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SUSPENSION OF SECULAR SERIOUSNESS: A KIERKEGAARDIAN REVIVAL OF
METAPHYSICAL HUMOR IN ETHICO-POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Scientific scholarship when applied to ethics may not only fail in providing a doctrine of ethics, but moreover negatively serve to drain the enthusiasm for concerted action. If a book on ethics makes one complacent rather than agitated to act, then according to Kierkegaard, it is written for unethical purposes. If an individual is more preoccupied with finding the perfect language to speak of ethics than becoming motivated to act in the world, then such profundity becomes a delay tactic to avoid right action. Even the careful attentiveness of waiting to act until one knows *for sure* that one's action is the right one becomes a means to uncoil one's active potential. How then can one write about ethics? Bar remaining silent, perhaps it is not a matter of writing *about* ethics in a detached manner of scientific academic prose but a way of writing that ignites the passions. Contrary to the common conception that Kierkegaard is against ethics in his pronouncement of Abraham's "teleological suspension of the ethical" in *Fear and Trembling* by his pseudonym Johannes de Silentio, I argue that Kierkegaard is deeply invested in exciting his reader towards ethical action even if he writes to offend so that the reader puts the book down in order to live. Also, contrary to another common conception that Kierkegaard suffers from deep melancholy, I argue that Kierkegaard

writes from a comic-tragic source that integrates humor and exaggerated seriousness that when later revoked speaks without authority to the individual reader who may be resistant to direct moral proselytizing. I argue Kierkegaard's attempt to (re)metaphysicalize Christian ethico-spirituality as humorous can help transform the foundationalist/antifoundationalist debate by integrating form and content in recovering the premodern comic roots of ethics. Taking Kierkegaard's heed not to academicize his work, I will do my best to tread carefully to avoid translating his indirect approach into a dry 'Kierkegaardian theory of ethics.'

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

List of abbreviations used for Kierkegaard's texts:

AR	On Authority and Revelation: Book on Adler
CI	The Concept of Irony
COR	The Corsair Affair
CUP	Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments
D	Diary
EO	Either/Or
FSE	For Self-Examination
FT	Fear and Trembling
JFY	Judge for Yourself!
JP	Journals and Papers
P	Prefaces
PAP	Papers
PF	Philosophical Fragments
TIC	Training in Christianity
PV	The Point of View for My Work as an Author
R	Repetition
SLW	Stages on Life's Way
SUD	The Sickness unto Death
TA	Two Ages
WL	Works of Love

Introduction

But then the world became so dreadfully serious—that is, altogether secular.

-Kierkegaard¹

I think we ought to read only the kind of books that wound and stab us. If the book we're reading doesn't wake us up with a blow on the head, what are we reading it for? So that it will make us happy, as you write? Good Lord, we would be happy precisely if we had no books, and the kind of books that make us happy are the kind we could write ourselves if we had to. But we need the books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us. That is my belief.

-Kafka²

How many political theorists can say this about their books? One can say that academic writing is not the place for shock therapy, yet one must still ask the question: what are we writing it for? If one writes for the small community of like-minded scholars similarly motivated to wade through the dense literature, then one can be contented with contributing to a knowledge niche within the academy. Yet, what if such knowledge is ethics? Would such niche building of an ethical language be considered unethical if it takes years of scholarship to crack the codes of academic jargon? Scientific scholarship when applied to ethics may not only fail in providing a doctrine of ethics, but moreover negatively serve to drain the enthusiasm for concerted action. If a book on ethics makes one complacent rather than agitated to act, then according to Kierkegaard, it is written for unethical purposes. If an individual is more preoccupied with finding the perfect language to speak of ethics than becoming motivated to act in the world, then such profundity becomes a delay tactic to avoid right action. Even the careful attentiveness of

¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, ed. Edna H. Hong Howard V. Hong, and Gregor Malantschuk (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), 4177 X2 A 486 n.d., 1850.

² Franz Kafka, *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors* (London: John Calder, 1978), 16. Quoted in Gabriel Josipovici, "Kierkegaard and the Novel," in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, ed. Jonathan and Chamberlain Rée, Jane (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 119.

waiting to act until one knows *for sure* that one's action is the right one becomes a means to uncoil one's active potential. How then can one write about ethics? Bar remaining silent, perhaps it is not a matter of writing *about* ethics in a detached manner of scientific academic prose but a way of writing that ignites the passions. Contrary to the common conception that Kierkegaard is against ethics in his pronouncement of Abraham's "teleological suspension of the ethical" in *Fear and Trembling* by his pseudonym Johannes de Silentio,³ I argue that Kierkegaard is deeply invested in exciting his reader towards ethical action even if he writes to offend so that the reader puts the book down in order to live. Also, contrary to another common conception that Kierkegaard suffers from deep melancholy, I argue that Kierkegaard writes from a comic-tragic source that integrates humor and exaggerated seriousness that when later revoked speaks without authority to the individual reader who may be resistant to direct moral proselytizing. I argue Kierkegaard's attempt to (re)metaphysicalize Christian ethico-spirituality as humorous can help transform the foundationalist/antifoundationalist debate by integrating form and content in recovering the premodern comic roots of ethics. Taking Kierkegaard's heed not to academicize his work, I will do my best to tread carefully to avoid translating his indirect approach into a dry 'Kierkegaardian theory of ethics.'

For Kierkegaard, to reduce ethics into an abstract dispassionate set of rules that breeds indifference is tantamount to writing uninspired music or rational humor. In Part I, I discuss the secondary literature on Kierkegaard who I argue cannot be made into a more

³ It is important to distinguish between Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms since he writes explicitly that "In *Fear and Trembling*, I am just as little, precisely just as little, Johannes de Silentio as the knight of faith he depicts..." A First and Last Explanation, VII 546 February 1846 in Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 626. A point of contention among Kierkegaard scholars is that he never comes out of hiding even in his veronymous writings. For an author who rarely pulls back the curtain, I argue that the times Kierkegaard says he is seriously speaking directly to the reader should have significance regardless of whether one can determine this is what Kierkegaard *really* thinks.

palatable figure for political theorists to digest since he sought to disabuse his readers from the tendency to freeze or rigidify either hot or cold responses to ethics through a comic-tragic perspective. In Part II, I pick unconventional texts to showcase his use of humor to what is conventionally understood as serious or melancholic works.

However, before beginning Part I, I highlight Kierkegaard's direct indictment of those, including the present author, who seek to reduce Kierkegaard into a standard philosopher, no less political philosopher. A parasitic theme runs throughout his authorship. Rather than argue in a Rousseauian rhetorical style of forcing one to be free, Kierkegaard identifies unrestrained reason as capable of destroying its host.⁴ In so doing, Kierkegaard allows the reader to gain some distance from the separate desires within the self. Rather than use the term force which signals an unnatural entrapment, Kierkegaard uses parasitic metaphors to make containment and hence extraction sound more like a corrective to an otherwise unnatural condition. His suggestions are corrections to return men to a more balanced state that incorporates the mixture of passion, reflection, and action. Due to the cunning of the "enlightened" age, he will parody its language to trap readers in their own game.

Aware of his audience, Kierkegaard matches the cunning of those who seek to translate his works into a grand systematic treatise. Rousseau's serious polemic will be matched with a polemic against scholars taking Kierkegaard too seriously. Kierkegaard adopts a Rousseauian tone of obligation and command to insist that scholars do not take him too seriously. Kierkegaard's style has an uncanny ability to offend the individual on an intimate level. A case in point of his offensiveness towards his readers is the following

⁴ Rousseau's forceful style came about through a conscious rejection of using wit in his works. See Rousseau's *Confessions* in which he claimed to have distanced himself from Diderot to write *The Social Contract*.

diatribe against those in academia that more than likely include writers of dissertations on Kierkegaard:

Somewhere in a psalm it tells of the rich man who painstakingly amasses a fortune and ‘knows not who will inherit from him.’

In the same way I will leave behind me, intellectually speaking, a not-so-little capital. Alas, but I know who is going to inherit from me, that character I find so repulsive, he who will keep on inheriting all that is best just as he has done in the past—namely, the assistant professor, the professor.

But it is part of my suffering to know this and then quite steadily go ahead with the project which will bring me toil and trouble and the yield the professor in one sense will inherit—in one sense, for in another sense I will take it with me.⁵

And even if ‘the professor’ happened to read this, it would not stop him, it would not prick his conscience—no, he would lecture on this, too. And even if the professor happened to read this remark, it would not stop him either—no, he would lecture on this, too. For the professor is even longer than the tapeworm which a woman was delivered of recently (200 feet according to her husband, who expressed his gratitude in *Adresseavisen* recently)—a professor is even longer than that—and if a man has this tapeworm ‘the professor’ in him, no human being can deliver him of it; only God can do it if the man himself is willing.⁶

If he is speaking to an increasingly scientific age in which faith is transferred from God to science, then Kierkegaard will try to speak to his readers in scientific metaphors. When he grants nonbelievers that they may be cleverer by avoiding being held by wonder, Kierkegaard “wonder[s] if he therefore was wiser whose life ran riot in parasitic growth because he was not bound!”⁷ To dissociate freedom from boundlessness, Kierkegaard asks his readers to envision a positive freedom that comes through containing the slavish reflection to bore and stilt action. Kierkegaard’s polemical tone is hard to ignore:

That I shall acquire a certain renown, surely not even my bitterest enemy will deny. But I begin now to wonder whether I shan’t become famous in a genre quite different from the one I had envisaged, whether I shan’t become famous as a naturalist, in that I have made discoveries or at least delivered a very considerable contribution to the

⁵ JP 6817 X⁴ A 628 *n.d.* 1852.

⁶ JP 6818 X⁴ A 629 *n.d.* 1852.

⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses : The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), “What it Means to Seek after God” 464.

natural history of parasites. The parasites I have in mind are priests and professors, these greedy and virulently self-reproductive parasites which even have the shamelessness (which is more than other parasites have) to want to be of service to those they live off.⁸

His vitriolic against professors shows how well he can pinpoint what would make his intended audience stand at attention. His polemic against professors shows his haughtiness but also his art of pinpointing what would make his intended audience stand at attention. If academics are hard of hearing to subtle clues of suggestion, then Kierkegaard speaks to them with deafening directness so the professor has no where to hide but listen or willfully reject his message. Kierkegaard's art of communication is not always to use indirect communication since professors may find such subtleties a license to avoid being confronted with the criticism to not destroy his work by converting Kierkegaard's style to a dry treatise.

To make sense of Kierkegaard, scholars have characterized him as melancholic. However, this may be a projection of scholarly seriousness unto an author that defies such one-dimensional classifications. If one insists on a serious reading of Kierkegaard, then many of his pronouncements may seem overly brooding. His attacks on professors and priests can be contrasted with his humbled attitude towards God that also shows his more subtle forms of self-deprecating humor. On the surface, Kierkegaard may seem melancholic, but not far from the surface there exists a humor that transforms an otherwise melancholic perspective into a humorous one. Part of Kierkegaard's humor is the realization that the two do not have to stand opposed. If Kierkegaard's father gave the writer a deep sense of melancholy, then Kierkegaard will make the most with the given situation:

⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, *Papers and Journals: A Selection*, ed. Hannay Alastair (London: New York, Penguin Classics, 1996), 1855 XI 2 A 277.

In human terms it could be said that my misfortune is that I have been brought up so strictly in Christianity.

From the very beginning I have been in the grip of a congenital melancholy. Had I been brought up in a more conventional manner—yes, it goes without saying, I would hardly have been so melancholy—then I would no doubt at an earlier point have undertaken to do everything to break out of this melancholy, which was on the point of preventing me being a human being, to do everything either to break it or be broken.

But familiar as I was in the very beginning with the Christian notion of the thorn in the flesh, that such things were part of being Christian, I found that nothing could be done, and in any case my melancholy found acceptance in this whole outlook.

So I reconciled myself religiously to it—humanly it has made me as unhappy as can be; but on the basis of this pain there unfolded a distinguished spiritual life as an author.

....

I would gladly take on an official appointment—but here my melancholy comes and makes difficulties. No one has any idea of how I suffer and the degree to which I am put outside the universally human. And this would have to be overcome if I were to be able to live together with others in an official capacity.

Yet one thing remains: I can never thank God enough for the indescribable good he has done me, so much more than I had expected.⁹

If this passage confirms Kierkegaard's melancholic nature, it also illustrates Kierkegaard's ability to see the light side of his deep melancholy—a springboard to his prodigious authorship. Unlike the philosophers he parodies, Kierkegaard would have attained a professorship if he could overcome his melancholy enough to be congenial with his would-be colleagues. For his inability to socialize with professors, he *thanks* his melancholy for the “indescribable good.”

It is hard for academics to take in this direct indictment of professors whom Kierkegaard predicts will be his intellectual heirs. If in his other works, he humbles himself before God and the lowest of the low, here he is unburdened with claiming his superiority over those in academia who will inherit from him. Despite his thrice warning to ‘move on’ from his work or else grow to parasitic size, I humor him by burrowing deeper into his works trying to remain cognizant of the traps he set out for those who

⁹ PAP 50 X² A 619.

seek a way out of the maze but find instead trap doors to extract cancerous intruders from destroying the host environment to grow for the sake of growth. Efforts to have a firm grasp on his thought threaten to break apart. What appears to be a consistent structure seems to unhinge at the moment of revelation as epiphanies are deflated at the moment when one expects to be uplifted. Frustration sets in as the more one reads the less one understands. I hope to join Kierkegaard by crossing the river Styx returning in whatever form that emerges comforted with the notion that no matter how much I butcher his approach, he would have taken most with him since much of his thought will never be ‘cracked’ by conventional approaches of critique.

He is conscious that his journals will be catalogued and dutifully read by the obsessive and will repeat, not twice, but thrice, that he will be on to us—that we should be prepared to be fooled if we continue on this fruitless path to nowhere.¹⁰ Those who venture into Kierkegaard’s world will not find a true Kierkegaard so much as a Kierkegaard to one’s own liking. Hence, I will try to balance my interpretation of things I like in Kierkegaard with things I abhor in Kierkegaard to force myself out of my own projective tendencies which may be inevitable in any case. Since there is no grounding authority to what one finds humorous, this dissertation will not lead to a more genuine account of Kierkegaard or his humor, but I do merely seek to investigate its effects on readers including myself.

This is a long winded caveat to readers that my interpretation is just that. A goal of systematically extracting a dry, secularized ethics from Kierkegaard’s work will fail. To take away the mystical elements of his work is to denude the ways in which his work

¹⁰ The mock journey tone of the explorer’s excitement reminds me of Pynchon’s *Crying of Lot 49* in which a woman goes in search of exactly what she wants to find. Kierkegaard makes references to de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* in his Journals and in *Fear and Trembling*.

has most impact: to give scare and joy to the reader of a disenchanted age. Kierkegaard's message may be to stop once in a while to gauge whether one's progressive confusion may be one's hubris at not taking the time to move on to other tasks, speak to other people one is not familiar, learn from others rather than lecture at them, remain silent rather than constantly speak, admit that one is being made fun of without taking it too much to heart, or to infuse life into pedagogy again. Kierkegaard would rather offend his reader than put her to sleep. It would be reason's triumph to discourage pupils who may otherwise be motivated to learn; whose active potential is being drained by reading lengthy treatises. Beyond indicting professorships as superfluous, Kierkegaard makes them parasitic life destroyers who infect men's minds without end. Perhaps we do not need to exorcize the demons from religion, but a God that can exorcize the professorial class from men's minds that has made reflection a stand in for action. The demons are not from without but within. They need to be coaxed out rather than extracted through directly confrontational means which only makes the worm furrow deeper. Only God can pull him out since the infection cannot be cured from within. Stated in these gruesome terms, reminiscent of medieval gothic imagery with a modern scientific medicinal twist, I find it hard to object to the need of external assistance.

Chapter 1: Inside and Outside Political Theory

Kierkegaard cannot be made likable. Howe makes a warning to reading Kierkegaard: “Just as we must accept the fact that Kierkegaard himself was a political conservative, and a misogynist, we must also accept that he was, so to speak, a religious imperialist: you don’t get Kierkegaard without the Christianity.”¹¹ I argue that Kierkegaard defies such labels at the same time that he fits them. Howe gives a feminist reading that ends up making Kierkegaard a more likeable proto-feminist but one that should not be appropriated wholesale. Trying to fit him in a particular category is part of the dilemma of taking Kierkegaard too seriously. I argue that what is considered as Kierkegaard’s misogynist bourgeois Christianity is directed at misogynist bourgeois Christians of his age. Given that these are fair warnings, I argue they signal that Kierkegaard may be strategically offensive as he is in his intelligent anti-intellectualism.

Kierkegaard shared Plato’s ambivalent attitudes to writing down what should be kept in movement. For Plato, he feared that the Socratic dialogues would be frozen on the printed page. For Kierkegaard, the maieutic method can be carried off of the page to the reader. Kierkegaard wanted to give the modern reflective age a dose of its own medicine by giving the mind unsolvable paradoxes as fuel to exhaust deliberation. For example, since any effort to theorize or generalize from Abraham’s position would always lead one back to the gulf of the paradox of understanding Abraham as either the knight of faith or a murderer, Kierkegaard seeks to tie the reader into tighter conceptual knots rather than clarify the paradox through reason.

Rather than write a straightforward critique of bourgeois Christianity, Kierkegaard would rather his readers come up with their own conclusion through the

¹¹ Leslie A. Howe, "Kierkegaard and the Feminine Self," *Hypatia* 9, no. 4 (1994), 154.

indirect help of the pseudonymous authors.¹² This reliance on reader response may be unsettling for political theory that has sought to either control or ignore reader response. There is comfort in the independence of a work that does not depend on reader's reactions or resistances. In ethical treatises, such an independence from the reader may work against the intended goals of the author.

Kierkegaard writes that his need to make words consistent with intention is like the "intensely religious enthusiast [who] would concentrate only on the author's faithfulness to himself and in his admiration would listen to nothing about a relation to a reading world, nothing about the world..."¹³ Without attention to reader response, political theory has cut channels of communication to the reading public. The enthusiast would evaluate a work based on the internal consistency of the work to itself as the point of reading the story, but Kierkegaard illustrates that such solipsism is to dissociate from one's readership. The activity of reading becomes a busy exercise for its own sake that "skips over the difficulties of life."¹⁴ Reading becomes a grading exercise in which readers hand out marks of approval. For Kierkegaard, it is irresponsible to write a

¹² Roger Poole shows that Kierkegaard got his inspiration for writing pseudonyms from reading Schleiermacher's review of Schlegel's *Lucinde*. Kierkegaard comments, "It is probably a model review and also an example of how such a thing can be most productive, in that he constructs a host of personalities out of a book itself and through them illuminates the world and also illuminates their individuality, so that instead of being faced by the reviewer with various points of view, we get instead many personalities who represent these various points of view. But they are complete beings, so that it is possible to get a glance into the individuality of the single individual and through numerous and yet merely relatively true judgments to draw up our own final judgment. Thus it is a true work of art." PAP I C 69. Quoted in Roger Poole, "Reading Either-or for the Very First Time," in *The New Kierkegaard*, ed. Elsebet Jegstrup (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 49. Kierkegaard notes that he can bypass the review process by incorporating different points of view through multiple pseudonyms. While his subjective writing style is not new since it was adopted from J. G. Hamann, Goethe, and other German romantics, his use of multiple pseudonyms is a unique genre. However, I argue that Kierkegaard's newness is not that he invented a new literary genre, but choose to stand in between disciplinary and literary boundaries through farcing its prose and structure. As shown above, he sought to entice scholars in a reflective age through a mock philosophical style.

¹³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Two Ages : The Age of Revolution : The Present Age a Literary Review* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

logically consistent treatise on religion without attention to how it will affect the reader. It is not in service to the reader to “write a treatise on God, rather than treat with God.” It is much to reflection’s liking to spend all of one’s energy on making sure a text is consistent with itself rather than to help the reader sort through her muddled wills. Often accused of espousing an irresponsible subjectivity or vacant amorality responsible for inciting violent fanatical devotionism, Kierkegaard is not afraid to leave room for the reader to make decisions on her own. However, Kierkegaard insists on inculcating the inward space necessary for such freedom by keeping reflection’s grasp at bay. If reflection chokes decisionmaking with endless deliberations, then one’s problem is not with fanaticism but with vacant apathy. Those who read for internal consistency are trapped in reflection’s grip to delay acting in the world. There is no direct relationship between the text and the world; theory and practice are related inversely. The writer must recognize his limits in affecting change in the world through his writings alone; he must incorporate the role of the reader as the necessary go-between between words and the world. Without readers, an author has no audience. It is those who insist on making word and meaning internally consistent that have turned away from the world. For Kierkegaard to espouse a political platform would go against his indirect method of allowing his readers to come up with their own conclusions of how to arrange their life choices.¹⁵

MacIntyre faults Kierkegaard for leaving the choice between the aesthetic and ethical stage open ended without judgment. For MacIntyre who conflates Kierkegaard with author A from the first part of EO, Kierkegaard represents a moral subjectivity

¹⁵ Clive notes that “Nietzsche and Kierkegaard remained political conservatives whose joint lack of adequate social theory can easily play into the hands of reactionaries” Geoffrey Clive, “Introduction,” in Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, ed. Geoffrey Clive (New York: New American Library, 1965), xvi.

indicative of a decayed moral culture that no longer makes justifications for moral choices. The problem with Kierkegaard, argues MacIntyre, is that the former does not pick sides. He offers a “criterionless choice”¹⁶ in which reason cannot be used to judge. It is not hard to find passages in Kierkegaard that confirms his political conservatism.

