when it is a duty to love, only then is love eternally made free in blessed independence*" (WL, 37, italics original). Love that is a response to duty is like romantic love and friendship in that to love entails a concern to be loved in return. But the satisfaction of this concern is not a condition on the love; were it such a condition, the love would not be love as a duty. Inasmuch as the one who loves because he *shall* love feels the need to be loved, he "depends on" the other for love (from her; he obviously can't supply her love himself). But if she doesn't return his love, he loves her nonetheless. His love for her is thus, in this sense, independent of her love. He feels the need that his love be reciprocated, but if sadly it is not reciprocated, he continues to love. Were he to "love" in such a way that in the defensiveness of "proud self-satisfaction" (WL, 39) he didn't need to be loved, then his "love" *would* depend on the other's love and would show this dependency in his proud self-satisfaction at not needing it. That is, the

defensiveness of proud self-satisfaction would change the nature of his love into something conditional. But dutiful love is not conditional on anything—except the command, the duty. Because real love entails a concern to be loved in return by the loved one, and so puts the real lover in the position of feeling dependent *for this return*; but as long as the lover doesn't make reciprocation a condition on his loving her (in which case he is not loving her *with the commanded kind of love*), his love is independent of the return. This is the "blessed" independence, and true freedom in love.

"*Only when it is a duty to love, only then is love eternally and happily secured against despair*" (WL, 40, italics original). I have distinguished (chapter 1) emotional despair from character despair. This distinction makes sense of Kierkegaard's thought when he says, "Only that person can despair [emotionally] who is in despair [as a matter of character]. When spontaneous love despairs [emotionally] over misfortune, it only becomes manifest that it was in [character] despair, that in its happiness it had also been in [character] despair" (WL, 40). A person in love who sees no hope for the relationship may feel vividly the pangs of despair. Anna is "desperately" in love with Boris and yearns "with all her heart" to be loved by him; but she sees that there is no hope of it. The phrase "with all her heart" suggests that she conditions the worth of her life, her very identity, on Boris's loving her. The feeling of this hopeless frustration of her passion is emotional despair. Suicide is the paradigm action of felt despair. But often when Kierkegaard writes of despair he isn't talking about a bad feeling, but about a general order of a person's concerns such that, *were* something to happen, such as the withdrawal of Boris's love, the person *would be* cast into felt despair. This despair is not an emotion, but a vulnerability begotten of overdependence on finite and temporal conditions (like Boris's love). If the temporal conditions cooperate (say, Boris is as madly in love with Anna as Anna is with him), then Anna can be "happy" despite being in character despair. But, thinks Kierkegaard, Anna's happiness is skating on thin ice, and the ice in question is the nature of Anna's love. The only cure for character despair is to invest one's heart in the eternal. "Despair is to lack the eternal; despair is not to have undergone the change of eternity through duty's *shall*" (40–41). If Anna's relationship to Boris, whether happy or unhappy love, is that she does not merely love him with spontaneous erotic love, but is responding to God's command that she love Boris, then her identity and the worth of her life are not found in Boris's response to her, but in her relationship with the Giver of the command. Her love for Boris may be frustrated and perhaps without remedy, but the frustration is

not an ultimate check of her whole life project. So God's command to love is consoling in a deep and thoroughgoing way, whereas comforts to the effect that "maybe Boris will come around" or "you'll find another lover" are counsels of despair. "The love that has undergone eternity's change by becoming duty is not exempted from misfortune, but it is saved from despair, in fortune and misfortune equally saved from despair" (42). "Wherever the purely human becomes tired and sagacious, the commandment inflames and gives wisdom. The commandment consumes and burns out the unhealthiness in your love, but through the commandment you will in turn be able to rekindle it when it, humanly speaking, would cease" (43).

We've glanced at the concept of love in the perspective of the law, the command of love. Let's now turn to a sampling of the "works" that evince the virtue of love, in particular, love's work of building us up, its work of forgiving our offenders, and its work of compassion for those who suffer and are defective.

Love Builds up

Expounding 1 Corinthians 8:1,[10] "Love builds up," Kierkegaard points out that what love builds up in another is the personal attribute or quality (*Egenskab*) of love (WL, 223). By perceiving love "in action" we are induced, or at least offered an opportunity, to become more human. Love beheld seems somehow to speak to a deep recognition in us of what we are and are to be. Kierkegaard highlights this power of love perceived by contrasting it with beholding the virtue of frugality. Frugality is a good attribute, and when we see it displayed it inspires us to be frugal as well. But this by itself is not properly upbuilding, says Kierkegaard; it does not build us up *essentially* as *persons*. Only love does that.

> When we see a solitary person managing by commendable frugality to get along thriftily with little, we honor and praise him, we are cheered, and we are confirmed in the good by this sight, but we do not actually say that it is an upbuilding sight. When, however, we see how a housewife, one who has many to care for, by means of frugality and wise thriftiness lovingly knows how to confer a blessing on the little so that there still is enough for all, we say that this is an upbuilding sight. The upbuilding consists in this, that we see the housewife's loving solicitude at the same time as we see the frugality and thrift, which we honor. (WL, 213)

The thrift, which is good, becomes an ultimately *personal* good by being deployed in the interest of love. Thriftiness does not make a person essentially human. It doesn't go to the heart of a person's humanity. Thriftiness *from love*, by contrast, is maturity as a human being, essential human fulfillment.

In this example, love beheld in third-person perspective builds us up. But most of Kierkegaard's deliberation on 1 Corinthians 8:1 attends to the second-person perspective—you are built up by someone's loving *you*. And here we see the really powerful upbuilding effect. When someone expressively loves you, "you feel built up by him just because he is loving, but you do not perceive that the explanation is that his love signifies that he presupposes love in you and that you are built up by this" (WL, 223). To love someone—say, your daughter—is certainly to wish her well, for example to desire that she succeed, that she be healthy, that she be happy, that she have a good life. But to wish her well in such ways while you think slightingly of her, considering her to be of little importance and not worth much as a human being, is inadequate and strange, to say the least, and is perhaps not even possible. So love's element of wishing the other well is intimately connected with thinking highly of the other, valuing and attributing worth to her, even cherishing her. But what is it that makes for human worth, if not love?

The upbuilding power of being loved is due to the natural human impulse to respond to love by loving—loving both the one who has loved you and others. And you respond in this way, according to Kierkegaard, because the other has taken *you* to be loving. In perceiving the other to have taken you to be loving, you perceive him as cherishing you, as valuing you, as holding you to be excellent and important. Because of our deep desire to be good, we see him who sees us as good as himself good, and so we love him in return. Furthermore, we are sometimes abashed when we see that another loves us, thinking that we don't deserve it. The discrepancy between what we are and what the loving one takes us to be is uncomfortable, and then the responsive impulse of our humanity may be to reduce the discrepancy by rising to meet the attribution. When the other takes us to be good, we want to merit this attribution, and thus feel an impulse to *be* as good as the loving other takes us to be.

It is true that we sometimes accept substitutes for being cherished, such substitutes as being admired or even envied or feared. These qualities, when we perceive them as being attributed to us, can make us glad and feel important. But if we rejoice in these attributions even though they don't betoken the real excellence—the truly *personal* excellence—of love, then we are confused about our humanity. We have degraded our own image of ourselves, accepting a cheap or even corrupt substitute for personal excellence. One of the names for this confusion is narcissism: an indiscriminate desire to be admired, envied, or even feared that is at bottom a confused need to be loved.

One of the works of love is the work of building up love in others. How do you go about doing this? Not by training them in love (what presumption!). Kierkegaard points out that the role of teacher or disciplinarian can tempt because it seems to give occasion to dominate others. But, by contrast with domination, "*The one who loves presupposes that love is in the other person's heart and by this very presupposition builds up love in him*" (WL, 216–17, italics original). One who loves takes a servant attitude of eliciting from or facilitating in the other the goodness that is already in her. To love another person is to attribute goodness to her, and the deepest human goodness is love. So in approaching another with the intent of building her up in love, we presuppose that the other is already loving. The loving person doesn't suppose the other is lacking in love and that he must persuade her to start loving or train her in loving or browbeat her into loving.

The recommended tactic involves doing nothing to the other, but instead working on *oneself*. The discourse "is about how the loving one upbuildingly controls *himself*" (WL, 217, italics added), resisting temptations and ensuring that he presupposes love in the other. "In this way he draws out the good, he loves forth [*opelske*] love, he builds up" (WL, 217). "The presupposition first and last is self-denial" (218). "Love humbly makes itself inconspicuous just when it is working the hardest—indeed, its work seems as if it did nothing at all" (218).

"The more perfect the loving one presupposes the love to be, the more perfect a love he loves forth" (219). This is a kind of agency that isn't agency. You plant the seed, and God gives the growth. We shouldn't deny that it is some kind of agency, but we shouldn't overrate it, either. The loving one "loves forth" love in the other, just as the gardener gardens forth the beans. Strictly speaking, the gardener doesn't "grow the beans." Instead he puts the seeds in the ground, and waters and weeds them, but the *beans* do the growing. He has a small but important agency in bringing them about, but he would be helpless to do it without the seeds and their inherent potential. The honest gardener, too, "denies himself" in awe at the process of growth that he merely facilitates. "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (1 Cor. 3:6–7).

Love loves forth love by presupposing love in the other. Kierkegaard has earlier distinguished Christian love, which is a response to the divine commandment to love the neighbor, from the loves that were known in paganism: erotic love and friendship. So what kind of love is it that loves forth love, and which of the loves is the one that is loved forth? Is either one or both of

these loves the love that is explicitly commanded in the Christian revelation? It seems to me the answer is yes and no. On the no side is the consideration that even if the one who loves is doing so under command, the love that she loves forth in the other doesn't seem to require access to the commandment. Surely you can love people who don't subscribe to the commandment, and if you succeed in loving forth love in them, their responsive love will not be in obedience to the commandment. And besides this, the process of loving forth by presupposing love seems to be a natural psychological interpersonal process. It doesn't wait to listen for the commandment. On the yes side, Kierkegaard says, "The one who loves works very quietly and very solemnly, and yet the forces of eternity are in motion" (WL, 218), indicating that this love—and the love that it loves forth—have the divine imprimatur.

What Kierkegaard says about the eternal dimension of the self (chapter 1) and the natural knowledge of God that self-awareness entails suggests a way to put the Yes and the No together. Just as there is a "Socratic," unrevealed analogue of Christian faith—a Socratic faith (see chapter 9)—so, it seems, can we posit a Socratic love that is not one of the standard pagan loves but is also not strictly dependent on the Christian revelation. And Socrates's midwife-like relation to those he "taught" (*Meno*, *Theaetetus*) is also analogous to the relation that the Christian who loves her neighbor bears to him insofar as by her love she builds him up in love. By resources natural to the human mind Socrates transcended paganism, yet without reaching the revelation of God's nature as knowable by way of God's incarnation in Jesus Christ. In a similar way the "selfless" love of another person naturally presupposes love in the other and so loves forth love in the neighbor, even in the absence of a knowledge of the commandment. Both loves involve motion of "the forces of eternity." The Christian revelation makes clear what earlier was a "mystery," though it is one of which there are numerous hints and prefigurations in nature. The experience of the eternal here remains thin and conceptually spare, but it is recognizable as eternal from the vantage of revelation. Kierkegaard speaks from that vantage point and, having the enriched knowledge of eternity so afforded, can speak with great clarity about that love. "When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts" (Rom. 2:14–15 RSV).

I want to stress that when Kierkegaard thinks of the relationship between two persons in which one builds the other up in love, he is not thinking just of

momentary episodes of presupposing that elicit momentary episodes of responsive love, but is thinking of an *ongoing quality* in the one person that allows her to presuppose (as a matter of "policy," so to speak) an *ongoing quality* in the other, in the context of a relatively *stable* relationship, of which the model might be marriage or friendship or filiality or collegiality.[11] I don't think we're talking here about hit-and-run encounters, but about something steady and temporally extended.

> Or what kind of person do you think one would be who could truly build you up? Is it not true that you would desire him to have insight and knowledge and talent and experience? But you still would not consider that it depended crucially on this, but rather on his being a trustworthy, loving person —that is, truly a loving person. Therefore you consider that to build up depends crucially and essentially upon being loving or having love to such a degree that one can rely upon it. (WL, 222)

I take my cue here from the words "person," "being," "trustworthy," and "rely." All of these suggest not episodes, but dispositions, like the word "quality" (*Egenskab*). In the next paragraph Kierkegaard distinguishes two kinds of qualities, qualities you have "for yourself" and qualities you have "for others." His example of the former is the virtue of wisdom. A wise person can use her wisdom for others—or not. If she uses it for others, it is because she has another quality, of a different kind: love. Love, unlike wisdom, is *necessarily* for others; that is its nature as a quality.

In some people it can be hard to presuppose a spark of love. If the person has consistently cheated others, lied to them for his own advantage, abused and demeaned others, sought revenge without mercy on his enemies, and generally shown himself to be uninterested in the well-being of anyone but himself, it is, I think, difficult to presuppose that down deep he is a loving person. If such a person is a public figure, and you're making public statements about him or her, it seems to me that stretching your hermeneutical resources to interpret his self-serving and vindictive actions as somehow loving, may further damage the social fabric that such a character is already corrupting.

However, I don't deny that, face-to-face with such a person, the loving demeanor would be to presuppose that love is in him. But what is it to presuppose something? I think most people patently have some love in them, and so in their case presupposing can mean *believing it to be true* that there is love, albeit mixed up with less savory attitudes. But in the case I'm considering, we may need to think of "presupposing" as we do when we say, "Let's suppose for the sake of argument …," where we suspend personal judgment concerning the truth of the question and go on *as if* the person had some love in him. In a

persistent case of the suspended judgment kind of presupposing in personal interactions with the corrupt individual that I have imagined, presupposing that he loves just might elicit some real loving from him, rather than just his habitual opportunistic coopting of the gullible. And if this happens, it would be confirmation of the original presupposition.

Love "Hides" Many Sins

The loving person performs the "work" of hiding the sins of others. He or she does so in a variety of ways: by not "discovering" them, by silence about them, by choosing mitigating explanations of them, and by forgiving them.[12] Kierkegaard begins by pointing out that love, like other things that belong to the eternal, has "a double mode: in an outward direction and in an inward direction back into itself, but in such a way that this is one and the same" (WL, 280). For example, love makes the loving person boldly confident (inward direction) at the same time as it makes those who feel the loving person's influence boldly confident (outward direction).[13] More generally, by lovingly hiding others' sins, you end up making your own sins less "visible."

Nondiscovery

Kierkegaard says that what you don't discover (*opdage*), you hide (WL, 282). This is a little strange. If I don't discover the skunks living under my porch, am I *hiding* them? If I don't discover that my neighbor is extorting some shopkeepers downtown, am I hiding his malfeasance? On the contrary, it seems that if I don't know something because I have failed to discover it, I *can't* hide it. I can hide only what I know to be there. I think that when Kierkegaard says we can hide a multitude of sins by not discovering them, he thinks of discovering as *making manifest* or *revealing*. In an older English, "discover" can have this sense. For example, Samuel Johnson writes of the poet Abraham Cowley, "From the charge of profaneness, the constant tenor of his life, which seems to have been eminently virtuous, and the general tendency of his opinions, which discover no irreverence of religion, must defend him" (*Life of Cowley*). Cowley's opinions reveal no irreverence of religion. And the loving person doesn't reveal (dis- or un-cover) his neighbor's sins; thus, if he knows about them, he "hides" them.[14] But Kierkegaard's discussion of nondiscovery of sin focuses on the loving

person's non-"discovering" of sins *to himself*—thus a kind of blindness to sin. The discussion is made somewhat confusing by the fact that Kierkegaard also uses "discover" in the way we are more familiar with. For example, he speaks of a scientist who discovers a bird species (WL, 283)[15] and persons who discover (more) evil by intentionally investigating.

I think that discovery and nondiscovery in Kierkegaard's discussion have perceptual import. Perceiving is a way of knowing, but we can know things without perceiving them. For example, if my wife tells me we have skunks under the porch, and she knows a skunk when she sees (or smells) one, I can come to know that there are skunks under the porch without perceiving them for myself. I know they're there, but I haven't seen them. Kierkegaard thinks that love makes a person blind to sin and evil, and in this sense love "hides" sin and evil from the loving person. This doesn't imply that the loving person doesn't know that other people are sinners, but the perceptual metaphor of blindness conveys that, under some circumstances, anyway, the person's love prevents her from perceiving the other's sin.

> Just imagine, to mention the highest example, imagine Christ in that moment when he was brought before the Council; imagine the raging crowd; imagine the circle of dignitaries—and then imagine how many a glance was directed at him, aimed at him, only waiting for him to look in that direction so that its glance could also convey its mockery, its contempt, its pity, its scorn for the accused! But he discovered nothing; lovingly he hid the multitude of sins. (WL, 287)

The "normal" reaction of a person who's been unjustly accused, standing before a jeering crowd mocking and scorning him and calling for him to be tortured to death, is to harbor bitter emotions. In this scene, Kierkegaard seems to equate "discovering" the crowd's sin with such emotions: "if he becomes embittered, he discovers the multitude of sins" (WL, 288). It is through such bitter emotions that we perceive the offensiveness of the other's action against us. Kierkegaard seems to be saying that if Christ does not become embittered by what he "sees," then he has not "discovered" the crowd's sin. But it is implausible in the extreme to suppose that Christ didn't *know* the crowd was sinning against him. This seems to allow that in some other sense he does recognize their sin. Seeing the sin, he doesn't become embittered, and so doesn't "discover" the sin (against himself). He doesn't think, with bitterness, "These people are being so unfair to me! I hope they get what they deserve!" He doesn't resent the crowd or feel contempt for it, but instead perceives them (let us say) with compassion. They look to him "like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt. 9:36). That, too, is a way of recognizing sin, though it is not a recognition of sin in its aspect of offense.

Christ knows that the crowd's jeering and glee are sin, but he experiences them not specifically *as sin*, but as haplessness, incompetence, and misery—perhaps, we could say, consequences of sin. The emotional response specifically to sin against oneself is "bitterness" (resentment, anger, perhaps contempt—some kind of emotional alienation). Someone who, in response to sin against himself, doesn't perceive it this way, doesn't "discover" sin. Christ doesn't feel alienated from the jeering crowd but sees them as a shepherd sees his sheep when they are in trouble: as his own, in need of his care.

We must distinguish here between *knowing* something and knowing that it has a certain property, on the one hand, and *perceiving* the same thing *as* having that property, on the other. A figure from gestalt psychology illustrates this difference clearly. The old woman/young woman figure can be seen two ways. Some people are "blind" to one of the aspects but can see the other. A person like this can know, for example, that the figure represents an old woman (he's been told on good authority), even though he can't "see" it; it only looks like a young woman to him.

It would be wrong to suppose that Jesus was incapable of seeing sin as sin—thus seeing it with anger and a sense of its offensive and alienating power. Jesus responds to the unresponsiveness of some of the cities to which he brought his ministry: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you" (Matt. 11:21–22). When some people in a synagogue looked on with disapproval as on the sabbath Jesus healed a man with a withered hand, "He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart" (Mark 3:5). When he cleanses the temple of trade and money changing (Matt. 21:12–13), he seems to be seeing sin in its alienating and offensive aspect. Unsurprisingly, Jesus can perceive sin in all its aspects, but when compassion is at the forefront, as Kierkegaard thinks it is in the trial scene, its offensiveness and alienation withdraw into the shadows. Sympathetic love hides the offensiveness from view. Nor should we think that in those scenes where Jesus's bitterness "discovers" the offensive aspect of sin, he has ceased to love the sinners. Indeed, his bitterness is an expression of his love.

The lesson from Kierkegaard's discussion of non-"discovery" for his psychology of the virtue of Christian love is that proper formation has a perceptual dimension: the well-formed Christian perceives fellow sinners primarily with compassion. That is the default setting, a "habit" of perception;

and that default is an aspect-blindness to (or perhaps better, an aspect-ignoring of) the offensive and punishment-worthy aspect of their sin. This perceptual disposition is compatible with knowing that the neighbor's sins are nasty and vile and worthy of condemnation, as are one's own; and it is also compatible with emotional perception of this aspect *on occasion*. But the default setting of the loving Christian is the perception of sinners in their aspect of "*miserable* offenders," as the prayer of confession has it.[16]

Silence, Mitigating Explanation, and Forgiveness

In addition to the perceptual formation that allows the loving person not to "perceive" most of the neighbors' sins, her love consists in other dispositions for handling the ones she does perceive. "*Love hides a multitude of sins; what it cannot avoid seeing or hearing, it hides by silence, by a mitigating explanation, by forgiveness*" (WL, 289, italics original). More or less, you are struck by the full offensive vileness of the neighbor's sin. In this case, you are not hiding the sin from yourself, but you can still hide it from others. And thereby, you may also weaken your own "embitterment" about it. Unless you are far advanced in learning to love your neighbor, this disposition will be one of controlling your own sinful inclinations. Kierkegaard laments, "It is only all too certain that every human being, unfortunately, has a great inclination to see his neighbor's faults and perhaps an even greater one to want to tell them" (WL, 290). We take pleasure in these activities because they build our self-esteem and console us in our guilt: a vivid impression of others' faults makes us look good to ourselves, or at least less bad, by comparison.

> It corrupts people to become accustomed through rumor or gossip to finding out, inquisitively, frivolously, enviously, perhaps maliciously, about the neighbor's faults. It would certainly be desirable if people would again learn to be silent; but if there is to be chatter, and inquisitive and frivolous chatter at that, then let it be about nonsense and trivialities. (WL, 289–90)

When we get in the habit of trafficking in other people's faults—often, of course, under cover of our supposed compassion and one or another "necessity"—it is hard to maintain rigorous truthfulness: we get "carried away" and embellishments begin to decorate our narratives. Love, by contrast, will train in silence.

Kierkegaard notes that people's actions acquire their moral identity (what, exactly, in moral terms, a person *did*) by reference to their explanations. Consider, for example, an assistant to a boss who is corrupt. The assistant tells

lies on behalf of the boss, with the consequence that some people are seriously hurt by believing the lies. Let's say the facts are these: the assistant lied and people got hurt. Onlookers respond by being outraged, even to the point of hating the assistant for what he did. How does the loving person respond to this situation? Kierkegaard says, "By a mitigating explanation the one who loves hides a multitude of sins. It is always the explanation that makes something what it now becomes. The fact or the facts are basic, but the explanation is the decisive factor" (WL, 291). Let us say that the assistant is ambitious for advancement, and also that he has a family to feed and few opportunities to work. It is ambiguous which of these motives was uppermost in the assistant's lying, but they differ in degree of moral fault. The family to feed is the mitigating explanation, so the loving person will fix on that, both in his thinking about the case, and in his communications with others. (We can imagine an unloving person who actually prefers the harsher explanation.) The loving person will be marked by a decided preference for mitigating explanations of the sins he perceives. Kierkegaard commends the practice that would lead to the formation of such a preference:

> Ah, if people would rightly understand what beautiful use they could make of their imagination, their acumen, their inventiveness, their power to put things together, by using it to find, if possible, a mitigating explanation—then they would gain more and more of a taste for one of the most beautiful joys in life. (292)

Of all the ways that love hides sins, says Kierkegaard, forgiveness is "the most notable" (WL, 294) because, starting with sins that exist, it causes them not to exist. "Keeping silent does not actually take away anything from the generally known multitude of sins. The mitigating explanation wrests something away from the multitude by showing that this and that were not sin. Forgiveness removes what cannot be denied to be sin" (WL, 294). Forgiveness does not just deactivate a sin in a victim's life (say, through the victim's forgetting about it, so that it no longer "exists *for him*"), but causes the sin not to exist. Faith in the power of forgiveness is faith that forgiveness removes sins. Kierkegaard calls this a miracle (WL, 295). How does this miracle work?

When God forgives sins, he wipes them out by "forgetting" them. God's power of forgetting goes beyond the corresponding human power: "Forgetting, when God does it in relation to sin, is the opposite of creating, since to create is to bring forth from nothing, and to forget [when God does it] is to take back into nothing" (WL, 296). Only God can *remove* sins—make the sin that exists cease existing. The loving person believes that God has taken away sins, and so becomes an accomplice, so to speak, of God's de-creation of sin (not that God

created sin; people did). The forgiver does not by himself cause the sin not to exist, but appropriates God's de-creation of sin by believing in it and following God's act of de-creation by himself forgiving the offender. In faith, we attach ourselves to God and "follow" him, understand him, ally ourselves with God, imitate him and in this sense participate in his de-creation of sin.

I'm not sure how to understand this idea of God de-creating sin by "forgetting" it, but I'll take a stab at it. One possible interpretation is suggested by the view of sin in *The Sickness unto Death* according to which sin is not the same as guilt or transgression against the moral law or as against the eternal conceived Socratically, but is guilt or transgression against the moral law *as before God in Christ*. (You'll remember the division between part 1 and part 2 of *Sickness*, the first being about despair and the second about despair as sin.) The concept of sin is a particular understanding of despair as *before God* where God is conceived as Christianity conceives God. Sin, as Anti-Climacus understands it, is a Christian concept, not available in either paganism or Judaism. I suggested in chapter 5 that the incarnation and atonement are the decisive marks of God as understood in Christianity. Christianity turns guilt into sin and in the same stroke obliterates it. To believe in the forgiveness of sins, then, is to believe in the cancelation of sin. This is not to say that people, including Christians, don't do bad things, or that the consequences of people's misdeeds are magically neutralized. But it does mean that the deep meaning of our misdeeds—our alienation from God on their account, their existence *as sin*—is banished into nonexistence. This is the omnipotence of God's love in Christ. Belief in this love of God is the background against which Christians, as deputies of God, forgive the misdeeds of their fellow sinners.

In the following passage, which may puzzle readers, Kierkegaard toggles between a factive and a non-factive sense of "see." In the factive sense, to say that you see something is to imply that it exists (that it's a "fact"). But we sometimes have visual experiences of things that don't exist. For example, in the Müller-Lyer illusion (see chapter 6) two parallel lines appear to be of different lengths, but they are actually of the same length. If you know about the illusion and someone shows it to you and asks, "What do you see?" you might answer, "I see lines of different lengths." That would be the non-factive sense of "see" because you realize that the lines are of the same length (that what you see is not a "fact"). But you might go on to say, "I don't really *see* lines of different lengths," because you're aware of the illusion. What you see (non-factive) cannot be seen (factive) because it does not exist. Note: in both factive and non-factive uses in the

following passage, "see" is used in a broad sense of "perceive"; vision in the narrow sense of what you do with your physical eyes is not in question. In the passage, I have marked the factive occurrences of "see" with "(f)"; the rest of the occurrences are non-factive:

> In forgiveness—and sin—there is … a relation of faith of which we are rarely aware. What, then, is the unseen(f) here? The unseen(f) is that forgiveness takes away that which does indeed exist; the unseen(f) is that what is seen is nevertheless not seen(f), for if it is seen, it obviously is unseen(f) that it is not seen(f). The one who loves sees the sin he forgives, but he believes that forgiveness takes it away. This cannot be seen(f),[17] whereas the sin can indeed be seen; on the other hand, if the sin did not exist to be seen, it could not be forgiven either. Just as one by faith believes the unseen(f) into what is seen(f), so the one who loves by forgiveness believes away what is seen [namely, the sin that he forgives]. Both are faith. Blessed is the believer, he believes what he cannot see(f); blessed is the one who loves, he believes away that which he indeed can see! (WL, 294–95)

You forgive someone a sin against you. By forgiving sins God makes sins not exist. Your forgiving is a deputy-action following God's cue. So your "seeing" the sin that you have forgiven (following God's forgiving it) is illusory, since God has put the sin out of existence. But the fact that God has put the sin out of existence is not something you can see (in the factive sense); instead, it is a matter of faith: when you forgive an offense, you *believe* that God has put it out of existence, because the sin appears to be there (is non-factively seen), in the history of your relationship with the offender. Still, to perform the action of forgiving an offense, you have to "see" it, at least in the non-factive sense. It also seems true that God cannot de-create something that never existed. God factively sees sin, but by forgiving it makes it unreal, thus creating the possibility of the believer's seeing it non-factively.

Forgiveness is the most extreme form of "hiding" another's sins, so extreme that it can be such only in a metaphorical sense; it goes so far beyond hiding as to obviate and preclude it: you can't hide what doesn't exist, and don't need to.

Love makes for an environment decidedly hostile to sin. By habitually veiling its offensive and bitter aspect from the apprehension of the one who loves, love cripples sin's ability to assault and weaken his or her love. By its blindness, love protects love. By keeping silent about others' sins, the loving person inhibits invidious curiosity from infecting both himself and his hearer. Again, it is his love that is protected. Mitigating explanations of others' faults are themselves works of love and simultaneously prevent those faults from occasioning the joys of alienating contempt. In forgiving others, we become deputies in God's project

of obliterating sin from the world.

Kierkegaard ends the Preface to *Works of Love* with this sentence: "Something that in its total richness is essentially inexhaustible is also in its smallest work essentially indescribable just because essentially it is totally present everywhere and essentially cannot be described" (WL, 3). This chapter is an effort to give a taste of Kierkegaard's thinking about the virtue of Christian love. But something like what he says about the selectivity of *Works of Love* in relation to love itself can be said about this long chapter in relation to *Works of Love*. It is but a sampling. I hope it can be a motive to those who have not yet read the book to read it, and to those who have read the book again and again to return to it once more to sound its practically unplumbable depths.

In the last three chapters we have sampled and explored Kierkegaard's thought about the great Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love. These are the central virtues of Christian character, each of them a kind of relationship with God, or an aspect of what Kierkegaard calls "the God relationship." No quality is a human virtue, in Kierkegaard's thought, if it doesn't partake of the God relationship. Any such godless trait is a vice, though admittedly one that "glitters"—that is, is good as far as it goes. But around faith, hope, and love orbit a number of satellite virtues that are also named in Christian tradition: patience, gratitude, humility, courage, forgivingness, self-control, contrition (penitence), wisdom, meekness, forbearance, and so on. In the discussions of faith, hope, and love we have perforce mentioned several of these. Kierkegaard has helpful things to say about these spiritual qualities, though often not in books or discourses dedicated to them, such as faith and love have. Any of these virtues would make a fit topic for a chapter in this book, but I will end, again merely sampling, with chapters on humility, patience, and gratitude.

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1. Also in the Supplement of *Works of Love*, 483.

2. But only if emotions are considered in their "intentionality," their nature as responses that reach out to situations of actuality. "In this little book we are continually dealing with the works of love, therefore we are considering love in its outward direction" (WL, 282).

3. What we call a good conscience is a clear and serene one. A bad conscience—felt as shame or guilt—shows a sensitivity to right and wrong and is thus in another sense a good conscience. Huckleberry Finn is an exception. When he feels guilt about his failure to uphold the rules of white supremacy, his "bad conscience" is morally bad (confused about right and wrong). See Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, chapter 16, and Jonathan Bennett, "The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn," *Philosophy* 49 (1974): 123–34, https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/jfb/huckfinn.pdf.

4. For a deft discussion of the special role of emotions in delivering knowledge, see Brian Ballard, "The Epistemic Significance of Emotional Experience," *Emotion Review* 13 (2021): 25–33.

5. Plato, *Apology*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 40a–c, p. 35.

6. See, for example, Joseph Butler, "Dissertation II: Of the Nature of Virtue," in *The Analogy of Religion* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1860), 329–37.

7. See C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard and Spirituality: Accountability as the Meaning of Human Existence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), especially chapter 9.

8. See Kierkegaard's list of ways of wrongly "loving" yourself at WL, 23.

9. See Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), especially chapter 9.

10. Other passages in which Paul speaks of upbuilding (*oikodomein*) are 1 Thess. 5:11 and 1 Cor. 14:4, 17.

11. The father of the prodigal son built up love in the son because "the son very vividly perceived that the fatherly love had persevered with him and thus there had been no break" (WL, 221).

12. John Lippitt's *Love's Forgiveness: Kierkegaard, Resentment, Humility, and Hope* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) brings out how Kierkegaard's treatment of forgiveness makes it a work of love. See especially the second part of chapter 3.

13. See chapter 7 for more about the virtue of bold confidence.

14. Jamie Ferreira, in *Love's Grateful Striving* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 169, speaks of "the refusal to look for or highlight sin or weakness," thus in effect reading *opdage* in the way I suggest.

15. Presumably, he would not infer that prior to the scientist's discovery she was hiding the bird species!

16. *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Pension Fund, 1945), 6.

17. Namely, that forgiveness takes the sin away. You cannot see this, because the sin seems to remain despite being forgiven. That it has been obliterated is a matter of faith.

12 HUMILITY

> *Never has a human being lifted his head as proudly in elevation over the world as did the first Christians in humility before God! … No, proud as they were in their humility before God, they said, "It is not for us to hang back and dawdle along the way; we do not stop—until eternity."*
>
> *For Self-Examination*, 87

HUMILITY AND PRIDE

Unlike some Christian thinkers, Kierkegaard thinks of humility and pride as two necessarily connected excellences of Christian character. They do not exclude but complement one another. In tying the virtues of pride and humility tightly together, he is surely reflecting the words of Jesus, "whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matt. 23:12b), and of the apostle Paul, who says that because Christ humbled himself, God exalted him highly, and that we are to model our humility on Christ's (see Phil. 2:8–9). This "dialectic" of pride and humility—of self-lowering and exaltation—pervades the New Testament.

In *Works of Love*, expounding 1 Corinthians 13:5b, "[love] does not insist on its own way," Kierkegaard says, "The small-minded person has never had the courage for this God-pleasing venture of humility and pride: *before God* to be oneself—the emphasis is on "before God" since this is the source and origin of all distinctiveness (*Eiendommelighed*)" (WL, 271, italics original). A small-minded person (the vicious counterpart of the generous or great-minded) feels a need to deprive other people of their human distinctiveness so as to gain his own. He thinks of life and human interactions as a contest for self-importance in which, to be important, he needs to be *more* important than some others, and in which the greater importance of others diminishes him. But, Kierkegaard thinks, *each* of us is *made* for distinctiveness—to be a particular, distinctive, standout individual. Love involves recognizing other people's distinctiveness and therefore not aggregating or assimilating or diminishing them but respecting each one's individuality. Thus, *agapē* is a kind of greatness of soul, a magnanimity or generosity toward others that allows them to be as "great" as myself. If I love, I do not seek to "create" the other in my own image, even if that other is my own child, but humbly allow the other to be as "great"—distinctive—as I am. And in

this humility, I manifest my own greatness as a particular individual—which is to say, I take pride in being the distinctive human being that I am, myself before God.

In the same context, Kierkegaard notes that

> Just as the rigid and domineering person seeks only his own, so also does small-mindedness, enviously imperious, cowardly timorous small-mindedness…. Small-mindedness is the creature's own miserable invention when it, neither truly proud nor truly humble (humility before God is true pride), creates itself and also distorts God, as if he were also small-minded, as if he could not bear distinctiveness—he who lovingly gives all things and yet gives all things distinctiveness. (WL, 271)

At the end of this chapter I will address the question whether it is better to think of humility as a distinct virtue or, rather, as an aspect of other virtues. Here I will just note that when Kierkegaard says "humility before God is true pride," I don't think he means to say that pride and humility are strictly identical—the very same thing—but rather that a person who has true humility will also have true pride, and vice-versa.

In *Practice in Christianity* Kierkegaard comments that Socrates, "that simple wise man," unlike most teachers who self-importantly "set a high price" on themselves for their teaching (for example, refusing to lecture for a lower fee than befits their dignity or declining invitations to speak unless the venue is sufficiently prestigious), "did not set a high price on either himself or his instruction," but talked indiscriminately to anybody who wished to engage him, "even though in another sense he thereby expressed with noble pride the dissimilarity of the value" (PC, 12) of what he taught from what the self-important teachers taught. So the happy combination of true humility and true pride is not strictly limited to Christianity. But this is another way in which Socrates is the example who, by his strange difference, highlights a feature of ancient paganism: that it almost never exhibited either true humility or the corresponding kind of pride. Christianity, it seems, is the historical source for each of these virtues to become a firm ethical theme and to take their place in lists of virtues.

"He Must Increase; I Must Decrease"

Whereas Kierkegaard has vast stretches of discourse—whole books—on faith and love, and multiple discourses and deliberations dedicated to gratitude, patience, joy, and forgivingness, his discussions of humility and courage have

few works specifically addressed to them. Instead, humility and courage, though they occur pervasively in his works, seem to be introduced mostly in the context of other virtues. An exception is the discourse on John 3:29–30 in which John the Baptist declares that the time has come for him to relinquish to Jesus his place of prominence as a prophet (EUD, 275–89). This discourse is dedicated to the virtue of humility, or what Kierkegaard calls "humble self-denial."

John the Baptist has been the focus of reverential and excited attention by the people. He has exercised the authority of a prophet, and many have responded with repentance and obedience. But now Jesus, whose coming John heralded, has arrived on the scene. We might expect that John, having enjoyed his own power and glory before the people, will now grieve just a bit as he perceives the sun setting on his ministry. Or perhaps, in his secret heart of hearts, he even feels a bit resentful that the limelight is flooding Jesus and throwing himself ever deeper into the shadow of forgetfulness and neglect. But no, in the face of his eclipse he affirms, "He must increase, but I must decrease," and likens his situation to that of the bridegroom's friend whose generous love for the bridegroom prompts unencumbered joy at the latter's arrival. His rejoicing is "full."

Kierkegaard says that John spoke "with humble self-denial" (*ydmyg Selvfornægtelse*) (EUD, 279) these words about decreasing as Jesus increased. The expression occurs eight times in this discourse. To my ear, "denial" sounds like an action—the act of denying something that has been proposed or asserted, in this case, by the "self" (oneself). To "deny" myself a second helping of apple pie suggests that I desire that second helping, but instead of succumbing to the desire I resist it and deny myself that indulgence or pleasure. On this natural interpretation, which I have affirmed in the past,[1] John felt that bit of grief or resentment at Jesus's taking over, but resisted it and managed to rejoice. But the text from John's Gospel doesn't support this interpretation, which would say that John's humility was not quite mature. It says explicitly that John's joy was "full" (*peplērōtai*). And I now think that we need not interpret Kierkegaard's "humble self-denial" as denoting an action that John performed as he spoke those words.

Denial can be an ongoing state or disposition of a person, as when we say that someone is "in denial" of some truth or truth-claim. We just mean that if the claim came up, he would deny it; we are not saying that he repeatedly denies it. Similarly, because of John's love of the kingdom that Jesus is bringing in, all possible ego concerns such as the love of his own prominence and power over the people and the sense of personal importance that he derives from having such prominence and power have been banished from his mind. His joy is full,

unmixed with hesitation or contrary feelings. Thus, he utters the words "in humble self-denial."

Another important question that humble self-denial raises is: Who is the self that here gets denied? It can't be the self that rejoices in the arrival of Jesus's kingdom. In John's joy, *that* self is alive and well and affirmed and undenied. This is not John the Buddhist! I think this is an implication of Kierkegaard's affirmation of the virtue of pride and its connection to the virtue of humility. The self that is "denied" in humble self-denial is the self that feels diminished when it envies a rival her success. It is the self that feels joy when the rival receives her comeuppance. It is the self that feels self-righteous joy at comparing itself favorably with a peer who is morally inferior to oneself. It is the self that is gratified by its own power to dominate others and receive from them signals of servility. It is the self that feels magnified by adulation and flattery and diminished when, taking a back seat, it must be ignored. It is the self that feels reassured of its importance when it successfully claims entitlements that other people don't have. When this self is dead, the living person in whom it is dead has the virtue of humility. He or she has been freed to live the life that Kierkegaard calls "spirit," a life of faith, hope, and love.

A Note on "Humble" and "Proud"

"Humble" can mean *of lowly status*. We can speak of a "humble cottage" (EUD, 234); saint Joseph was "a humble man of the people" (EUD, 207). The cottage doesn't have the virtue of humility, and Joseph could be a humble man of the people, uneducated and engaged in a humble trade, without being virtuously humble. Similarly, in the language of woodworking, a through tenon is sometimes called "proud," meaning only that it is not planed flat but left extending a little beyond the opening of the mortise (a little bit "high").

In this chapter "humble" refers to an attitude that a person may have toward himself, other people, and perhaps God. This attitude, when deeply entrenched, is a trait of character and a virtue.

"Humble" can also be a verb. We can say that a person was humbled, or that she humbled herself. When a person is humbled, she may respond graciously or not. People with the virtue of humility, when humbled, take it in stride. John the Baptist, for example, was humbled by the advent of Jesus, and took it graciously, even joyfully. But a vain person, when humbled, may take it with dudgeon. For example, a philosopher who has enjoyed a certain amount of notoriety retires

and notices that her writings are less and less cited and she is invited less and less to speak. If she is vain (in this way nonvirtuously "proud"), this humbling will "wound" her vanity. She will feel bereft, betrayed, disappointed, and sad—maybe even humiliated. Kierkegaard gives many examples of ordinary persons being humbled (EUD, 278–79). Most people experience being "lowered" on one occasion or another, and our reaction to such events reveals to us, and often to others, our state of character.

We can also humble ourselves. For example, when we ask forgiveness of someone we have injured, especially a subordinate, we humble ourselves. When we admit we don't know something that we should know in a context where our reputation is likely to suffer from the admission, we humble ourselves. When we pray to God, admitting that we are at our wits' end, we humble ourselves before him. The "before" is important. Humbling ourselves is typically "before" someone—the party we've injured, the colleagues who hear us admit our ignorance, or God our judge. If we have the virtue of humility, humbling ourselves will be relatively easy—I say "relatively" because it may still be painful. But the typical case for us human beings is that humbling ourselves is part of a discipline of growing in the virtue of humility. Acts of resistance to the vices of pride are typically acts of humbling ourselves. We learn humility by practicing it, and we practice it by humbling ourselves. Kierkegaard writes frequently of humbling oneself.

If "humble" has associations with lowness, "proud" has them with highness. When we say a person is proud, we suggest that he thinks he has, makes claims to have, or aspires to have high status in some regard. Conceit is perhaps the paradigm kind of thinking oneself to have high status, though not virtuously. The conceited person thinks of himself as very important, but in a way that his critics take to be inappropriate, disordered, or exaggerated. Conceit is a vice of pride, a vicious way of being proud. The kind of pride that Kierkegaard takes to be coordinate with the virtue of humility is thinking highly of oneself in an appropriate way. A beautiful statement of the virtue of pride is his discourse, "[How Glorious It Is to Be a Human Being]"[2] (UDVS, part 2, 183–200). Recognizing in oneself a being with the very special status of being able to live one's life before God (in contrast with all the creatures that live their lives doing what God wills them to do, but without freely *obeying* God) and rejoicing in that status, is proper pride.

We speak of "priding ourselves" on this and that, including some appropriate things as in "I pride myself on my children's love." The person who humbles

himself before God can properly feel exalted in and by his living before God. In this sense, perhaps it would not be wrong to speak of a human action in which a person exalts *himself*—by humbling himself before God. When the apostle Paul, using words of the prophet Jeremiah, says "Let him who boasts (*kauchāsthai*) boast in the Lord," perhaps we could paraphrase this as "humbling yourself before God, take pride in him."

Pride as Contrary to Humility

When Kierkegaard talks about pride (*Stolthed*) as contrary to humility, he often mentions more specific variants of it, such as presumption (arrogance), vanity, envy, domination, conceit, and self-righteousness. He also speaks of comparison (of oneself with other human beings) as a special mark of these vices, though I think the vices differ from one another in the prominence of the comparison dimension. Presumption seems to me the least comparative, whereas self-righteousness and envy are intensely comparative, and vanity falls somewhere in between. This is not innocent comparison (the child comparing her handwriting with that of an adult, to improve her shaping of the letters, or the Christian disciple comparing herself with Jesus to imitate him more perfectly). Instead, competitive comparison is part of a concern or struggle for personal importance. It partakes of a way of thinking of oneself in relation to others that contradicts and undermines the central human project of becoming a free "single individual." It partakes also of a false idea of what constitutes a person's importance or excellence. Because of their strong relation to comparison, the vices of pride paradoxically work to homogenize persons, depriving people of their individual distinctiveness. It does so paradoxically, because these vices are all "selfish." When I evaluate myself by comparing myself with others (say, by social status, intelligence, beauty, or wealth and power), I underrate myself and place myself in servitude to others—even if, in my judgment, I come out on top in the comparative evaluation. And it is really pride even when I enviously feel myself to be the loser in this competition, because this dismal self-evaluation is based on the concern to be superior, or at least comparatively equal. This kind of thinking is vicious because I, like everyone else, am a creature whose glory is that I am in the image of God. So to evaluate myself by a standard on which human beings differ from one another is a big comedown, a self-degradation. We have seen that Kierkegaard calls it "small-mindedness" (WL, 270–73). Let us now consider some of the variants that fall under the umbrella of pride as a vice. For

the sake of brevity I have selected just four.