The following statements confirm MacIntyre’s complaints:

Human equality—yes, Christianity does indeed want this! In two ways: either that you—if you are the one who has drawn the shortest straw—patiently reconcile yourself to the fact—for in this way the distraction is essentially removed, or that those who are favored with the good themselves resolve to give up something or everything.¹⁷

This misses the radical ways in which Kierkegaard tried to speak to different groups of readers simultaneously. It is to underestimate the resistances to ethical and spiritual calling to assume that one can easily convert the reader through words for “[t]he ethical demand upon a man to bear witness to the truth is directly not at the intellect but at the will.”¹⁸ It does not take the strength of mind but of will to act ethically. Therefore, to appeal to the mind would be to assume that only those who understand intellectually what one ought to do can be able to act in such a manner. Kierkegaard argues that genius is not a requirement but may be a deterrent to ethical action if one’s intellect is not checked from talking oneself out of every possible action which is not ‘ideal.’ It is fear of what one can do that makes one avoid the decision:

Every human being fears nothing so much as to know what huge capacities he has. You are capable of – do you wish to know? You are capable of living in poverty; you are capable of putting up with practically any conceivable maltreatment, etc. But you don’t wish to know it, do you? You would be furious with the person who told you,

¹⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 38.

¹⁷ JP 4206 X (to the 4th) A 83 *n.d.*, 1851.

¹⁸ PAP 50 X 3 A 104.

and you consider as a friend only the person who helps to confirm you in the thought that 'I can't put up with it, it's beyond me', etc.¹⁹

He does not put down those who do not meet the ethical demand as incapable of good will. Rather he inverts the emphasis to assume each individual has inherent potential to choose the ethical.

While MacIntyre criticizes Kierkegaard for not providing the reader with guidance, MacIntyre is in turn criticized for not having enough faith in the reader or seeing through Kierkegaard's indirect method of making the reader choose. In response to MacIntyre, Mooney writes that Kierkegaard was not appealing to his readers' intellect in arguing for the ethical: "Kierkegaard aims not just to alter a reader's beliefs but, more radically, to temper and humble a reader's will."²⁰ I argue that both MacIntyre and Mooney may be right. In providing an open ended choice, Kierkegaard exposes how many choose not to choose. If Kierkegaard provides reasons for a choice, then a reader can continue to stall a decision by finding endless rebuttals. If Kierkegaard clears the ground for choice by not judging what a reader should do because it is absolutely right, then the reader has no excuses to delay the choice except to admit that one has not chosen. I argue that Kierkegaard does not want to temper or humble wills so much as shock it out of hiding. This criterionless choice does not mean that Kierkegaard will be indifferent to the choice. There is a difference between not judging in ethically foundational terms and judging in terms of aesthetic tastes. Kierkegaard makes suggestions based more on his personal tastes than on a universal standard. This does not make the reader immediately reactive to his opinions, which are not espoused as absolute

¹⁹ PAP 54-55 XI 2 A 381, PJ p. 641.

²⁰ Edward F. Mooney, "The Perils of Polarity: Kierkegaard and MacIntyre in Search of Moral Truth," in *Kierkegaard after MacIntyre: Essays on Freedom, Narrative, and Virtue*, ed. John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd (Chicago: Open Court, 2001), 233.

truths of right and wrong. This requires giving up ground on absolutes to surrender to subjective standards. Yet, if tastes were cultivated towards the eternal, then this strategy may be more effective than forcing men to accept abstract principles.²¹

In MacIntyre's response to his critics, he writes that Kierkegaard is both against immanently urging for the ethical and for a subtextual immanence that favors the ethical:

What I am suggesting is that there are two different strands to the account of the relationship of the aesthetic to the ethical in *Either/Or* which coexist uneasily: the dominant strand is one in which the radical discontinuity between the aesthetic and the ethical is emphasized, but in the subtext continuities are identified.²²

While these commentators are busy arguing over whether the ethical is impurely mixed with the aesthetic in “artfully arguing” for the ethical, Kierkegaard may be smiling down asking whether it is important to argue over such matters of either/or when he argues elsewhere that what matters is that the ethical should be brief so the reader is quickly faced with the task. The open-endedness to Kierkegaard's work allows these two strands to co-exist without proof that one is truer than the other. Arguing over whether Kierkegaard is ultimately for immanence or transcendence in choosing between the aesthetic and the ethical may confuse the reader more than give the reader a simpler message. Kierkegaard makes the difference between the aesthetic and the ethical rather simple: the former is easy while the latter is hard. The most that Kierkegaard will ask his readers to do is to be honest: “But I want the truth. I will not strain one single person's life more than he has been accustomed to until now—but he has to be honest, he must

²¹ “If it was not in bad taste to use an individual as a means to an end, he would use another to get over a heart break.” Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way : Studies by Various Persons, Kierkegaard's Writings* ; (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 100.

²² Alasdair MacIntyre, "Once More on Kierkegaard," in *Kierkegaard after Macintyre: Essays on Freedom, Narrative, and Virtue*, ed. John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd (Chicago: Open Court, 2001), 349.

declare that the easy life is the highest life.”²³ If one actively chooses the life of a Don Juan, then Kierkegaard will not judge him as better than the Married Man. The sin would be to stay lifeless without choosing. To try to be a Christian is the harder choice for there is a deep concern for the lowest of the low in Christianity: “Christianly, God chooses and is closest to the despised, the castoffs of the race, one single sorry abandoned wretch, a dreg of humanity.”²⁴ In WL, Kierkegaard writes that if one wants an easy life, do not pick Christianity. Kierkegaard will not sugarcoat Christian duty: “But if your ultimate and highest purpose is to have life made easy and sociable, then never have anything to do with Christianity. Flee from it, for it will do the very opposite; it will make your life difficult and do this precisely by making you alone before God.”²⁵

Just as one is at the height of abstract theory, Kierkegaard brings the reader back to the concrete. Intellectual labor is no match for emotional labor in existence. Since Kierkegaard is challenging the systematic discourse of political theory to create followers of a grand system, he may even welcome these contrasting opinions of him eschewing the need to make everyone agree what his texts mean. This can be extrapolated by his annoyance with scientific scholarship of Holy Scriptures: “a holy Scripture requires ‘faith,’ and for this reason there must be disagreement so that the choice of faith can take place or that faith becomes a choice and the possibility of offense gives tension to faith.”²⁶ Kierkegaard will write to offend to excite his readers to decide to either meet the calling or be conscious that one chooses the easy road. To write to achieve unanimous agreement is to exorcize the “tension of faith.” The “possibility of offense” is crucial for

²³ JP 4186 X³ A 529 *n.d.*, 1850.

²⁴ JP 4231 X¹ A 330 *n.d.*, 1854.

²⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love, Kierkegaard's Writings*; (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 127.

²⁶ JP 3860 X³ A 702 *n.d.* 1851.

exciting the reader who can never rest with one's interpretation as the correct one, since such a comfortable stance would mean that the individual has not grappled with the dialectical tension of faith.

To make this tension, Kierkegaard's words are not mere vehicles for ideas as Locke would like, but are as one commentator notes "provocative, explosive, suggestive and *moving* [get us moving, *electrifies* reader]."²⁷ This kinetic element in Kierkegaard's writing is often overlooked as a side benefit to his works that I argue devalues the works that incite passion in the reader. Locke guards against rhetoric not in strict service to order, clearness, and consistency which became attached to seriousness to the exclusion of silliness. I argue that this disconnect between seriousness and silliness marks a reading and compassion. Moving from a straight line from A to B or to value only order and clearness does not necessarily mean an economical path towards moving the reader. Yet as walking straight causes one to lose potential energy in limiting the kinetic momentum of the body's forward propulsion, so a straightforward treatise does little to move men to change or act in prescribed ways. As in walking, taking into account the natural arc of walking of letting the body fall utilizing the potential force of gravity means that the circuitous route may "do more good" in speaking to the reader and/or through her defenses.

Calling the existential dimensions of Kierkegaard's writings as "a scripture for our time,"²⁸ Beitchman focuses on how contemporary theorists have misread Kierkegaard to suit one's respective agenda. Kierkegaard wrote to invite critical animosity to avoid

²⁷ Philip Beitchman, *The View from Nowhere : Essays in Literature, Mysticism, and Philosophy* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2001), 146.

²⁸ Beitchman x.

having his work anesthetized into a grand system that breeds indifference rather than offense.

I argue that Kierkegaard's seduction is not in obliging his readers to will a particular choice; such directness would ward off his readers. In both subtle and over the top ways, Kierkegaard wants his readers to develop her own thorn within. Rather than write a grand treatise on the ethical, Kierkegaard takes a different approach:

Readers are best readied for this extraordinary 'news' not by a series of direct propositions and conclusions, but instead indirectly by a method of allusion, satire, irony, metaphor, example and suggestion—all (non)guaranteed by one from the battery of hilariously non-existent 'authors' Kierkegaard chose for the purpose.²⁹

Kierkegaard's method will not guarantee a consistent reading. His style is contradictory to fool those who insist on making him into a systemizer.³⁰ Kierkegaard will not seek to over take Hegel at his game. He does not seek to reconstitute the system. Kierkegaard admires but does not take Hegel too seriously:

I nurture what is for me at times a puzzling respect for Hegel; I have learned much from him....The only thing I give myself credit for is sound natural abilities and a certain honesty which is armed with a sharp eye for the comical....But here is where he leaves me in the lurch. His philosophical knowledge, his amazing learning, the insight of his genius, and everything else good that can be said of a philosopher, I am willing to acknowledge as any disciple. Yet, no, not *acknowledge*—that is too distinguished an expression—willing to admire, willing to learn from him. But nevertheless, it is no less true that someone who is really tested in life, who in his need resorts to thought, will find Hegel comical despite all his greatness.³¹

While Kierkegaard's thought on Hegel is clearly espoused, the former's relationship to Kant is more hidden. Ronald Green tries to find the hidden Kant in Kierkegaard. While Kierkegaard shares much conceptually with Kant, Green points out

²⁹ Ibid., 113.

³⁰ Hegel also used style to throw off his readers from presuppositions. Hegel was also strategically using style to disabuse the reader from common place assumptions. Kierkegaard may be speaking to Danish Hegelians who took Hegel's system too seriously.

³¹ PAP 45 VI B 54:12, p. 195.

that their major disagreement is “our ability to escape from this [our bitter involvement in sin] on our own.”³² Kant notes that religion is needed to make wills conform to the ethical. However, Kant stops at the tension of Kierkegaardian despair. Rather than intoxicate the reader, Kant deals with the despair by providing a “sober hope.” One’s principles cannot hold one indefinitely, the support is easily shaken as long as ethics stays within reflection’s grip.

Green decodes Kierkegaardian terminology of faith as absurd as a more emotionally jarring version of Kant’s second *Critique*. Making Kierkegaard a more explicit Kantian, Green concludes that “Kierkegaard’s concept of faith is not the flight of irrational fancy it is sometimes taken to be, but is a philosophically informed reminder, in the spirit of Kant, of the preeminence of practical reason and of the proper limits of theoretical reason.”³³ Kierkegaard’s knight of faith is a more dramatized way to express Kant’s moral agent since Kierkegaard’s method is to compel the reader to *experience* the ordeal of faith as irrational, not simply in the form of a thoughtful “reminder.” For example, through Johannes de Silentio, the paradox of faith is performed as the tension of trying to resolve whether Abraham was a knight of faith or a murderer is pushed to the extreme. The contrast stretches one’s mental faculties thereby preventing one from resting in complacency or fanaticism. As soon as one makes a decision one way or the other, one cannot keep out the other possibility. Kierkegaard’s emphasis on resisting

³² Ronald Michael Green, *Kierkegaard and Kant : The Hidden Debt* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 204.

³³ *Ibid.*, 137.

apathy on one hand and fanaticism on the other is similar to Aristotle's definition of virtue as a difficult negotiation of means.³⁴

Green writes that Kierkegaard was a hidden Kantian to fool the Danish Hegelians of his time. Kant has already claimed that the only hope to synchronize wills to the ethical is the transcendental act. Hence Kant diagnosed in conceptual terms what Kierkegaard tries to solve.³⁵ Kierkegaard answers Kant's question: "If a man is corrupt in the very ground of his maxims, how can he possibly bring about this revolution by his own powers and of himself become a good man?"³⁶ Kant says one is never sure that one is entirely good or bad. One can never rest that one has jumped the last hurdle to reconciling instinct and duty. No one can live under the categorical imperative all the time. As imperfect beings who succumb to the desires of instinct, one can still gain a distance from those desires since it is one's radical freedom to choose when to give in to or abide by duty. It is easy to blame the desires rather than one's lack of control over merging with those desires. One rationalizes oneself into letting desires take over in surrendering to the impulse. Kant ultimately has to depend on a transcendental justification for ethics over self-love since rationality is not enough to hold one to the moral precepts of doing good when it conflicts with natural desire. Since reflection and aesthetics work against the dictates of moral duty, it is rational to posit the existence of a transcendental being otherwise the burden is too difficult to bear. But this only applies to those who have already a commitment to morality; it is a comforting move to believe in

³⁴ See Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, trans. R.W. Browne (London: H.G. Bohn, 1950), 1105-09.

³⁵ Green 167.

³⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Green and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 43. Quoted in Green 66.

transcendental forces. It is not necessary, but volitional to believe in God.³⁷ In *Critique of Judgment*, Kant says the idea of God is powerful “because no other expedient is left to make reason harmonious with itself.”³⁸ Kant relies on the Bible for comfort. Hard work in dutiful action pays off in eternity. The weight of repentance is lifted by the sacrifice of Jesus in the “economy of redemption.”³⁹ Christianity makes sense based on economics if the commodity is suffering rather than money. Jesus paid for our sins by suffering; our sins in turn are forgiven because Jesus paid, hence we owe him our grace. For Kant, God is “the mythological expression of an idea of moral purity always resident within our reason.”⁴⁰ The urge to follow impulses that leads to evil can break through at any time, and rather than despair over this possibility, Kant provides the rationalized hope. It is a scaffolding to scale the impossible walls of moral duty. One cannot rest however that one is saved or forgiven. It is something to keep in mind when one is striving towards doing good. The moral agent can not sit idly hoping to cash in on divine grace. Grace is the final push when one is at a standstill between impulse and duty. One must be conscious of his construction of the transcendent God so that he can operate from his own moral will not from the fear of eternal wrath. We need the idea of God only to continue being more morally perfected beings, to keep up the moral demand that requires us to act in bounded ways. Kant admits that God cannot remain a thought experiment since it lacks force. If we tend to be bad, then an empty transcendent being will not hold men to duty. He asks how can one rely on our demand to be good without an external forced charged with providing a secured form of redemption. How can one operate on unsubstantiated

³⁷ Kant, *2nd Critique* KPV, 146, See Beck 151.

³⁸ Kant, *Judgment* 187, quoted in Green 62.

³⁹ Green 67.

⁴⁰ Kant, *Religion* 43

hope, unproven revelations when there is no security to these made up justifications? The ethical demand requires more than is in the bank vault of human good will. The limits of good will are reached rather quickly as degeneration is not far behind. The religious must infinitize the receiving of grace in payment of ethical debt. One then can tap into the religious vault of God's compassion.

While they share these similarities, Green identifies their major difference: "Kant championing an Enlightenment emphasis on unaided human moral self-renewal and Kierkegaard favoring a Christian 'orthodox' reliance on grace."⁴¹ Green's delineation of Kant and Kierkegaard's "terminological worlds"⁴² is crucial for understanding Kierkegaard's contribution in reconnecting form and content in presenting the ethico-religious realm. Kant would not use the term leaping into faith since this is too close in rhetoric to mystic unification with the divine. Kierkegaard calls faith an absurd paradox which Kant would not allow in his logical system. Kierkegaard thought that a direct exposition of idealism via Kant would be counterproductive to the goals of promoting good will.

To support his findings, Green notes that Kierkegaard mentioned Kant a total of seventeen times in his Journals. As an example, Green writes that upon reading Kant's *The Conflict of the Faculties*, Kierkegaard cites Kant for his awry admittance: "For his standpoint it is jaunty of Kant to say (in one of his small dissertations): It is all right with me for philosophy to be called the handmaid of theology—it must be that she walks behind to carry the train—or walks ahead and carries the torch."⁴³ This can explain why

⁴¹ Green 167.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴³ PAP X2 A 539 *n.d.*, 1850: JP II 2239 Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Abaris Books, 1979 [1798]), 491. Quoted in Green 11.

Kant would utilize religion only so far and could not allow the secrecy of Abraham's relationship to God since one cannot cast light on Abraham's decisionmaking process. Through his detective work, Green found passages in Kierkegaard's *Papers* that were taken from Kant's *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*. Without directly implying that Kierkegaard plagiarizes, Green calls this "likely unacknowledged borrowing."⁴⁴ Green notes that Kierkegaard also borrowed Kant's sense of humor. One of the two passages Green used as support are when Kant compares mystical revelation to breaking wind which Kierkegaard uses to compare Lutheran revelations:

Dreams provides another illustration of these same two phenomena: the appreciation of Kant's humor and the unacknowledged utilization of it. This involves a vulgar joke made by Kant...Having at length demolished the pretensions of the mystic and visionary Emanuel Swedenborg, and with him the metaphysicians..., Kant applies to the whole lot of them the judgment of "sharpsighted" Hudibras.⁴⁵ They are, he concludes, the sort of hypochondriacs for whom, when they have wind in their intestine, everything depends on the direction it takes: "If it goes downward," Kant writes, "it becomes a f____. If it goes up, it becomes a vision or holy inspiration."⁴⁶ Writing in a journal entry in 1854, Kierkegaard seems to apply this same vulgarism to Luther:

Although it is true that for some years he [Luther] was salt, his later life was not devoid of pointlessness. The *Table Talks* are an example: a man of God sitting in placid comfort, ringed by admiring adorers who believe that if he simply breaks wind it is a revelation or the result of inspiration.⁴⁷

I agree with Green that Kierkegaard probably did not dutifully cite Kant as his intellectual father in order to speak indirectly to the Danish Hegelians of the time. Rather

⁴⁴ Green 11.

⁴⁵ Hudibras is a knight errant in the 17th century English mock-epic by Samuel Butler. Butler has been influenced by Rabelais and de Cervantes.

⁴⁶ "so ist er eine Erscheinung oder eine heilige Eingebung." Immanuel Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Illustrated by Dreams of Metaphysics*, trans. Emanuel F. Goerwitz (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1900), 84 GS II, s. 348.

⁴⁷ "at blot han slær en Fjart saa er det en Aabenbaring eller Følge af en Indskydelse." PAP XII A 61 *n.d.*, 1854: JP III 2546. Quoted in Green 13. Zwart writes that Lutheran catechisms were documented to be written while he was sitting in the can. According to the OED, catechisms in the format of short questions and answers is a parody of previous centuries that only during the 17th century became a serious written form. Due to a medical condition, Luther used to spend an inordinate amount of time in the bathroom. Zwart implies that it is an apt locale to urge Christians to let go of the gothic horror to allow God's grace to save one from utter doom.