Presumption (Arrogance)

"Presumption" (*Formastelighed*) and "arrogance" (*Hovmod*) are closely related, if not the very same vice. The vice involves falsely presuming or arrogating to oneself privileges, prerogatives, rights, standing, or entitlements. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "presume" as "to undertake without adequate authority or permission" and offers as an example of usage a comment from E. Edwards's *Life of Sir W. Ralegh* (sic), "To his mind it was … intolerable that historians should presume to sit in judgment on the actions of kings." Mere historians lack the standing to criticize the morality of kings, but they implicitly claim that standing when they do so. That claim is thus a decisive mark of their presumption or arrogance. A prayer that is said just before the celebration of the Lord's Supper is called the Prayer of Humble Access. It begins, "We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies."[3] Since God is the ultimate and only king to whom we human beings owe allegiance and obedience,

> Presumptuousness pertains essentially to a person's relationship to God; and this is why it is inconsequential whether a person presumes in the least or in the greatest matters, because even the least presumptuousness is the greatest, is toward God…. It is only a subsequently formed, a derived but correct language usage to say that a child is presumptuous toward its parents, a subject toward the king, a pupil toward the teacher. (CD, 63)

When a person acts in disdain of a legitimate but subordinate authority (say, of parent, teacher, king), she acts presumptuously, as though claiming for herself a prerogative or right that she, as a human being, doesn't have, and this false claim expresses presumption because that legitimate authority derives from God's authority. Kierkegaard goes on to note that this kind of pride comes in two varieties, "*either* in a forbidden, a rebellious, an ungodly way *to want to have God's help, or*, in a forbidden, a rebellious, an ungodly way *to want to do without God's help*" (CD, 63, italics original). The conceptual element that makes for presumption is the divergence of the human will from the will of God. *Any* such divergence is presumptuous (viciously proud) on the part of a human being.

In "An Occasional Discourse" (UDVS, part 1) Kierkegaard makes it painfully clear how high the standard is for perfect humility. The "occasion" referred to in the title is the office of confession, and the requirement against which the

individual who confesses measures himself is the purity of his heart. Purity of heart is willing the good in truth. Kierkegaard does not say in this discourse what the good is, but let us say that it is the will of God. If so, then purity of heart is to will the will of God in truth. Let us say that "in truth" means *in accordance with the nature* of God's will. God's will, unlike any creature's will, is sovereign. It is to be obeyed without any qualification (no "ifs"). Any "if," any qualifying of your submission to God's will, is "double-mindedness": it is willing the good *while also* willing something that limits your commitment to God's will. Such qualified willing of God's will is not willing it in truth.

Kierkegaard notes three possibilities of such "ifs" (see UDVS, 60–64). First, you might will God's will for the sake of a reward. Perhaps you see it as your ticket to heaven, or more mundanely as a way of achieving respectability or admiration in your community. This is clearly a case of presumption: to lay an "if" on your commitment to God's sovereign will is insolence and insubordination and "untruth." Second, you might will that God's will be triumphant through you as the agent who brought it about: you might, for example, be an evangelist who obeys the call to enlarge and strengthen the church, but with a secret insistence that God's success be achieved *through you*[4] —even if no one knows of your contribution.[5] In this case, says Kierkegaard, your "reward" is a "proud consciousness" (UDVS, 61). This insistence, too, is presumptuous: we're inclined to ask: Who are *you* to insist that the good be effective through *you*? You just don't have that standing. A third possibility is that you do not insist that the good be victorious through you, but you do insist (humbly?) that the good be victorious somehow in time (in temporality). This too, says Kierkegaard, is doublemindedness. It is presumptuous insubordination. If it is God's will that his will not triumph in time, who are you to insist that it triumph in time? (The good always triumphs in eternity, says Kierkegaard; we might say that *by definition* it triumphs in eternity; if it didn't triumph there, it wouldn't be the good.) "The good puts on the slowness of time like a shabby suit of clothes, and in accord with this change of clothes, the double-minded person must [to humble himself] be dressed in the humble character of the unprofitable servant" (UDVS, 63–64). The faithful and fully humble servant of the good has to will the good (the will of God) without any qualifications whatsoever. If he does this, his heart is morally and spiritually pure. Humility is not the *same thing* as willing the will of God in truth (perhaps that would be faith and love), but it is *the way* you must will the will of God if you are to will it in truth—namely, without presumption: with no qualifications. If your heart is impassioned in faith

and love, then humility is the purity in purity of heart.

Notice that here, humility seems to be a privative state of character, the *absence* of any compromising or morally polluting concern. Of course, it would be nothing at all in the way of a character trait if this absence weren't an absence *in* a person who loves and seeks the good. Humility is a virtue only in combination with other virtues of positive willing or concern, such as love, faith, and hope. That is the nature of any purity, whether it be purity of water, purity of gold, or purity of heart: it is the absence *of contaminants* relative to whatever it is a purity *in*. Purity of heart is to will (*only*) one thing. Humility consists in a canceled *only if* condition. But "only if" makes no sense apart from the clause that precedes it.

Among the creatures of the earth only human beings of a certain maturity are capable of presumption. Lilies and birds go to extremes of beauty and performance, but they always remain "humbly" within the dictates of their natures.

> That the yellow bunting wears all its finery and the grey sparrow is poorly dressed is not presumptuousness on the part of the yellow bunting; the grey sparrow does not crave this[6]—*that* would indeed be presumptuousness. And when the bird hurtles down from dizzying heights, there is no presumptuousness in that, nor is the bird tempting God—who is indeed also the One who holds it up more securely than if all the angels were holding it up lest it bruise its foot upon some stone. (CD, 61)

Whatever lilies and birds do, they are always and inevitably within the will of God. Their nature prevents them from presuming on God's will. Human beings are different. They start out like the lilies and birds, but at a certain point in development, the child becomes able to presume.

> In their relation to God, the lily and the bird are like a baby when it is still as good as one with its mother. But when the child has grown older, even though it is in the parents' house and ever so close to them, never out of their sight, there still is an infinite distance between it and the parents; and in this distance lies the possibility of being able to presume. (CD, 62)

That is, the child has become able to claim for itself a prerogative that it does not legitimately possess. The baby can indeed do things at odds with its parents' will—say, wail when they would like it to sleep quietly—but at that point the baby is not claiming any prerogative, but just doing what babies do. That infinite gulf, which is spiritual, between the teenager's will and her parents' will has not yet yawned. The small child is not yet capable of either presumption or humility. At some point, though, the child acquires sufficient understanding of the parents'

authority to be able to violate it presumptuously—and by the same token, to submit to it humbly.

Anxiety accompanies presumption because, in one way or another, the presuming individual apprehends that he is on thin ice in claiming an entitlement that he doesn't have. The child who disobeys his parents, thus committing presumption, will feel uneasy, whether she admits it, even to herself, or not. Similarly, thinks Kierkegaard, the adult who lives "spiritlessly" as though God doesn't exist will at some conscious or unconscious level intuit that his life is out of step with what Kierkegaard calls the eternal, which is a dimension of everybody's mind, and that this presumption puts him on thin ice. "But if it is certain that no blessing accompanies stolen goods and no title to them is acquired, so also does the presumptuous person have the worry that God will take everything away from him, has this worry at every moment" (CD, 67).[7] The presumptuous person is a dependent creature—dependent on permission to do what he does, dependent on submission and accountability to an authority higher than himself and higher than that of any fellow creature. And this intuition shows up as anxiety—the anxiety of presumption.

Vanity

Vanity (*Forfængelighed*) belongs in the category of what I called passion in chapter 6, where I noted a distinction in which, in one usage of "passion," a passion is a concern and not an emotion. Think: a passion for opera. Vanity is a concern or passion to be regarded by others in a complimentary light. It is gratified by admiration, honor, applause, celebration, approval, and the like, directed at oneself. When this condition is met, the vain person will feel something in the neighborhood of joy, perhaps a calm, understated satisfaction or contentment, or, in some cases an intense, exultant joy. But vanity can also be a source of suffering: it can be stung or wounded. For example, a person acts in a way that he expects to be admired and applauded for, but people treat him as having done nothing special, just what anybody could do. His vanity is wounded, he feels "crushed." His desire for applause has been frustrated, and he feels let down and terrible. He may even feel worthless. Both the feeling of exaltation and the feeling of desolation, insofar as they come from vanity, are symptoms of folly, according to the Christian tradition.

The behaviors characteristic of vanity are ways of "showing off": boasting, seeking the spotlight, accoutring yourself in pretentious clothing, car, house, and

so forth, wearing clothes that flatter your well-defined muscles or your hourglass figure. The final aim of vanity seems to be self-importance; and getting the approving or envious attention of others is the means for achieving this kind of importance.

In another usage (to attempt in vain, "The Vanity of Human Wishes"), "vain" means futile, pointless, empty of purpose, or unsuccessful. To call vanity, as a passion, a vice is to say that the kind of importance it aims at is empty, relative to what a human being is. It is not the kind of importance that is proper to human beings (they *are* important, only not in the way vanity conceives [some human beings] to be). Being in the limelight, however important it might make you *feel*, will not in truth serve to make you important, as Christians understand the importance of persons. The concern for applause and admiration is a vice of pride, standing in contrast to the virtue of humility. Let us look at some passages in Kierkegaard's writings where he remarks about vanity and the corresponding humility.

Comparing ourselves with other people, the moral futility of which Kierkegaard so often emphasizes, is more clearly evident in his comments about vanity than in his comments on presumption. In his discourse on the lilies and the birds, Jesus points out that the grass of the field is more gloriously clothed than Solomon in all his glory, and then says, "if God so clothes the grass of the field, … how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith" (Luke 12:28). Kierkegaard interprets this to mean that each human being, simply as a human being, is glorious beyond the glory of the grass which is beyond the glory of Solomon in all his glory. This self-evaluative judgment is one of

> those great, uplifting, simple thoughts … [that] are more and more forgotten … in the weekday and worldly life of comparisons…. Just as miners never see the light of day, so these unhappy people never come to see the light: those uplifting, simple thoughts…. And up there in the higher regions of comparison, smiling vanity plays its false game and deceives the happy ones so that they receive no impression from those lofty, simple thoughts, those first thoughts. (UDVS, 189)

"Impression" here, as so often in Kierkegaard, is emotion—joy at the thought of how glorious it is to be a human being. The contrast is between the thoughts that make for smiles on the part of the vain, which always refer to a comparative advantage—how healthy I am, how wealthy I am, how good a job I have, how well married I am, how smart I am, how pretty I am, how beautiful my children are—and reasons for rejoicing that I share with every human being that is and ever was and ever will be—to wit, how glorious it is to be a human being. Kierkegaard thinks that vanity is essentially comparative. What I show in

showing off is "worth" showing off because not everybody can "boast" of it. It is to some extent *extra*ordinary, or at least I see it as being so. By contrast, having the glory of being human, which can't be an inter-humanly comparative advantage (though obviously, Jesus *is* comparing being human with being grass, birds, and lilies), also can't be an occasion for vanity. It is instead an occasion for humble gratitude and praise.

Kierkegaard conveys with powerful rhetoric the futility dimension of vanity in a paragraph that sums up the personal disaster of a human being who has given his life to the concern for applause and admiration in his achievement of "loftiness."

> Finally the care [*Bekymring*: concern, preoccupation] swallows its prey. Just as pithless rotten wood glows in the dark, just as the nebulous will-o'-the-wisp of miasma tricks the senses in the fog, so in this glittering of his earthly loftiness he exists *before others*. But his self does not exist; his innermost being has been consumed and depithed in the service of nothingness; slave of futility, with no control over himself, in the power of giddy worldliness, godforsaken, he ceases to be a human being; in his innermost being he is as dead, but his loftiness walks ghostlike among us—it lives. When you speak with him, you do not speak with a human being; in his hankering after loftiness, he has himself become what was coveted: a title regarded as a human being. Within there is sheer emptiness and trumpery[8]—indeed, there is nothing. But the appearance is there, the vain appearance that bears the marks of worldly loftiness that command the deference of the passersby—while he bears all this loftiness somewhat as the cushions that bear his medals at the funeral. (CD, 58, italics added)

How is it that someone who has devoted his life to being famous, admired, celebrated, envied, and applauded by other human beings—and succeeded pretty well in achieving this outcome—has necessarily destroyed himself? The answer, surely, goes back to the basic structure of the human self: that we are a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal. We draw this synthesis toward completion by living our lives prayerfully and meditatively in humility before God. In such synthesizing living, we recognize our fellow human beings as fundamentally equal to us: they neither serve our importance by recognizing our superiority nor are they our masters on whom we depend for adulation and assurance of our worth.

The lure of vanity, however, persists tenaciously in threatening our personhood. Hamlet, says Kierkegaard, has lived an "enormously strenuous hidden life … in the service of the idea," but then, face-to-face with death, he "thinks of the busyness around him, which has scarcely five minutes to waste on understanding the richness of thought in a prodigious work," and he shudders at the prospect that his life of thinking would end up being appreciated by no one, with no one to attribute its greatness to *him*. Kierkegaard says that if this anxiety

"gets the upper hand, then it is vanity! There is a remedy for all nervous impatience: it is faith, humility" (BA, 171). Its getting the upper hand would be despair, and the despair would be based, vainly, on the concern to be understood by at least one human being. The remedy is the conviction that one's life and thought are "before God" and the humility is the consequent death of the vain concern to be understood by at least one human being.

Flattery is the device of choice for manipulating people who have infected themselves with vanity. So the serious person may safeguard himself against temptations by reducing the amount of flattery in his environment. Because Kierkegaard was a genius and entertaining to watch, he conceived a plan for defending his humility against the prevalence and power of flattery. The awe of the public can be nourished by teasing it with aloofness and keeping it on a starvation diet of public appearances. So, at the height of his favorable reputation Kierkegaard made a point of appearing briefly but frequently in a part of Copenhagen where common people gathered, walking up and down and conversing with passersby as though he had nothing better to do. This was very much an illusion since he was working at breakneck speed on the world classic *Either/Or* and spending a good amount of time each day in prayer and pious meditation. He comments,

> Even if an achievement were eminent to a degree never seen before—if the author just lives in [such a way that he appears illusorily to be lazy and easily available], he will in a very short time have safeguarded himself against worldly esteem and against the bestial flattery of the crowd. The crowd has no ideality and therefore no power to hold on to an idea despite appearances;[9] the crowd always falls into the trap of appearances. To be seen day after day and to be seen in the most casual company are enough to make the crowd lose the idea and very soon become sick and tired of a person. (PV, 59)

The reader may detect in this quotation a tone not exactly expressive of humility. Kierkegaard seems to agree, and the key is that vanity is not the only way to be unhumble. Having conquered vanity, you can still fall short of humility by way of conceit, invidious triumph, and domineering vengeance. "Since I was who I was—yes, I do not deny it—in a certain sense I found a satisfaction in that life, in that inverted deception, a satisfaction in thinking that the intrigue succeeded so extraordinarily that the public and I came to say *du* to each other" (PV, 62). Though he had prevented the public from perceiving him with awe and had even got them to see him as morally inferior to themselves, he took a delight "in which at times I was as if beside myself," a delight that was also a temptation, and says that if he had "capsized,"

> It would have to have been on … an almost obsessed rapture over the thought of how the deception succeeded, which indescribably satisfied the secret resentment[10] I had harbored since childhood, because long before I myself had ever seen it I had learned that lies and baseness and injustice ruled the world, which often led me to think of those words in *Either/Or*, "If you people only knew what it is you are laughing at, 'if you only knew with whom you are involved, who this *flâneur* is!' " (PV, 62–63)

What would it be to capsize on this rapture? Does the rapture of invidious triumph not already count as capsizing into the sea of unhumility? One might think so. Another way to capsize into worldliness from the protection of Christian humility is one to which Kierkegaard, in his suspicion of Christendom, is less likely to succumb. He notes, in one of his Friday communion discourses, how Christendom subverts Jesus's teaching about humility. Pagans practiced vanity in pursuit of vain self-importance by competing to sit at places of honor, and Jesus taught us, instead, humbly to take a place at the low end of the table (Luke 14:7–11) and so to combat our natural tendency to vanity. (The point of the teaching is not to increase the population of low places at tables, but a discipline of spiritual transformation by which disciples become inwardly humble.) But then, under the sway of Christianity, we practiced vanity in pursuit of self-importance by sitting in the "humblest" place. We got into a pride-generated competition for the prize of humility-champion! In both cases, we practice vanity in pursuit of vain self-importance. But the latter is worse than the first, because the first was a frank and honest owning of vanity while the latter is vanity parading dishonestly as humility (see DCF, 101).

In another of his Friday communion talks, also about self-transformation, Kierkegaard says that the woman who was a sinner (Luke 7:36–50) hated herself and annihilated herself by walking in on the Pharisee's feast, because of the tremendously humiliating situation of being a sinful woman exposing her sin before the Pharisees—at a feast, no less. Though Kierkegaard does not, in this discourse, speak of humility, she, in crashing the feast, does perform an act of humility; she humbles herself, surely in an even more heroic way than the person who does so by taking the seat of lowest honor. This discourse is interesting for its depiction of three stages with regard to the woman's "self." In the second through fourth paragraphs Kierkegaard repeats that "she hated herself, she loved [Jesus] much" (DCF, 109–11). I take it that the self she hates is her vain self, the self that she tortures by appearing before the judgmental and contemptuous Pharisees whose feast she has ostentatiously breached (they take her, oddly, to be motivated by vanity). But in the sixth paragraph and continuing to the ninth, Kierkegaard repeatedly says she "completely forgot herself, she loved much"

(DCF, 111–13). When she hated herself, surely she hadn't forgotten herself—the self she hated! No, when out of love for Jesus she hated herself, she was painfully aware of the self she hated, the vain self that she combatted and sacrificed by walking in on the Pharisee's feast and making a scene about Jesus! It was her vain self that she tortured and killed, the self that cares about being humiliated before the Pharisees. But this self is already dead when she has "forgotten" herself completely and is simply filled with love for Jesus. After elaborating on her love's involving forgetfulness of herself, Kierkegaard raises the question about her self-love. Someone may object that she loves herself after all, in loving Jesus; she asserts herself and loves herself at the cost to the Pharisees of having a peaceful feast. And Kierkegaard responds,

> Were someone to speak this way, then I would reply, "naturally," … and then add, "God forbid that I might ever be tempted to want to love my God or my Savior differently, for if there was nothing in the sense of self-love in my love, then I would indeed be imagining that I could love them without needing them—and from this presumption may God preserve me!" (DCF, 113)

For all the hating and killing and forgetting of her "self," *she* is filled with love for Jesus! In contrast with the self of the man consumed with the care of loftiness before people, her self before Jesus is robustly alive and well. That vestige of the vain self is no longer protesting in pain, but lying quietly in its grave; yet *she* is alive and well—the self that loves Jesus.[11]

Vanity can look like wanting to be loved, but they are very different. To want to be loved properly involves wanting to love, wanting to be in a mutual relationship of giving and receiving love. But the vain person desires to receive, without the love relationship, the admiration and honor that are properly a dimension of love. Vanity's goal is not communion, but self-importance. Rosamond Vincy, a beautiful but vain young woman who figures in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, is thinking about Tertius Lydgate, a handsome young physician newly arrived in town and whom Rosamond takes to be of a higher social class than the eligible men in Middlemarch.

> Rosamond, in fact, was entirely occupied not exactly with Tertius Lydgate as he was in himself, but with his relation to her; and it was excusable in a girl who was accustomed to hear that all young men might, could, would be, or actually were in love with her, to believe at once that Lydgate could be no exception. His looks and words meant more to her than other men's, because she cared more for them: she thought of them diligently, and diligently attended to that perfection of appearance, behavior, sentiments, and all other elegancies, which would find in Lydgate a more adequate admirer than she had yet been conscious of.[12]

Foolishly, Lydgate falls in love with Rosamond, but fails to love forth love from her, because her vanity twists his love in her mind, making it appear to her as nothing more than an ego-satisfying adulation. In Kierkegaard's thought, the fullness and significance that stands in contrast with the emptiness and insignificance of mere applause and admiration is the eternal, and love belongs to the eternal. Love implies humility insofar as humility is purity of vanity's pollution.

The Domineering Person

The domineering or overbearing person (*den Herskesyge*) wants to leave *his* stamp of agency on everything, like a brand that says to all and sundry: this is *mine* by the power of creation and control. He "seeks his own so that wherever he points he can say: See, it is my image, it is my idea, it is my will" (WL, 270). He wants nothing to have independent excellence, but everything, instead, to be a result of his influence. Ungenerously he views all other agents either as competitors (threats to his domination) or subordinates whose proper attitude is servility to his will. Competitors he feels compelled to "put out of business" and from subordinates he brooks no resourcefulness for which he cannot take credit. The tendency to domineer seems to lurk, mostly suppressed, in the heart of every human being, suppressed only by lack of power and opportunity and the embarrassment of being seen to be such. "A person can be tempted to be a builder, a teacher, a disciplinarian because this seems to be ruling over others; but to build up the way love does cannot tempt, because this means to be the one who serves" (WL, 217). One of Kierkegaard's themes is that the omnipotent God uses his power generously and lovingly to give independent, separate excellence to what he creates. He imagines how much less impressive nature would be if God were domineering (WL, 270), and God's humility is even more evident in his creation of human beings:

> This is the unfathomable fountain of goodness in God's goodness that he, the Omnipotent One, yet gives in such a way that the receiver acquires distinctiveness, that he who creates out of nothing yet creates distinctiveness, so that the creature in relation to God does not become nothing even though it is taken from nothing and is nothing but becomes a distinctive individuality. (WL, 271–72)

Domination is one of the forms of vicious pride. The generous love that stands opposed to it therefore requires humility, a lack of interest in the self-importance that domination seems to the domineering to yield.

The domineering person is overbearing in two senses of "over." First, as domineering, he seeks to be "over" or above the person he dominates. To dominate another is to bear *down* on him or her, to *op*press her. This is where comparison appears: the domineering person enjoys the superiority he experiences in dominating the other, whom he sees as in the inferior position. This downward pressure satisfies his lust for self-importance; its downwardness gives him a sense of being above. Second, he also bears overly, in the sense of inordinately, on her, and so his attitude is to be contrasted with proper authority. He weighs on the other, like a rider that is borne on a horse, but he weighs inappropriately, given the other's innate dignity and freedom, which the loving person humbly recognizes. The overbearing person has this bearing on the other in common with the properly authoritative person, only the latter bears appropriately, and thus humbly, acknowledging that the legitimate authority he bears has been graciously assigned to him by God. The exercise, and even enjoyment, of proper authority is compatible with humility. We are all *sub*ject to one another and accountable to one another. By contrast, the domineering person tries to practice asymmetrical accountability: he insists that others be accountable to him without his being accountable to them.

When we enjoy lording it over others (Mark 10:42–44), most of us are aware that this is unloving (because unhumble) and wish to mute the impression of what we are really doing. A wonderful description of the vice of domination is in chapter 2 of Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. Ivan Ilych has started a new government job and is comparing the satisfactions of the new with the former. In his former job he had enjoyed walking, in his attractive uniform, through the room of nervous petitioners waiting for an audience with the governor and enjoying their envy of him as he jauntily went straight into his chief's office for a cup of tea and a cigarette. But in that post only a few people were directly dependent on him, and he liked treating them respectfully, almost as pals,

> as if he were letting them feel that he who had the power to crush them was treating them in this simple, friendly way…. But now, as an examining magistrate, Ivan Ilyich felt that everyone without exception, even the most important and self-satisfied, was in his power, and that he need only write a few words on a sheet of paper with a certain heading, and this or that important, self-satisfied person would be brought before him in the role of an accused person or a witness, and if he did not choose to allow him to sit down, would have to stand before him and answer his questions. Ivan Ilyich never abused his power; he tried on the contrary to soften its expression, but the consciousness of it and the possibility of softening its effect, supplied the chief interest and attraction of his office.[13]

The overbearing person lacks sympathetic imagination, borne over as he is

by his compulsion to dominate. The humble, by contrast, is free to bend his own thought in openness to the contours of another's mind, and can follow the train of another's alien reasoning and grasp another's feeling. Domination, the insistence on one's own way of thinking, causes one's thinking to be inflexible and inefficient. It makes for narrowness and tunnel-vision. Because of this cognitive deficit, the domineering individual tends to be blind to the wonders of other people's individuality. And they often feel it, even if subconsciously, as oppressively alienating: "whereas the presence of a domineering person is as oppressive as the heavy pressure of sultry air—love gives bold confidence" (WL, 280–81). Maybe this, rather than our own domineering impulse, is why we tend to find people with the virtue of humility attractive. If their humility is genuine, it will permeate such other virtues as generosity, forgivingness, gratitude, and love; and interaction with such a person builds us up.

In *Practice in Christianity* Anti-Climacus gets inside the head of a "sagacious and sensible" contemporary of Jesus who is impressed with him, in a way, but also dumbfounded by the dullness of Jesus's insight into life. Jesus immerses himself in the lives of ordinary people, going humbly *to them* to perform his deeds of mercy. The contemporary remarks with dismay,

> "Instead of haughtily and domineeringly keeping people from himself at the distance of profoundest servility and accepting their adoration on the rare occasions when he is seen, instead of that to be accessible to all or, more correctly, to go himself to everyone, to associate with everyone, almost as if being the extraordinary meant to be the servant of all; … he certainly must very well know what I with less than half of my sagacity can tell him in advance, that this is no way to get ahead in the world." (PC, 42)

The speaker's philosophy of success in life is that success is the power to subordinate others to one's own will, and this "vision" of what life is about makes him unable to wrap his mind around Jesus.

We damage our souls by shrinkage when we yield to impulses of envy and domination, impulses that draw us into the trap of getting lost in the crowd where the value of people is comparative. We underrate our personal importance by accepting a false and comparative criterion of personal importance. We make being a "single individual" impossible by "wanting to deny [our] kinship with all people" (WL, 74). In an effort to be "great" we lose touch with our humanity and rule out the prospect of taking proper pride in being human.

Self-Righteousness

In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard notes, "Ah, to keep oneself unstained by the world is the task and doctrine of Christianity—would to God that we all did it—but to cling to that in a worldly way as if it were the most glorious of all dissimilarities—that is plain defilement" (WF 74). The self-righteous (*selvretfærdig*) element in this keeping yourself unstained is in the "clinging to" this purity *as* setting yourself in contrast with, and morally above, most other human beings. The idea that it is "glorious" to remain unstained in this particular way is the idea of the pleasure and satisfaction you derive from not being like those sinners. It is right and Christian to want to have this purity, but to care about it *as superiority* to others is itself defilement and a moral stain. This concern and the defiling pleasure of its gratification is called self-righteousness.

Kierkegaard's communion discourse on Jesus's story of the Pharisee and the tax collector (DCF, 100–107) contrasts the tax collector's penitence with the Pharisee's self-righteousness. Luke introduces the parable saying that Jesus told it for people who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt" (Luke 18:9). The Pharisee thanks God that he isn't like sinners such as rogues, thieves, and adulterers, and proudly looks over at a tax collector who is also in the temple to pray and offers him as an example of the kind of person he is grateful to be unlike.[14] And he lists some of his own virtuous acts—ones the sinners don't perform. Meanwhile, the tax collector is standing far off, paying the Pharisee no attention and beating his breast in sorrow over his sins, pleading for God's mercy. "The Pharisee proudly found satisfaction in seeing the tax collector; the tax collector humbly saw no one, not this Pharisee either; with downcast eyes turned inward he was in truth—before God" (DCF, 104). As far as the tax collector's awareness goes, the transaction is just between him and God. For example, he's not thinking, Look at that Pharisee across the way: he fasts twice a week and gives away a tenth of his income. What a miserable sinner I am by comparison!

This discourse is about the humility of penitence, which is the attitude appropriate to receiving communion at the Eucharist. It is contrasted with the proud self-righteousness of the Pharisee, who takes pleasure in comparing himself with the "less righteous" tax collector. Although self-righteousness as a vicious character trait is a tendency to exaggerate our own righteousness, it is not just that. Rather, it is an especially "comparative" vice of pride. Self-righteous feelings have a double focus—on myself and on the person I am comparing with myself.

The tax collector's humility, which is penitent, differs from the humility of

John the Baptist's glad willingness to step aside and down as he welcomed the beginning of Jesus's ministry. John's humility is joyful, marked by emotional pleasure, the tax collector's penitential, marked by sorrow. The humble self-denial in John 3:29–30 is not connected to repentance. John's humble joy does not express contrition. The other virtues that it expresses are love and hope—and of course, faith.

If we measure our moral standing by comparing ourselves with some of our fellow human beings, we may come out measuring pretty well, or perhaps pretty badly, but in either case falsely. Self-righteousness, being based on a concern for moral superiority, or at least equality, with other human beings, can be "wounded," just like vanity. We may not be inclined to call such a wound *self-righteousness*, since it is self-*un*righteousness, so to speak. But it is only accidental that the passion got frustrated rather than satisfied. The root vice is the passion itself.

We self-righteous ones care about moral excellence, in our own way. But our mind is shaped by a deplorable defensive tactic. Being morally sensitive, in our own way, we don't like to confront our shortcomings. If I feel ashamed of myself, I look around for somebody to be morally superior to, and I take comfort when I find an example. Self-righteousness is on a hungry prowl for tender provender—morally inferior peers. It involves the tendency to pick, for purposes of comparison, others whose moral standing seems to us to compare badly with our own, while still being close enough to our "class" to warrant the comparison.

Self-righteousness seeks a moral superiority, and is thus more momentous than ordinary vanity, which traffics in such qualities as beauty, intelligence, and popularity. "Righteousness," which is a somewhat quaint word for ethical excellence—virtues like justice, compassion, generosity, truthfulness, and forgivingness—seems to go to the very core of a human being in a way that beauty, intelligence, and so forth don't. The self-righteous person looks with contemptuous delight on the other's failure in righteousness. Since the self-righteous person "uses" others for self-exaltation by pressing them into a position of inferiority and relative misery *in this momentous dimension* of human existence, self-righteousness seems especially invidious and contrary to a loving attitude. In the mind of the self-righteous person, there is always a victim, a person who is "put down," a target of happy scorn. The self-righteous person targets the moral core of his victim and rejoices in her shortcomings in *that* dimension. The interpersonal perversity of self-righteousness is blunted by the fact that much of it skulks in the secrecy of feelings and thoughts. But its

nefarious social dynamic comes out vividly in the following thought:

> What an exquisitely contrived kind of cruel enjoyment to want to feel one's own righteousness in relation to someone who is suffering by explaining his suffering as God's punishment upon him, so that one hardly dares to help him, or by asking him that censorious question that flatters a person's own righteousness before one helps him. (PC, 19–20)

It is hard to think of a more forbidding obstacle to compassion or friendship. In his pleasure the Pharisee spiritually abuses the tax collector. Instead of sympathizing with him, wishing him well, and perhaps helping him to find a better way of life, he treats him with gleeful contempt; spiritually speaking, he grinds him under his feet and exults in his being down there.

One kind of humility that is contrary to this vice is the virtue of penitence or contrition.[15] Penitence is the disposition to lament and bewail our own sins and so to cast ourselves on the mercy of God—to admit that we can do nothing to make ourselves righteous before God. The self-righteous person who has turned penitent in remorse has transitioned from comparing himself with a poor sinful human being to standing in humble self-accusation before a holy God. Penitence acknowledges head-on the ideality that self-righteousness denies with its relativizing, comparative conception of righteousness.

Much of Kierkegaard's work aims to correct this debased standard of ethico-spiritual uprightness by reminding the reader of an "ideality" an important part of which is the purity that goes by the name of humility. An important aspect of being a "single individual" is to live one's life, not comparing oneself with fellow human beings, but in consideration of ideality—the life that we *ought* to live before God: "but this is required of everyone, that he before God shall honestly humble himself under the requirements of ideality" (PC, 67).

Self-righteousness involves an interest in merit. Merit is agent credit: being credited as an agent for something well done. The self-righteous person enjoys thinking of himself as having *more* merit than the person he compares himself with. So the kind of humility that is the contrary of self-righteousness involves a lack of interest in merit. Harry Truman identified this kind of humility when he said, "It is remarkable how much one can get done if one doesn't care who gets the credit."[16] Kierkegaard points out that a sense of obligation can purify a person's character of a proud interest in merit. He says it's burdensome to be under obligation to do what you don't want to do, but if you already want to do it, then to consider yourself obliged to do it is a blessing, because now

> the word "shall" is not so much commanding—for to what end is the command to someone who

> enthusiastically desires what the commandment commands him—as it is sanctifying and purifying that in this zeal there must be no impetuousness, no conceited excessiveness, no defiling thought of any meritoriousness. (PC, 173–74)

The disciple rejoices in that what he is doing for Christ is an obligation and is not meritorious; and this rejoicing is rejoicing in the freedom of humility. By using obligation to wipe out the meritoriousness, the "you shall" purifies the heart and protects it against conceit and self-righteousness.

Similarly, Kierkegaard points out what a blessing it is, when you are suffering, to suffer as guilty. Innocent human suffering, if there were such a thing, would seem to call into question whether God is love.

> When one suffers as guilty, then the concern—in which there nevertheless is the comfort of eternity, indeed, the joy of eternity: to admit that God is right—is humbling. But when one, entirely innocent, suffers, then it seems as if it has not yet been quite decided that God is love, seems as if the struggle were about justifying God, something only the conceit of fools and conceited wisdom can regard as the easiest—because for a human being that is really presumptuousness. (UDVS, 273)

The humble admission that, in your suffering, God is right and God is love preserves, in your consciousness, the moral integrity of the world.

We've had a brief look at four of the different but related vices of pride that Kierkegaard contrasts with the virtue of humility: Presumption (arrogance), vanity, domination, and self-righteousness. Each corresponds to a different kind—or, perhaps we should say, aspect—of humility. We might have considered others, for example, envy, conceit, and what I have elsewhere called hyper-autonomy,[17] but in this, as in everything, I have been offering only samples.

Humility and Other Virtues

Throughout this chapter we have connected humility with such virtues as faith and love. Such associating might lead us to wonder whether humility is actually *a virtue* or, alternatively, just an aspect of these other virtues. If the vices of pride are, as I have tried to show, motives in which the self seeks to exalt *itself* by overreach of entitlement and privilege, by display of its strengths and excellences, by domineering over others, and by moral superiority to others, they are pretty clearly incompatible with faith, love, and other virtues that involve starkly different and opposed kinds of motivation. The very idea of arrogant or vain faith, or domineering or self-righteous love, is incoherent. Humility, then, is just a logically necessary feature of these other virtues, not a virtue on its own. So to

speak of humble faith or humble love is redundant; any other kind of faith or love is defective.

In both *Fear and Trembling* and *The Sickness unto Death* we find the expression "humble courage," and this combination of concepts does not seem to be redundant. Arrogant or presumptuous courage, or domineering or self-righteous courage, seem to be real possibilities. Anti-Climacus contrasts humble courage with brash courage (SUD, 85; Lowrie has "impudent"). Perhaps this is because courage is a different kind of virtue from faith and love—a kind that doesn't imply any special kind of motivation. This would be a kind of courage that is analogous to the "mundane" patience to be discussed in the next chapter. A person could show this kind of courage in trivial or even unethical endeavors, as well as in noble ones.

I have argued that for Kierkegaard, humility is a kind of purity—a purity of motive, the contraries of which are various kinds of moral-spiritual motivational pollution that I have called the vices of pride. Is purity a *thing*? Well, in a sense it's nothing: pure water, for example, is nothing but water. But it can be a very important kind of nothing, if the something of which it is the absence is poisonous or noxious in some other way. The vices of pride certainly qualify for noxiousness. On the other hand, purity is not absolutely nothing. You can't have purity all by itself; it has to be the purity *of something* or *in something*. In the case of humility, it is the purity *of* a person's love or faith or other motivational virtue. So I choose to say that humility is a virtue, and in this I am in stride with the Christian tradition and with Kierkegaard's thought.

Kierkegaard uses the word "pride" (*Stolthed*) both as the name of a vice and as the name of a virtue. The difference must be discerned by attention to context. When it is used for a virtue, it is associated with faith and the consequent bold confidence, and when it is used for a vice it is associated with envy, conceit, arrogance, presumption, vanity, self-righteousness, and being domineering. When "humble" is used for a character trait, I think it is invariably a virtue. Unlike Hume and some other English speakers, Kierkegaard does not use it for low self-confidence, self-denigration, and chronic shame. Humility is a crucially important virtue in Kierkegaard's psychology of character. So is patience, to which we now turn.

1. Robert C. Roberts, "The Vice of Pride," *Faith and Philosophy* 26 (2009): 129–30.

2. The square brackets indicate that the title of the discourse is not in the original but has been supplied by the Hongs as editors.

3. *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 337.

4. The insistence on the "double" or second object of your willing can be expressed as "only if."

5. I think there's nothing viciously proud about *caring* to be the agent of a contribution to the good; for example, a person might virtuously be grateful to God for giving her a role to play in his work. She might even feel honored to be given this role, as Paul felt honored to be allowed to work with his own hands, according to Kierkegaard in UDVS, 199–200. This attitude toward one's own agency is an example of *virtuous* pride, and Kierkegaard explicitly connects it with gratitude to God. Gratitude's connection with both humility and pride in this case provides another angle on the partnership of humility and pride in Christian character.

6. Because it would be desiring something the grey sparrow is normatively not *supposed* to have, something not in the nature of the grey sparrow.

7. I have put "worry" where the Hongs have "care."

8. Believe it or not, this word is actually in the Hong translation.

9. The "power to hold on to an idea despite appearances" is *character*. Character allows one to see through the appearances, even if the appearances somewhat obscure the truth (their futility). Honesty, humility, faith, and courage are among the traits that make such insight possible.

10. Invidious triumph, domineering revenge.

11. Somehow the woman has perceived that Jesus loves her in a way that no one else does. And her love for him is a response to Jesus's love. As Kierkegaard says in the prayer attached to this discourse, Jesus "loves forth" love.

12. George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London: Penguin, 2016), chapter 16.

13. Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, in *Iván Ilych and Hadji Murád*, trans. Louise Maude and Aylmer Maude (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Death_of_Ivan_Ilych/II.

14. Gratitude is a Christian virtue. But *this* gratitude is a corruption. He finds the comparison gratifying, but we can doubt that the Pharisee succeeds in being grateful *to God* (his concept of God fails to hook up with reality).

15. Contrition is contrary to the self-exalting aspect of self-righteousness, the exaltation by genuine righteousness. Love (sense of kinship with everybody) is contrary to the other-abusing or comparing aspect.

16. See David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 564.

17. See Robert C. Roberts and Ryan West, "Jesus and the Virtues of Pride," in *The Moral Psychology of Pride*, ed. J. Adam Carter and Emma C. Gordon (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 99–121; and Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, "Understanding, Humility, and the Vices of Pride," in *The Routledge Handbook of Virtue Epistemology*, ed. Heather Battaly (London: Routledge, 2019), 363–75. Kierkegaard does not use the term "hyper-autonomy."

13 PATIENCE

There is a remedy for all nervous impatience: it is faith, humility.

The Book on Adler, 171

THE CONNECTIONS OF PATIENCE

The idea of patience connects with several other ideas—(1) with the passage of time and waiting (one waits patiently—or impatiently; patience is the virtue of waiting *well*); (2) with suffering (pathos as suffering). The suffering may be extrinsic to the temporal duration, as when you suffer physical pain or are in prison, making the time waiting for relief seem longer: tumult, disruption, upheaval, plague, and confusion are sufferings in which it is natural to want to escape them or want them to be over. Or the suffering may come *from* the temporal duration, as when you're patient or impatient for something good, or where the suffering is the impatience of boredom. (3) Patience connects with being the object of action, the thing acted *upon*, in contrast with being the agent, the act*or* who initiates and performs actions (patiency, as we might say, rather than agency, passivity rather than activity[1]). (4) It connects with the will, since impatience is a desire that something happen or cease to happen now, or soon, and patience and impatience seem at least partially to be subject to our will; patience seems subject to command: "be patient!"; we can practice patience. (5) And it connects with self-possession, being in control of oneself, if of nothing else—not being at the mercy of circumstances, and thus freedom. In the expositions of patience in his discourses Kierkegaard exploits all of these connections.

In my dialect, the word "patience" seems to me primarily to exploit the connection with waiting, though the first sense listed in the *OED* is "the calm, uncomplaining endurance of pain, affliction, inconvenience, etc.; the capacity for such endurance" and the third sense is "calm, self-possessed waiting." The apostle Paul says that love is patient (1 Cor. 13:4).[2] He lists it among the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). He says that in the strength of God's glory we Christians are joyful in our patience (Col. 1:11) and exhorts the Colossians, as

people chosen by God who are holy and loved, to "put on" patience and to be patient with one another (Col. 3:12–13).

To think of patience as a virtue is to think of it not as an action (*calm down! be patient!*) but as a trait of character (being a patient *person*), a personal way of being, a reliably stable way of living your life, a style of attitude in situations of discomfort, and thus being disposed in an excellent and appropriate way with regard to these dimensions of our existence. Patience is a readiness to "deal" properly with our passivity, with temporal duration and having to wait, with suffering, with tumult, disruption, upheaval, and confusion in the environment; and it is a dispositional state of the will and a kind of self-possession. Its contrary is a disposition to lose control of ourselves, to be disabled and confused in our thinking and choosing, because of such stressful circumstances.

Two Kinds of Patience

Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses contains three discourses on patience. Two of these—"To Gain One's Soul in Patience" and "To Preserve One's Soul in Patience"—are based on Luke 21:19: "In your patience (*hypomonē*) you will gain your souls." The context is Jesus's warning about the coming doom of Jerusalem (see Luke 21:10–19). Kierkegaard's paraphrase is possibly even more terrifying than the original:

> The elements disintegrate, the sky is rolled up like a garment, the abyss of annihilation opens its throat and roars for its prey, the shriek of despair sounds from every direction, even inanimate nature groans in anxiety—yet the believer does not press forward battling in order to find rescue, but while nothing has continuance, while even the mountain, tottering, abandons the site where it has stood without moving for thousands of years, he remains quiet and gains his soul in patience, while people are about to die of fright and the expectation of things to come. (EUD, 170)

In the midst of this tumultuous, chaotic scene of domestic and international war, natural disasters, unreliable rumors, famines and plagues, persecutions of disciples, betrayal by family members, and destruction of the city, the disciple gains his soul by patience. In the outer situation "nothing has continuance," while inwardly the believer "remains quiet and gains her soul in patience." I think this is not to deny that the believer sizes up the situation and acts appropriately to assist those who are fleeing, to comfort the distraught, to limit the destruction as she can, and to guide and encourage others to act rationally in the horrific situation. Patience doesn't simply "zone you out," making you oblivious of or uncaring about what's going on around you. Rather, your own

inward calm aids you in performing such actions as fit the circumstances. Such a disciple integrates the temporal with the eternal in both directions. This ideal disciple trusts in God, not panicking, but keeps her mind about her by prayerful communication with God. Faced with these circumstances, she calls on God for orientation; in the particular circumstances of her finite life she finds ways to express her communion with God. And so she will be gaining her soul, drawing it away from disorienting subjection to the excitement around her, while nevertheless being appropriately and deliberately engaged with it.

"Patience is a soul-strength that everyone needs to attain what he desires in life," says Kierkegaard (EUD, 160). Everyone needs this strength because, from the point of view of a desire, the time it takes for events to unfold can be a typical and generic source of adversity, quite apart from the dramatic kind of adversity just described. Children "just can't wait" for it to be Christmas—yet they must; if it is two days before Christmas, nothing they can do will diminish the time until Christmas. Painful impatience is the emotion that registers this adversity. Impatience is suffering from having to wait; patience is relaxing *into* the suffering that cannot be avoided. Impatience is the frustration of not having *now* (or very soon) what you want. It may involve a double suffering: suffering of some unavoidable kind, and a suffering *about* the unavoidable suffering. The latter is avoidable—by patience. In aligning your will with the suffering, you reduce the suffering to the singular; you are still suffering, but not *about* the suffering.

Kierkegaard distinguishes what we might call utilitarian or mundane patience from spiritual patience and illustrates, with a string of examples of mundane patience, how patience is a strength of soul against the possible frustrations of delayed gratification. The hiker wants to reach his far destination; the gardener wants the harvest; the merchant wants a customer to buy his wares; the bird-catcher wants to catch birds; and so forth (see EUD, 160–61). All these goals require patience. People understand that because it takes time for such results to emerge, life lays down this condition of patience on successful outcomes, and they submit to it and let themselves be formed by it. That is, they are formed in patient strength of soul. They are glad (or at least willing) to act patiently rather than with "wild, undisciplined outbursts [of impatience] that achieve nothing but only give rise to confusion and harm" (161). The thought that vegetables take time to grow, or that birds come to the trap-site only in the evening of the day, or that understanding Kierkegaard's writings takes long study, becomes so second-nature to the practitioner, so much a matter of silent

embedded presupposition, that she doesn't need to *use* the thought to quiet her impatience. When this is so, mundane patience has become a trait of her (mundane) character at least within the context of, for example, bird-trapping, and the indication of this is that the painful impulses of impatience in the relevant context are minimal.[3] She doesn't cease to look forward to the fulfilment of the expectation or the end of the distress, but she no longer suffers from impatience in that context. Mundane patience that is specific to bird-catching is a virtue only in a weak sense; to be really a virtue, this strength would need to span a variety of characteristic contexts.

By mundane patience a diversity of objects are to be gained; but Jesus speaks of the *soul's* being gained by patience. You don't gain your *soul* (*psychē*), your distinctively human life or self, by the "worldly" kind of patience that is needed for good hiking or merchandizing; you just become better able to gain certain advantages. Spiritual patience is the patience by which you gain your soul. But gaining your soul is surely the basic project of every human life;[4] and it seems that here patience is not merely a means or useful ability or disposition by which you gain something *else* that merely *pertains* to living, but is incorporated into what it is to *live* ("exist") as a human soul. We might call it existential patience. Patience here is a genuine spiritual quality—a *human* virtue—and not just an appurtenance or useful accessory; it is an attitude that belongs to the essential nature of a spiritually mature soul.