Kierkegaard spoke in hints perhaps to excite scholars to do some detective work. In a recent biography, Garff notes that Kierkegaard was attracted to writing detective novels at an early age. It is probable that he wanted his readers to find the hidden Kant in his writings as well as mock the citationary practice in academia.⁴⁸

Could Green be pushing too far the extent of Kant's humor or perhaps the joke is on Green for going to great lengths to dutifully cite the source of Kierkegaard's banal sense of humor? One can go on indefinitely in tracing one's intellectual borrowings. Zwart illustrates that Luther's catechism is an exaggeration of gothic revelation to correct for gothic gloom. Zwart writes that Luther performs a "parody of revelation." Elsewhere Kierkegaard reminds his readers that his severe form of Christianity is not his invention. His version of Christianity is bland compared to Lutheran revelations:

I could be tempted to take Luther's book of sermons and extract a great many propositions and ideas, all of them marked in my copy, and publish them to show how far the sermon nowadays departs from Christianity, so that it won't be said that it is I who have taken it into my head to exaggerate.⁴⁹

Green shows the tendency of a commentator who would rather find hidden connections to the past, then discuss how Kierkegaard writes for his present and future readers. Referring to Kierkegaard's reference to Hagar and Ishmael, Green finds a hidden message to his recently deceased father:

The elder Kierkegaard's poor treatment of his second wife—he initially saw to it that Ane [Kierkegaard's mother] was not to be given a wife's usual inheritance rights, but only household effects and 200 rd. a year if he should die or end the marriage—is an additional interesting parallel to the Hagar narrative. That this episode was on Kierkegaard's mind as he prepared the early pseudonymous works is suggested by a

⁴⁸ See Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁴⁹ P 50 X 3 A 127. Zwart's interpretation of Luther's humor appears to differ from that of Kierkegaard. However this may be an uncertain conclusion if one does not take Kierkegaard's views of Luther at face value. Perhaps Kierkegaard is not punting responsibility for exaggerations of the Christian doctrine to blame Luther but to make his critics return to Lutheran texts.

remark by Judge William in E/O. Defending his own highly ethicalized view of marriage (and of marriage untouched by sin), he states, “My wife is not the slave woman in Abraham’s house, whom I banish with the child.”⁵⁰

Green makes the connection that Kierkegaard as the inheritor of his father’s sin broke off his engagement with his fiancé Regine Olson with whom Kierkegaard thought he could not be maritally faithful. While this could be true, I wonder whether writing to those whom he has inherited from either familially or intellectually may not be his main concern. Kierkegaard converts an old proverb in his journals:

‘Write.’—‘For whom?’—‘Write for the dead, for those in the past whom you love.’—‘Will they read me?’—‘Yes, for they come back as posterity.’

An old saying.

‘Write.’—‘For whom?’—‘Write for the dead, for those in the past whom you love.’—‘Will they read me?’—‘No!’

An old saying slightly altered.⁵¹

Those who only focus on whether Kierkegaard is writing to his intellectual fathers will miss his humor. Those who write for dead audiences will not have to worry about reader response. Needless to say that Kierkegaard wants his writing to communicate to the living.

While it is important for scholarship to trace Kierkegaard’s intellectual influences, I wonder whether reducing Kierkegaard to Kant without remainder will take away the affect that Kierkegaard sought to stir in the reader. Kierkegaard re-infuses religion with wonder that Kant takes away in diagnosing religion as prescription or “antidote.”⁵² There is a difference between calling the transcendent an antidote and a wound in terms of where pain is located. It is easier to embrace an antidote than a wound. To represent God

⁵⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), II, 81. Green n. 44, 283.

⁵¹ PAP IV B 96 1a, 1b, 1c *n. d.*, 1843: JP II 1550.

⁵² See Gordon E. Michalson, *Fallen Freedom: Kant on Radical Evil and Moral Redemption* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

as a sanitized gap is to blunt the thorn in the flesh. A bleeding wound one picks at to never let heal is not Kierkegaard's answer either. He works in consolation so his readers can have a break from the seriousness of some of his pseudonymous authors specifically Anti-Climacus. Kierkegaard's pseudonymous and veronymous works give contradictory messages since Kierkegaard knew his readers to be at different levels of need. Through humor, he does not have to be consistently antifoundational. Kierkegaard can be more radical in form in his pragmatic foundationalism:

When someone faints, we call for water...; but when someone wants to despair, then the word is: Get possibility, get possibility is the only salvation....At times the ingeniousness of the human imagination can extend to the point of creating possibility, but at last—that is, when it depends on *faith*—then only this helps: that for God everything is possible.⁵³

There are those who may take the misfortunes of the world too seriously as Caputo points out that those who commit suicide find the world too much to bear because they take it too literally or strictly as truth.⁵⁴ They are not distracted with as many soothing delusions as those who decide to remain on earth. In Caputo's words, "they have overexposed themselves to the truth, to the cold truth."⁵⁵ For Caputo, the suicidal have too much sense or "lack the good sense to come in out of the cold."⁵⁶ Caputo via Conley advocates a "trembling community"⁵⁷ rather than the lone knight of faith. Caputo is

⁵³ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death : A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 38-9 cited in Stephen Crites, "The Sickness Unto Death: A Social Interpretation," in *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community : Religion, Ethics, and Politics in Kierkegaard*, ed. George B Connell and C Stephen Evans (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1992), 156.

⁵⁴ In his introduction to Simone Weil's *Waiting for God*, Leslie Fiedler writes that Weil's pronouncement of the most extreme contradictions produces statements that "we ordinarily accept with the tacit understanding that no one will take it *too* seriously." Fiedler, "Introduction," Simone Weil, *Waiting for God* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1951), 29. Caputo would note that the suicidal are not included in this "we."

⁵⁵ John D. Caputo, *Against Ethics : Contributions to a Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1993), 240.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁵⁷ Verena A. Conley, "Communal Crisis," in *Community at Loose Ends*, ed. Miami Theory Collective (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 68. See Hume's essay "On Suicide," in *Essays Moral*,

forewarning those who may commit suicide in the name of groundlessness and urges the need to take a break from the intensity. For Kierkegaard, there is a time when consolation is needed. If the ethical duty is too hard to bear, Kierkegaard is not afraid to provide reprieve. If apodictics has been settled, then Kierkegaard sees no reason why he cannot sooth the pain of those who may need consolation at times.

However, Kierkegaard wrote his edifying discourses with a precaution to the reader to see rhetoric for what it is, a soothing relief from the agony of living according to divine precepts. While Kierkegaard sometimes wrote to draw out the exertion required in performing Christian works, he also writes for those who may need consolation when the religious calling is too hard to bear. He also writes edifying sermons to serve men's weakness in sustaining the rigor of living as a Christian. They are meant to be read out loud when the trial is too hard to bear alone. Since he regards preaching as a "lower form of the religious,"⁵⁸ Kierkegaard's sermons are not meant to convince. Rather it functions to nourish the soul to appeal to those in the lower more immediate realms of religiousness, what Anti-Climacus calls Religiousness A. It is written for those uncomfortable with the uncertainties of acting on groundless faith in the higher Religiousness B:

And you, my listener, remember that the higher the religious is taken, the more rigorous it becomes, but it does not necessarily follow that you are able to bear it—perhaps it would even be an offense to you and to your ruin. It may even be that you need this lower form of the religious, need a certain art to be used in its presentation in order to make it more appealing to you. As for the rigorously religious individual, his life is essentially action—and his presentation is searching and spare in a way different from the more comfortably composed discourse. My listener, if you are of this mind, then take this and read it for upbuilding.⁵⁹

Political and Literary (London: Oxford UP, 1963). quoted in Caputo 244. Caputo thanks Drucilla Cornell for her critique of the "glamorized masculine anxiety" as "the lone phallus."

⁵⁸ FSE 11.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Contrary to a grand system which requires throwing away what does not fit into its own logic, Kierkegaard practices the kitchen sink approach—if you need it, use it, but be aware that it is written according to need. It is a medicine for times of sickness that when momentarily cured one should not hold on to the bottle. Kierkegaard is more concerned with what his readers need than on being systematic. For the seriousness of Religiousness B, Kierkegaard writes that it is through the comic that contradictions are kept but maintained at a distance:

In the case of an immediate existence it is important not to see the contradictions, for with that immediacy is lost; in the existence of spirit the important thing is to hold out and to endure the contradictions, but at the same time to hold them off from oneself in freedom. Hence the narrow-minded seriousness is always afraid of the comic, and rightly so; but the true seriousness invents the comic. If this were not so, stupidity would be the privileged caste with relation to seriousness.⁶⁰

‘Narrow-minded seriousness’ leaves no room for release or comfort. Ethical seriousness cannot sustain itself. Kant and Hegel can be ironic, but they lack the flexibility to be humorous. Kierkegaard’s humor can provide “the emaciated ironist who needs the humorist’s desperate depth.”⁶¹ Kant’s thinning antidote will eventually wear thin if the transcendent is not infused with more depth. Desperate depth does not mean a return to metaphysical union. Irony scratches the surface of the humorist’s bottomless depth. It does not simply magnify but infinitizes the distance between God and man. The spatial metaphor no longer works in infinity. Ungrounding faith means Kierkegaard is

⁶⁰ SLW 335.

⁶¹ JP 1706 II A 179 Oct 11, 1837. See EO I, p. 19. Resistances to such laughter include Zizek’s warning that “the revisionary psychoanalysis affirming laughter in extremis risks complicity with the ‘cynical ideology’ that sees ironic laughter as ‘part of the game.’ Slavoj Zizek, *For They Know Not What They Do : Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 1991), 28. Cited in Carole Anne Taylor, "Authorship without Authority: Walden, Kierkegaard, and Points of View," in *Kierkegaard and Literature : Irony, Repetition, and Criticism*, ed. Ronald Schleifer and Robert Markley (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), 13.

freer than the ironist to provide consolation, to provide nourishing food to sustain the gap of negativity that will always become hungry again:

For if love endures, it is equally certain that it is in the future, if this is the consolation you need, or that it is in the present, if this is the consolation you need. Against all the terrors of the future set this consolation: love abides; against all the anxiety and staleness of the present set this consolation: love abides. If it is consoling to a desert-dweller to know for sure that here is a spring and would be a spring no matter how far he traveled, what spring would nevertheless be so missed, what manner of death would be so excruciating as would be the case if love were not and would not be for all eternity!⁶²

Certainty can be purchased in the subjunctive. The reader has to be cognizant of her needs, which already gives superstition a reflexivity degrees removed from pure immediacy. To focus on the needs of the reader to either be shocked or consoled, Kierkegaard sacrifices his need to be consistent. Moreover, the hunger left by the wound of negativity with the divine will not be mistaken for the food that satisfies the hunger momentarily. Humor does not take away but accentuates the infinitized horror that one can never be sure whether one is right or wrong, no less judge others' relationship to the divine. The horror consists in not being able to claim oneself as absolutely right to denounce others as wrong.

Irony stays within the bounds of reason and for this reason becomes a skeletal abstract form of the morality that in pre-modern times was injected with the fullness of the divinely comic. Humor allows space for prophetic messianicism when it is needed. Lipman writes that jokes spread by victims of the Holocaust of “*when* the war is over, *when* the Nazis lose, *when* the Jews and other victims come out on top—characterizes much humor from the time [Holocaust].”⁶³ It is in utter terror of hopelessness that the

⁶² WL 280.

⁶³ Steve Lipman, *Laughter in Hell: The Use of Humor During the Holocaust* (Northvale, N.J.: J. Aronson Inc., 1991), 202.

messiah figure spoken in *whens* needs to be taken with literality. The tone of messianicism is needed during times of the threat of total annihilation. To take away theology from believers in times of radical suffering is to take away liberation, to take away the only realm left for freedom—the imagination. Lipman remarks that during the Holocaust, miracles were sought in all places including the Bible, numerology, and mysticism.

Agacinski argues that Kant took away the element of imaginative risk in religion which means Kant could not accept secret revelations. For Agacinski, Kant wanted to make faith into a purely ethical religion: “In Kant, the fear was exorcized: the absolute was no longer external. It is as if it had been turned inward so that we need no longer bow down before anything external, but only before the moral law *within*.”⁶⁴ Kant performs an exorcism to take away the horror of living in a society of Abrahams who communicate in secret with God. Kant cannot accept what would be absurd to reason. Yet the wound of negativity means to keep open what cannot be known for sure. The danger of faith in revelation is that “Faith is not necessarily madness, but it always *might* be.”⁶⁵ This might unsettle those who fear readers might take home the wrong impression. There is no guarantee in a may be. However, faith without externalized horror takes away humility by internalizing the moral command. To reduce the absolute into the symbolic, aesthetic realm is to take away the trembling religiosity since the horror religiosis is kept at a safe distance. There is a fear to allow theology except within “reasonable” constraints because of the risk of being wrong. In carrying the torch to light up theology, Kant wants

⁶⁴ Sylviane Agacinski, "We Are Not Sublime: Love and Sacrifice, Abraham and Ourselves," in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, ed. Jonathan and Chamberlain Rée, Jane (Oxford, UK: Malden Mass., 1998), 136.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

philosophy to enlighten that which Agacinski insists must remain in the dark. Opening oneself up to the divine requires suspending this need to guarantee against the maybe.

To internalize religion is to take away the power of religious language to scare people into behaving. An age that does not experience the fear and trembling will not be offended when called a “hypocrite” or “ungodly.” For Kierkegaard, to take out an independent spirit from Christianity or “having a religion which one regards as a fable” means that mankind will base “their worth in animal terms.”⁶⁶ Kierkegaard will insult this animalistic sense of worth by calling it parasitic. For religion to have power over man, one cannot reduce it to a convenient man-made supposition. If religious insults do not sting men in a disenchanted age, then insulting its animal instincts might hit a chord. While Kierkegaard shared conceptual themes with Kant, the former thought that the horror religiosis must not be presented in neutral terms. The transcendent must be presented either as hot or cold, nothing in between would hold the reader at attention. Moreover, presenting a lukewarm version of Christianity would make one think only of duty in convenient times. Kierkegaard would rather have his readers be repulsed than indifferent to his reading of the Gospels since this is a consequence of willing not to believe rather than the apathy of a nonchalant attitude to religion. Having passions in either way means that at least the reader is related to faith either in the positive or negative. Kierkegaard can engage with those who feel, not those who stand unmoved. Faith must be felt, not simply presupposed in a thought experiment: “If anyone thinks he has faith and yet is indifferent towards his possession, is neither cold or hot, he can be certain that he does not have faith.”⁶⁷ Cold atheism is better than lukewarm,

⁶⁶ PAP 54 XI 2 A 198, p. 630-1. NB (35) (XI 2 A 188 to 239), 3 December 1854.

⁶⁷ WL 42.

noncommittal agnosticism, the constant state of deciding not to decide. To those who espouse lukewarm religiosity, Kierkegaard writes “He does not treat with God, but his is a treatise with God.”⁶⁸ Kierkegaard thinks passion is in the tension of being both hot and cold to faith. To be a believer of faith or non-faith is not to be a daydreamer removed from the joys and sorrows of life. Faith tugs one’s emotions as one wrestles with the horrors and joys of the maybe.

If Kierkegaard thought that ethics cannot be presented in its angst ridden despair, then he would prefer the opposite extreme of utter mathematical abstraction calling an ethical manual for what it is—an instruction book without rhetoric. For this type of instruction book ideality, Kierkegaard uses a pseudonym lest his readers think that it is humanly possible to be such an abstract ideal: “It is quite right—a pseudonym had to be used. When the claims of ideality are set at the maximum one should above all take care not to be mistaken for them, as though one were oneself the ideality.”⁶⁹ Kierkegaard sought to increase the Kantian pitch of ideality even higher: “Kant’s theory of radical evil has just one fault: he does not make it quite clear that the inexplicable is a category.”⁷⁰ If hot faith does not stir the reader to feel, then Kierkegaard will out categorize Kant.

Below is Kierkegaard at one of his hot-cold moments of exaggerating the terror of the religious. By heightening the tension of what it means to be a Christian, Kierkegaard can send chills to those who have hardened themselves to the pain of abiding by Christian ethics:

Even an adult is uneasy when the dentist brings out his instruments and it is his own tooth which is to be extracted. And even the most courageous man feels slightly queer

⁶⁸ Kierkegaard, “What it Means to Seek after God” 462.

⁶⁹ PAP 49 X I A 548.

⁷⁰ JP 255.

around the heart when the surgeon brings out his instruments and it is his own arm or leg which is to be amputated.

Yet in every man there is something that is more deeply rooted than a molar, that is most deeply rooted, something to which he clings more closely than to an arm or a leg of the human body—it is man's lust for life.

Therefore all experience cries out to a person: Above all take care not to lose your lust for life; whatever you lose in life, if only you keep that it is always possible to get it all back again.

God thinks otherwise. Above all, he says, I must take away a person's lust for life, if there is to be any question of becoming a Christian in earnest, of dying to the world, of hating oneself, and of loving me.

Terrifying, then, when God brings out his instruments for the operation which no human power has the strength to perform: taking away a man's lust for life, killing him—so that he can live as one who has died from this life.

Yet it cannot be otherwise: a human being can love God in no other way. He must be in a state of anguish so that if he were a pagan he would not hesitate for a moment to commit suicide. In this state he must—live. Only in this state can he love God. I am not saying that everyone in this state therefore love God, by no means. I say only that this state is the condition for being able to love God.

And this religion has become a folk religion. One thousand oathbound Falstaffs, or veterinarians, live off it with their familiar, etc.⁷¹

The line break between the penultimate and last paragraph signals a pause that the reader should take to perhaps find herself somewhere in between terrifyingly true and folk Christianity. If Kierkegaard can soothe the desert dweller in the time of greatest need, he can also turn Christianity into the coldest horror to offend one's self-preservation instincts. Christianity in this cold extreme can make men without faith commit suicide. In the moment of the greatest despair when nonbelievers "would not hesitate for a moment to commit suicide," Kierkegaard inverts the despair by commanding that the believer must—live. What begins as a spiral of despair ends on a high note of having the potential to love God. Rather than speak in the abstract of making one's happiness correspond to virtue, Kierkegaard magnifies the difficulty by saying that one has to kill one's lust to live in human terms to love God. To say that Christianity goes

⁷¹ PAP 55 XI 2 A 421. PJ p. 644.

against basic self-preservation is not enough. The Christian way of life is stated in such terrifying simplicity: “to love God is... impossible without hating what is human.”⁷²

While the demand is worse than cutting off one’s limb, Kierkegaard does not give solace that this ensures that one can love God—one merely prepares for the possibility. It is important to note that Kierkegaard is not advocating asceticism. To convert the lust for life to love God is not to die away to the world. It is not a disengagement from the world, but a dying to the world to have the possibility to love God through one’s neighbor. In WL, Kierkegaard elaborates how dying to the world to love God should not be confused with misanthropic escapism.⁷³

Kierkegaard reminds the reader of his dialectical approach to presenting Christianity in a mixture of consolation and horror. Christian suffering is contextualized as a corrective in the context of Judaism:

No, Christianity does not declare that to exist is to suffer. Quite the reverse, and therefore it is erected directly upon Jewish optimism, utilizes as foreground the most intensified lust for life which has ever attached itself to life—in order to introduce Christianity as renunciation and to show that to be a Christian is to suffer, including having to suffer for the doctrine.⁷⁴

The difference of suffering in existence and suffering as a Christian is the element of voluntary choice. However, this suffering is in joy unlike Schopenhauer’s version of Indian religion:

Schopenhauer belittles Christianity, jeers at it in comparison with the wisdom of India. That is his own responsibility.... There is something false, however, in his gloomy Indian view that to live is to suffer. On the other hand it can be very good for the contemporary age to be confronted with such a melancholy view in order to

⁷² PJ XI 1 A 445; PJ: A Selection, 606; cf. JP 6902, vol. 6, 526-7.

⁷³ Kierkegaard criticizes Schopenhauer for his escapism. XI¹ A 144, JP Schopenhauer Notes, p. 632. See also Alfred Schutz, "Mozart and the Philosophers," *Social Research* 23, no. Summer (1956). More than his misanthropic asceticism, Kierkegaard’s major disagreement of Schopenhauer is the latter’s hypocrisy of not practicing what he preaches “for it is always dubious to propound an ethic which does not exercise such power over the teacher that he expresses it himself.” JP 3877 XI¹ A 144 *n.d.*, 1854.

⁷⁴ JP 3881 XI¹ A 181 *n.d.*, 1854.

become attentive to the essential Christian principle, which Johannes Climacus expresses: to be a Christian is to suffer—something that the New Testament teaches as well.⁷⁵

To not dismiss Kierkegaard's offensive 'Christian imperialism,' I find that this passage also shows that he does not dismiss the dialectical approach to exposing a 'pleasure-seeking age' with a bit of melancholia. Whether gloomy is what religion should or should not be in the absolute sense is ambiguously stated; "there is something false."

Kierkegaard may not take religious differences so seriously for his main focus is whether it is appropriate for the times. To consider a point of view as false does not necessarily make it less useful. Kierkegaard's humor is in the whatever works method to get an apathetic age to feel.

Given this foundational and pragmatic method, Kierkegaard holds a curious position in political theory. Usually left out of the canon, he holds a strange place within the tradition of political philosophy in that he evokes a range of extreme responses to his works. Adorno criticizes Kierkegaard for his elitist analogies. However Kierkegaard anticipates these responses as he asides that his metaphors are consciously acknowledged for its problematic dynamics; e.g. aware of the unethical connotations of using a military metaphor, Kierkegaard equates drawing out ethics from readers as analogous to pounding discipline *out of* rather than *into* troops. Moreover, Kierkegaard does not deny that his standards of excellence have an aristocratic ring:

⁷⁵ JP 3881 XI¹ A 181 *n.d.*, 1854. Kierkegaard is highly critical of Schopenhauer as a self proclaimed first philosopher to introduce asceticism to the system: "he makes asceticism interesting—the most dangerous thing possible for a pleasure-seeking age which will be damaged most of all by distilling pleasure even from—asceticism." Kierkegaard has a dialectical relationship to Schopenhauer. "In one respect I almost resent having begun to read Schopenhauer. I have such an indescribably scrupulous anxiety about using someone else's expressions without acknowledgement. But his expressions are sometimes so closely akin to mine that in my exaggerated diffidence I perhaps end by ascribing to him what is my very own." J 3886 XI² A 59 *n.d.* 1854. "Therefore the Oriental may indeed wish to be liberated from the body and feel it as something burdensome, but this is really not in order to become more free but in order to become more bound, as if he wished for the vegetative life of the plant instead of locomotion."

A real achievement, the fruit perhaps of several years' strenuous work, always enjoys a certain silence—which embarrasses the age, indeed causes offence—it has something of the odour of aristocracy. [...] The whole age is, from one end to the other, a conspiracy against real achievement, just as it is a conspiracy against capital, and the like.⁷⁶

Adorno notes that Kierkegaard's lack of social theory of classes reduces the world to a world of neighbors. While Kierkegaard did not seek to provide a grand theory of class inequality to speak to groups, he admits that his focus is on the single reader. Kierkegaard is conscious that he will be suspect as unsophisticated.⁷⁷ However, he reminds a reflective age the danger of sophisticated abstraction to mask the horror of preventable human misery. For example, his statements about the poor are treated with a humanity that does not hide the suffering in scientific terms. In *SLW Frater Taciturnus*, the brother who remains silent, writes that “one owes one's luxurious living to the possession of means whereby one holds the horror at a distance. To the poor indeed one can shut one's door, and if someone were to perish of hunger, one can find out from the statistical works how many die each year of hunger—and one is comforted.”⁷⁸ To portray starvation in *masse*, one can feel comforted that the reader as a single individual cannot make much of a difference to help. But by focusing on the single starving neighbor, Kierkegaard makes one unable to say that she is unable to help. One may delay action by reasoning that one person cannot cure world starvation on a mass scale. In this case, his lack of sophistication makes the demand simpler and harder to ignore. It is the reflective age that judges on the lack of complexity irregardless of whether this negatively impacts the reader to choose the ethical or not. More complex information may not make people

⁷⁶ PAP 50 X 3 A 650, p. 511.

⁷⁷ Agacinski makes excuses for Kierkegaard's political naiveté as a benefactor of the Danish monarchy. I argue that the problem of making excuses for Kierkegaard is that it would take away his intention to offend.

⁷⁸ *SLW* 433.

care. It may create more distance to the tragedy since in the aggregate, the masses of people dying of hunger does not disturb one as much as the individual outside one's doorstep.

Given these criticisms, I contend that Kierkegaard should not be solely evaluated on how much he borrows from other grand theorists but how much he serves as an important mirror to a tradition that has particularly eschewed the force of the transcendent in moral philosophy. The difficult passages in the Bible are not meant to be cracked into reasonable terms, but are meant to serve as a mirror to those who think they have achieved a comfortable understanding of the religious:

One could almost be tempted to assume that this is craftiness, that we really do not want to see ourselves in that mirror [of God's Word] and therefore we have concocted all this that threatens to make the mirror impossible, all this that we then honor with the laudatory name of scholarly and profound and serious research and pondering.⁷⁹

Kierkegaard would not want to make Christianity fit neatly with philosophy; nor would he want those who are allergic to religion find a too palatable version of Christianity. Through pseudonyms, Kierkegaard's version of Christianity is heightened to unbearable extremes even for those who already believe in authority and revelation. Just as Kierkegaard may be considered too religious for the standard believer, he is also often considered too foundational for political theory. Just as Kierkegaard keeps out those who insist on academicizing his work, scholars try to keep him out of political philosophy. One commentator confirms this claim that Kierkegaard "does not seem interested in the implications of this doctrine [Abraham's suspension of the ethical] for political

⁷⁹ FSE 26. In his notes to his papers, Kierkegaard comments on Benjamin Franklin's use of the weak ambivalent tone to make suggestions to the reader rather than speak pedantically to them.

philosophy.”⁸⁰ The suspension of the ethical is incompatible for a modern liberal democratic polity in which the rule of law trumps divine revelation. I agree when Stewart delineates “moral and political theory [from] revelation and faith,” yet I contend that it is precisely because Kierkegaard maintains this delineation that makes Kierkegaard an important thorn on the sides of political theory.⁸¹ Rather than reject him as unfit for political theory, I approach Kierkegaard as an important maverick to the tradition. Moreover, it is telling that scholars would go to great lengths to keep him out of political theory.

Perhaps the strong reactions to Kierkegaard show political philosophy’s uncomfortableness with mystical discourse. It reveals a dis-ease with letting matters metaphysical muddle what theorists have tried to keep separate since the Enlightenment. Kierkegaard does not want to blend politics and revelation but recognizes the tendency of the age to do so. To maintain a separation between politics and religion does not mean that either one has to be banished. The two can be connected through difference. Kierkegaard speaks to those who think that their own interpretation of revelation is absolutely right to entertain doubt to take away their confidence that they can *know* the divine will. He uses the language of revelation but comes short of merging with the unknown in order to reveal the infinite distance between man and God.

In other words, Kierkegaard satisfies a hunger for those looking for metaphysical meaning while seductively disturbing those same readers from resting in intellectual,

⁸⁰ Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 320-1.

⁸¹ Another Kierkegaardian scholar thinks it a misapplication to use Kierkegaard as a political philosopher. John Smyth rejects Kierkegaard’s use as political theory. See his John Smyth, "Sacrificial and Erotic Materialism in Kierkegaard and Adorno," in *Idealism without Absolutes: Philosophy and Romantic Culture*, ed. Tilottama Rajan and Arkady Plotnitsky (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

moral, or mystical complacency. His approach to making Christianity both familiar and radically foreign can be disorienting. Kierkegaard insists that genuine religiosity must at times entertain faithlessness. One must resist the urge to merge with the ideal.

Kierkegaard is conscious of the pull of mysticism and sought to expose how mystical discourse works with mood rather than thought. He cracks the rhetoric structure of mysticism:

When the discourse is about the Living Word, the speaker's mood increases like this: This Living Word, life and spirit, the mother tongue, the feminine heart, Denmark's loveliest field and meadow, the word of the Church, Martin Luther, the matchless discovery, the Word that was in the beginning.⁸²

He dissects what is used to set the ground for mysticism. The pull of mysticism is in the longing for a directly revealed sign. Kierkegaard illustrates that this longing need not be conquered but tempered with constant reminders that such discourse is used only for upbuilding in times of need. The wish must be acknowledged but not fully given into. This captures one of Kierkegaard's approaches to edifying discourses—while he can use his rhetorical skills for consoling the reader into complacency with promising tones of redemption, he can also dissuade or deseduce his readers out of complacency. In giving the reader ample warning, Kierkegaard releases his authority so if the reader ends up being edified in the process of reading, but later happens to find the road too hard and renounces the choice taken, the reader cannot blame the author who has told the reader that the searching will not be satisfied if one is looking for an ultimate grounding to one's faith. He will arouse restlessness but will not use his oratorical skills for persuasion:

no persuasion or craft or cunning or enticement whatever will be used [in sermons] in order to lead you perhaps so far out that you might regret having yielded yourself

⁸² CUP Supplement p24, JP VI B 29 110. For a discussion of the exaggerated humor in Martin Luther see Zwart.

(which, however, you really ought not to regret and would not if your faith were stronger). Believe me (I say it to my own shame), I, too am all too pampered.⁸³

He sees himself as the Socratic midwife to excite his readers to restlessness that does not lead one to come closer to God, only to grow more inward depth.⁸⁴

Kierkegaard hopes that readers will retain this skeptical religiosity to temper violent fanaticism. To think one is always on the side of right may lead one to justify oppressive violence upon others deemed as wrong. Referring to Matthew 11:12 (“From the days of John the Baptizer until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force”), Kierkegaard warns that unmediated mysticism may lead to self-righteous violence:

May not Matthew 11:12 properly be interpreted as referring to the mystics (here I am giving this verse a wider meaning, whereby it can apply outside the sphere of theology also), who think that they have a direct relationship to God and consequently will not acknowledge that all men have only an indirect relationship (the Church—in the political domain, the state).⁸⁵

To be conscious of this indirect relationship to both the religious and secular is a reminder to keep open the ‘wounds of negativity.’ Such negativity is not merely a void but performs a function that can be felt as a wound to self-righteousness. Far from filling in the space of negativity, Kierkegaard makes one aware of one’s limits to attain oneness with God no matter how dutifully one abides by ethical demands. The traditional understanding of the leap of faith that surrenders questioning fundamental precepts of religion would be taking an illusory shortcut. It reduces spirituality to a matter of surrendering a critical distance to the divine rather than the experience of the ordeal of abiding by an ungrounded faith. Those who arrive at the limit of reason and jump into

⁸³ FSE 12.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁸⁵ JP 2794 I A 168 June 6, 1836.

faith with eyes closed will be jumping into “a new immediacy,” a new metaphysics that would easily lead one on a path to violent fanaticism. One must live with the void rather than fill it in with an immediate merger with the divine. The task is never complete: “Repentance, however, viewed religiously, will not have its day and then be over; the uncertainty of faith will not have its day and then be over; the consciousness of sin will not have its day and then be over—in that case we return to the esthetic.”⁸⁶ The highest sphere, Religiousness B is a “paradoxical-religiousness” in which “every remnant of original immanence annihilated, and all connection cut away, and the individual [is] situated at the edge of existence.”⁸⁷ Completely revoking immanence is the highest sphere of religiousness.

Kierkegaard’s skeptical religiosity that maintains the force of superstition is applicable for political philosophy. If revelation and faith inspires people to act ethically, Kierkegaard is not afraid to write in mystical discourse, as long as one remains cognizant of its strategic nature and resists a cozy embrace with his radical skeptical mysticism. Kierkegaard reminds his readers that mysticism is an immature spirituality that “does not have the patience to wait for God’s revelation.”⁸⁸ Kierkegaard is willing to provide metaphysics if that is what his reader needs. Throughout his authorship, he asides that he hopes his readers will use his text for their own upbuilding according to need. If the above scholars claim Kierkegaard’s texts should not be applicable for political philosophy because faith and revelation should be kept out of the political,⁸⁹ then I argue

⁸⁶ note to CUP VII 458

⁸⁷ CUP VII 490.

⁸⁸ JP 2795 III A 8 July 11, 1840.

⁸⁹ There are theologians who seek to draw out critical insights against metaphysics within theology. For example, Westphal wants to bring back the religious writers because he thinks the major canonical thinkers eschew religion in their efforts to expunge metaphysics: “thinkers like Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida, who operate on the assumption that a serious critique of metaphysics can only occur outside the

that it is precisely because Kierkegaard is committed to deal with how religion and politics tend to be merged that makes Kierkegaard crucial for political theory.

Kierkegaard keeps spirituality separate from politics in order to inspire readers without having them fall back on mystical union. For those who are nonbelievers, he will not seek to convert. It may be disadvantageous to sermonize to the unconverted: “in case he has not experienced it [the state of wonder], then to hear or to read a discourse will be of dubious benefit to him.”⁹⁰ This is because “[t]he decisive religious category cannot be required of the age, because the age is too abstract a qualification for engagement in the religious. The final religious decision remains the single individual’s own concern, there where all collectivity and noise cease.”⁹¹ Kierkegaard does not seek to make copies of himself but helps his readers develop their own singular relationship to the religious, even if it is in the negative. This inwardness against collectivity does not mean that Kierkegaard wants his readers to withdraw from the world. God is a place holder so one can have the intensity to serve men:

If you wish to love me, love the men you see.... God is too exalted to be able to accept a man’s love directly, to say nothing of being able to find pleasure in what pleases a fanatic.... If you want to show that your life is intended as service to God, then let it serve men, yet continually with the thought of God.⁹²

Some commentators blend his skepticism with a blind mysticism. Inglis may share Kierkegaard’s mystical tone but her conclusion goes against Kierkegaard’s radical negation of a merged discovery of God through faith. Inglis writes: “The movement through the stages is hierarchical, a moving up and out of solitude. In the conclusion of

framework of Judeo-Christian faith, either on the soil of some pagan cult or in the ether of a radical secularism.” Westphal

⁹⁰ Kierkegaard, “What it Means to Seek after God” 461.

⁹¹ TA 123, Pap VII B93:8 *n.d.*, 1845-6. From draft; see 21: 17-21.

⁹² WL 158.

the search, one assumes that the repose in faith is possible because God is the last, the final, the highest stage.⁹³ Yet Kierkegaard does not think one can “encounter God” in a new immediacy, nor does he want one to “overcome” the loneliness of solitude to find complete solace in God. While Inglis interprets the stages literally, I argue that one can never leave a “stage” behind but is always left hanging in between, without closure, left with the desire to get closer to the divine but nonetheless unfulfilled in its lack.

Kierkegaard may awaken the longing only to magnify the restlessness of Religiousness B. Inglis’s interpretation gives Kierkegaard the “mystical tone” that Adorno warns against in reading Kierkegaard’s texts.⁹⁴ Another commentator writes in terms of discovery:

the stories open up space for a new discovery of God, or, a discovery of a new God. This God is not to be found in the stories directly, but only beyond the traditional options made impossible by the stories. To use Kierkegaard’s concepts, one could say that the stories of Abraham and Job provide the absurd by virtue of which a repetition, a new birth, of our view of God can be accomplished.⁹⁵

I argue that Kierkegaard resists this new birth which he would call the new immediacy. One cannot discover God in the absurd. The hypnotic effect of his religious discourse would dull one’s critical faculties. Inglis’s description of God can be contrasted with Climacus’ description of god:

But what is this unknown against which the understanding in its paradoxical passion collides and which even disturbs man and his self-knowledge? It is the unknown. ... Let us call this unknown *the god*.⁹⁶

⁹³ Laura L. Inglis, *Old Dead White Men's Philosophy* (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 2000), 126.

⁹⁴ Other scholars have noted the tendency to equate Kierkegaard with Kierkegaardians similar to the qualitative difference between Plato and the Platonists.

⁹⁵ Mark L. Taylor, "Ordeal and Repetition in Kierkegaard's Treatment of Abraham and Job," in *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community: Religion, Ethics, and Politics in Kierkegaard*, ed. George B. and Connell Evans, Stephen C. (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1992), 49. Cited in Inglis 118.

⁹⁶ PF 39.

Inglis interprets Kierkegaardian stages as leading up to the discovery of God, but I argue that “calling the unknown *the god*” and “discovering” God is different in so far that the self-conscious act of naming which connote a degree of arbitrariness is different from the foundationalizing language of discovery that implies it always already exists. The paradox of faith does not lead immanently to finding the other, but rather to a positing of its possibility. Between Climacus and Anti-Climacus, Kierkegaard is somewhere in between unmediated immanence and abstract transcendence. The language of discovery must be taken with some quixotic doubt. For example, after reading FT, one may feel exhausted as if one is taken on a journey. I do not mean that this equates with real action, as Kierkegaard warns in his other texts that grappling contradictions in the mind is not the same as performing the duty of the ethical. One can easily become enraptured with a new immediacy, but this would be a weakening of the tension of doubt. Even when Kierkegaard uses the rhetorical mystical tone in his upbuilding discourses, he reminds the reader in the preface and in notes that one should not absolutize mysticism but must use it when one is weary.

Given these critical resources within the religious tradition, Nicoletti communicates that those who wish to project a political philosophy unto Kierkegaard will not only fail to see the unique contribution of Kierkegaard’s thought as a religious writer but also miss his political conservatism vis-à-vis the liberal-democratic revolutions of the nineteenth century. Yet he has also been appropriated by the left. Scholars reduce Kierkegaard’s corpus to a reiteration of prior and concurrent political philosophy in the likes of Plato, Kant, Hegel, and Marx. He points to Löwith who “establishes a parallelism between Marx’s critique of bourgeois society and Kierkegaard’s critique of bourgeois

Christianity.”⁹⁷ As noted above, such parallels are found with other German idealist thinkers. Nicoletti writes that Kierkegaard’s thoughts can be matched in Plato’s *Republic* as an analogy for the need of an “interior government.”⁹⁸ However, I argue that the attempt to familiarize Kierkegaard’s work in these comparisons is to take away his strangeness. The assumption is that such an eccentric stylist is entertaining but whose serious thoughts are better read in more mainstream thinkers.

Kierkegaard’s contribution is that he connects politics and religion not through its merger but through maintaining the tension between reason and faith. Kierkegaard serves as a reminder that one cannot produce a safe, comfortable abstract morality to hold one to duty. By keeping the finite and infinite worlds juxtaposed but kept at a distance, Kierkegaard sought to recoil his readers’ active potential necessary for responsive action in the world. Kierkegaard is between promoting pure immediacy and abstract morality: “Mysticism wants to remove both finitude and politics; mundanity wants to remove infinity.”⁹⁹ Speculative philosophy in eliminating the unknown is too mundane to have power over men. To infinitize one’s potential in religious inwardness would not take away the political; rather it renews politics with an impractical imperative:

politics is liberated from the condemnation that put it into the realm of pure force and power, and it can give space to love....But “unpractical” as he is, the religious man is nevertheless the transfigured rendering of the politician’s fairest dream. No politics ever has, no politics ever can, no worldliness ever can, think through or realize to its last consequence the thought of human equality.’¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Michele Nicoletti, "Politics and Religion in Kierkegaard's Thought: Secularization and the Martyr," in *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community : Religion, Ethics, and Politics in Kierkegaard*, ed. George B Connell and C Stephen Evans (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1992), 183. See also Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, trans. David E. Green (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Kierkegaard, “The Individual,” Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author; a Report to History, and Related Writings* (New York: Harper, 1962), 107., Quoted in Nicoletti 192-3.

The ideal of human equality cannot come from common sense or secular politics. To love in politics is to go against practical common sense which holds out rewards and punishment according to reciprocity. The Christian ethic is a giving economy that does not hope to be repaid in this life.¹⁰¹ It is a spiritual love that will decentralize winning in the political sphere as the prime goal. Without the religious reminder of infinitude, politics becomes the new immediacy: “Kierkegaard directs his critique against the new divinity of his time—the ‘crowd,’ the ‘public...’”¹⁰² In order to disrupt the deification of the political, Kierkegaard illustrates that the commitment to political ideals is not the starting point, but a symptom of one’s relationship to faith. Hence, Kierkegaard does not start with the secularized problem of one’s lack of commitment to political ideals, but from a deeper source of inspiration in faith. Assuming that the passion for acting in the social-political world comes from a deeper source than reason, Kierkegaard brackets the political question to inspire readers on the spiritual plane.

¹⁰¹ Contrast this with the place of love in politics is denounced by Arendt who thought that it did not belong to the political sphere. For Arendt, respect, not love, belongs in the political. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959).

¹⁰² Nicoletti 188.

Chapter 2: Performing Antifoundationalism

What makes a difference in life is not what is said, but how it is said. As for the ‘what,’ the same thing has already been said perhaps many times before—and so the old saying is true: there is nothing new under the sun, the old saying which is always new...¹⁰³

Kierkegaard’s status as both inside and outside of theology and philosophy troubles those who would like to keep the two disciplines from crossing. Kierkegaard threatens the tradition that seeks to separate form and content. Some approaches to make Kierkegaard fit into the political theory tradition do so by translating his works into straight political philosophy in an attempt to make Kierkegaard less strange. However, Kierkegaard does not simply remain in the shadow of the grand theorists if one takes into account the importance of the “how.” Kierkegaard challenges what it means to be new. To those who dismiss his work as redundant and psychological, Kierkegaard warns that this may be a symptom of avoiding the duty:

When something is said to people that they do not want to hear, something true, the usual way they use in seeking to avoid what is in essential opposition to them, to avoid letting the truth decisively exercise its power over them and over conditions—the usual way is to treat the discourse on truth as daily news and then say: We have heard that once—as if it were the day’s news they were listening to when it was said for the first time and now they want to be done with it, just as one ignores the day’s news, which cannot stand a second hearing....¹⁰⁴

Kierkegaard is not simply repeating factual information. For example, although the problem of radical sin has already been mapped by Kant, Kierkegaard does not think that being conscious of sinfulness once or in one way is enough. Those bent on keeping Kierkegaard out of the canon may fear the power of his words. Beyond apodictics, there seems to be no need to return to foundationalism debates. Yet, while foundationalism has

¹⁰³ JP 1059.