Just as mundane patience incorporates bits of understanding about the time it takes for various outcomes to be achieved, and thus attunes a person's emotions to temporal reality, so spiritual patience incorporates wisdom such as, "God will make the temptation and its outcome such that we are able to bear it" (EUD, 201; see 1 Cor. 10:13); "No one can add a foot to his growth even if he were concerned about it; no one can take what has not been given to him" (see Luke 12:25). "Today we shall do this, tomorrow that, God willing" (see James 4:13). These thoughts all are (or can be) ways of connecting with God. In the midst of a trial like that described in Luke 21, to be reminded of God's providence by the thought that God will not let trial exceed our resources quiets our anxiety and impatience. Spiritual patience incorporates spiritual wisdom, while utilitarian patience incorporates sagacity (shrewdness, cunning: *Klogskab*), prudence (*Forsigtighed*). Spiritual patience calls on the eternal as a calming factor, just as mundane patience calls on (for example) the thought that plants take weeks to yield their fruit. And when the thought of the eternal becomes so embedded in our consciousness that it becomes a way of spontaneously seeing

reality, then spiritual patience has become a trait of our character. But the very fact that it, like mundane patience, makes tactical *use* of or recruits a *thought* in the interest of trustful waiting is a similarity. It too is a strength of soul with a skill-like character, a practice, even if in your maturity the practice is so second-nature that you don't need explicitly to call on your patience or practice it.

Mundane patience is a way of accomplishing things. It's handy and adaptive given that we live in time and that much of what we would accomplish takes time. Spiritual patience, by contrast, is a property of persons *as persons*, and thus, as in all things personal for Kierkegaard, has to do with a personal *relationship*: spiritual patience is a way of relating to yourself and to God. Among other things, it is a way of accepting yourself as a creature subject to suffering and passivities; it is a way of trusting and thus loving God. So, unlike the infinite varieties of mundane patience, it is a feature of any mature soul.

What is Impatience and What is Wrong with It?

In Kierkegaard's writings the word "impatience" can refer to either one of at least two different but related psychological realities. "Impatience" can name a vice, an undesirable character trait opposed to the desirable trait of patience, but also a type of emotion on a par with anger, envy, and fear. Impatience as an emotion can also be called a feeling, since typically the emotion of impatience is felt: you feel impatient for something to happen, or for something to be over. A person with the vice of impatience doesn't feel impatient all the time, but only in certain situations. Impatience as a vice is a *proneness* to respond with the emotion of impatience to situations that you see as frustrating because of what feels like a delay. The perfectly patient person would presumably never feel impatience. None of us, it seems, is perfectly patient.

Since the trait of impatience is a disposition to feel impatient, we will understand the vice only if we understand the emotion—what the vice is a disposition *to*. Impatience as an emotion is frustration with delay: you want something to happen or to be over, but it takes time—*too much* time, as it seems to you. Boredom, anxiety, and guilt (feelings) may be kinds of impatience. Here's a boredom case: you're at loose ends, you pace around looking for something interesting to do. Time weighs heavy on you. You're dissatisfied with the pace of things; you want to move on to something interesting. An anxiety case: you've had medical tests that may reveal a serious illness and you're waiting for the results, but they are delayed. You are anxious: you want the results *now*, though

you also fear them. A guilt case: you are feeling guilty about something you said about a friend, and you want to be rid of the feeling—the sooner the better. Impatience isn't always boredom, anxiety, or guilt. The pregnant woman two weeks overdue is not bored, anxious, or feeling guilty, but she is impatient for the baby to be born. One reason is that her condition is increasingly uncomfortable, but another is that she "just can't wait" to have the baby in her arms! But one thing is always true of the emotion of impatience: as a kind of frustration, it is unpleasant (at least mildly); it is a discomfort.

Impatience as an emotion, then, is symptomatic of impatience as a vice. But it isn't the only kind of emotion that expresses this vice. Not every emotion that expresses impatience is a kind of frustration. The past, with its fixed character, says Kierkegaard, is like the eternal, and so we can learn from it to see the time of expectancy as neither "lengthened by our impatience" nor "shortened by our impatient joy over the fulfillment" (EUD, 206). So joy can also be a symptom of impatience. As an expression of the vice of impatience, this joy is perverse.

How might joy be a symptom of impatience? You were impatient for some positive outcome or relief from some negative condition; what you want occurs and you feel joy. If you were suffering from some negative condition and that suffering ends, we call this joy "relief." But even the fulfillment of an expected positive outcome can be seen as a relief—relief from the pain of impatient desire. Such joy is impatient because it is the satisfaction of impatient desire. It seems that a situation of fulfillment can be a reason for joy in two ways: you can rejoice in the fulfillment as such (say, the arrival of the beautiful baby) or you can rejoice in the end of the distress of impatience. It is only natural to find some satisfaction in the cessation of suffering, so it seems to me that joy will count as a symptom of impatience only if it achieves a threshold of intensity that marks the underlying concern as impatient. Kierkegaard thinks that both the pleasures and the distresses of impatience are ultimately disconsolate because of the eternal in the human self. That dimension of the self demands a happy, trusting relationship with God, one whose defectiveness impatience signals.

By contrast, when you await something patiently, you still have a desire for it, and so you have joy in it when it occurs (for example, the birth of a healthy baby, or relief from political oppression); but you also have joy in it *as you patiently wait for it*, and you don't feel the emotion of impatience. In this case, then, both of these joys—the one you have while waiting expectantly, and the one you have when your expectancy is fulfilled—are patient joys. These joys are also expressions of the virtue of hope.

How does a being who is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, the finite and the infinite, achieve genuine patience? Kierkegaard thinks that as long as our outlook on life is limited to the round of piecemeal expectancies of secular life with their fulfillments and disappointments, we are disconsolate, though in a way that we misunderstand. We may even feel happy, if our most intense piecemeal expectancies are often met with fulfillments. Because perspective on our own life depends so much on the particular orientation of our minds, we are often not very reliable judges of our own happiness or unhappiness. But the eternal in the self requires a relationship with the Eternal Other such that union with him is the fulfillment of our expectancy. Patience has a special relationship with hope. That relationship engenders patience that transcends and infuses the round of secular expectancies. It can make every finite joy and disappointment serene, calm, quiet, and fulfilling.

Kierkegaard calls this proper relationship with the eternal by various names in different parts of his writings. For example, in "An Occasional Discourse," which is part 1 of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, he calls it "to will one thing in truth" (the contrary being "doublemindedness"). In another passage from the same discourse he calls it "humble, obedient enthusiasm." In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Johannes Climacus calls it relating absolutely to the absolute end and relatively to all relative ends (the contrary being to relate absolutely to a relative end or relatively to the absolute end). All of these concepts can be thought of as obedience to the First Commandment: to have no other "gods" (objects of committed devotion) than God himself. Because Christendom is so "spiritless" and has such low expectations for human spirituality,

> alas, often enough people confuse impatience with humble, obedient enthusiasm (*ydmyge lydige Begeistring*); the impatient person himself is all too inclined to this confusion. If early and late a person is on the go "for the sake of the good," makes a big noise, is sheer unrest, hurls himself into time as a sick person throws himself on his bed, throws off all consideration for himself as a sick person [does] his clothes, scorns the rewards of this world, keeps people at a distance—then many think that he is enthusiastic, as he himself imagines himself to be. And yet he is anything but that, because he is double-minded, and double-mindedness no more resembles enthusiasm than a tornado resembles a steady prevailing wind. Indeed, all impatience is like this—it is a kind of ill nature. Already with the child this is the cause, that the child will not take time; it emerges in that double-minded person because temporality and eternity cannot be reconciled in the same person. He cannot and he will not understand the slowness of the good, that in its compassion it is long-suffering, that in its love for the free it will not use power, that in its wise understanding of the weak it shuns every deception; he cannot and he will not humbly understand that the good can do without him. (UDVS, 62, translation slightly altered)

Humble, obedient enthusiasm for the good is an attunement of our will to the will of God, and God has set us in a finite world of time. That is the set of conditions under which we are to pursue God's purposes. It is a world where the good can be worked out only gradually, where compassion requires tolerance of the slowness of ameliorative processes, where cutting corners is detrimental, where working with free spirits requires restraining ourselves from overpowering them, where understanding dawns only after extensive investigation, where quick teaching is often inconsistent with insisting on truth, and where our contribution to the good is often minimal and invisible within our lifetime. To insist on a speedy realization of the good is to compromise the will of God with a condition laid down by our own will, and thus is doublemindedness (see chapter 12).

When Kierkegaard says that "temporality and eternity cannot be reconciled in the same person," he isn't denying that we human beings can synthesize (thus, in a sense reconcile) our temporal nature with a commitment to the eternal God. After all, that is what faith is, as Anti-Climacus describes it in *The Sickness unto Death*. Instead, the reconciliation is impossible *in the impatient person*, because of that person's insistence on his own schedule. In effect, impatience is a presumptuous unwillingness to let God be God. It is a shortage of "humble, obedient enthusiasm." The frenetic urgency of the impatient person is a failure to understand "the slowness of the good." The urgency (against time as one perceives it) is a sign of enthrallment by the temporal. The contrary of this enthrallment and susceptibility to the urgency—the virtue of patience—subordinates the temporal to the eternal in a way that undercuts this temporal urgency. But humble, obedient enthusiasm is nevertheless *enthusiasm* for the good. Patience is not lukewarmness, lethargy, or defeatism. This is the other side of the synthesis that is patience. Kierkegaard's writings exude this obedient enthusiasm for God. It is this that led some of his contemporaries to think that he was impatient. But impatience is like a tornado, episodic and destructive; enthusiasm is like a steady prevailing wind, the same from day to day and year to year, dependable and beneficent.

Patiency, Agency, and Freedom

Kierkegaard says (UDVS, 118–19) that patience (*Taalmod*) is a form of courage (*Mod*). How so? We might say that courage is the paradigmatic *overcoming* virtue. It's a power to transcend obstacles in the interest of something. Courage

overcomes fear. But fear is the subjective counterpart of threats and dangers; it is the means by which the threats and dangers erect obstacles to appropriate action. Thus, by overcoming fear, courage overcomes external threats—say, by bullies, fire, water, or thugs—that can deter us from appropriate action. By courage, a person frees herself from domination—bondage, servitude to whatever threatens her. She rises above it. The courageous person acts, knowing that she is bringing danger on herself to which she would not be subject if she didn't act. This is, at least, plausibly a paradigm kind of case, and it is what Kierkegaard has in mind. So she is free from what is threatening, and her freedom is a freedom *to act*. In her action she declares and claims her freedom.

Patience is a kind of courage because it too is an overcoming virtue. Like courage, patience transcends obstacles and declares the individual's freedom. Here, however, the obstacle is not a threat (the *possibility* of suffering, harm, or death), but present, unavoidable sufferings. While courage chooses to take on dangers and possible sufferings that could be avoided by not acting courageously, patience chooses to take on sufferings that are inescapable because they are already upon you. It is thus domination of sufferings by submitting to them, and by reframing them.

Kierkegaard notes that some people belittle patience, denying its status as a virtue, but he says that a virtue is exactly what patience is:

> When one who is constrained is patient in his suffering, they say of him, "Shame on him—after all, he can't do anything else and is simply making a virtue of necessity." Unquestionably he is making a virtue of necessity; that is the secret, that is the most typical expression for what he is doing—he is making a virtue of necessity, he is deriving a category of freedom (virtue) from what is defined as necessity. (UDVS, 119)

Kierkegaard says that patience performs an even greater miracle than courage: whereas the courageous person takes control of the situation by choosing his own sufferings, the patient person must deal with sufferings that are imposed on him. How is this a greater miracle? The typical courageous person likes to be in control, and this pride is a "treacherous resistance" (UDVS, 119) to unavoidable suffering. Thus, when he must suffer without being in control of his suffering, the "dreadfulness of unavoidability" (UDVS, 118) tends to combine with that treacherous resistance to "crush" the courageous person. "Patience is the counter-pressure of resiliency [*Gjentryk*] whereby the person who is constrained makes himself free in his constraint" (UDVS, 119). The courageous person whose courage is perfected by the virtue of patience is thus freer than the person of imperfect courage who can't stand to be passive with respect to his sufferings.

How does the patient person free himself, and what does he free himself from? If courage tends to make a person resist accepting the passivity that inevitable sufferings impose, patience seems to recruit another virtue—humility—in its counterpressure of resilience against the apparent suspension of agency in accepting unavoidable sufferings. Impatience and defiance seem to be natural partners in willful resistance of the creaturely burden of time. Patience makes the sufferer resilient by allowing him to submit humbly to his sufferings. He frees himself by accepting his sufferings as a condition of acquiring his soul, just as the patient gardener humbly accepts the waiting period of plants' growth as a condition of getting a harvest. In his patience he is able to take joy in the prospect (thus experience hopefulness), and even to some extent in the sufferings, as a condition of the prospect. This joy is possible to the extent that he has quieted his impatience with the slowness of time to yield the prospect.

The dread of passivity that makes for the courageous person's treacherous resistance to being patient involves a shallow understanding of human agency, and patience stands as a correction of that understanding. This is another aspect of the "wisdom" that goes into patience. The passivity of human patience is not like the passivity of a stone. The stone not only doesn't determine where it lies, it also can neither accept nor protest that it lies where it lies. It cannot set its will for or against its lying where it lies—because it has no will. The passivity of the patient person to her unavoidable sufferings is a passivity to which she is free to adopt an attitude of her choosing. She can resign herself to it, she can construe it as within God's providence, she can entrust it to God—or she can rage impotently against it. Hers is an active, voluntary passivity, a passivity subject to choice; a voluntarily willing or unwilling attitude taken toward the inevitable. Patience is active acceptance, an owning of this passivity. And herein lies one aspect of its freedom. (Other aspects are that patience renders its possessor free *from* the suffering of impatience and free *to* find joy in that suffering.)

In patience, says Kierkegaard,

> the soul comes to terms with all its possessors, with the life of the world in that it sufferingly [*lidende*] gains itself from itself, with God in that it sufferingly [*lidende*] accepts itself from him, with itself in that it itself retains what it simultaneously gives to both [the life of the world, and God] without anyone's being able to deprive the soul of it—patience. (EUD, 172)

This passage stresses the note of passivity enclosed in the word and concept of patience. It is contrasted with "power" (though as we have seen, it *is* a soul-power). The "sufferingly" repeated in the first sentence is *lidende*, which means

both to experience distress and to "let," to be passive with respect to something (suffrage as being allowed to vote; "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me" [Matt. 19:14 KJV]). But this is a paradoxical passivity, since it is actively chosen: the disciple who "actively" *lets* a child impose on Jesus chooses this passivity—namely, to do nothing to prevent it. This kind of passivity is a locus or a mode of freedom. You are free to accept your passivity or resist it—at least in attitude.

Evidence that the stress is more on passivity than on distress comes in the next sentence: "The soul can obtain nothing through power; it is in the hands of an alien power" (172). The powers in whose hands the soul finds itself are the life of the world and God. One is reminded of Romans 6: you are either a slave to God or a slave to the world; in either case you are a slave. As a soul your choice is which power to give your allegiance to, and which to subordinate to the other in your devotion. In spiritual patience, your allegiance is to the eternal.[5] This power of assigning allegiance is the power and freedom of the soul. The soul can't choose whether or not to be under the sway of the life of the world, and it can't choose whether or not to be under the sway of God; it is of necessity under both sways. But it can choose to which it gives allegiance, and this is its freedom. Kierkegaard says that if the soul were free in any other way "it would not be the self-contradiction in the contradiction between … the temporal and the eternal" (EUD, 172). It would not be the paradox that freely synthesizes these opposites. This paradox is again expressed in "the soul's being stronger than the world through its weakness" (that is, able to resist having its identity in worldly terms by accepting its passivity vis-à-vis the world), "in its being weaker than God through its strength" (that is, having it within its power to rest transparently in God, to give God the glory), "in its inability to gain anything but itself unless it wants to be deceived" (if it thinks it can gain importance as a soul through wealth or fame or achievement it deceives itself, but it can "gain itself" through accepting itself in worship as from the hand of God), and "in its being able to gain itself only by losing itself" (that is, losing its identity in terms of the world, and devoting itself to God) (EUD, 172). What does Kierkegaard mean by "the self-contradiction in the contradiction between the temporal and the eternal"? Perhaps just this: that the *patiency* in patience is a kind of *agency*; it is not "undialectical" patiency like that of a rock.

Kierkegaard's stress on human passivity in his comments about patience may suggest a "quietism" according to which spiritual action is all inwardly mental and has no effect "in the world." This would be a misreading. In many of his

writings Kierkegaard lays stress on acting. For example, his treatise on love is pointedly titled *Works of Love*, and his *Two Ages* is a critique of his age for its tendency to temporize in endless deliberation rather than take action. His critique of Hegel is that everything is turned into thought and theory and never amounts to anything to be *done*, to be *lived*. He saw his writings as an action of spiritual ministry to others and was concerned for their publication. He intended his writings to have consequences—changes in the people who read them. Also, when poor people came to Kierkegaard's door asking for a handout, he often gave them something, and this act of love would not have been complete had he merely wished them well. Human actions have consequences. But he does insist that the spiritual quality of an action is not merely a matter of its having good or bad consequences. Bad actions can have good consequences and good actions bad ones. An action is an event brought about by an agent, and it gets its particular identity from the intention with which the agent performs it. In his preoccupation with action in his writings, Kierkegaard lays stress on the attitudes with which actions are performed rather than on the public results because he was interested in the personal formation—the spiritual character—of his readers. This interest is illustrated in what he says about acquiring the virtue of patience.

I mentioned earlier that the mental-emotional calm of patience makes use of thoughts that can be so incorporated into your outlook on life that they become silent presuppositions, and thus form your very character. Thus the mature gardener needn't calm her impatience for the harvest by reminding herself that peas take several weeks to develop and bear fruit, but, knowing this, she simply gardens patiently, taking regular joy in the hope of harvest. Beautiful though it is, this is an example of mundane patience. Spiritual patience is distinguished by its use of spiritual thoughts such as "No man can add a foot to his growth even if he were concerned about it; no man can take what has not been given to him [by God]" (see Matt. 6:27).[6] Kierkegaard comments:

> Is this not persuasive for all time and against all doubt; can these words not remain with one in joy and sorrow; are they not strong enough to preserve a person's soul? … Does patience jeeringly tell a person that no one can add a foot to his growth, as if it wanted to make him feel how small he is and how powerless. Not at all; far be it from patience, which even knows how to make the reproach very gentle; "even if he were concerned about it," it says, by which it also says as mildly as possible that he really should not be concerned about it. (EUD, 189–90)

He also comments about James's recommendation that when we are about to set out on some enterprise we say to ourselves, "Today we shall do this, tomorrow that, *God willing*" [see James 4:13, italics added].

> Patience has discovered the danger and the terror, but it also comforts: "Today we shall do this, tomorrow that, God willing." Are these words not indescribably comforting; do they not take all the premature [ill-timed: *utidige*] hardships [drawbacks: *Besværligheder*] away from the purpose? And yet the purpose is not thereby destroyed; does it not become truly glorious only in this way! (EUD, 191)

The danger and the terror are that the purpose, on being fulfilled, will be found to be empty. Spiritual patience, by its access to the eternal, casts light on this feature of the finite purpose (see the book of Ecclesiastes), showing it to be dangerous and terrifying. The purpose in question is the purpose for which we will do this today, and that tomorrow—say, to make some money, or give someone surgery, or build a house. But now, expressing our patience, we say, "God willing." One might initially think that if we condition the finite purpose on God's endorsement of it, it will cease to be our purpose. How can it really be our purpose if we encompass it within this "if"? But, Kierkegaard says, this is not so. The purpose is the same finite one as before, except that it is now not merely to accomplish this or that, but to accomplish it *in God's will*. Thus the purpose is sanctified by humbly making it conditional on God's willing it, and thus in spiritual patience we align our will with God's will. This retention of the finite purpose, qualified by the condition that God will it, is an instance of the synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, the finite and the infinite. To the extent that the soul has acquired a stable disposition to integrate its finite purposes with submission to the will of God, the soul has successfully synthesized the finite and the infinite. Spiritual patience as a virtue is a dimension of such a synthesis.

Acquiring Patience

Patience is a kind of endurance (*Udholdenhed*). Endurance is the ability to "hold out" with equanimity (act rationally, pursue purposes, not be emotionally upset) despite suffering—for example, the suffering of as-yet unfulfilled hopes. We all come equipped with a certain amount of endurance. People vary in how much of it they have, as they do in other natural endowments. A person who has more of the original natural power than others may get a reputation for being a person of unusual patience, but this will be an illusion unless the person who possesses the power has become an agential source of it. Patience, which is built on the natural endowment, is a special kind of endurance, one that is acquired by adopting or grasping it in an act of will, in circumstances that require something more powerful than the natural endowment.

> The original natural power of endurance can be different in different individuals, but as soon as the fulfillment fails to come for such a long time that this original power is consumed and exhausted, then and only then will it become manifest whether the person has new oil in readiness, only then will his patience in expectancy become manifest. (EUD, 213)

The natural original power of endurance is what Aristotle would call a "natural virtue" (see NE 6.13). It is virtue-like, in that it enables a person to function well in the same general kind of situation as the corresponding virtue does, but being a natural endowment, it is not acquired through practice. It is also less powerful and, because it has not been "tested" against strong countervailing motives, more subject to corruption (reverse education).

We must distinguish acts of patience (the practice of patience) from the virtue of patience. The virtue of patience is a person's fitness and inclination to perform acts of patience. It is a trait of the person's character. But reciprocally, the virtue of patience is acquired by performing acts of patience with some regularity. The natural endowment of endurance explains how this reciprocity can get started. By the power of your natural endurance you perform acts in which you "endure" the emotions of impatience, and when, with repetition, such acts become natural to you, you have begun to acquire the virtue of patience.

When "is patient" refers to an action, the action it refers to is the one that expresses most directly the virtue of patience. It is an act of quieting the spirit, of calming or dispelling the emotions of impatience. But the presence of the emotions of impatience indicates a deficiency of the virtue of patience. This apparent paradox (that the action characteristic of the virtue of patience addresses a deficiency of the virtue that it expresses) is due to the fact that virtues come in degrees of depth. The person who *exercises* patience, quieting the emotions of impatience in himself, couldn't act in this way if he had no patience at all, but he wouldn't need to act in this way if he were perfected in patience.

How does one act patiently? What constitutes an act of patience? This action involves accessing reserves of passivity, of rendering oneself more passive, in a way, by relaxation of impatience, of *letting the impatience go*. The emotions of impatience are ones that can motivate in two ways: by their logic, and by their discomfort. Anxiety can move us to find the security that anxiety registers our lack of; or it can move us to avoid the pain of anxiety. Guilt can move us to make reparation for our misdeeds, or it can move us to avoid feeling the pain of guilt. Boredom can move us to find an interesting new activity, or it can move us to quell the discomfort of boredom. We can see the difference here by considering that the discomfort of anxiety, guilt, and boredom can be dispelled in ways other

than finding security, doing reparation, or finding something interesting to do. Alcohol and other drugs can mitigate these distresses, for example, and so, also, can appeal to the eternal. When these emotions make us impatient, our interest is in being done with them. Kierkegaard thinks that the motivation generated by the logic of the emotions of impatience will take us in the wrong direction spiritually. It seeks a resolution of the emotion in the finite and the temporal, and that is ultimately impossible or spiritually counterproductive. This is why we need the virtue of patience. Acts of patience give relief from impatience not by satisfying the emotions of impatience, but by accepting them, or rather by accepting the conditions of the world and self that give rise to them, by the power of a relation to the eternal. We deal with them by accepting the insecurity that anxiety registers, by relaxing into the temporality of the world that boredom registers, and by accepting the guilt that our feelings of guilt register, by seeing them in the perspective of eternity. This acceptance, this relaxing into these conditions, is the action of patience. It is a kind of agency in which one renounces agency, or at any rate external agency (acting "out"). Being patient is action directed at oneself. Remember: "patience is the counter-pressure of resiliency whereby the person who is constrained makes himself free in his constraint" (UDVS, 119).