¹⁰⁴ PAP XI3 B 122 *n.d.* April 1855 in Supplement to Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition* (Princeton: Princeton university press, 1946), 330.

been banished in content since Kant, it has found a home in the form of abstract language. It justifies its deified existence by foundationalizing the separation between reason and religion, serious and humorous, ideas and rhetoric. Foundationalism can be found in the merger of the literary and literal world that collapses reflection as action, thinking as writing (to write to convey exactly what one thinks), and writing as reading (to write to control exactly how one wants to be read). Foundationalism reasserts itself in demanding ordered, clear speech that stills the contingent. To rigidify representation into a form that locks out the imagination reduces the affect of words closing the potential for multiple interpretations. Foundationalism has moved on to the terrain of writing technique. It is on the level of technique that antifoundationalism is to break free from the bonds of foundationalist discourse that seeks to separate form from serious content. If antifoundationalism merely puts faith in this term to control a reader's tendency to still the contingent into reified categories, then continuing to repeat antifoundationalism in a banal literality will merely instill more foundationalist understandings of antifoundationalism—only the term has an added prefix. Since foundationalism is hiding in antifoundationalist vocabulary, it must be coaxed out with a less direct approach. What is needed is not simply adding a prefix or more abstract vocabulary in which foundationalism is literally hidden in the new vocabulary, but more creative ways of disrupting foundationalism by breaking the rules of its own game. This approach will not be called new. It will return to the basics, before the separation between form and content, ideas and rhetoric, reason and emotion. This approach will not seek a new grounding that eliminates foundationalism with a grander theory of antifoundationalism. It will take foundationalism to its extremes so foundationalism has no where to hide. It

will make foundationalism stand out in the open to recognize itself without the modern clothes where its self certainty has been nurtured in ever voluminous tracts in abstract vocabularies. It will parody foundationalism by giving it not a new word to hide behind, such as Other, Woman, or God.

Kierkegaard will remetaphysicalize Christianity as humorous in “the invisible unity of earnestness and jest.” Those who attempt to write a foundational, scientific treatise on Christianity will be considered comical. Kierkegaard will not claim to speak to all except the single individual. He will not ask to be judged by conventional, foundational standards of seriousness and logic. He admits he will not be a pure theorist. He will not exclude the insignificant, frivolous, or aesthetic subject matter from serious life or death topics like ethics, religion, and politics. He will commit offenses to break rules of logic and academic prose by contradicting himself, write in pseudonyms and his own voice and then retract his words, be serious in his pseudonyms and humorous in his veronyms, use both indirect and direct communication. His analogies may be inappropriate and politically incorrect. He seeks to disrupt the structure set up to create order from chaos to dismiss the imagined from the real. He will loosen the formalism of foundationalism so it cannot stand on or hide in even the deconstructive tool made for the purpose of dismantling foundationalism. This will require more than cognitive strength.

Kierkegaard will bring back religion as the enigmatic cure and admit in its comedic command to love. Those who are too sensible to love will lock themselves out of the mystery. Those threatened by Kierkegaard's techniques as those invested in maintaining the structures that depend on order and clearness. He disrupts order by

muddling the boundaries between art, literature, theology, philosophy, politics, and ethics.

The promotion of order and clearness as unquestionable rules of writing suffer the pathology of strict perfectionism. Kierkegaard wants to redefine what perfection means. His humor is in disrupting order and clearness even to what one considers as humorous. Kierkegaard's humor hovers between seriousness and jest that integrates both. He writes in between truthfulness and falsehood in order to achieve a looser form of perfection that leaves room for the reader to determine the middle point for herself. For Kierkegaard, this is because "Life is like music; perfect pitch hovers between true and false and that's where the beauty lies; for the musician perfect pitch in the more restricted sense, just like logic, ontology, or abstract morality—here the mathematical—would be false."¹⁰⁵ Order and clearness afforded by abstraction gives one easy standards to judge right or wrong, but this misses the concrete beauty of perfection in its lived reality. To make readers return to lived perfection, Kierkegaard will parody and exaggerate the logic of abstraction. Anti-Climacus will turn religion into pure algebra hoping that the reader in being taken to extreme abstractions will be able to take some comic distance from the endeavor. Mathematical equations are neat on paper just as Mark Twain writes that Wagner's music is better than it sounds. The ethicist as composer must remember that ethics is to be done not to stay as notes on the page. Perfection in this aesthetically beautiful sense is living within this space between the extreme categories of true reality and false imagination. It is living in the somehows and maybes. Leaving room for revelation to work its effects on the reader without being strangled by paralyzing doubt requires a more mature type of spirituality.

¹⁰⁵ PAP 11 April 1838 II A 711.

Since immediacy with the divine has passed, it is time neither to return to mysticism nor abstract morality. It is time to find a lived perfection between true and false, the logical and the absurd: “Thus the religious advance and exertion will be that each must bear in himself the duplicity of understanding that Christianity is in conflict with reason yet believing it just the same.”¹⁰⁶ To believe in Christianity just the same is in conflict with reason; hence this call cannot appeal to the intellect. Kierkegaard’s method is to unapologetically insist the unreasonable. This mature faith will keep the tension of the dialectic of faith to pull on both the understanding and belief in opposing directions. Kierkegaard will use the foundational rhetoric to insist on the inconsistent. He will be clearly illogical, ordered in his nonlinearity. He does not want to merely turn upside down what reason has insisted is right side up. Rather than banish reason, Kierkegaard will ask it to share the spotlight with faith. This sharing is not necessarily harmonious as he magnifies the agony when the two are in conflict.

To translate Kierkegaard’s approach into the dry term antifoundationalism may kill the force of Kierkegaard’s technique of goading ethical behavior by the integration of form and content in promoting the comic roots of ethics. In the language of political philosophy, Kierkegaard is at most an antifoundationalist thinker. However this designation does not fit his apparent foundational pronouncements. It sounds unconvincing if antifoundationalism is only restricted to a simple literal reversal of foundationalism. The language of antifoundationalism signifies that one can get beyond or move away from foundationalism. The understanding is that there is space that one can move to that does not involve foundationalism. The effort to name a skeptical sensibility that keeps ontology in play may be well intentioned, yet this perceived mental move of a

¹⁰⁶ PAP 50 X² A 622. Žižek identifies this mature spirituality as the juxtaposition of “yes, but nevertheless.”

new conceptually delineated idea may refoundationalize the new term, whether one disguises it in antifoundationalist vocabulary or not. Reification can be a natural cognitive reflex to categorize the world. Via Barthes, one scholar discusses the thin line separating foundationalism and antifoundationalism: “How can one differ except by a banal proclamation of one’s difference?”¹⁰⁷ How does one go beyond this banalism? How can one challenge foundationalism in another way except to state its opposite? If Barthes has a point that antifoundationalism cannot be expressed except as a “banal proclamation of its opposite,” then form and content must be integrated in an antifoundationalist sensibility that goes beyond its literal expression.

I argue Kierkegaard’s method of indirect humorous communication of the metaphysical can get around the dilemma of the antifoundationalist/foundationalist vocabulary. However, this requires not justifying Kierkegaard as a strict antifoundationalist. Kierkegaard can serve as a reminder that espousing antifoundationalist sensibility must not be restricted to the literal plane of meaning. Taking antifoundationalism literally may be counterproductive since this may reassert foundationalist sensibilities hidden in antifoundationalist vocabulary. This is because antifoundationalism, however rightly conceived, may be re-reified into rigid constructs which may be a function of thinking and writing itself. To keep terms and ideas from being thingified, one must integrate form and content to trick the mind to keep these concepts from settling. In other words, antifoundationalism must be performed in the text, not merely proclaimed as self-evident. To separate the ‘what’ from the ‘how’ is how

¹⁰⁷ Candace D. Lang, *Irony/Humor : Critical Paradigms* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 59.

foundationalism takes its revenge on being banished since Kant. Kierkegaard brings back the ‘how.’

The integration of form and content means that Kierkegaard’s texts will be difficult to decipher by traditional methods of critique. Kierkegaard’s form is not simply a playful artificial dressing on hidden serious content but integral to the art of communicating his message. Those who praise Kierkegaard’s thought in terms of political theory tend to separate his form from content. Mark Dooley emphasizes the political implications of Kierkegaard’s thought by its comparison to Derridian notions of justice but does so at the expense of separating form from content. In the afterward to this work, Dooley writes:

In driving home this conviction [that Kierkegaard’s work has political significance], I have sought to take the side of those thinkers who consider Kierkegaard a postmodernist before his time, while concomitantly steering clear of those who would blunt the edge of Kierkegaard’s work in this regard as a consequence of an overemphasis on literary gimmicks and stylistic form.¹⁰⁸

I argue why a political consideration of a philosopher’s thought cannot include a simultaneous discussion of the form that such thoughts take. Does a discussion of the political implications of Kierkegaard’s thought necessarily mean that one must exclude such “literary gimmicks”? The assumption that one can “overemphasize” form shows a deep distrust of the integrated nature of form and content as if form was merely a gimmick to trick the reader. The implication of this is that to drive home a conviction is to beat the reader on her head. I am sympathetic to the cause of representing Kierkegaard’s more responsible ethics than asocial solipsism, but I want to integrate the insights of those who take his rhetorical art of irony and humor ‘seriously.’

¹⁰⁸ Mark Dooley, *The Politics of Exodus : Søren Kierkegaard's Ethics of Responsibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 247.

Moreover, Kierkegaard can be thought of as more than a proto-postmodernist since he adopts a premodern mode of discourse in speaking about the divine. This implies that the postmodern challenge to bring back the divine is using a premodern mode of discourse. The separation of the political and the literary signals a refusal to accept that the ethos after foundationalism rests on a therapeutic rather than a purely conceptual dimension. To let go of foundations must not simply be stated, but must be performed in the text and reader.

The political implications of this inability to let go of foundationalism in form is that superstition has hidden itself in the abstract vocabulary of Order and Security. Because people still need to fill the void of meaninglessness, superstition can take revenge on thought if completely banished. Without faith, without a self-consciously freely chosen belief, the need will assert itself in the political world. Simone Weil issues this warning to those who no longer believe in magic. For Weil, “There is no area in our minds reserved for superstition, such as the Greeks had in their mythology; and superstition, under cover of an abstract vocabulary, has revenged itself by invading the entire realm of thought.”¹⁰⁹ Weil lists the following as words that have become sacred resulting in its automatic legitimation: security, nation, order, authority, and property. They have become code words for a new immediate metaphysics. Calling God’s name may no longer hold, but political leaders can now justify gross infractions of the rule of law all in the name of “national interest” and “security.” Instead of calling on God, all now must obey to the national interest. There is no room to question this new superstition since one puts blind faith in those who work for the “security” of the nation. Since there

¹⁰⁹ Simone Weil, *Selected Essays, 1934-1943*, trans. Richard Rees (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 156.

is no room for a self-conscious faith, it seeps unconsciously in the way one puts absolute faith in the authority of political leaders to preserve order. There is no questioning the authority figures since these abstracted concepts take on a superstitious significance of their own; a sacred barrier has been erected around these terms. For example, blind mysticism can be applied to patriotism that “inclines us to put our country before justice or to believe that there can never be any question of having to choose between them.”¹¹⁰

By fulfilling man’s need for spirituality in the proper realm of theology, one can achieve a critical distance but still maintain a relationship to mythology. For Weil, one can fill in the “vacuous” nouns that the public now holds sacred and unquestionable, “by reviving the intelligent use of expressions like...*on condition that, in relation to.*”¹¹¹ For example “There is democracy *to the extent that...* or: There is capitalism *in so far as.*”¹¹² Weil’s Kantian insight that if mysticism is not given a place in the spiritual world, then it will revenge itself on thought is grounds to map out an appropriate space for the spirit. In Kierkegaardian terms, the demystification of wonder in the world will result in a new blind immediacy that fetishizes thought and locks out freedom to make qualifications, special circumstances, and the suspension of rules *on the condition that*. Weil’s insistence on one’s vigilance over justice can be applied to Kierkegaard’s method of deciding when to suspend the ethical. Kierkegaard’s project may be a humble one of reminding his readers to bring back faith, albeit a critical faith that is aware of its groundlessness in a humorous way. Yet beyond ego-reducing, this faith in humor can bracket the need for blind myths while keeping it from spilling over into the political world.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 195.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 170.

¹¹² Ibid., 157.

Weil notes that the ways that God returns is not through a direct utterance, but through sacralizing the secular monoliths. There is no talk of God but there is talk of national security. One can replace one for the other as one hears of “all in the name of security.” You must obey “in the national interest.” Since there is no room for a self-conscious faith, it seeps unconsciously in the way one speaks about abstract concepts of political significance. Weil wants to make these abstractions real. This is the problem of the security acts which seek to submerge, suspend justice, in the name of the country’s interest. When put this way, any downplaying of fairness and justice to nation should be suspect. The sacred is somehow constructed against choice and judgment. Weil’s insight is found in what one commentator writes as “Kierkegaard’s most prophetic political insight:”

Inevitably man is religious and will turn religious again; and if it is not the Christian religion to which he turns, it will be daemonic religion, religion horribly twisted and distorted....The race which abolished the old Absolute will presently invent a new one.... He learned from Hegel that it would be the *State*—a State that demanded of its citizens uncritical allegiance, unconditional obedience, religious devotion, and self-immolation.¹¹³

Although this is a distortion of Hegel, I argue that reviving spirituality is not a luxury. The danger of a new immediacy spilling over into the social world has meant the justification of unspeakable crimes. Even ethics has been abstractly divinized. By suspending the ethical which has gained a mystical status in which one can be a fanatical ethicist, Kierkegaard reminds the reader to return to humbled ungroundedness. He does this by insisting that true inward religiously is dialectical: “As soon as I take the

¹¹³ Howard A. Johnson, “Kierkegaard and Politics” in *A Kierkegaard Critique: An International Selection of Essays Interpreting Kierkegaard*, ed. Howard A. Johnson, Niels Thulstrup, and F. J. Billeskov Jansen (New York: Harper, 1962), 77.

dialectical away, I become superstitious, and attempt to cheat God of each moment's strenuous reacquisition of that which has once been acquired."¹¹⁴

To understand Kierkegaard's method, one can compare and contrast his works with negative theology and apophatic mysticism, the mystical union with the divine through its negation. The work within negative theology can be helpful for thinking through the foundationalist/anti-foundationalist debates that takes into account not simply what is said, but how what is said influences the reader to produce an experience of apophatic encounter with alterity.

Kierkegaard can be understood in the tradition of apophatic mysticism that emphasizes religious pedagogy of disabusing a reader's tendency to concretize notions of God into foundational, positive representations. This tradition allows the believer to remain a believer but still be open to the wound of negativity of ambiguous contingency. To evaluate Kierkegaard, I borrow techniques from theologians who evaluate apophatic mysticism by taking into account how a text performs negative theology. It does not simply state it in a treatise. I find these theological borrowings significant in that these secondary sources provide a model to evaluate Kierkegaard beyond simply the ideational plane, particular since he did not think it responsible for a writer to his readership to separate ideas from rhetoric. Michael Sells evaluates a text not based on content, but based on the intensity of the antifoundationalist performance. The focus should be shifted from when a text essentializes to when a text generates "anarchic moments" when the mind momentarily breaks loose of the logic of foundationalism. One of the most intense apophatic moments is achieved by Dominican theologian Meister Eckhart's famous

¹¹⁴ CUP 35 n. David R. Law, *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 175.

unsaying “pray to God rid me of God.”¹¹⁵ These are “meaning moments” in which the contradiction in conceptualizing or grounding a concept and its opposite dislodges the mind momentarily. Hence, the first pronouncement is within a set meant to set up the meaning moment and should not be separated. The fear of foundationalism paralyzes a writer from saying anything positive even if utilized as a set up for the potential “meaning event.” When it comes with that which is unrepresentable in thought or language, it is necessary to engage in such a mental wounding process.

This produces a silence in the mind. Kierkegaard writes about the power of silence as a force of which its meaning is indeterminable in language. If one is concerned with what silence means in language, then one cannot let go to allow silence to have power over the individual. Kierkegaard anticipates this line of questioning but refocuses the discussion letting silence have its affect: “What does it [silence] mean? let us not investigate further but bear in mind that it is precisely this silence we need if God’s Word is to gain a little power over people.”¹¹⁶ There is a force to silence that speech does not contain. Kierkegaard would rather not dwell on the meaning of silence, to convert silent meditation into an endless speaking exercise to discover its essential meaning. Similarly, one cannot communicate one’s faith in words because “the essence of faith is to be a secret.”¹¹⁷ While one may not be able to translate silence into meaningful words, the power of silence is in its unspoken presence. Kierkegaard gives silence presence through this analogy:

¹¹⁵ While it was not the scope of his work, Sells also gives the example of Indian Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna, whose unsayings include, “life is like a river, ok, life is not like a river.” Michael Anthony Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

¹¹⁶ FSE 47.

¹¹⁷ WL 43.

Silence—it is not a specific something, because it does not consist simply in the absence of speaking. No, silence is like the subdued lighting in a pleasant room, like the friendliness in a modest living room; it is not something one talks about, but it is there and exercises its beneficent power. Silence is like the tone, the fundamental tone, which is not given prominence and is called the fundamental tone precisely because it lies at the base.¹¹⁸

Silence prepares the ground for action; it is “not something one talks about.” If silence is reduced to the “absence of speaking” then silence will be seen as contentless, which implies that content must necessarily be able to be put into speech. If silence is taken as the lack of words, and words the conveyor of meanings, then silence will be considered meaningless. Kierkegaard considers animals having an advantage over man by not being able to speak for “All that talks in animal existence is its life, its actions. [...] What confuses everything is this advantage man has over the animal [...]. So dubious is this advantage [...] which, ironically, often means that he is what the animal is not, a babbler or a hypocrite.”¹¹⁹

Kierkegaard reminds theorists that words may not be the sole vehicle of force.

The charges against Kierkegaard’s contentless philosophy may be a symptom of the inability to allow or a distrust of silence to exert its ‘beneficent power’ on the reader. One scholar notes that reading Kierkegaard challenges one’s valuing of words over silence:

To read Kierkegaard is to surrender oneself to irony and silence; to write about him is to surrender oneself to a medium that proclaims its inability to do what we insist it must. But each is a surrender which is also a victory, since surrendering to silence is to open oneself to choice. Thus, the critic finds himself trapped—and traps himself—between two possibilities: the meaninglessness of irony...and the promise of repetition....¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ FSE 49.

¹¹⁹ PJ 54 XI 2 A 222.

¹²⁰ Robert Markley and Robert Schleifer, "Editor's Introduction: Writing without Authority and the Reading of Kierkegaard," in *Kierkegaard and Literature: Irony, Repetition, and Criticism*, ed. Ronald Schleifer and Robert Markley (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), 20.

Silencing the mind allows one to choose. To be a critic of Kierkegaard may not lead to a definitive take on the author since his irony traps those who seek to go beyond his style. While Mooney tries to go beyond Kierkegaard's 'literary gimmicks' to discuss the political implications of Kierkegaard's thought, I argue that he is explaining away Kierkegaard's method of trapping his readers into a choice. For example, Mooney tries to fill in Kierkegaard's ethics as the "politics of exodus," while I address Kierkegaard's method over content as an ethical midwife.

If silence allows one to choose, then the silence resulting from arresting thought in paradox may free one to decide. While becoming silent and confused is considered by the understanding as a dead end, this may spur a reader's active potential. Such an arrestment in thought may generate the openness to choice by drawing one nearer to the existential crisis confronted by the reader in the text. To end Kierkegaard's works with confusion is to be trapped, not with paralysis but with its opposite—one is trapped to decide.

Returning to Sells, he notes that there are three methods to apophatic mysticism: 1) silent meditation, 2) spatial separation of the divine as beyond the known, and 3) revocation of the known by its immediate unsaying. Sells chooses the last method that unsays representations immediately after each positive saying as the most intense form of apophasis. However, Sells admits the weaknesses of all three approaches as transient. I argue that the problem with intense moments of unsaying is that such a neatly knotted juxtaposition of opposites will not induce the discomfort necessary to remain in an antifoundationalist sensibility. One will eventually get used to the contradiction without

much mental agony. Given enough time to settle, tricks of semantic reversals will eventually create a new immediacy with God.