I began this chapter with reference to Kierkegaard's discourse on Jesus's saying that "In your patience you will gain your souls" (Luke 21:19).[7] He says that the order of words in this saying indicate the process of acquisition that they describe. The phrase contains a repetition, since the import of the word "gain" is just a repetition with added emphasis of the expression "in patience." This repetition makes the words of the statement taken as a whole like a picture of the process of acquisition that they describe. Acquiring your soul is a matter "not of making a conquest, hunting and seizing something, but of becoming more and more quiet, because that which is to be gained is there within a person, and the trouble is that one is outside oneself" (EUD, 170–71). To gain one's soul and to gain patience are the same thing. What you gain in the practice of patience is your soul, because to acquire patience (the virtue) *is* to acquire your soul. Patience is a kind of self-possession. Here Kierkegaard's thought reflects the ancient logic of the concept of a virtue: a virtue is a realization of the essential nature of whatever possesses it; it is the actualization of a potential. It is essential to a soul to be in possession of *itself* rather than of money, reputation, worldly security, and the like, and patience, the quiet of a soul begotten of the soul's relation to the eternal, is a feature of such self-possession.

Just as these words are a repetition, so the soul gains itself by repeated acts of taking possession of itself in patience. The process is not by an action that once for all gains the soul (in patience), but is a gradual inculcation through repeated acts of patience by which the soul becomes more and more quiet (less and less beset by impulses of impatience), and this quietness is a gathering in of the self, which initially was "outside" itself in worldly concerns. Episodes of disturbance of the soul by impatience, which are frequent enough in a typical human life, become occasions for the practice of patience, the act of quieting the soul by reference to the eternal.

The soul was formerly not its own, which is a kind of "contradiction" of its nature as a soul, because to be a soul is to possess that soul, and to possess it is to be it. Self-possession is a mark of a soul's maturity. In contrast with this is the possession of "external" objects that are to be gained by mundane patience. If such aims are the principal or only goods at which a soul aims its patience, the soul doesn't possess itself but is possessed by those aims. The true nature of a soul is spiritual patience, so that what is gained by gaining patience is not something other than the soul, but the soul itself, its self-possession, its "resting in the power that posited it," that power being the eternal, unchangeable God.

Two Disciplines of Patience

Some occasions are especially apt for the practice of patience, and thus for growth in the virtue. Two such occasions are the contemplation of nature and the office of confession.

The Contemplation of Nature

Worldly wisdom, says Kierkegaard,

> has invented a great deal to entertain and divert the mind, and yet the law for this kind of invention ridicules the useless effort by its self-contradiction. The artifice itself is in the service of impatience; it teaches how to compress the multitude of diversions more and more impatiently into the fleeting moment. The more this shrewdness increases, the more it works against itself, since the diversion turns out to cover a shorter and shorter time as the artifice increases. (UDVS, 184, translation slightly altered)

We sometimes use diversions like bowling, movie going, or checking email as a way to relax from the anxieties and stresses of our work. But these diversions are episodic, and the more entertaining they are, the more likely we are to anticipate

them with impatience and the more let down we are when they come to an end. One diversion whets the appetite for another, and we are caught in a cycle of the dissatisfaction of impatience. That is, the more you fall into treating your distresses by snacking, surfing the net, going on cruises, searching out new restaurants, going to shows, and the like, the more you fall into a *vice* of impatience—not just impatience as a momentary feeling, but an impatient *way of life*, a *disposition* to be impatient, impatience as a quality of your soul as one disposed to flit constantly from this to that.

To divert is to direct away: when we divert a river or a train, we make it go a different way than it otherwise would. And worldly diversions seek to reroute our attention away from its usual focus, which has somehow become burdensome, to refresh the mind (soul). But ordinary diversions accomplish this only temporarily, after which we return to the worldly burdens of boredom, anxiety, and guilt. The impatient person craves the excitement of the entertainment, momentarily gets lost in it (all the while dimly aware that he is not actually lost in it, anxiously feeling the urgency of time passing), and then feels the letdown of its climax and of its ending. The impotence of ordinary diversions to pass away the time for long is not just that the entertainment is short-lived, but also that it often lightens the burden of time only for moments as the entertainment proceeds. In the midst of the diversion the restless mind of the fugitive from time wanders from the diversion, and with a nagging whisper wakens the impatience from which he flees. Ordinary diversions don't teach us the virtue of patience.

By contrast, the contemplation of nature, a "godly diversion," can foster growth in the virtue of patience, because we learn this only from a relationship with the eternal.

> O godly diversion, you do not perfidiously and traitorously call yourself a diversion while at the same time with empty noise, with darting impatience, you are in league with boredom, into which you plunge people deeper and deeper—by means of diversion. No, you are in league with the eternal, and therefore only the beginning is difficult; when that is made, then the stillness of diversion grows, and in that stillness grows the persuasion. (UDVS, 185–86)

I say "can" because, although nature has the power to fascinate and beguile and so heal the human mind, it cannot guarantee such an effect, but often requires a certain voluntary cooperation from the contemplator.

> Have you ever looked at the starlit sky, and have you ever really found a more dependable sight! It costs nothing, and so there is no incitement of impatience; nothing is said about this evening, even less about ten o'clock sharp. Oh no, it waits for you, although in another sense it does not wait for

> you—the stars now twinkling in the night have done so, unchanged, for centuries. Just as God makes himself invisible—ah, perhaps this is why many never really become aware of him—so also the starry heaven makes itself insignificant, so to speak—ah, perhaps this is why there are many who have never really seen it. Divine majesty disdains the visible, the falsely conspicuous; the solemnity of the starry heaven is more than unpretentious. Ah, but if you stand still, if perhaps with no purpose in mind you went out there where it is visible, unnoticed year after year, if you by chance halted and looked upward—you surely have sensed it: the persuasion mounts with every instant; more and more movingly it steals the temporal from you; with every moment you continue to contemplate it, that which ought to be forgotten sinks into deeper and deeper oblivion. (UDVS, 185)

What is it "really to see" nature, and through it to be "persuaded" of its creator? Really to see in nature that feature that undermines your impatience is to appreciate its beautiful sameness across time, its apparent tranquility suggestive of eternity. Just as so much is happening in the universe, yet the happening is so continuous and in its way stable, so your human existence is always evolving, though within a possible sameness across time that marks its *character*; and as analogue in the human soul this active sameness is patience. It is the depth of settling into communion with the eternal, of the minimization of the disturbing weight of the temporal. Persuasion (*Overtalelse*) is a vividness of perception of truth. We say, "I've believed it for years, but in that moment it really came home to me." It's something like "appreciation": it is the mental state that convicts, by which you become confident in a vision, see clearly, see with your heart. Spiritual patience is a calmness about the temporal by way of communion with the eternal. It is a diversion from the stress and impatience of the temporal by contemplation of the eternal. This spellbound contemplation of nature affords us a perspective that is patience. The godly diversion diverts the mind from the frenetic concerns of daily life by presenting it with a striking image of eternity—striking *if* one really sees it.

The practice of contemplating in nature the reflection of the eternal, in connection (contrast) with your impatience, can have the effect, thinks Kierkegaard, of fostering your growth in patience. It is not an escape from the temporal—after all, the virtue of spiritual patience is one of the forms of the synthesis of the temporal and the eternal—but it is a "placement," a "location" of the temporal specifically in its relation to the eternal, and thus a relativizing or dethroning of it that can dispel impatience. Impatience can be seen as a disturbing idolatry or hyper-valuation of time, and spiritual patience, accordingly, as a proper and thus calm perspective on time.

The Practice of Confession

We have noted the natural association of guilt with impatience. A person who feels vividly the distress of guilt may be impatiently precipitous in his desire to be quit of it, thus threatening to forestall the development of a virtue of penitence (contrition). Kierkegaard tells the story of such a person, who put himself in jeopardy of an attack of despair in consequence of the immaturity of his repentance (UDVS, 17–18). A convict, having served his sentence, returned to society morally reformed. On release he emigrated far away and in his new place became a respected person; and all was going well for him. Then appeared in this country a man who had been his partner in crime in the bad old days. The sight of this former confederate in his midst was appalling and created a deadly anxiety in this now respected person. Then, when his former comrade began to speak aloud of their past together,

> despair suddenly seized the man who seemed redeemed, and it seized him just because repentance was forgotten, because this civically reformed man was still not surrendered to God in such a way that in the humility of repentance he remembered his former condition. In the temporal and sensuous and civic sense, repentance is still also something that comes and goes over the years, but in the eternal sense it is a quiet daily concern. (UDVS, 18)

Kierkegaard here distinguishes a civic, sensuous, and temporal kind of repentance from repentance "in the eternal sense," that is, genuine repentance, repentance matured by patience. The former "comes and goes over the years" in moments of painful recollection interspersed with patches of self-confidence and oblivious well-being, while the latter has the steadiness and reliability of patience and mature virtue. The repentance of our criminal was of the former kind and marked by the precipitous, burning, off-casting motive of impatience.

To avoid such an unsteady, convulsive penitence, you must practice the office of confession with concerted patience. And this means that you must prepare yourself for it. It is usually not best to repent in the emotional heat of fresh guilt,

> because in this moment of haste, when the engaged thoughts and various passions are still busily in motion or at least tensed in the relaxation, repentance can so easily … confuse itself with … momentary remorse, that is, with impatience; with a painful, tormenting worldly grief, that is, with impatience; with a desperate pulling apart within itself, that is, with impatience. But impatience, however long it continues to rage, however darkened the mind becomes, never becomes repentance. (UDVS, 17)

The purpose of repentance is to build up your character, to achieve freedom in new life, and to make way for joy. Such free openness to joy is a mark of the *virtue* of penitence. Aristotle would not think there could be such a thing as a

virtue of penitence (contrition), because a virtuous person will have nothing to be penitent about (see NE 7.2, 9). But Christianity and Judaism recognize more clearly the depth of human spiritual dysfunction and so realize that if there is to be human virtue at all it must be compatible with being a sinner, and in the virtue of penitence we have a virtue that quite directly addresses sin. We might say that penitence is the virtuous attitude toward one's own sin. And this virtue is supported by patience practiced in the preparation for confession.

> No, regret must be an action with a collected mind, so it can be spoken about for upbuilding, so it may of itself give birth to new life, so that it does not become an event whose mournful legacy is a sorrowful mood; repentance in the sense of freedom with the stamp of eternity must have its time, yes, even its time for preparation. (UDVS, 16)

To regret something is to be sorry that it happened; when I regret an action, thought, emotion, or other product of my freedom, I am sorry that I *did* it. Regret is surely an emotion, and so not an action, strictly speaking. But we can do things to bring on regret, and when we do them for the express purpose of bringing it on, as we do in the office of confession, we can speak about regret as an action. It is more natural to speak of repentance as an action; repentance would be the spiritual action that one performs in confessing one's sin, and it will involve the pain of regret. Merely going through the "motions" of confession would not really be confession, because the repentance and regret are absent from it. Repentance is the action that the virtue of penitence enables and fosters, and Kierkegaard is saying that repentance, to be mature, must be practiced patiently.

He sketches what maturity in repentance—that is, the virtue of penitence—is by contrasting it with less mature regret of wrongdoing:

> There is a suffering of repentance; it certainly does not bear the punishment impatiently, yet at every moment it is writhing under it. If so, repentance is still young and weak. There is a quiet, sleepless sorrow at the thought of what has been wasted; it does not despair, but in its daily grieving it never rests. If so, repentance is still young and weak. There is a toilsome progress in the good that is like the gait of one whose feet are blistered; it is willing enough, would so like to walk swiftly, but its bold confidence has been damaged and the pain makes its walking precarious and agonizing. If so, repentance is still young and weak. But if a surer step is made on the path, if the punishment itself becomes a blessing, if the consequences become even redemptive, if the progress in the good is visible, then there is a mitigated but deep sorrow that recollects the guilt. It has removed and overcome what could deceive and confuse the vision; this is why it is not mistaken but sees only that one sad thing: this is the adult, the strong, the powerful repentance. (UDVS, 18–19)

It is also the patience that has matured into a strong disposition of the heart. If you can clearly see the good that painful regret has wrought in your life, joy in

this good mitigates your sorrow. The joy doesn't remove the regret but qualifies it. And this combination is a more "natural" patience in the suffering than the patience that is exemplified in the earlier, less mature cases of repentance. So, just like other virtues that are gradually acquired by the less-than-ideal practice of them, patience is a fruit of the practice of patience.

How is repentance practiced patiently? Let's return to the story of the reformed convict whose old associate suddenly shows up and starts talking, casting him into despair. How might the practice of penitence have enabled him to encounter the former associate with frank and honest equanimity? How might he have practiced penitence so as to build up his character, give him freedom in new life, and make way for joy? We're not told about the convict's spiritual practices during or after his imprisonment, but we can imagine the ways in which they were deficient in patience as serving to cultivate the virtue of penitence. So this will be an exercise in moral imagination.

First, whether the office of confession involves a pastor or priest in the role of listener or is simply prayer directed in private to God, the patient practice will not be an effort to put the guilt behind me once and for all, but I will dwell in it in the presence of a forgiving God. The explanation for the mitigation of the distress of penitence in its most mature form is the graciousness of the God to whom I humbly confess. Humility is a supporting virtue in the practice of confession, for it takes humility to internalize God's grace in connection with my serious distress about my sin. Second, I will process my guilt not by justifying my action or mitigating its seriousness in my own eyes, but by honestly taking responsibility for it, feeling its wrongness and the role of my own agency in it. I will probably have impulses to justify or mitigate (maybe by casting blame on other persons or other factors such as my misfortunes), but when I feel such impulses I will patiently combat them by honest and humble acknowledgment of *my* responsibility. Third, when I find myself wanting to forget my misdeeds, I humbly bring them before my mind. Fourth, when I feel the panic of impatience to be rid of my guilt, I will employ my wisdom and truthfulness to admit the difference between impulses of impatience for relief and the remorse of feeling the seriousness of my offense. Fifth, instead of emigrating to avoid exposure to other people's consciousness of my criminality, I dwell among these knowers in frank shared knowledge of my penal status—or, if I do emigrate, I frankly let my past be known to my new associates. And sixth, I will concentrate on keeping myself in the practice of the virtues to the best of my ability, gaining new and better dispositions and putting my criminal actions farther and farther in the

past.

Does Spiritual Patience Promote Mundane Patience?

Spiritual patience is a dimension of the synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, and mundane patience is not. Spiritual patience is the ability to live a temporal life from which impatience has been dispelled by your relation to the eternal. Mundane patience by itself belongs simply and wholly to the temporal: it makes use of temporal "wisdom" and aims at and yields a temporal benefit. Examples of its "wisdom" are *birds come to where the traps are only in the early evening* and *swimming your laps takes about an hour*. The benefit in each case is a calm presence of mind during the activity with all the benefits that that, in turn, can yield—say, productivity in catching birds. Mundane patience seems to be more or less specific to kinds of activity, such as gardening, investing, cooking, and so forth. Spiritual patience, whose wisdom is theological and which is trust in the eternal and the perspective of a relationship with the eternal on whatever you experience, yields above all the relation to God and thus the virtue of spiritual patience and the possession of your soul. That is the primary good you get out of it.

But, since spiritual patience is *general* patience, it will make you patient in those activities that mundane concerns motivate. Despite its origin in wisdom about God and a consequent trust in God, spiritual patience applies to secular projects like hiking to a destination or understanding Kierkegaard's writings or swimming your laps or catching birds. That is implied by spiritual patience's being a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal. But the fact that spiritual patience yields temporal benefits is not sufficient for calling it mundane, because the "rationale" for spiritual patience is love for and trust in the eternal God. A testimony of Brother Lawrence (Nicholas Herman of Lorraine) illustrates beautifully the relation between spiritual patience and the mundane:

> "The time of business," said [Brother Lawrence], "does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clutter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament."[8]

The standard Aristotelian conception of a virtue says that a virtue is a fulfillment quality, a property that makes what possesses it to be a complete or mature

(*teleios*) specimen of its species. According to Kierkegaard, a human self or soul is a self-constituting synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, the finite and the infinite, that is, a being who lives its finite, temporal life voluntarily (willing to be) before the eternal God in such a way that its actions, passions, and emotions bear the stamp of that relationship. A dimension of that stamp is patience. Without patience, the synthesis is incomplete and the soul is not yet a fully formed human soul according to Kierkegaard's Christian psychology of character. Spiritual patience is a reliable disposition to be free in all circumstances—even ones that are quite stressful like those depicted in Luke 21:10–19—from a kind of precipitousness of action begotten of a panic of impatience. Such moments of precipitousness betoken an insufficient access to the eternal, which is to be constant and reliable in all finite circumstances. Along the way we have noted the connection of spiritual patience to other virtues. For example, patience depends on humility, while hope—the expectation of good—depends on patience, and patience on faith.

I have called humility and patience "satellite" virtues because they are anchored by the virtues that centrally constitute Christian character: faith, hope, and love. In the final chapter of this book I turn to the satellite virtue of gratitude; and I will also discuss generosity, the virtue to which gratitude is a natural response.

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1. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines patiency as: "The quality of being acted on, passivity. Chiefly in contrast with agency."

2. The New Testament words for patience are *hypomonē* (*hypomenein*), *makrothymia* (*makrothymein*), and *anoxē* (*anechesthai*).

3. David Brooks, in *The Road to Character* (New York: Random House, 2015), xi–xiv, has distinguished résumé virtues from eulogy virtues. Résumé virtues are traits of character that make you useful to an enterprise, that help you "succeed" at what you try to accomplish; eulogy virtues make you good as a human being. Kierkegaard's two kinds of patience divide along similar lines.

4. Kierkegaard's later expression is "become a self." See especially *The Sickness unto Death*.

5. Synthesis doesn't imply equality of factors synthesized.

6. The phrasing is Kierkegaard's (EUD, 189).

7. This is the wording used in the Hong translation of Kierkegaard's discourse.

8. Quoted in Hannah Whitall Smith, introduction to Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1897), *Internet Archive*, https://archive.org/stream/brotherlawrencep00lawr/brotherlawrencep00lawr_djvu.txt.

14 Gratitude and Generosity

Oh, the more I think of what has been granted to me, the more I need an eternity in which to thank God.

Journals and Papers §3704

Reflection and Gratitude

Throughout this book we have testified to the importance of thoughts in Kierkegaard's psychology of character. The person of character is, among other, connected attributes, someone who has learned to think about himself or herself, about God, and about other people, in certain determinate virtuous ways. Such people have shaped their way of "seeing the world" by "set[ting] their minds on" (Rom. 8:5, *phronein*) certain upbuilding thoughts, or on "things that are above" (Col. 3:2), by "think[ing] about" (*logizesthai*) what is true, what is honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, excellent, and worthy of praise (Phil. 4:8), by "tak[ing] thought" (*pronooumenos*) for what is noble in the sight of all (Rom. 12:17). Perhaps God speaks to some people, or gives them experiences of himself, in ways that are less mediated by thinking, but Kierkegaard says of himself,

> I do not have an immediate God-relationship to appeal to, nor do I dare to say that it is God who directly contributes the thoughts to me, but that my relationship to God is a relationship of reflection, inwardness in reflection, since reflection is the predominant quality of my individuality; this is also why in praying my strength is in giving thanks. (PV, 74)

Why would Kierkegaard connect giving thanks, or a "strength" in giving thanks, with reflection? I take it that a strength in giving thanks is both an inclination and an ability to give thanks to God—the virtue of gratitude. Kierkegaard is saying that he is especially adept at giving thanks that is properly directed *to God* and that he is deeply moved to do so, and that this trait is connected with his being by nature a thinker. How do we make ourselves grateful—either to a particular person for a particular benefit, or more broadly and generally? It seems to me that we do so by dwelling on the benefit, thinking about the impact it has had on us, on what life would be without it. But even more, we become grateful by dwelling on the giver's goodwill toward us in bestowing the benefit—the giver's love, perhaps as reflected in the difficulty the giver overcame to

procure the gift for us, the giver's steadfastness in pursuing the good for us, or the suffering the giver endured for our sake, and on our own unworthiness to be so blessed. To be grateful is very different from thoughtlessly "taking for granted" what we have been given or thinking ourselves deserving of what we have received. Kierkegaard repeatedly says that writing his works was his own ethical and spiritual upbringing. If we enhance our gratitude by concertedly contemplating the benefit we have received, the benefactor who gave it, and the benevolence with which he or she gave it to us, it is not surprising that the feeling of gratitude is an impression of these things in their relations to one another. The impression is a product of the thinking, a coming of these things to mind. And such reflection can become a habit, a part of our "second nature," a strength in giving thanks.

Kierkegaard attests that gratitude to God was second nature to him. He had an intense and continuous sense of dependency on God and joy in God's love and guidance. He says that his reliance on and interaction with God is so organic and present, as he writes *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, that "I do not need the help of memory or recollection, or of journals and diaries, or to compare these with one another—I am reliving it again so vividly, so presently, at this moment" (PV, 72). He speaks of "the indescribable things" that God has done for him, and of marveling over God, God's love, and his amazement at what a weak and sickly human being like him can accomplish with God's help. A frustration that he feels in connection with his gratitude is a "poet impatience" to find a way of putting into words what he is experiencing. He compares himself to the king who shouted impatiently, "My kingdom for a horse." His poet nature can think of nothing more wonderful, nothing so worth dying for, as to have apt expressions of his thankfulness come to mind. And then: there they are: "expressions so soothing to the feeling of gratitude in me, so cooling to the hot longing—it seems to me that if I had a winged pen, indeed, ten of them, I still would be unable to keep up with the abundance offered to me" (PV, 73). But then, when he tries to put these expressions on paper, a paralysis comes over him: it is as though the abundance of ideas crowding up create a dam, and he seems to hear a voice saying, Dullard, don't you know that obedience is dearer to God than the fat of rams? Just do it as a work assignment.

> Then I become completely calm; then there is time to write every letter, almost meticulously, with my slower pen. And if that poet passion awakens in me again for a moment, I seem to hear a voice speak to me as a teacher speaks to a boy: Now, just hold the pen properly and write each letter exactly. Then I can do it, then I dare not do anything else, then I write each word, each line, almost unaware of the next word and the next line. (PV, 73)

When he later reads over what he has written with this recaptured patience, he has a different pleasure than flooding the page with self-"expression" would have afforded. He realizes that he may have failed to put down some of the glowing phrases that so excited him, but he has produced something else: "It is not the work of the poet passion or of the thinker passion, but of devotion to God, and for me a divine worship" (PV, 73).