I note that Kierkegaard performs an alternative method of increasing the intensity through exaggerated seriousness that insists on the literality of the impossible until the reader achieves an ‘action moment’ of suspending the texts’ literality to act. Rather than write antifoundationalism literally, Kierkegaard tricks the mental reflex from reifying the ungeneralizable. Kierkegaard’s method uses foundationalism against itself. He recognizes the lure of the concrete, the seductiveness of making the unknown known. Rather than reject foundationalism or metaphysics, he pushes it to the (il)logical extreme. Rather than empty antifoundationalism of content which ends up being deified in terms of contentless devotion to the term, Kierkegaard fills in the space of antifoundationalism with a humorous metaphysical version of Christianity that avoids the shortcomings of apophatic mysticism. Rather than lead to paralysis, apophatic mysticism is active on the level of affect. The wound of negativity coils the energy potential in the reader granted one moves on from the wound towards action. The postmodern ethic devoid of metaphysical force lacks power to hold men in fear and trembling. Rather than work against centuries of religious tradition, Kierkegaard achieved an uncomfortable embrace with what Derrida calls the “Christian belief economy.”¹²¹ To do so without resorting to converting his readers to mysticism, Kierkegaard unites the agonistic and therapeutic into a humorous penultimate step prior to the strictly religious which he claims he could never achieve. To

¹²¹ Derrida thought Nietzsche was working uphill by throwing away the Christian belief economy. Derrida’s ethics of a gift economy that does not seek return for good will is a Christian ethic although Derrida would say “he passes for atheist.” Speaking about Christianity as an ethical currency is another way of suspending Christian ontology. See Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

keep mystic language from becoming a new immediacy, Kierkegaard reminds his readers to read his works with an eye towards the humorous.

Moving beyond the banal proclamations of negating positivism in celebrations of negativity, I argue that shifting the debate to humor necessarily integrates form and content since one cannot be humorous without attention to both. While negative theology engages in a process of renaming that may keep reification in check at first, Kierkegaard notes that the new name ends up being deified sooner or later. One must play with the logic of deification in order to subvert its logocentric trappings. While resisting the mystical goal of union with the divine, Kierkegaard uses mysticism's techniques of erasure to achieve a desired affect of leading readers into what they may later find as a wild goose chase. However, one may find herself changed through the process of chasing.

Just as those within philosophy seek to make him less strange; those within theology try to de-mystify Kierkegaard by contextualizing his method within the tradition of negative theology which posits that knowledge of God must come through negation. However, every tradition he is placed never completely captures his method since he adopts and then challenges the traditions' grounds. Negative theologians appropriate his works only to show that he is more negative than negative theology by refusing the goal of mystic union with the divine.¹²² I argue that Kierkegaard makes his work incongruous with any genre or discipline so as to shake up the comfortable terminology that one ends up relying on without critical thought. Kierkegaard is accused of a lack of a theological terminology to carry his exegesis all the way through. For example, James Collins writes:

¹²² See Law.

as often happens in Kierkegaard, when the theme reaches a certain degree of development, it comes to an end and even undergoes a process of involution. Because of a lack of a solid theological method and a precise terminology, the profound intuitions of his Christian soul are expressed in inadequate formulas which may even pass from one extreme to the other.¹²³

I argue Kierkegaard does not lack rigor but is working as a strategic outsider. Such remarks play into the sorcerer's hands of working incognito without being recognized as such. Kierkegaard is conscious that his pseudonymous authorship does not provide satisfying grand theories that reveal his direct intentions: "As yet I have not said a direct word about myself: the postscript to *Concluding Postscript* contains nothing of the sort; all I did was to assume responsibility for the pseudonyms and speak *hypothetically* ('according to what I have understood') about their ideas."¹²⁴ This is not his personal doctrine because to say that he is directly endorsing one view is to make his readers reject the message as hypocritical since the pseudonyms are one-dimensional exaggerations.

One of the biggest dangers of writing about Kierkegaard is a withdrawal into the mechanics of spiritual transformation that takes away the magic of the experience of reading. Below are those who walk the line of exposing Kierkegaard's method without killing it. Rather than serve as religious shockers, I argue reading Kierkegaard forces one out of leaping into religiousness but continues to throw one back to the social-political world. He gives the reader the false hope of reaching a destination of oneness with the divine only to throw her out as soon as the moment seems immanent. While one is lured by the promise of immanence, the moment never arrives, but rather one is sobered by the pronouncement of the limits of the known and to return to the lived tasks at hand to love, to fulfill the one alien commandment to love your neighbor as thyself.

¹²³ James Collins, "Faith and Reflection in Kierkegaard," in *A Kierkegaard Critique; an International Selection of Essays Interpreting Kierkegaard*, ed. Howard A. Johnson (Chicago: H. Regnery, 1967), 169.

¹²⁴ JP VI 636 (*Pap. X' A 161*) *n.d.*, 1849. See also TA 150.

Law writes that Kierkegaard goes beyond negative theology by uses the rhetorical devices of apophasis to avoid its ultimate goals. Avoiding a palatable relationship with religion is a continuous task that must be supported by a humorous spirituality. I argue Kierkegaard's apophatic moves can be of value to political theory in maintaining an ethos that resists foundationalism. Kierkegaard is not merely espousing a doctrinal negative theology which resists describing God in positive terms. Rather, Kierkegaard's writing moves the reader into a foundationalism that is later revoked leading to a sustained contradiction until well beyond the end of the text, leaving the reader in a perpetual unease, what Derrida would call an uncanny humor that keeps spirituality from freezing into absolutes.

Kierkegaard sets up his apophasis through the extremes of the integration of the tragic-comic modes. Logic may get in the way of the action moment. Kierkegaard uses humor to counter this tendency to rigidify the unknown by making light of such tendencies. The Married Man in SLW hopes that his readers would have the humor to not generalize from his one example of what married life is like. Rather than working up hill to resist this tendency, he pushes it to maximum discomfort as he presents a religiosity that resists a comfortable closure. If foundationalism can be used to cave in on itself, then the mind will be unable to fix a tight grasp on the divine. If religion is made to induce both horror and humor, then the emotional labor will induce mental exhaustion to suspend grounding religion in ontology.

I argue that antifoundationalism should be taken in with a significant pause so that the reader can wrestle with the failure to fully represent what the term means in concrete ways. It is the moment when one laughs at oneself for claiming "This text is anti-

essentialist;” when one realizes there is no way to definitively assert the truth of the statement. To stay within the language of antifoundationalism/foundationalism is to remain within the bounds of Reason which does not always apply to matters of decision making.

The language of foundationalism/antifoundationalism can be too paralyzing as one remains trapped within reasoned discourse. This does not mean that decisions are entirely irrational. There is not an antagonistic relationship between decisions and reason except when the latter gets in the way of making a decision.

The antifoundational in Kierkegaard is what he calls humorous. Kierkegaard’s texts should not only be evaluated based on how reasonable the claims which seeks to eliminate contradiction, but also the degree to which humorous sensibilities are instilled in the reader. The play with linguistic paradoxes meant to confuse the reader will be seen as invalid based on the rules of reasoned speech. Yet, if humorous is substituted for antifoundational, then one does not have to engage in the debate of whether one is operating from reasoned discourse. Humor does not threaten reason, but suspends reason in the interest of meaning. Humor can be evaluated under how much it affects the reader, rather than on how reasonable or true in content.

The difficulty of the term antifoundationalism is that it signifies an attitude that cannot be indoctrinated. Antifoundationalism is not a doctrine, a concept that is simply the opposite of foundationalism. Since it must be performed, humor is a better way to capture this attitude. It is easier to understand that the attitude cannot be made into a doctrine since this would fail to achieve its desired effect to dislodge seriousness from its exalted position of superiority. In other words, antifoundationalism is an academic way of

signaling the reader not to take the term too seriously. To think one knows, or can move on from the logic of antifoundationalism is to take the topic too seriously. I question the logic of seriousness as a remnant of the medieval attack on the comic perspective.

Seriousness is a relatively new value given the scientization of fields that in premodern times where comic genres: ethics, religion, and critique. The world of the political has always been associated with the serious business of drawing blood.

Antifoundationalism is not separate from humor. Humor is not merely a glossy presentation of otherwise serious topics; rather it is reclaiming a “metaphysical perspective that has been cornered in the comedy club or sitcom.” It recovers a co(s)mic perspective: “The comic is really a metaphysical concept. It brings about a metaphysical reconciliation.”¹²⁵ Kierkegaard is daring readers to metaphysicalize humor. The comic cannot be treated as if it were within the bounds of pure reason.

¹²⁵ JP 1748 IX A 420 n.d. 1848. See Hegel *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik, Werke*, I-XVIII, X, pt. 3, p. 534. On Hegel’s consideration of irony see Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates : Together with Notes of Schelling’s Berlin Lectures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 406, n. 7. for Hirsch’s list.

Chapter 3: Humor as Metaphysics and Method

The need to delimit humor as anti-serious adopts a seriousness to humor that limits the ways that earnestness and jest can work together as straight and funny man work together in comedic duos. The effort to resuscitate humor by philosophers has focused too much on the frivolous nature in compensation for the serious exclusion of the comic in academia. Yet this adopts a strict definition of humor that was constructed by the logic of seriousness. Kierkegaard works in both earnestness and jest in his comic-tragic approach to his humor that defies such strict boundaries. His humor can be found to be extra or an exaggerated form of seriousness. Kierkegaard's humor depends on a reader to "get it." His complicated humor is a living entity that mixes with the temperament of the reader in a mutual give and take.

Scholars have an uncomfortable relationship with Kierkegaard's indirect approach to communication. Underlying this anxiety is the Enlightenment rationale for privileging directly saying what one means. Locke communicates this clearly:

To make words serviceable to the end of Communication, it is necessary...that they excite, in the Hearer, exactly the same *Idea*, they stand for in the Mind of the Speaker. Without this, Men fill one another's Head with noise and sounds; but convey not thereby their Thoughts, and lay not before one another their Ideas, which is the end of Discourse and Language.¹²⁶

According to this function of words, Kierkegaard merely fills his readers with "noise and sounds." In the context of challenging 'serious' communication, Kierkegaard is strategically disengaging this need to control exactly how a reader is to take up the intentions of the author. A commentator notes that Kierkegaard's way with words is

¹²⁶ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979): bk. 3, ch. 9, s. 2-6 quoted in Linda M.G. Zerilli, "Philosophy's Gaudy Dress: Rhetoric and Fantasy in the Lockean Social Contract," *European Journal of Political Theory* 4, no. 2 (2005): 154.

considered “gestural.” He uses rhetoric that deepens one’s experience of the word.

Adorno notes that Kierkegaard’s writings have the power of incantation to keep his readers spellbound.

According to Locke, in serious communication, words should be in strict service to direct communication and should not be used for any other purpose except to convey what the author means to say to the reader:

I confess, in Discourses where we seek rather Pleasure and Delight, than Information and Improvement, such Ornaments as are borrowed from them, can scarce pass for Faults. But yet, if we would speak of Things as they are, we must allow that all Art of Rhetorick, besides Order and Clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of Words Eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong *Ideas*, move the Passions, and thereby mislead the Judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheat.¹²⁷

Modern political theory keeps strict discipline about acceptable forms of discourse. Ideas are separated from the passions which because they incite religious fervor should be avoided at all costs, even the cost of creating an apathetic citizenry. This attitude is more fervently defended in the use of humor. Francis Bacon tries to limit what subjects could be subjected to humor. Bacon marks the beginning of the separation between humor and sympathy:

As for jest, there be certain things which should be exempt from it, namely religion, matters of state, great persons, any man’s present business of importance, and any case that deserveth pity. Yet there be some that think their wits have been asleep, except they dart out somewhat that is piquant and to the quick: that is a vein which would be bridled—And generally men ought to find the difference between saltness and bitterness. Certainly he that hath a satirical vein, as he maketh others afraid of his wit, so he had need be afraid of others’ memory.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Locke, *Essay* bk. 3, ch. 10, s. 34. Cited in Zerilli 146.

¹²⁸ Francis Bacon, *Essay on Discourse* Quoted in Mary A. Grant, *The Ancient Rhetorical Theories of the Laughable: The Greek Rhetoricians and Cicero* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1924), 8. See George Meredith, *An Essay on Comedy, and the Uses of the Comic Spirit* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1972). Max Eastman, *The Sense of Humor* (New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1921).

According to the OED, the common usage for silliness meant compassion up until the mid seventeenth century. Kierkegaard sought to bring back the power of rhetoric, particularly humor to reconnect what was separated by canonical thinkers like Locke and Bacon.

To counter this tradition of elevating Order and Clearness as ideal, Kierkegaard's writing is strategically strange. His writing serves a pedagogic function to affect a diverse reading public. Kierkegaard laments that the relationship between writer and reader have been inverted:

People no longer write for someone to learn something. Perish the thought, what disrespect! the reading public knows everything already. It isn't the reader that needs the author (as the patient the doctor); no, it's the author who needs the reader. An author is therefore quite simply someone with financial problems. So he writes and this is entering for an exam in which the reading public, which knows everything, give the grades. A person who writes but doesn't earn money is not an author...¹²⁹

Kierkegaard's strangeness is also familiar if his method is related to the ancients. His preferred method of writing is also his method for teaching. He praises the maieutic method over the rote method of regurgitation.¹³⁰ However, Kierkegaard moderates the Socratic form in that Kierkegaard wants the reader to take the place of the interlocutor in a Socratic dialogue.¹³¹ While Socratic dialogues take place inside the structure of the text, Kierkegaard's reader fills in the dialogue outside of the text. Kierkegaard's self-

¹²⁹ PJ 46 VII I A 51, p. 209-10. Just as Socrates was not paid to be a gadfly, neither did Kierkegaard earn money from his books. This drives him to be more prodigious:

But then—it was my fate to be an author in, well, Denmark. In any other country, this kind of writer's existence, would have been the road to riches—in Denmark it cost me money. Contumely was heaped upon me, practically everything was done to make my life insupportable: it makes no difference—for me this writer's existence, which was and is my potential, was a gratification, and I could never thank guidance enough, for the more the opposition, the richer, simply, the productivity.

But—it costs money (yes, the situation is practically crazy, to the jubilation of the market-town in which I live, surrounded by derision, pursued by envy) and I can no longer afford it.

PAP 50 X 2 A 619.

¹³⁰ D 146.

¹³¹ Law, *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian*, 63. Law writes that “a reading of Kierkegaard's works is never simply just a reading but is a process of self-interpretation and self-discovery.” Law 69.

professed goal is to speak to the reader as an individual granted with the freedom to decide. He does not address his readers as lecturers address a crowd who can hide in anonymity. When the calling is put upon the anonymous crowd, one can hide behind the presumed assurance that somebody else will take up the call. For Kierkegaard, “there is nothing to do here but split [the crowd] apart, get the single individual aside, and place him existentially under the ideal. This is my work.”¹³²

To write to the single individual is not to treat her as an anonymous reader:

After one and another little misunderstanding, when it was deceived by a fleeting likeness, it finally encountered that single individual whom I with joy and gratitude call *my* reader, that single individual whom it seeks, towards whom as it were it stretches out its arms, that single individual who is willing enough to let himself be found, willing enough to encounter it finds him happy and confident or ‘weary and pensive.’¹³³

Careful to the psychological differences among his readers, he will engage in a series of caricatures to catch his readers according to their various inclinations. Since he does not assume his readers have similar inclinations, he wrote through various pseudonyms exhibiting a range of personality types. Kierkegaard does not write to clarify an objective truth agreeable to an anonymous crowd, but to help the individual reader find her own subjective truth:

Through the repellent effect exerted by the contrast, which on a higher plane was also the role played by his irony, the learner would be compelled to understand that he had essentially to do with himself, and that the inwardness of the truth is not the comradely inwardness with which two bosom friends walk arm in arm, but the separation with which each for himself exists in the truth.¹³⁴

Through Climacus, the language of truth is not given up to objectivity. One’s interpretation of Kierkegaard’s text is just as true as another. When critics fear subjective

¹³² JP 3860. X³ A 702 *n.d.* 1851.

¹³³ Preface to ‘The Woman That was a Sinner’ Copenhagen, May 5, 1843. Søren Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 260.

¹³⁴ CUP 222, cf. 217, 235.

truth, they may be imagining the exclusive clique between merged friends or the members of a cult, granted these distinctions are indistinguishable in the external and hence arouses fear. One is to gain a personal relationship with the text rather than rely on interlocutors, reviewers, or peers who may take away the autonomy of the reader in forming her own conclusions about the text, and in turn her own life. Kierkegaard's corpus is written to speak to a variety of readers through both enticing and offending them in intimate ways so as to draw out unique responses from the reader. However, he does this in a non-didactical way. Those who detect his approach have called it ironic. Crites writes that the pseudonymous works (seven) are "all aesthetic and ironic: aesthetic in that they are all discarnate objects with fantastical authors, distorting mirrors in which the reader may contemplate his or her own life and its apparent possibilities; ironic in that no actual author directly speaks his own convictions in them."¹³⁵ Yet calling Kierkegaard's pseudonyms ironic implies that he wants his readers to take in the opposite of what his pseudonyms represent. It becomes an easy exercise of simply inverting the life views to understand what Kierkegaard *really* meant. Crites illustrates this understanding of interpreting Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings:

For it is only necessary to adhere strictly to the text's dialectical exposition of selfhood to recognize how wrongheaded many of these opinions are. If our interpretation is critical, the critique is immanent in the text itself. We need only bring out the self-criticizing resources of the text, which provides the basis for an interpretation of its meaning unrestricted by the biases of the author.¹³⁶

The tone of this passage makes Kierkegaard's *real* understandings clear, if one simply reverses the "wrongheaded" opinions. Crites uses the term immanent, which to Kierkegaard would be too cozy a term since he sought to leave the ground open for the

¹³⁵ Crites 145.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 144.

reader to make her own interpretation. Kierkegaard sought to lead his readers into a contradiction rather than to taint the texts with his own judgment.¹³⁷ I argue that Kierkegaard does not want to convert his readers through simple rhetorical strategies. The objective is not to make copies of himself, but to make the reader confront her own life choices as mirrored in the pseudonyms' perspectives. The decisive moment is far from immanent, but comes about as the result of an inward struggle without outside foundations for support. If one claims that Kierkegaard is only ironic then it is easy to decode Kierkegaard as the opposite of his pseudonyms. I argue that the process of reading Kierkegaard slowly, repetitiously, is that he sought to create affects in the reader as well as distance himself from being a didactician. While Crites allows for an ironic approach, I push further that Kierkegaard is a humorist in that one can never be sure when he is being ironic or not, radically leaving the ground open for readers to interpret the text on her own terms.

The speculative philosopher makes the ethical follow immanently rather than transcendently. Kierkegaard mocks Danish Hegelians who attempt to convert Hegel's system into a Hegelian theology:

But the mockery takes its revenge; it is so far from being excluded that it rather seems as if speculative philosophy had shut itself in with it, so ridiculous has it become. Its distraction of mind is also revenged, when speculative philosophy proposes in Ethics to have a living individual act by virtue of a theory of immanence, i.e. to act by inaction; for the point of view of immanence exists only for contemplation, essentially and in truth only for God, and as an illusion for worshipful professors and their friends and family.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ "My destiny seems to be that I shall set forth the truth insofar as I discover it and simultaneously demolish any attendant authority. Then, as I become unauthoritative, and in the highest degree unreliable in the eyes of men, I set forth the truth and thus bring them into a contradiction from which they can only be rescued by absorbing the truth by themselves. Only that personality is mature who absorbs truth and makes it his own, no matter whether it is Bileam's ass talking or a guffawer with his horse-laugh, or an apostle and an angel." D 1846, 147. "Bileam's ass: God conferred upon it the gift of being able to talk to its master." Fourth Book of Moses, Numbers 22, 28.

¹³⁸ CUP 133.

If Kierkegaard suggests that “immanence exists only for contemplation,” then, like Kant, he illustrates that reason cannot close the distance between ought and is. Reason will never come any closer to a decision than the theory of immanence is a substitute for action. To wait for immanence is to stall in indecisiveness.

While apodictics, or absolute unmediated knowledge, may have long been settled by the Kantian *Critiques*, there is still a need to revisit these themes of transcendence on an existential plane. However, Kierkegaard does not attempt to disrupt the canon with a grand system of his own. Compared to the lofty aspirations of grand theorists, Kierkegaard admits that what he writes is insignificant. For Kierkegaard the responsibility of writing about ethics is not simply to convey the clear intentions of the author. Rather than be a grand systems thinker, Kierkegaard would rather be a humorist since he does not have to fit everything under one consistent umbrella. To do so would convert the wonder of the world into dreadful seriousness:

Therefore the humorist can never actually become a systematizer, either, for he regards every system as a renewed attempt to blow up the world with a single syllogism in the familiar Blicherian manner, whereas the humorist himself has come alive to the incommensurable which the philosopher can never figure out and therefore must despise. He lives in the abundance and is therefore sensitive to how much is always left over, even if he has expressed himself with all felicity (therefore the disinclination to write). The systematizer believes that he can say everything, and that whatever cannot be said is erroneous and secondary.¹³⁹

The humorist knows that any attempt to understand the world in totality will fall short.

The grand theorist must necessarily exclude unsolvable riddles to the margins to maintain the bounds of serious discourse. The humorist knows the limits to his task which always falls short of such a strict sense of perfection. Humor has the flexibility to be no less

¹³⁹ JP 1702 II A 140 n.d.

perfect. For Kierkegaard, humor always spills over from the written text which cannot contain the infinite depth of humor:

I perceive why genuine humor cannot be caught, as irony can, in a novel and why it thereby ceases to be a life-concept, simply because not-to-write is part of the nature of the concept, since this would betray an all too conciliatory position toward the world....Just as Socrates left no books, Hamann [“the greatest and most authentic humorist, the genuinely humorous Robinson Crusoe, not on a desert island but in the noise of life; his humor is not an esthetic concept but life, not a hero in a controlled drama.”]¹⁴⁰

Kierkegaard is making fun of himself as he may have written too much to be considered a humorist. However, Kierkegaard is not a standard humorist. Kierkegaard’s humor incorporates exaggerated seriousness that is not always obvious. This is similar to Socrates as Eastman writes:

Indeed it is the peculiar charm of his [Socrates’] irony that it never completely confesses itself to be a joke. We are never quite sure whether Socrates is humorously understating himself, or whether he is simply the first and only man in creation who ever state himself with enough hesitation to be accurate.¹⁴¹

There is no standard to judge whether any part of Kierkegaard’s work is humorous since his humor depends on how the text is read by the reader. It depends on the temperament of the reader who may not take his seriousness as humorous. I argue humor allows room for the serious since it does not have definite boundaries or guardians that police what counts as humorous. Humor is not a subject that can easily be dissected or studied. If one attempts this task, it is like “A man who lets himself be skinned alive in order to show how the humorous smile is produced by the contraction of a particular muscle—and thereupon follows this with a lecture on humor.”¹⁴² Humor cannot be dissected in this manner. An author writing humorously on humor warns that:

¹⁴⁰ JP 1699.

¹⁴¹ Eastman 53.

¹⁴² JP 1718 II A 689 Jan. 6, 1838.

the problem of humor has always been a special field of play for the irresponsible essay-writer.... When I told Bernard Shaw that I was writing this book, he advised me to go to a sanitarium. 'There is no more dangerous literary symptom,' he said, 'than a temptation to write about wit and humor. It indicates the total loss of both.'¹⁴³

Herbert Blau writes about the inherent circularity of an investigation on comedy. It is those "ticklish truths" that will never settle down long enough for one to lock its meaning and effects. Comedy defies categorization into rigid generic genres; as soon as one attempts to arrest the play of comedy, it in turn morphs into another shape that slides past all efforts to patrol or tame its effects. Kierkegaard is accused of far worse than irresponsibility. Kierkegaard's indirect and direct communication tries to negotiate using humor while providing commentary on this method without skinning it alive. While some commentators evaluate Kierkegaard's humor based on how many times he mentioned the word,¹⁴⁴ Kierkegaard would argue that this literal quantification of his work does not encompass the ways in which humor challenges such objective criteria. Moreover, through humor, Kierkegaard can challenge systematizers without writing an anti-system that would end up upholding the presuppositions of grand theory in the long run. Kierkegaard does not use a doctrine of humor to challenge the systems thinker. Hence, to make sense of Kierkegaard under the criterion of logical consistency would be to destroy his method of indirect communication through humor. Part of the experience of reading Kierkegaard is to become accustomed to inconsistency.

Irony is not enough to challenge the systematizers of Ethics in an abstract morality. While irony allows one to entertain the idea of the realm of ethics, humor is needed in the difficult task of living by the ethical. Humor can manage the times when one falls from duty; it gives space for one to strive to live a spiritualized existence but

¹⁴³ Eastman viii.

¹⁴⁴ See Lippitt who writes that Kierkegaard mentioned humor the most number of times in CUP.

gives allowances when that demand falls short to temporal demands. Irony does not take off from the ground as much as humor. To be a humorist is to be radically without grounding:

Humor is irony carried through to its maximum oscillations. Even though the essentially Christian is the real *primus motor*, nevertheless there are those in Christian Europe who have not achieved more than irony and for that reason have also not been able to accomplish the absolutely isolated, independently personal humor.¹⁴⁵

To have a humorous relationship to Christianity means to achieve a truly inward groundless connection to the divine which opens up the possibility of an irreligiousness religiousness. To be absolutely isolated is to entertain the notion that one might also be mad. Kierkegaard refuses to make his readers into carbon copies of blind religiousness. Kierkegaard writes in an ambiguous style that does not guarantee a strict reading. In *Training in Christianity*, Anti-Climacus writes in a manner to “bring defense and attack together in such a unity that no one can say directly whether one is attacking or defending [Christianity].”¹⁴⁶ One cannot tell whether Anti-Climacus is arguing as a Christian or an atheist. His works are left deliberately ambiguous. Through this unity of the contradictory affect of repelling and attracting the reader, the reader becomes philosophically and emotionally knotted in the process of reading the text. One scholar writes that “Climacus’s use of paradox is designed both to ward off those readers who are deficient in philosophical eros and to entice and provoke those who are not.”¹⁴⁷ Those in love with philosophy will be easily hooked. It is up to the reader to make up her own mind about what to do next. For Kierkegaard, reading should not be a comfortable process of passive learning. He sought to transform reading into a transformative experience without a clear

¹⁴⁵ JP 1699. II A 136 August 4, 1837.

¹⁴⁶ TIC 133.

¹⁴⁷ Jacob Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates: A Study in Philosophy and Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2.

direction for such a transformation. Kierkegaard does not simply convey what one should and should not do. Those who seek instruction by fully identifying with a pseudonym will not get any closer to finding a solution that they can find by relying on a didactic sermon. The knot does not unravel by itself. The reader must take up the responsibility for her own disentanglement if this is what she is willing to do.

Anti-Climacus can be the equivalent to the Christian drill sergeant who is relentless with training his soldiers. In the editor's preface, Kierkegaard writes that TIC is the most intensely religious where one will find "the requirement of being a Christian is strained by the pseudonym to the highest pitch of ideality."¹⁴⁸ But not everyone is attuned to the highest pitch. When ideality is too painful for the ears, Kierkegaard reminds the reader that the text is written for the author himself. TIC is to be "addressed solely to me [Kierkegaard]."¹⁴⁹ Lowrie insinuates that Kierkegaard took his attacks upon Christendom so seriously that it terminated his life:

One will be more irritated than edified by the pungent reflections of this book if one will not take S.K. at his word when he affirms that he regards them as addressed primarily to himself, does not recognise how poignantly they wounded him, and does not know how salutary his wounds proved to be at the last.¹⁵⁰

Yet Lowrie may be taking Kierkegaard as too much of an Anti-Climacus. Kierkegaard writes that he is somewhere between Climacus and Anti-Climacus. I wonder whether one can assume Kierkegaard became so merged with Anti-Climacus that the latter could have fatally wounded Kierkegaard as Lowrie implies.

These remarks reveal how much effort Kierkegaard expended to hide behind his writings. Kierkegaard does not provide easy roadmaps for readers whom he thinks must

¹⁴⁸ Lowrie, Editor's Preface, TIC.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. n 2.

¹⁵² CUP 73.

find their own way struggling with uncertain conclusions. She must find it in herself through “inward appropriation” of the life views presented in his texts. Just as the writer must write with the eye towards the reader and the self, so much the reader should read to ultimately return to the self in inwardness. Climacus writes that the path to salvation “makes it a secret for everyone who is not in the same way doubly reflected within himself.”¹⁵² The double reflection takes place when the pseudonyms reflect back to the reader what the reader has reflected in herself. This double reflection is facilitated by the author only when he can make himself disappear. Kierkegaard uses devices to avoid making himself into an authority who reveals truths in strictly linear logical forms. It is Kierkegaard’s humor to utilize ambiguity to communicate by stepping down as the authorial figure. Kierkegaard is engaged in the “double task” of helping but not appearing to help, to play the fool at the same time as an inward enthusiast:

Yet the unrecognizable ones...will have a double task in comparison with the men of distinction...in an earlier structure, for the unrecognizables are obliged to keep on working—and at the same time work to conceal their working.

The unrecognizables recognize the servants of leveling but dare not use power or authority against them, for then there would be a regression, because it would be instantly obvious to a third party that the unrecognizable one was an authority, and then the third party would be hindered from attaining the highest.¹⁵³

Kierkegaard needs Anti-Climacus not simply to hide behind but to throw off readers from finding a true Kierkegaard underneath any of the pseudonyms. While working in the service of the reader, Kierkegaard is constantly hiding his efforts. He must write in a weak vocabulary to diminish his authority. There is a reason that Kierkegaard sought to distance himself from the directness of Anti-Climacus. This inverts the idea that weak ambivalence in speech signals a weak agent. As an admirer of Socrates, Kierkegaard notes that hesitation is not weak, but rather allows one to act. Hesitating

¹⁵³ TA 109.

thought may allow one to let go of reflection enough to act. To be weak in thought is not synonymous with weakness in action. Kierkegaard remarks that Ben Franklin acknowledged the benefits of hiding behind the grammar of ambivalence. Kierkegaard notes in his journals how Franklin in his autobiography chooses to advise in humbling tones so as not to arouse the disfavor of those averse to pedantic sermonizing. Kierkegaard quotes Franklin's self-conscious understatements: "I spoke less frequently in definite opposition to anything; I generally used such expressions as: I believe that one might suppose etc."¹⁵⁴ One may be accused of being a weak writer, but this form of hesitancy may speak more effectively to the reader. The humbled attitude of the speaker is less likely to arouse opposition.

The unrecognizables are obliged to be devotedly unrecognized in the service of the reader. It would be unGodly to preach to those who may be reactive to direct confrontation. The strategy is always towards the other since to remain pure in one's expression of thought may turn people away from acting. The author cannot stand on the pulpit since "the law of his existence...is not to rule, to guide, to lead, but in suffering to serve, to help indirectly."¹⁵⁵ Kierkegaard writes further:

Those who have not made the leap [to help themselves through religious inwardness] will interpret the suffering act of the unrecognizable one as his defeat, and those who have made the leap will have a vague idea that it was his victory. But they will not be certain, because certainty could only come from him.¹⁵⁶

Those who "leap" will remain in a vague relationship with the indirect communicator if he is to remain unrecognizable. The lack of certainty of being helped signals that a 'leap' is also not definite or committed only on one occasion. The author

¹⁵⁴ JP 4204 X (to the 4th) A 68 *n.d.*, 1851.

¹⁵⁵ TA 109.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

must not stand above the reader since an author who speaks pedantically about the religious duty will be seen as hypocritical since no one can live up to the religious demands. Kierkegaard desires to eliminate his authority by hiding behind a dash so as not to invite later resentment by the reader as she reacts against being persuaded to walk the hard road. Like a force that exerts pressure on both sides, the dash will keep both sides in tension. The reader can only blame himself for choosing to continue reading and following in the divine illusion. Kierkegaard's goal is to be the midwife to allow the reader to find her own path with his indirect help:

No, he [the reader] stands alone—by another's help. But this help by another is hidden, hidden from him—for him who was helped?—no, from the eye of the independent man (for if he knows that he has been helped, he is really in the deepest sense not an independent man who helps and has helped himself); it is hidden behind a dash.

...

Although that rogue [Socrates] made himself infinitely light with the cunning of the dash, and the art is precisely in having been able to do everything for a person and to appear to have done nothing at all—for the lover the dash, even though in the sense of thought an infinite lightness, is in another sense (and it is important to observe that it is not observed) like a heavy breathing, almost like a deep sigh. For in this dash is hidden the sleeplessness of anxiety, the night-tossing of labour, almost desperate exertion; in this dash is hidden a fear and trembling which has never found an expression, and for this very reason is all the more dangerous. The lover has understood that is truth the greatest, the only benefaction one man can accomplish for another, is to help him stand alone, to become himself, to become his own; but he has also understood the danger and the suffering in the midst of the task and above all the terribleness of responsibility.¹⁵⁷

The tone of this passage in WL reveals the emotional labor of working to conceal one's efforts. The underlying humor in these efforts to be effortless signals the impossibility to completely communicate indirectly just as it is impossible to write about being fully hidden and state the inexpressible. By repeating these paradoxes in speech,

¹⁵⁷ WL 257. See interview with Levinas who shares this restlessness. For a detailed discussion of how Levinas's ethics contrasts but is similar to Kierkegaard see below as well as Westphal's article. This is Levinas ethic of care but with the realization that resistances to living such a life require an appropriate technique.

Kierkegaard sought to instill in the reader the limits of language. Containment through concealment becomes a virtue in leading readers to acknowledge their responsibility in choosing a life-view.¹⁵⁸ A lover should seek to “pack his whole life together in a dash.”¹⁵⁹ She must resist loud pronouncements of what is good and right reducing herself into a dash to represent the technique of ushering the reader into facing an existential choice. Hence it would be a disservice to the reader if the author as instructor writes about ethics directly: “If he had not really been a lover, he would have directly cried out the truth less thoughtfully, and then he would immediately have had disciples who had picked up the truth—and called him master.”¹⁶⁰ Adopting a Socratic ambivalence to language, Kierkegaard notes the over neglected function of the dash. If silence is one way to teach, then so is hiding behind the dash in writing. Kierkegaard challenges discourse theory by giving power to punctuation whose original purpose is to send signals to the reader of how to read a text. This is a fitting metaphor for how Kierkegaard perceives his role as an author.

Given his almost over attentiveness to the limits of language, the humorous aspect of this passage is how much text he needs to explicate that he is hiding behind a dash. Part of the humor in Kierkegaard is his direct expositions of his indirect method. How is one to make sense of the very visible call to remain invisible? Kierkegaard is mocking the self-righteous tone of the “desperate exertion” entailed in writing incognito. It is not possible to be perfectly hidden just as one cannot remain perfectly silent. Because one cannot be perfectly hidden, one must use humor to throw the reader off lest she might

¹⁵⁸ Kierkegaard writes to “Kierkegaardians” for misunderstanding his intentions if failing to see this point. *Ibid.*, 373, n. 30.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 259.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 260.

detect the author's authority behind the dash. However, to be an outwardly noticeable humorist is to betray one's indirectness. To throw off any hint that one is a genuine indirect writer, one cannot always hide behind a particular device in a particular manner. Because of this contradiction of using obvious humor as a hiding device, the incognito writer must be more ingenious in his humor while not taking his role as incognito writer too seriously. Kierkegaard notes the writer cannot be perfectionistic about his role as an incognito writer since it is inhuman to be perfectly selfless. Even if one manages to trick the outsider, one will not be able to still the inward struggle of working so hard to be misunderstood. All authors have a degree of vanity to be recognized to some extent. Kierkegaard notes that the author needs humor to deal with this internal conflict:

But is humor the incognito of the religious individual? Is it not his incognito that there is absolutely nothing that marks him off from others, absolutely nothing that could serve as a hint of his secret inwardness, not even so much as the humoristic? At the supreme maximum, if this can be obtained in existence, this would doubtless be so; but as long as the conflict and the suffering persist in his inwardness, he will not succeed in wholly concealing it. But he will not express himself directly, and he will negatively prevent such a direct expression with the assistance of the humoristic.¹⁶¹

While using humor to help others, the author must also be helped with the humoristic. Kierkegaard challenges humor to only mean the opposite of seriousness. I argue that his humor includes exaggerated seriousness that speaks without authority to the reader albeit in a different tenor. I contend that every attempt to create boundaries around humor will fail to contain it. Eastman is aware that the basis of containing humor is out of fear. The common conception of humor as that which excludes life and death issues is a way to maintain a delusional hold on a world in which disorder and chaos will erupt at any moment. Eastman articulates the ways in which humor is only acceptable if it is

¹⁶¹ CUP Lowrie C.3 447.

punctuated with superciliousness so as not to serve as a threat to the established order that reveals arbitrariness of one's position in the world. According to Eastman on humor:

They call it 'levity,' and wish to have it segregated and rendered irrelevant, confined to the 'funny page,' or the 'comic paper,' included in parentheses, or at least stigmatized with an exclamation-point, or a pointed voice, or something else to indicate that it is not to be taken seriously or allowed to spread.¹⁶²

This definition can apply to the sentiment against Kierkegaard's writings. Kierkegaard's humor is not announced or separated from the serious. There is a desire to both embrace and limit humor, to lock it up and compartmentalize its domain of meaning so as not to infect the "seriousness" of the other works. Anthologies of Kierkegaard's humor collect excerpts of witticisms that are seen as a break from the serious works. His humor is considered as time off from the serious. Yet Eastman writes that one "does not have to have a bell rung and a flag put up every time anything is to be taken humorously. He does not regard humor as an interlude."¹⁶³ Kierkegaard illustrates that humor is not a break from the serious; it is a state of mind that one carries in tension with the ethico-religious.

Kierkegaard challenges the association between earnestness and seriousness:

one has not learned from God (and this one learns from God) to be earnest enough himself to be able to go about it as lightly as the truth actually permits. Do not ever believe that earnestness is suliness; do no ever believe that earnestness is the grim countenance which spreads evil on sight: no one was ever earnest who has not learned from earnestness that one can also seem too earnest.¹⁶⁴

One can be earnestly too earnest and humorously too funny. Roberts writes via Kierkegaard that a sense of humor is a "way out"¹⁶⁵ or "an expedient for backing off and objectifying the situation....an auxiliary belief which disemburdens you of total

¹⁶² Eastman 47.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ WL 313.

¹⁶⁵ CUP Swenson p. 462f.

responsibility for correcting the evil.”¹⁶⁶ C. Stephen Evans via Kierkegaard writes that “The individual who is ‘trapped’ or ‘caught’ by a contradiction experiences it as tragic. To be amusing the contradiction must be one for which the individual knows a ‘way out.’”¹⁶⁷ But humor is more than amusing or a ‘literary gimmick.’ Rather than justify humor as a way out, Kierkegaard puts seriousness on the defensive.

Since earnestness is not restricted to a gloomy ill-humor, Kierkegaard also wrote in more obviously frivolous ways. In a short piece “Light Reading for People in Various Estates According to Time and Opportunity,” Kierkegaard through his pseudonym Nicolaus Notabene protested the loftiness of writing a preface. Notabene asks why a book would be necessary if one can simply write a short preface explaining it once and for all. For Kierkegaard, repetition is the key, since to return to the texts that baffled one allows the text to work its baffling effects on the reader. I argue that one can look to Notabene’s diatribe as a not so subtle hint that Kierkegaard would want his readers to engage in the slower task of reading his books rather than a shortened synopsis in the form of a preface.

Notabene mocks the writer of prefaces which is usually aimed at getting to the point of a book without going through the movements of the text itself. Notabene denounces preface writers as analogous to those who stand at the gates of adventure but do not cross the threshold. The energy he spent on describing a substance-less activity with colorful analogies is an example of the repetitive “dignity of language” that Adorno admired but disapproved of as incantational rather than philosophical or political.¹⁶⁸

Notabene speaks of the preface writer, “his halting manner in getting to the point makes

¹⁶⁶ Robert C. Roberts, "Smiling with God: Reflections on Christianity and the Psychology of Humor," *Faith and politics* 4, no. 2 (1987): 172.

¹⁶⁷ C. Stephen Evans, "Kierkegaard's View of Humor: Must Christians Always Be Solemn," *Faith and Politics* 4, no. 2 (1987): 178.

¹⁶⁸ I argue his comments also apply to the academic abstract.

him comic.... Writing a preface is like having done something that justifies claiming a certain attention, like having done something on one's conscience that tempts confidentiality."¹⁶⁹ The preface exhibits a vanity on the part of the author to reveal the punch line before the joke has been told to give away the point of the story before the reader has a chance to experience reading the book. Rather than give the reader a short cut to the main point of the book, Notabene writes the preface is better left as a preparatory throat clearing, the tuning of instruments meant more for the artist than the audience. The preface is a game of hide-and-seek to trick the reader. A preface reads like a confession of the good works one has done, a selfish divulging that serves the author more than the reader. Notabene provides a repetitious series of minutely detailed metaphors until one gets the point of the pointlessness of writing a preface. Draining all imaginative energy on half baked plans and near completed adventures, writing a preface, no less reading one, is stalling entrance, looking over into an abyss, chatting in complacency at the foot of the wonder. It is the moment when one knows for sure that one can rest in tranquility with the merger with the beloved, when the agony, restlessness is reduced knowing that the puzzle will be solved. Notabene's polemic against preface writers may be Kierkegaard's way to remind the reader not to have a too comfortable relationship to his works, to avoid becoming one with the author. Kierkegaard may be speaking to translators like Lowrie who are too sure of the wishes of the author. It is an understatement to call these works polemical, for he pushes his offensiveness to the

¹⁶⁹ Prefaces. *Light Reading for People in Various Estates According to Time and Opportunity* (June 17, 1844) by Nicolaus Notabene, 157-8. Søren Kierkegaard and Selections, *The Essential Kierkegaard*, vol. 2 5 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

extreme. His long winded attack on preface writers, being himself a preface writer, is also written for himself.