The Social Structure of Gratitude

Another emphasis of this book has been the social nature of Kierkegaard's thought. Becoming a "single individual" is an ideal formation of character (a virtue-like state) that implies being embedded in a primary *relationship* with God having many ramifications in the individual's relationships with fellow human beings, as we can see by reading *Works of Love*.

It is natural to think that gratitude has the following social form: When you are grateful, your feeling is directed *to* someone (a person) *for* something. You construe the situation as having three interconnected poles: a beneficiary (usually you), a benefit, and a benefactor. An important part of the connection is that in gratitude's vision the benefactor stands out as caring about you and has expressed that caring or love by bestowing the benefit on you. Furthermore, you care about the benefit; it seems really good to you. Gratitude is your caring recognition of the benefactor's caring bestowal of the benefit. It is a response to the love of the benefactor, and the beneficiary's response is also love.

In fact, the benefit, as something external to the benefactor's benevolence toward you, can drop out, so that the benefit *is* just the benefactor's love for you. This happens among human beings when the intended benefit misfires for one reason or another: you give someone something intending for it to benefit her; but it doesn't do so. If the beneficiary is mature in her gratitude, she will feel grateful to you nevertheless. Now the benefit for which she is grateful is just your benevolence. Thus, gratitude at its best is a specific kind of interpersonal love—namely, one that is mediated by the bestowal of a benefit. Gratitude to God has traditionally taken this triadic form. The General Prayer of Thanksgiving in the *Book of Common Prayer* reads, "Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants give *you* humble thanks *for* all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made. We bless *you for* our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life."[1]

Some thinkers about gratitude, who feel uncomfortable with the idea of God, have come up with another kind of gratitude that they sometimes feel in response to good things that cannot be plausibly attributed to any personal agency, for example, their life or a fortuitous escape from a threatening evil (the large tree fell just inches from me, without touching me). Brother David Steindl-Rast distinguishes "thankfulness," which has the to-for structure that I have outlined, from "gratefulness," which does not. An atheist may say, "I'm so grateful that it didn't rain on my wedding party." She's not grateful *to* anybody; she's just grateful. Brother David would say that she's expressing gratefulness, but if she is a deeply committed atheist, without even the vaguest hinting suspicions of a personal good will behind it all, it seems to me more precise to say, "I am so glad that…."[2] She is expressing *joy* (perhaps more specifically *relief*), but it is misleading to say that she's *grateful*—misleading in the direction of suggesting vaguely that she has in mind some benevolent higher power *to* whom (or which) she feels grateful for that lovely spring day. Brother David calls such "gratefulness" transpersonal, but again it seems to me better to call it impersonal, because by hypothesis it is not gratitude *to* anyone. By contrast, for Kierkegaard gratitude or thankfulness is a personal relationship—first with God, and secondarily with fellow human beings.

Gratitude to God

In a journal entry from 1849 Kierkegaard notes that he has chosen his difficult life both out of a desire to atone for his sin and from gratitude for the great blessings of his life.

> It is true that I have been willing to venture, to make a sacrifice, to expose myself to dangers; it is true that the thought of my personal guilt and the hope of possibly doing something good in return have been with me—but I must also confess that my whole life has been an indescribable joy or satisfaction, which is also why in praying to God I always thank him for the indescribable good he has done to me, far more than I had expected. (PV, 212)

But he does not think that his small atonement is any substitute for the Atonement wrought in and by Jesus Christ for the sins of the world. Gratitude to God for God's atonement provides the Christian's motive for ethical and religious efforts to live a better life:

> Christianly the emphasis does not fall so much upon to what extent or how far a person succeeds in meeting or fulfilling the requirement, if he actually is striving, as it is upon his getting an impression of the requirement in all its infinitude so that he rightly learns to be humbled and to rely upon grace

> … infinite humiliation and grace, and then a striving born of gratitude—this is Christianity. (JP 1:993)

For Kierkegaard, God's benevolence—his good will toward us sinful human beings—is a nonnegotiable article of faith based in God's demonstration of his love for us in Christ's atonement for our sins. This is why it is always appropriate, regardless of our particular circumstances, which can be pretty horrific, to give thanks to God, to rejoice gratefully in God's benevolence and beneficence, and to be moved by this gratitude to try to be faithful to God's goodness.

That the central object of Christian gratitude is Christ's atonement is not to deny that we can be properly grateful for particular finite blessings and can pray for the removal of particular evils. But the person whose gratitude is a Christian trait of character will give thanks for what he regards as good and pray for the removal of what he regards as evil *with a certain self-skepticism* that Johannes Climacus calls "dialectical uncertainty." We finite human beings aren't always (or ever?) the best judges of what is good for us or the contrary, although we cannot but trust our own judgment to some extent, or at least hypothetically. The person with the Christian virtue of gratitude keeps ever in mind the proviso, "if it be thy will" and "thy will be done." In a footnote, Climacus illustrates dialectical uncertainty about the objects of one's gratitude by quoting a person who was deficient in it. " 'After many errors, I finally learned to cling to God in earnest, and since that time he has not left me. My business flourishes, my projects prosper, I am now happily married, and my children are healthy, etc.' " (CUP 1:446, footnote). Climacus thinks that if this person's gratitude is not, in a sense, hypothetical—if it is not marked with the skeptical proviso—then the gratitude fails to be *to God*. He goes on,

> Even if he deigns to say that he thanks God for all these blessings, the question still is *how* he thanks him, whether he does it directly or first makes the movement of uncertainty that is the mark of the relationship with God. In other words, just as a person experiencing misfortune does not have the right to say to God directly that it is misfortune, since he must suspend his judgment in the movement of uncertainty, so also he may not appropriate all these good things as a sign of the relationship with God. (CUP 1:446, footnote, italics added)

Note that the skepticism here is not about God's disposition toward the one who gives thanks. The Christian believes that God is always well disposed toward him or her. The uncertainty is about how the finite object of thanks (for example, the flourishing of one's business or the children's health) figures in God's providence. It *seems* to the thanker to be a good, a blessing, but to claim or

believe that with dogmatic certainty is as presumptuous as it would be to suppose with equal certainty that the death of one's child is an evil. God's ways are not our ways, and that insight is another formulation of the "movement of uncertainty." We execute the movement of uncertainty when, in the midst of our grateful enthusiasm for the blessings of this life, we remind ourselves that God's ways are not our ways. And by thus humbly respecting God's sovereignty and transcendence, we help to ensure that our gratitude connects to *God*.

Socrates thought that one's character, for good or for ill, was a matter of the order of one's cares (*Apology* 36c–d). We care more about some things than about others, and our living (our "existence," including both actions and emotions) reflects what we care most about. We give priority to what concerns us most, and we also get most exercised emotionally about what we care most about. Socrates thought that the *proper* order for a human being was to care most about the moral and social good, which he associated with obeying God, and only secondarily and subordinately about other things such as money, reputation, longevity, and the like. We have seen this same idea about the nature of good character in Climacus's formula for the task of becoming a human being, "to be able simultaneously to relate oneself absolutely to the absolute *telos* [end or goal] and relatively to the relative ends" (CUP 1:414). This thought is also the formula for the Christian virtue of gratitude, in which thankfulness is directed preeminently to God for the God relationship, and secondarily to God for finite blessings. Climacus illustrates this with an example in the same footnote that I have cited, the example of an actor's response to public acclaim:

> When, for example the great actor Sydelmann (as I read in Rötscher's biography of him), on the night he was crowned with a wreath in the opera house "to applause that lasted several minutes," then went home and very fervently thanked God for it—the very fervency of his giving thanks shows that he did not thank God. With the same passion with which he gave thanks, he would have revolted against God if he had been booed. If he had given thanks religiously and therefore thanked God, then the Berlin public and the laurel wreath and the applause lasting several minutes would have become equivocal in the dialectical uncertainty of the religious. (CUP 1:446)

If Climacus is right about the order of Sydelmann's cares, his character fault would be that he cares more about the applause than about God's love for him, and is presumptuous in supposing he knows better than God what is good for him. Consequently, when he thanks "God" for his success, the *to* of his gratitude misses its mark: the "God" he intends is not in fact God, but a finite concoction of his own concerns and misguided understanding. The virtue of gratitude predicts that he will thank the real God with equal enthusiasm, whether the

audience covers him with laurels or hisses him off the stage. Sydelmann's disposition to withhold gratitude from what he calls God in case things seem to him to have gone wrong falsifies the hypothesis that his passionate thanking of "God" that evening was an expression of the virtue of gratitude.

If Sydelmann is a cautionary example, Job shows us what a real virtue of gratitude to God looks like, as Kierkegaard explains in an edifying discourse from 1843. Job is a teacher of mankind, not by presenting a doctrine, but by the example of his well-ordered passions. True, he presents the order of his passions by a saying that expresses his thought, but the saying would have a different meaning and would be a different thought were it lifted away from the life context in which Job said it. Job utters his words in response to a series of reports that all the finite objects of his satisfactions and joys have been ripped from him: all his great wealth of oxen, donkeys, camels, sheep, and servants have been destroyed or carried off and, worst of all, his children have been killed when the house where they were feasting was blown down by a mighty wind. "Then Job arose, and tore his robe, and shaved his head, and fell upon the ground, and worshiped, saying: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; the Lord gave, and the Lord took away; blessed be the name of the Lord' " (Job 1:20–21; quoted in EUD, 109). Kierkegaard notes that Job doesn't start by lamenting his loss, but by gratefully acknowledging the Lord's generosity to him: "the Lord gave." *Then* he addresses the current situation, in which the Lord has taken away the finite blessings, and responds by worshiping and pronouncing the name of the Lord to be blessed in his sight. Kierkegaard doesn't think that, because Job worshiped the Lord who was responsible for his losses, Job minimized his suffering or was indifferent to the losses. Job is no Stoic,[3] and Kierkegaard uses words like "terrible," "horror," "distress," and "the battle of despair" to describe Job's pain. Nevertheless, to people who are not sissies about facing the horrors that are possible in human existence, Job stands as a comforter of humankind who "witnesses that the horror has been suffered, the terror has been experienced, the battle of despair has been fought to the glory of God, for [Job's] own rescue, for the benefit and happiness of others" (EUD, 110, translation slightly altered).

In my discussions of Kierkegaard on the concepts of character and virtues I have tried to bring out his anti-existentialist and biblical insistence on the steadfastness of the person of character. The ups and downs of life test our character by testing its steadiness. While not denying the fleshy finitude of the person of character, or the circumstantial drama of his finite sensitivities,

Kierkegaard insists that the person of character is no slave of circumstances, but a being with an eternal dimension that allows him to put current circumstances in perspective, thus transcending them. Job, as exemplar of the virtue of gratitude, illustrates this unwavering tenderness.

However, Kierkegaard warns us at some length against a false (and most likely sentimental and unrealistic) sense that we understand Job. We read that he was able, in the midst of his terrible sufferings of loss, to maintain his sense of God's love for him and his heartfelt appreciation of the blessings that God had showered on him. In a way, we understand his beautiful words, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord," and we understand that he uttered them at a time when the blessings had been taken away. But do we understand *Job*? Do we understand *how* he did it? Kierkegaard takes us through a series of characters—the child, the youth, the adult—all of whom understand the words of the saying, but without really understanding Job (EUD, 111–12), culminating in "the tested person," who "understands the saying, he interprets it, even if he never talked about it, more gloriously than the person who spent his whole life explaining just this one saying" (EUD, 112). Understanding Job goes beyond the ability to explain him, as Kierkegaard does so deeply in his discourse and as I am trying to do, following Kierkegaard, in this chapter. Understanding Job requires being "the tested person," the person of patience, honesty, humility, courage, and faith who has experienced, at least in ruthless imagination, losses like Job's and emerged a person of joyful gratitude to God.

People may react to loss in a variety of ways that preclude the development of the virtue of gratitude to God. They may defend themselves against the personal devastation by minimizing the goodness of the good things they had enjoyed: "It wasn't really that great; those things didn't really make me happy." Or they may resent their former joy because it set them up for this terrible pain: Had they never known how happy life could be, they wouldn't now be so disappointed. Or they may be angry with themselves for waiting until now that their blessings have been taken away, to be sensitive to how wonderful they were; and they may spend their time fantasizing about having them back for a moment so they can properly enjoy them. Or they sink into denial, refusing to admit to themselves that the blessings are lost, cravenly avoiding any humble striving to reconcile themselves with their loss. Gratitude to God is not a virtue that can live in isolation from other virtues. It needs the support of honesty to reckon with the loss and its magnitude and the support of courage to address the fear of the

truth; the support of patience to wait on the Lord in his ultimate goodness; the support of humility to submit to God's will; and of faith to believe in God's goodness through it all.

Another way that growth in gratitude may be hindered is by fixing on the penultimate, finite causes of one's loss (see EUD, 118–21). It was the Sabeans who raided the herds and cut down the servants; lightning destroyed the sheep and shepherds; a storm from the desert blew down the house and killed the children. Kierkegaard stresses that, though each of the messengers offers a finite explanation of each loss, Job responds by immediately attributing the loss to the Lord's agency: "the Lord took away." The virtue of gratitude to God is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, the finite and the infinite. If we attribute the finite blessings of our life to God, it is just confusing to attribute the withdrawal of those same blessings to the Sabeans and the lightning. Both *can* be attributed to finite causes, but the virtue of gratitude to God, as Job shows, involves attributing everything to God; it is a form of the God relationship. Job doesn't deny the messengers' finite attributions, but it is part of our comfort in the Lord —part of our sense that life is ultimately good—that God, who is good beyond our finite understanding, is in control of everything, not just the things that seem good to us. In the midst of the loss of his finite blessings, Job thanks God for the blessings, but he doesn't thank God for taking them away; that is perhaps more than human frailty can achieve, and it might bespeak an inhuman transcendence of a person's finite humanity.

The goodness of God's will and gifts toward us is not the only thing we properly recognize with gratitude. In a derivative way, *we* give good gifts to one another that reflect *our* good will. And these too are to be received and recognized with gratitude. Vis-à-vis God, we are only receivers, but vis-à-vis our fellow human beings, we are receivers *and* givers.

Gratitude and Generosity to Fellow Human Beings

Since we occupy the role of giver as well as that of receiver of benefits, and since we may occupy either of these roles well or badly, we need to think about two virtues in tandem: gratitude by which we receive benefits from one another, and generosity by which we confer them on one another. Gratitude is the fitting response to another person's generous acts, thoughts, and concerns. I use the word "generosity" for the giving virtue even though Kierkegaard does not, and in *Works of Love* even objects to doing so, because it seems to me the best word we

have. I will comment on his objection a little later. In the discourse from which I will chiefly inform this discussion, he gives no name for what I will call generosity. Instead, he speaks of being "willing to give," and then offers comments about *ways* a person may be willing to give good things to another, distinguishing the right way of being willing to give from several deviant ways of being so.

In 1843 Kierkegaard published three very different discourses with the same title, "Every Good and Every Perfect Gift Is from Above." The third of these discourses (EUD, 141–58) is about our gratitude and generosity toward fellow human beings, and Kierkegaard's thesis is that the right (virtuous) way to practice giving and receiving good things to and from one another is by keeping steadily in mind that every good and perfect gift is from above. The text of the discourse is James 1:17–22, the title being from verse 17, but Kierkegaard immediately jumps ahead to chapter 2, where James warns against letting our attitude toward one another be influenced by distinctions of higher and lower social status.

If a richly dressed person and a poor person in dirty clothes both come into the congregational meeting, and we honor the well-dressed person but motion the poor man to sit in a corner on the floor at the back of the room, James suggests, we must not really believe "in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" (James 2:1–3). Instead, true Christians are like our Lord in treating all persons as equals. Clothes, fancy or ragged, should elicit absolutely no difference in the way we treat the persons wearing them, or in the attitude that such treatment expresses. Worldly ways of distinguishing persons by their relative "worth" are almost countless: intelligence, fame, achievements, wealth, beauty, parentage, jobs, skills, and so forth; and the kind of difference that matters to one person may not matter to another. But we are all inclined unchristianly to use such differences to sort people according to differences of worth. One basic distinguishing factor, and the one that is directly relevant to generosity and gratitude, is whether a person is in a position *to give to another* or, rather, in a position of *needing to receive* from another. James 1:17 specifies for the giver-recipient distinction the principle that before God, all persons are of equal worth. Christian generosity and gratitude both entail seeing no difference of personal worth corresponding to the distinction between the ability to give and the need to receive.

The human tendency to make the giver-recipient distinction into a distinction of personal worth can be illustrated by part of Aristotle's description of the person with the virtue of greatness of soul (*megalopsychia*,

"magnanimity") (NE 4.3).[4] Greatness of soul is the crown of the virtues, according to Aristotle. The person with greatness of soul is one who possesses all the virtues, and whose thinking and acting is guided by knowledge of this fact about himself. Greatness of soul makes a person enjoy conferring benefits, but ashamed of receiving them, "for the one is a mark of the superior, the other of an inferior." If someone does him a favor, he tries to do the giver an even greater favor in return, thus regaining the upper hand in the struggle for superiority. Also, the great of soul tend to remember benefits they have conferred, but to forget the ones they've received, and to hear with pleasure about the favors they've done for others, but with displeasure about the ones others have done them. To put the point dramatically, the interaction involves the person in the giver position depressing the value of the person in the receiver position, dominating the receiver in the competition for personal worth, exploiting the other's inferiority to the profit of his or her own superiority. *Interpersonal* generosity—as distinct from the virtue of magnificence, which is giving wealth for public works, thus a kind of civic virtue of the rich (see NE 4.2)—is a use of kindness for a hostile takeover of another person's agency. Since the transaction is a matter of benefits freely bestowed, this motivational dynamic is covert, largely unadmitted even to the parties themselves, and cloaked in pretensions of beneficence.

Aafke Elisabeth Komter cites the story of Marina Tsvetajeva.[5] The story illustrates Aristotle's generosity dynamic from the point of view of a self-aware "loser." Tsvetajeva was a poet whom the Bolshevik revolutionaries persecuted by preventing the publication of her works. As a result, she had to live with her two children in an icy room in her parents' house and accept handouts of food from friends and acquaintances. She accepted these gifts but found them deeply humiliating, even an attack on her selfhood. Speaking warningly to the person in the position of giver, Kierkegaard asks whether you are willing to give someone help in such a way that you become his soul's enemy. Would you "murder his soul as you saved his body?" (EUD, 147). In self-defense, Tsvetajeva used a reframing device against those who would murder her with kindness. To prevent the painful sense of her own servility and of the giver as coopting her agency in dominating it, she depersonalized the transactions by construing the giver not as a person, but as merely a hand, and herself as not a person, but merely a stomach. A detached hand placing food in a detached stomach was just a physical movement, not an intolerable and spiritually abusive interpersonal exchange.

The problem with this solution is that, to inoculate both parties against an abuse of generosity and gratitude, it erases the persons altogether and thereby rules out the virtues of giving and receiving. Kierkegaard's proposal bears a distant similarity to Tsvetajeva's solution, in reconceptualizing both agents to defend against an abuse of gift-giving or -receiving. Only, instead of reducing the human-personal to the merely physical, he subsumes the human-personal in the love of the divine-personal. And instead of denying or obscuring reality, he can claim to plumb reality's depths.

In the second chapter of James's letter, he pictures the Christian congregation as under threat of incursion by the distinctions of human worth. But the idea that God is no respecter of persons is native to the congregation as under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and is its defense as long as single individuals there keep it alive for application in their life. It is true that even these virtuous ones have a "sensate eye" and a "sensate mind" that are alive to the worldly distinctions and vulnerable to their misguidance (they are sinners, after all), but they are not enslaved to the perceptions of splendor and squalor and "know how to rise above the concern [envy, shame] occasioned by" their own lack of such splendor or possession of such squalor (EUD, 141).

> And even if [the single individual] sometimes forgets about equality again and loses himself, distracted by life's confusing distinctions, nevertheless his mind, every time he goes to the hallowed place, will be preserved in equality before God during that time and will be educated to preserve increasingly this equality in the clamor of the world and with it to penetrate the confusion. (EUD, 141–42)

Kierkegaard stresses less than some of us might wish the role of the congregation in character development, but in the opening paragraphs of this upbuilding discourse he accepts the cue in James 2 to make the congregation a "hallowed place" where a disciple is constantly reminded of the fundamental equality of all persons before God.[6] Of course, the congregation is such a hallowed place only if it has discarded the power and squalor of the world, "so that the intercessory prayer can be prayed equally truly and interchangeably for the ruler and the powers that be and for those who are sick and sorrowful, for the person who leans on his scepter and for the overburdened person who has to be contented that God is his rod and his staff" (EUD, 142–43). By frequenting a congregation in which the equality of all before God is taught and earnestly practiced, the individual is gradually weaned off the concern-burdened perception of human distinctions: "the divine equality … opens the soul to the perfect and blinds the sensate eye to the difference" (EUD, 143).

Kierkegaard first discusses generosity and then gratitude. He introduces both discussions by proposing to make a "pilgrimage" with the text of James 1:17 into differences of status that are due to being able to give (EUD, 145–51), and differences that are due to needing to receive (EUD, 151–56). And he says that if it "stands firm" that every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, then the differences will be both canceled and perfected. This cancelation and perfection of the difference is a matter of how the gift, the giver, and the receiver are seen by the one party or the other. This way of seeing these elements is to become a matter of "habit" or disposition or *hexis*,[7] an alteration of personality or character, due to regular choices such as going to church and attending sensitively to the words that sustain the congregation: the single individual is to be "*educated* to preserve *increasingly* this equality in the clamor of the world" (EUD, 141–42, italics added).

Generosity

I begin with a note about the word "generosity" (in Danish, *Gavmildhed*). In *Works of Love*, in the deliberation titled "Mercifulness, a Work of Love Even If It Can Give Nothing and Is Able to Do Nothing" (WL, 315–30), Kierkegaard contrasts compassion (mercifulness) with generosity. He begins the deliberation by criticizing the "worldly" talk from pulpits about beneficence and generosity, which thus addresses only people with money to give, neglecting compassion, a spiritual attitude and motive that even poor people can exemplify. People who happen to have money *may* express compassion by generosity with their money, but the idea of generosity doesn't *imply* compassion, according to Kierkegaard's usage in this deliberation. A person might be "generous" to get her name plastered on the front of a building, or to ease a stinging conscience, or out of a desire to get the preacher to stop pestering her.[8]

I'm not confident about the nuances of *Gavmildhed*, but I am sure that "generosity" can be the name of a virtue and that when it is, it entails a motive, and involves giving benefits not only of money, but of a wide variety of kinds. When Wittgenstein gave away all his money because he didn't want to be encumbered by it, he wasn't being generous even though the amount he gave was considerable. In fact, he was being self-serving, in an admirable sort of way. It is true that we sometimes use "generous" in a mildly comical and derivative way, as when I respond to my grandmother's piling food on my plate by saying, "Grandmother, you give really generous helpings," and she responds, "I want to

get rid of it; it's taking up room in the fridge." But in its deepest sense, generosity implies unselfishness—concern for the well-being of the person or persons who receive the benefit. And so, to the extent that I'm being generous, I am *not* trying to display my superiority to the recipient or attach him to myself by a kind of debt-bondage or dominate him in the interest of my own power. Such motives pollute and degrade generosity, making it cease to be generosity if they are dominant. These are all points that Kierkegaard makes in the discourse on every good and every perfect gift, in its application to the giver, though without using the word "generosity." And this generosity of spirit is a trait that regular attendance at a congregation of persons who are guided by the thought that every good and every perfect gift comes from above can be expected to inculcate.

So this section of *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* (145–51) is about generosity. The main point of the discourse is to show how constant attention to the text (James 1:17) cancels and perfects the distinction between the one who can give and the one who must receive, a distinction which, in the world, is liable to poison the relationship and the individuals involved. The poison is status-differentiation, and it poisons because it is invidious and unloving and thus inconsistent with generosity. Both generosity and gratitude are variants of love—the giver's love for the recipient and the recipient's responsive love for the giver. The words of James 1:17 present a thought that can both cancel and perfect the difference between the human parties of the gift relationship if that thought is held fast in contemplation of giver, gift, and recipient in the course of acts of generosity.

It may seem paradoxical to say that one and the same thought can *both* cancel *and* perfect the same thing, namely, the distinction between giver and receiver. Cancelation of something and perfection of the same thing seems impossible. If, say, I cancel an appointment, I no longer have the appointment, and so I can't perfect it. Is that not right? I think it is. So we need a distinction: what is canceled must not be exactly what is perfected.

Kierkegaard is really talking about two kinds of distinction here. On the one hand, you have the distinction between the one who is able to give and the one who must receive. This distinction can't be canceled if we are to have generosity and gratitude; both virtues depend on *that* distinction holding fast. But people perversely associate that distinction with the distinction that Aristotle's great-souled people are so concerned about: the distinction between the superior person and the inferior person. That's the distinction that made life intolerable for Marina Tsvetajeva. The association of these two distinctions—the necessary

distinction and the invidious distinction—is deep in human nature, so deep that Aristotle and Tsvetajeva think they can't be separated. Kierkegaard says the invidious distinction is "indigenous in people's gifts" (EUD, 145), but he thinks the distinctions can be separated. The invidious distinction can be canceled in those who consistently contemplate the truth that God is no respecter of human status distinctions, that before God all persons are equal, and that every good and every perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights. And this very cancelation is the perfecting of the roles of and relationship between the human giver and the receiver of gifts. The cancelation is the cancelation of the invidiousness of the difference;[9] but to cancel the invidiousness is to perfect the difference! Both the cancelation and the perfection result from turning the human giver into a deputy of the divine giver. There is neither humiliation of the receiver of gifts if the giver is God, nor, if the real giver is God, does the human giver triumph personally over the receiver. The cancelation is a purification of generosity and gratitude that allows them to be forms of genuine and effective love.

Insofar as a gift is good and perfect, God is the ultimate Giver and any human being involved in the interaction is a mediating agent, a deputy giver. She accepts the deputation, and so gives the gift voluntarily. So she is a genuine agent, not an impersonal mediating factor. The person who resists this deputation, insisting on being the sole and ultimate giver of the gift, suffers from the pride of presumption as well as the pride of domination. But people who know that every good gift comes down from above see their role in the interaction as that of deputy, not of ultimate agent. This is a happy comedown from their pagan days. The individual construes the gift and herself in these terms, and this rules out her thinking of herself as dominating the recipient. The giver who realizes the imperfection of her gift on its own rejoices that God perfects it by being its ultimate origin. She is humbly grateful to God for giving her the role of deputy giver, for honoring her with this role in giving a perfect gift, for the privilege of sharing in God's agency. That the giver gives the gift as God's deputy is part of the goodness and perfection of the gift. The difference between the giver and the recipient of the gift is perfected by this new construal: a human giver is more perfect as a giver if she sees herself to be God's deputy than she would be if she thought of herself as going it alone. Another part of the goodness and perfection of the gift is that knowing herself to be God's deputy in giving the gift may inspire her to give a somewhat different gift than she would have given had she thought of herself as its only giver. Keeping the text in mind

alters the human giver's construal of herself as giver, of the recipient as recipient, and of the gift: each of the three elements in the gift situation undergoes purifying change by its falling under the conceptualization of James 1:17. Let us take a closer look at how this works.

Generous people satisfy three conditions. First, they are inclined to give. This rules out misers, hoarders, and stingy people who make excuses for keeping their good things for themselves. But if you do will to give good things to others, a second condition for generosity is that you take *joy* in giving. If you rejoice only in the prospect of receiving return goods from the beneficiary, you are like the rich man who gives banquets for his rich friends, in hope of being invited in return. This is where equality comes in: third, the joy you take in giving should be indiscriminate: you take joy in giving *to other persons*, not just to this or that other person. This is the indiscriminateness of *agapē* as distinguished from "preferential" loves, and it implies that you give to these other persons out of love for *them*, not for the superiority to them that you think giving affords you. Kierkegaard divides his discussion into two kinds of gifts: material gifts and help, and nonmaterial gifts such as advice, consolation, admonition, and sympathy. His expositions start by describing a deviant case, and then expands on what makes it deviant.

"You were willing to give and to assist someone in need who had nothing to give in return, and yet you demanded something from him: his respect, his admiration, his subservience—his soul" (EUD, 146). Satan, says Kierkegaard, was willing to give lavishly: his whole kingdom to Jesus, if only Jesus would bow down and worship him. So the person who wants subservience—the soul of the recipient in return for his lavish gift—is an imitator of Satan. Kierkegaard also compares such a person to Judas, who would betray his neighbor with a kiss. Kierkegaard warns against overbearing openhandedness: the recipient may react, quite appropriately in a sense, by rejecting the servility that the gift entails, and so reject the gift, teaching you that "he is not as down and out as you are high and mighty, that you are not able to corrupt his soul, even though you can make his body suffer" (EUD, 147). Keep an eye on your gift to see what it's doing to the soul of the other, and if you see that it's inspiring him to be servile, admonish him, "direct him to God, or preferably abstain entirely from giving to him," because it is "infinitely more important to save a soul" (EUD, 147) than it is to relieve a lesser suffering. The words of James 1:17 put things in perspective: by them you come to see that your gift is quite insignificant, and that you, as the giver, are even more insignificant.

Or you savor your philanthropy in ruminations after the fact, showing that it was a big deal to you, and that the chance to help was not enough reward. Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. "Then you will rejoice in secret, as a benefactor may" (EUD, 148) with empathy for the recipient's joy, rejoicing in his joy, rejoicing with him that the gift is from above, both of you rejoicing in God's benevolence.

Or you designate the gift for the needy one, but you *make him wait* for it to impress him with your importance. "Scripture declares that no more is required of a person than that he be trustworthy as a steward" (EUD, 148, see 1 Cor. 4:2). The steward is less important than the house and goods he oversees, and he is certainly less important than his lord and master. Making a person wait can be a way of telling him he is "nobody" (EUD, 148). Kierkegaard asserts again and again in this discourse, and in italics, that the giver is "*more insignificant than the gift*, which is always the case with the giver when he gives a good gift or does his part so that it can become that" (EUD, 149, italics original). These repeated phrases express the "cancelation" of the difference that is accomplished by contemplating the thought that every good and every perfect gift is from above. And this success is a matter of the giver's self-construal. If I have given somebody a gift in his need, it is more important that he *have the gift* than that he have it *from me*. And it is more important that *he* have the gift than that he have it from me. This is the humility of generosity. In the most mature and integrated exemplars, it's not so much that the giver thinks of himself and says, "I am very insignificant," but rather that his attention is on the gift and the recipient rather than on himself; and his attention is under the direction of his concerns. His own importance is not an issue for him. We can express the principle that is voiced in the italicized words as an inversion of the order of memory of Aristotle's great-souled man: virtuous people soon forget the benefits they've given others but long remember benefits that others have given them.

We can exemplify generosity not only in giving material support and lending a hand, but also in giving "spiritual" goods like guidance, advice, consolation, admonition, and sympathy. I may think of my advice as very important because it cost me so much trouble and suffering, and so I may put a high price on it and be personally invested in it so that I don't want to squander it, and so I become stingy and possessive. Another possibility is that I may think myself superior to my advice, in the sense that I no longer need it but the recipient does. This is a kind of inequality between the giver and the recipient. A way to resist it is to humble myself under my advice, acknowledging that I need it as much as ever,

and so am on an equal footing with the person to whom I give it. The thought about every good and perfect gift allows me to admit that I don't know whether my gift of sympathy is good, and that only God can make it good for the recipient.

You are intellectually gifted and so can give counsel, but "you could not set yourself aside" in giving it. It was important to you that it came to the other from you, for two possible reasons: (a) you wanted the glory and admiration of being its source (vanity); (b) you wanted it to relate the other to you as disciple, and thus dependent on you (domination).

> Therefore, if you have any truth to offer mankind, reduce the impact of yourself, nullify yourself, sacrifice yourself when offering your gift, lest people take you instead of the gift, lest their lives be ruined in an illusion by possessing truth without, however, possessing it. Since you are the strong one, you know best how this can be done. Then you are indeed the giver, but nevertheless *more insignificant than the gift*, and every good and perfect gift is from above, even though it came through you. (EUD, 151, italics original)

Or perhaps you think of yourself as a simple person with no ability to give advice or help to others. Withholding what you have is, in a way, an insistence on being important or at least not simple, as though if you can't give important advice, you will proudly give none at all. Your consciousness of "simplicity" is really a fearful kind of pride. Thinking of the help or advice as coming from God can neutralize this vain fear.

In all these cases Kierkegaard's point is that true generosity involves humility, that is, a *kind* of disappearance or withdrawal of the self of the giver. Yet the giver doesn't become unaware of being the one who has given the gift or benefit. Were that to happen, the virtue of generosity would be undermined. As I said earlier, it takes at least two selves to have a generosity-gratitude interchange; both are *social* virtues. Kierkegaard recognizes this when he insists, in the coming discussion, that gratitude for gifts mediated by human agency does not, in attributing the gift to God, cancel that human agency. The human giver is God's steward, and if the giver understands this, the receiver of the gift must thank the human giver as well as God. Stewardship is a real contribution, even if not the ultimate source of the benefit. The giver is to remain aware of his stewardship, and thus of his positive part as a conveyer of God's gifts. One who is spiritually a steward thinks of his stewardship as *obedience*.

Here, as so often when examining Kierkegaard's talk about the self, it is important to be clear which "self" we are talking about. Kierkegaard doesn't make explicit all the distinctions that need to be made, and this is one of the

difficulties that readers have in understanding him. The self (and the self's consciousness of itself) is very important in Kierkegaard's thought, and so it can't be his meaning that the giver literally and simply "nullifies" himself or "sacrifices" himself, forgets himself, or otherwise eliminates himself or his self-awareness in generous giving. In other writing, I have distinguished self-importance from importance of the self,[10] and claimed that humility is the absence of the former but not of the latter. I think something like this distinction is implicit in Kierkegaard's writing about humility and the virtues that depend on it such as generosity and gratitude.

Self-importance, as I propose to the use the phrase, is a pseudo-importance to which human beings are lamentably inclined. It is the kind of importance that the conceited person thinks he has a lot of, the envious person feels the lack of, the domineering person feels when he rules over other persons, and the vain person feels when he gets a lot of admiration and applause. The "self" that one constructs around the concern for self-importance is a false construct. It is constructed out of a competitive and comparative way of thinking about oneself and others, and it is driven by the concern to be "important"—to be a "winner"—in those terms. The death or nullifying or sacrifice of this self is the disappearance (or "canceling," to use Kierkegaard's word) of this concern and its supporting ways of thought. What Kierkegaard calls "the single individual" is the person with the virtues of faith, hope, and love, and thus the person whose self-important self has died or is moribund. By contrast, the real human self, the self that is a realized synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, the finite and the infinite, of necessity and freedom, is the self that loves God and fellow human beings and knows him- or herself to be loved by them. It is a self that is conscious of her own importance as a *member* of this fellowship of faith and love.

Gratitude

Kierkegaard's discussions of generosity expound the virtue by showing how the text of James 1:17 corrects cases of deviation from it, and the same is true of gratitude. He imagines a case like that of Lazarus who lived at the door of the rich man (Luke 16:19–31). "When you are willing to give thanks, the words [of James] watch over you so that you do not do injury to your soul by being obliged to receive and by wanting to thank *people*" (EUD, 153, italics added).

The injury is in the neighborhood of servility. Servility is the vice of accepting as appropriate to yourself to be treated with disrespect and contempt by another

human being. The rich man throws out his scraps knowing that you, who are lying at his door, will pick them up. You are glad to have the scraps, and your heart goes out to him in gratitude. You want to thank him, and thus communicate to him your gratitude for the scraps. But in his haughtiness he refuses to have this interpersonal connection with you. So he tosses out the scraps when you are asleep or sends a servant to toss them. He treats you as though you are at most a convenient way to get rid of his garbage. But the scraps are a sufficiently big deal to you that you want to give him thanks, and by thanking him you invite him to see the value in the scraps and to acknowledge you as a human being. You want him to acknowledge your acknowledgment as something of value. He refuses, and if that's all there is to it, you are left without the affirmation of the gift and thus of your self that you need. You are left feeling like shit. Servility is the finality and acceptance of that feeling, in exchange for the scraps. But every good and every perfect gift comes down from above; and so you can after all give thanks for the scraps, without injury to your dignity. As coming down from the Father of lights, those scraps are of high value, and so are you, as the recipient of this good and perfect gift.

Lest Kierkegaard seem to be saying that in such a difficult case you can just bypass the deputy and thank God for the gift, he insists that we must thank the human giver. When a person to whom you owe something significant refuses to accept your thanks, leaving you thus high and dry, then thank the Father of lights from whom comes every good and perfect gift,

> But do not therefore fail to thank your benefactor; your thanks still belong to him. Guard it as property entrusted to your care, as one conserves the property of someone who has died or of someone who has gone to a far country, so that he can receive it, honestly administered, if at any time he desires it. (EUD, 155)

The debt you owe—and feel the urge to pay—to your human benefactor is not properly paid by thanking God. But by thanking God for it you can keep it secret in your heart, saved for the day when the human benefactor will receive it willingly.

Or, in a different kind of contempt (not the ignoring, but the possessive kind), someone gives you a "gift" intending to subject and dominate you thereby —to make you an extension of his power, a servant of his will. He seeks to make you ultimately accountable to himself. In this intention of his gift, he expresses contempt for you, an ungenerosity that refuses to respect the dignity of your humanity and your freedom. Perhaps, ironically, his gift to you is the

Presidential Medal of Freedom, in exchange for which he expects you to accept reduction to an extension of his will. But you will avoid the degradation of servility if you see the medal, to the extent that it is a good and perfect gift, as coming down to you from the Father of lights to whom, alone, you are ultimately accountable. Seeing it in this way will allow you to be grateful to your human benefactor while holding your head high. And were he to try to call in his supposed credit by holding you accountable to him for some "loyalty" that you cannot properly owe to any human being, then the fact that your gratitude is ultimately to God will shield you against complicity in his sin, and in your proper pride you will resist him.

If Marina Tsvetajeva had been able to thank God for the bread she needed, she would not have had to dehumanize the transaction to guard her soul against servility. Tsvetajeva's case is an unusually striking illustration of Kierkegaard's thought that a gift presumptuously given in domination of the recipient can damage one's soul. Frightened of servility, Tsvetajeva banishes her soul altogether, at least momentarily, in turning it into a detached stomach. The servile person suffers damage to her soul by her contempt for herself. But Tsvetajeva finds such self-contempt inadmissible and commits this species of psychicide rather than endure it. If she could manage to see the bread as coming from God, and being handed to her by a deputy giver (however defective that giver may be), she would not feel servile toward the human giver and instead would worship God in thanksgiving. She wouldn't feel enslaved by a human debt to a potentially domineering human giver. The thought that every good and every perfect gift comes from above will liberate Tsvetajeva for gratitude, and thus for spiritual health in her situation. Still, there will be a spiritual difference between the case in which both parties to the transaction understand that the good gift comes from above, and the case in which only one of them understands this. If Tsvetajeva's bread-donors look down on her in joyful domination, it will be harder for her to practice gratitude than it would be if she saw them as being of the same mind with her about the origin of the gift.

In the ideal case, the giver gives out of love for the beneficiary and the gift is but an expression of that love and regard; the beneficiary receives the gift as an expression of the giver's love, and in gratitude loves the benefactor in return. In both directions it is love responding to love in the equality of friendship, and this love of neighbor is in harmony with its source, God's love for both parties. But inequality of circumstances threatens to taint this love with the vices of pride, impairing love and both parties' God relationship. The thought that every good

and every perfect gift comes down from above reminds both parties that the essential point is love, and keeping the thought constantly in mind produces a shield against the love-corrupting acids of pride.

In Kierkegaard's thought, character is never a formation of the self in isolation from God or other selves. Gratitude to God and fellow human beings and generosity toward fellow human beings are major formations of the self, formations by which and in which the self relates to the other. Benefits, favors, and gifts figure in particular expressions of these virtues as a medium of connection between the parties, and their involvement is necessary to the identity of these traits (generosity is about giving *something*, and gratitude essentially involves the *for which*), but the medium is less important than the connection. The virtuous connection with God is faith and love, and the connection to fellow humans is love. Accordingly, the self that is formed in gratitude and generosity must be free from the selfishness of pride in its various guises of vanity, presumption, and domination, and much of the "dialectic" of generosity and gratitude in Kierkegaard's writings is taken up with tracing the lineaments of these virtues in their exclusion of those vices.

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1. *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 125, italics added.

2. I discuss these issues in greater depth in Robert C. Roberts, "Cosmic Gratitude," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 6 (2014): 65–83. Brother David's view can be found in his short essay, "Gratitude as Thankfulness and as Gratefulness," in *The Psychology of Gratitude*, ed. Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 282–89, and at greater length in his book, *Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1984).

3. "Does not the person who takes pride in not being able to sorrow on the day of sorrow have the shame of not being able to rejoice on the day of joy, either?" (EUD, 114).

4. Some translators translate the word as "pride."

5. Aafke Elisabeth Komter, "Gratitude and Gift Exchange," in Emmons and McCullough, *Psychology of Gratitude*, 207.

6. Kierkegaard refers to the congregation as the "hallowed place" four times on pp. 141–43 and refers back to it frequently with the adverbs "here" and "there."

7. *Hexis* is Aristotle's word for the intelligent readiness to act and feel virtuously in situations that call for such action and feeling. Virtues are *hexeis*. This is the word that Thomists often translate as "habit," but the English "habit" conveys suggestions of mindless automaticity that *hexis* does not. See the discussion of *habitus* in chapter 4.

8. Kierkegaard seems to be using *Gavmildhed* for what we would call philanthropy, a practice reserved for people with extra wealth, and despite the *phil*, indifferent with respect to motivation. By contrast, generosity, being a "spiritual" trait, can be exemplified by poor people. I thank Steve Evans for this point.

9. Invidiousness is the inverse relationship of personal worths such that one party's worth implies the

other party's lesser worth and the one party's lesser worth implies the other party's greater. This inverse relationship of worths is canceled in the difference.

10. See, for example, Robert C. Roberts and Ryan West, "Jesus and the Virtues of Pride," in *The Moral Psychology of Pride*, ed. J. Adam Carter and Emma C. Gordon (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 99–121.

Concluding Postscript

Kierkegaard revered Socrates, arguably the first "virtue ethicist" in the Western philosophical tradition. Socrates went about his city engaging people who would *think* with him—mostly about what it is to be a human being. He thought that such thinking might actually make people better human beings. Thinking about the virtues might nudge or draw the thinker toward *existing* in the thought-about virtues: it might gradually transform the thinker. Certainly, if the capacity to think about ideas and ideals, and especially to wonder at and about our own nature, is the chief feature that distinguishes human beings from all the other creatures on earth, then a concerted application of that capacity might well be thought essential to living the most distinctively and excellently human life. Socrates's pupil Plato carried further the idea of thinking as a way of improving and completing the human soul, and he proposed that in his imagined polity the leaders, who needed to be the very completest possible human beings, would undergo a long and stringent discipline of "dialectic" that would inculcate an intelligent love of the good known as wisdom.

Kierkegaard inherited this self-transformative kind of thinking from Socrates and Plato. It is a thinking not of a "detached" intellect but of the whole human being. This is why the philosopher-leaders of Plato's republic needed to have a deeply humane childhood and liberal early education of their tastes. Before strict training in careful thought, they needed to have learned to love intuitively what is good and beautiful, and to be intuitively repelled by what is bad and ugly. Their hearts needed to be prepared in a kind of heartfelt appreciation of what they would later rigorously understand. Kierkegaard didn't have the luxury of overseeing the early education of the Danes to whom he was trying to reintroduce Christianity. His writings were not programmatic educational proposals, but directly addressed adults, attempting to engage them in an ethical and Christian "dialectic" that would affect them somewhat in the way that Socrates's conversations had riveted the youth of Athens. The "poetic" character of Kierkegaard's writings is the analogue of Plato's childhood affective education. His writings aim not only to instruct and train in the dialectic of ethics and Christianity, but also to penetrate, awaken, and sensitize by way of their "poetry."

In this book I have exploited and explored Kierkegaard's Socratic insight that virtues like faith, love, hope, patience, humility, pride, gratitude, generosity, bold confidence, penitence, and courage have a dialectic (or "logic" or "grammar," to use other terms) such that to have that dialectic elaborated, articulated, and displayed can possibly help the willing person to grow in those traits. The very names of the traits suggest that that dialectic is a dialectic of the passions, of the thinker with a heart, and not merely an "intellectual" dialectic.

This book has also exploited an insight that was perhaps not available to Socrates and Plato, but which is essential to Kierkegaard's thought. This insight is reflected in Kierkegaard's notion of "stages" on life's way. Configurations of human character are embedded in life-views, outlooks, contested conceptions of what it is to be a human being and of what the universe contains. The Christian virtues are not the same as the virtues that Socrates and Plato explored. (The Socratic virtues belong to religiousness A.) And they are different indeed from the aesthetic "virtues," if that term is not too much of a stretch (it is). This book has focused primarily—as Kierkegaard's writings do—on the Christian virtues, but has found it sometimes helpful, in clarifying these traits, to compare them with analogues in alternative worldviews.

My tracing of Kierkegaard's thinking about the Christian virtues has been an effort to think through them in a manner reminiscent of his own. Though it traces but a sampling of his rich thinking about these virtues, it attempts to reproduce something of the personal and invitational mood of his writing while also replicating the conceptual care that marks Kierkegaard's writing. If I have succeeded, this book will have been an intellectual workout that was at the same time a workout for the soul.

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