The art involved in my whole underlying existence consisted not only in abstaining from talking about what occupied me so infinitely and keeping silent about the books in which I gradually laid down my best efforts, but principally in being always at the beck and call of others, ready to talk about everything else: jokes, larks, etc, like a man of leisure who has all the time in the world.¹⁷⁰

His direct communication may be to throw off the reader from achieving a transparent relationship to the author. One cannot take him completely seriously even when he is writing in his own name. If Kierkegaard meant to put seriousness in suspense, then the same cannot be said of most of his interpreters. While I agree with most scholars that Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works should not be taken literally, I disagree with those who claim that one can find the genuine Kierkegaard in his veronymous works.¹⁷¹ While his veronymous works are penned in his name and assumed to be more directly transparent in communicating his thoughts, Kierkegaard keeps his intentions ambiguous. In the translator's preface to Kierkegaard's last works in TIC, Lowrie attempts to make Kierkegaard into an evangelical preacher, or at least come out of hiding as a once and for all serious thinker. Lowrie attempts to solve the riddle of Kierkegaard's whole corpus which I argue should remain unsettled. I take Lowrie's justification for publishing the last of Kierkegaard's works before his other post-pseudonymous works as an example of the anxiety of Kierkegaardian scholars to secure a reader's 'right' interpretation—a task I argue defies the wishes of the author. Below is an example of the effort by Kierkegaard scholars to make him a serious thinker in the end to justify his significance to academic

¹⁷⁰ D 149, 1846, 121.

¹⁷¹ Kierkegaardian scholars have coined a term to discuss works written under his own name as veronymous. Kierkegaard's veronymous works were sometimes published simultaneously as his pseudonymous works, but after 1848, he began writing veronymously until the last years of his writing life.

scholarship. I argue whether seriousness and significance are necessarily synonymous. In appropriating Kierkegaard's humor in the service of a serious endeavor or taking his humor seriously, one not only kills his humor but also makes seriousness the unquestioned standard for significance.

Lowrie exhibits the dis-ease of a Kierkegaardian scholar uncomfortable with a generation of American readers who might not take Kierkegaard seriously. He narrates his rush to translate Kierkegaard's last works in case readers miss his *real* meaning which I argue must always be left in suspense since Kierkegaard notes he has taken much with him. It is as if without certainty of Kierkegaard's final aim in his writings, one cannot glean meaningful insight from his texts. One's reading of Kierkegaard can never be settled since one can never be sure of what Kierkegaard *really* meant. I think that *is* the point to reading Kierkegaard, if one insists on finding a point to reading him. In Lowrie's tone there is an effort to still the ambiguity of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works that necessitates a definitive solution key. I ask whether one should take a master of indirect communication seriously when he says he speaks directly. Perhaps Kierkegaard would say that it is best left up to the reader. Lowrie suggests that taking enjoyment of a text would be a disservice to Kierkegaard's ultimate task which to Lowrie is to talk pedantically to the reader in the last instance. Unwilling to let the strange remain strange, Lowrie speaks with the authority of a gatekeeper to guard against unwarranted interpretations that might make Kierkegaard into a flippant writer of merely entertaining texts. Lowrie explains:

So I do not hesitate to publish now these latest works [Edifying Discourses], which are so clear and definite in their aim that they may serve to define the tendency and purpose of the earlier, the strictly pseudonymous works which seem to leave the either/or undecided, which are so delightful to the reader, but are so ambiguous, so

full of mystification, so baffling. Moreover, being a serious person in a serious calling, one of the ‘parsons’ so roughly treated in these last works, it is a matter of course that I should devote my effort to rendering these most serious books accessible, leaving the philosophical works to Swenson as Professor of Philosophy, and to more aesthetic persons the ‘aesthetical’ works. It is not my fault if by prodigious industry and by reason of leisure from other tasks I have got a little ahead of the procession.¹⁷²

Lowrie speaks with the seriousness of a humorless Judge Wilhelm. It would be appropriate to address Lowrie as Frater Taciturnus addressed the overzealous:

Of course one does not at once get the patient to laugh at his fixed idea, but by the employment of analogies one approaches nearer and nearer. If he laughs easily and heartily, one may be able perhaps to take him off his guard....there is nothing more ludicrous than to see religious categories employed with profound and stupid seriousness where one ought to employ aesthetic categories with humor and jest.¹⁷³

Taciturnus makes passion synonymous with humor rather than a “profound and stupid seriousness.” By insisting on separating Kierkegaard’s works into entertainingly aesthetic, philosophically baffling, and clearly serious religious works, Lowrie draws strict boundaries around Kierkegaard’s approach which is meant to mock such strict delineations in the first place. Lowrie ends up splitting Kierkegaard into two personalities despite the fact that Kierkegaard sometimes published his pseudonymous and veronymous works on the same day.¹⁷⁴ Having taken on the task of translating the later post-pseudonymous works in a division of labor with other Kierkegaardian English translators, Lowrie writes that he felt a rush to jump to the last writings so readers can have an answer to the puzzle lest they become sidetracked by his pseudonymous

¹⁷² Preface to TIC vii.

¹⁷³ SLW 421.

¹⁷⁴ For example, FT was published on the same day as *Repetition* and two veronymous discourses.

works.¹⁷⁵ However, Lowrie is conscious of the effect of publishing these ‘direct’ convictions as he recalls that Swenson warns him against it:

But although my impatience has led me to put the last first, I am not unmindful of the ‘difficulty’ to which Professor Swenson rather anxiously called my attention; remarking that ‘*Training in Christianity* and the subsequent quasi-polemical discourses are very strong meat, not just adapted for babes. To introduce these discourses of Kierkegaard to an unprepared public, and one which is so far from having any very concrete religious education as our public in America, either experimentally or ideologically, is certainly putting the blunt end of the wedge in first, and may cause misunderstanding.’ This is true, it may cause a little misunderstanding, and many who do not misunderstand may be offended—and yet a man so ‘unprepared’ as Georg Brandes, a Jewish free-thinker, said of the *Training in Christianity*, ‘I consider this book one of the most admirable writings, and it is a work above all distinguished for acuteness of thinking and love of the truth. He who cannot find time to read many of the works of Kierkegaard’s last period must at least read this book thoroughly. In it he will find Kierkegaard’s whole train of thought and his most profound feeling.’¹⁷⁶

This exchange between Lowrie and Swenson shows an “anxious” Swenson trying to dissuade an overeager Lowrie to translate and publish the works in order. Assuming the public is not ready for Kierkegaard without his masks, the translators sought to keep the American reading public from being “offended”—an effect that Kierkegaard may not want abated. Granted, Lowrie hesitates to claim Kierkegaard’s last works as unmediated direct pronouncements to the reader since Lowrie qualifies Kierkegaard’s last works as only “quasi-polemical.” However, there is still a tone of distrust of whether the reader will read Kierkegaard correctly. Yet as Kierkegaard illustrates in *Repetition* that the value of a farce is that the audience can never be sure if one laughs at the right places since there is no one to look to as the authority of when to laugh or find something funny, I

¹⁷⁵ Lowrie vi. “I have already published Kierkegaard’s intimate self-revelation, *The Point of View*, together with the other documents which properly go with it. I was in haste to produce this, so that it may be available as a guide to the earlier works which have already been published in English or are about to be. And I am in haste also to publish the volumes now being issued, containing the last and most decisive expressions of S. K.’s Christian discourses.”

¹⁷⁶ TIC vi.

argue that this theory is not all together applicable to Kierkegaard's corpus when one is entirely alone in the endeavor of deciding when to take Kierkegaard at his word or not. I argue whether it ultimately matters that one takes his aesthetically humorous works seriously or his serious works humorously when I speculate Kierkegaard would rather have one gain an intimate, unique relationship to his texts, whether one had "the required religious education" or not.

Lowrie wants to paint the edifying discourses by the pseudonym Anti-Climacus as the short cut to understanding Kierkegaard as a Christian thinker. Yet for Kierkegaard, there are not shortcuts to be a Christian since he is always *becoming* Christian. Kierkegaard writes in his journals that he would "place myself higher than Johannes Climacus, lower than Anti-Climacus."¹⁷⁷ Kierkegaard is somewhere in between, just as a reader is always occupying spaces in between spheres of interpretation and its meaning for existence. It takes a comic-tragic sensibility to occupy these in between spaces of interpretation to be translated into action.

While Lowrie acknowledges that Kierkegaard did not consider himself the "almost repulsive, almost demoniacal"¹⁷⁸ Anti-Climacus, Lowrie insists that Kierkegaard crossed into the highest stage of religiosity designated by the abstract title, religiousness B in SUD.¹⁷⁹ Lowrie writes against Kierkegaard here: "For the reader of to-day the pathos of the work lies in the fact that he actually became such a Christian as he here depicts, a Christian who stood ready to sacrifice everything for Christ and did in fact die

¹⁷⁷ JP 7: 6433. Crites 146.

¹⁷⁸ TIC xxiii.

¹⁷⁹ Climacus in CUP differentiates between Religiousness A and B that respectively signifies a merged comfortable relationship with the divine (A) and one that is kept at an uncomfortable comic-tragic distance (B).

in performing the task he believed was laid upon him.”¹⁸⁰ Lowrie wants to separate the pseudonymous and veronymous works, to excise those parts of Kierkegaard’s works which I argue are an indispensable part of Kierkegaard’s authorship. Lowrie shows this attitude by singling the edifying discourses for the following reasons:

Of all S. K.’s works, those composed between 1848 and 1852 seem to me the most likely to ‘do good’.... They are free from the exaggeration which mars for us the effect of his pamphleteering attack, however necessary it may have been in its time; and they represent the real Kierkegaard more truly than do any of the pseudonymous works, even if they do not represent him so completely, with the poetical and humorous embellishments which make the earlier works so delightful.¹⁸¹

In an effort to discover the real Kierkegaard, Lowrie has negated Kierkegaard’s efforts to remain incognito. Here the serious and good are contrasted with the humorous and false which implies that humor cannot ‘do good.’ Yet what if his humor takes away the need to find the real Kierkegaard? What if humor was more than an embellishment but at the heart of how Kierkegaard viewed his method in conveying content? What if humor and significance do not have to stand at odds? If humor and ambiguity allows one to hear the message, then truth and falsity may not be central to meaningfulness. In breaking the spell of Kierkegaard’s works, does one go against Kierkegaard’s intentions, if this is possible to know?

I argue that the relationship between Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous and veronymous writings are not always clear. Kierkegaard’s last veronymous works are curiously revoked. Published under Anti-Climacus, the second edition of TIC was published with a newspaper declaration that Kierkegaard wished to have republished it with his name instead of Anti-Climacus and leave out the Prefaces and the Moral. In the end, Kierkegaard revokes his direct communication in the Preface and the Moral, but

¹⁸⁰ TIC xxiii.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., xxvi-xxvii.

does so directly without hiding behind Anti-Climacus. This move may be more than an afterthought, but a way to throw his readers off guard of certainty since Kierkegaard said in his Journals that “revoking a text is not the same as having not written it.”¹⁸²

Kierkegaard wrote in the newspaper retraction that he did not want his readers to be too comfortable with the graceful tone of the text. Lowrie comments on Kierkegaard’s retraction:

This retraction concerns me personally, for I find comfort in the Preface and the Moral. S. K. explains in his context that in the Preface and the Moral he had treated ‘grace’ as if it were available not only for the forgiveness of sins past but also ‘as a sort of dispensation from the actual following of Christ and the actual exertion of being a Christian’. I think he puts the case against himself too strongly. I would say rather that the Preface and the Moral, which offer the grace I so much need, might too easily be twisted into indulgence or dispensation. This means, as S. K. often affirmed, that ‘it is so frightfully easy to fool God’.¹⁸³

Kierkegaard does not want his rhetoric to cheapen grace giving the reader too much comfort. Relaxing the tension in the last instance is like the writer of prefaces who sits comforted with having solved the riddle once and for all. I insist, against Lowrie, that Kierkegaard’s retraction is consistent with his inconsistency of his earlier works that revokes comforting endings, activating the reader with a heavy dose of fear and trembling, but mixed in with a dash of the comic. As Lowrie shows, this retraction does not take away the healing from having read the Morals and the Prefaces in the first place.

Kierkegaard further retracts his corrections as self-important. He asks the reader for forgiveness in coming out of hiding to speak to the “chance reader:”

Therefore I believe that I have expressed myself fairly intelligibly for the book’s real reader, whom I beg—as I almost beg the book—to forgive me if I distort its individuality by revealing what it preferred to hide within itself and only wishes to entrust to the real reader as the meaning of the jest by making it more clear to the eyes of a chance outsider, although it wished to go on living an inconspicuously as

¹⁸² JP

¹⁸³ TIC xxvi

possible in the public eye, but also wishes to be saved by its insignificance from the self-importance of corrections.¹⁸⁴

In urging his readers to stay away from the Preface and the Moral, Kierkegaard seduces his readers into reading them. His inconsistencies make it difficult to write about Kierkegaard or humor. Kierkegaard is often described as a mirror to those who find what they are looking for. This is why Kierkegaard is accused of opposing personality types such as being both melancholic and a buffoon. The effort to find the core of Kierkegaard in which all contradictions are revealed to be consistent will fail. To dismiss or overlook Kierkegaard because of his elusive style is to protect the discipline from a particular style of writing. Kierkegaard throws off the reader who aims at comprehension. He unsettles those within moral philosophy trying to write a theory of ethics.

Rather than judge those who choose not to be ethical, Kierkegaard focuses attention on those who think they are closer to the ethical in writing about it. Such inaction posing as action will do more harm than those who choose not to do the task:

The significance of Socratic ignorance was precisely to keep ethics from becoming scholarly knowledge—instead of practice. There is nothing more dangerous than to transform into scholarly knowledge something which should be practiced. To refrain from doing it is not nearly so dangerous, but scholarship knowledge looks as if it amounted to something and renders performance almost impossible.¹⁸⁵

The problem with indirection is that one can never be sure that Kierkegaard has succeeded. Moreover it would go against indirectness to be directly acknowledged as having been entirely indirect. Therefore, a praise of Kierkegaard's method would go against his wishes to remain incognito. Kierkegaard is successful when he fails in being recognized. Those who are offended by his works may in fact be the 'correct' inheritors

¹⁸⁴ "A Little Contribution by Constantin Constantius Author of *Repetition*. PJ IV B 117 285 *n.d.* 1843-44, in Supplement to R 305.

¹⁸⁵ JP 3871 XI (to the 2nd) A 362 *n. d.* 1854.

of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard would want his followers to keep him at a distance. To be an author who negates his authority is to bind oneself to indirection. Since the reader can never tell when the incognito is telling the truth, Kierkegaard is not afraid of breaking his own rules for indirection. Kierkegaard is not as anxious as Anti-Climacus when he cries “Oh, loftiest height of self-abnegation when the incognito succeeds so well that even if he now were inclined to speak directly, no one would believe him!”¹⁸⁶ The pseudonymous works made his readers distrust him to such an extent, that Kierkegaard is aware that even in direct communication; his words would not be fully believed. Hence there is no use to come out of hiding to tell the truth once and for all. It rather gives him freedom to display “truthfulness” knowing that his readers may not trust him to speak the truth in the last instance. Polk writes of this “tendency of Kierkegaard’s to ironically cancel himself while justifying himself, in the service of the reader’s edification.”¹⁸⁷ I agree with Polk that even Kierkegaard’s polemical writings such as *Attack Upon Christendom* are a form of polemic poetry: “the pseudonyms, including that of Søren Kierkegaard, as all refractions of a self torn by the inescapability of the aesthetic.”¹⁸⁸ Kierkegaard is too dialectical to write directly even in his own name which I argue are to be read in tension with his pseudonymous works.

Contrary to Lowrie’s gloomy view of Kierkegaard, I argue Kierkegaard had his wits about him until the end of his life. On one of his last visits to Kierkegaard who was bedridden from sickness, Emil Boesen, a long time friend from seminary, asks:

¹⁸⁶ The Offence, TIC §2, 129. See Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1991), Book II : “There must be no seeming; for if the just man seems to be just, he will be honoured and rewarded, and then we shall not know whether one cannot be recognized for doing good since this will taint his motivations for such actions.”

¹⁸⁷ Timothy Polk, *The Biblical Kierkegaard : Reading by the Rule of Faith* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1997), 199.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 209.

Would [Kierkegaard] want to have changed anything he had said? After all, hadn't he expressed himself in rather unrealistic and severe terms?" Kierkegaard replies, 'That's how it should be, otherwise it doesn't help.' What good would it do to speak first for awakening and afterwards for pacification?¹⁸⁹

It would cancel his whole authorship to convert his readers into sleepwalking believers.

In the end, Kierkegaard will not retract the high pitch of his writings if it does not help the reader. Beitchman writes that his intensity failed to pacify the author. For Beitchman, Kierkegaard became Anti-Climacus in "the fanatic, cranky last days of his *Attack on Christendom*, his 'direct' and very polemical assault on the complacencies of the Danish church, which probably even shortened his life..."¹⁹⁰ Beitchman supposes that Kierkegaard took his attacks so seriously that it ended up taking Kierkegaard's life. I argue that even on his death bed, Kierkegaard maintained the laugh on his side. When Boesen asked Kierkegaard on his death bed whether he wanted to receive his last rites, Kierkegaard said "'Yes, indeed...but from a layman, not a priest.' 'That can hardly be done,' said Boesen. 'Then I'll die without!'"¹⁹¹

What exactly did Kierkegaard leave and take with him, when was he being serious or funny? Perhaps this parable from pseudonym A in EO helps:

Something wonderful happened to me. I was drawn up into the seventh heaven. There sat all the gods in assembly. By special grace I was granted the privilege of making a wish. 'Will you,' said Mercury, 'have youth, or beauty, or power, or a long life, or the most beautiful girl, or any of the other glories we have in the chest? Choose, but only one thing.' For a moment I was at a loss, then I addressed myself to the gods thus: 'Most honorable contemporaries, I choose one thing, that I may always have the laugh on my side.' Not one of the gods said a word; on the contrary, they all began to laugh. From that I concluded that my wish was granted and that the gods knew how to express themselves with taste; for it certainly would have been improper to answer seriously: 'Your wish is granted.'¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ PJ 633. Postscript: The End or the Beginning.

¹⁹⁰ Beitchman 104.

¹⁹¹ PAP 654. Postscript: The End or the Beginning.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, I 41-2, SV II 44. Quoted in Strawser "Epi-Laugh"

This passage reminds me that even if I had the opportunity to ask Kierkegaard face to face, it would not be in good taste for him to provide a straight answer. Given all the tangible goods the material world has to offer, Kierkegaard chooses the immaterial, the ability to laugh, to never have laughter fade. Perhaps it is not so important to figure out what Kierkegaard really meant, then let the text exercise a little power over the reader. If you are not intriguingly offended enough to either move on or start reading, neither hot nor cold, then Kierkegaard would probably not speak to you. For all those he has warded off from reading his works, Kierkegaard has also spawned endless volumes of Kierkegardiana.

If he refuses to clarify his brand of Christianity by removing masks, then Kierkegaard would want his readers to take him seriously in his last will and testament not about religion, or ethics, but his love for his fiancé. If commentators argue as to whether Kierkegaard's whole authorship was to justify his decision to break off the engagement with his fiancé Regine Olson, then Kierkegaard gives his inheritors a clue that suggests that for Kierkegaard why he broke off the engagement is not as important as his love. What matters is not whether Kierkegaard does or does not leap into the highest stage of religiousness or when he is being serious or not, but whether he performed the works of love. If Kierkegaard could not be a husband or a Christian in the convention sense, he will make this symbolic gesture to love as if he were one. Kierkegaard's will reads:

It is, of course, my will that my former fiancée, Mrs. Regine Schlegel, inherit unconditionally whatever little I may leave behind. If she will not accept it for herself, she is to be offered it on the condition that she be willing to administer it for distribution to the poor.

What I want to express in this way is that to me an engagement was and is just as binding as a marriage, and that therefore my estate is her due exactly as if I had been married to her.

Your brother,
S. Kierkegaard¹⁹³

Similarly, I interpret Kierkegaard's relationship to Christianity as an unfulfilled engagement. Just as he could not consummate the marriage vows to Mrs. Regine Schlegel, he could not consummate his religious vows to be a man of faith. However, his promise to be a Christian is *just as* binding as having been one. He performs the duty of love as if he had been a Christian, just as he will give to Regine as if he had been her husband. However, just as his love is manifested in the writing of his will, Kierkegaard's works of love is in his works as an author, not as a missionary or husband.

The attempt to convert Kierkegaard into a more palatable figure has precedent even during Kierkegaard's graduate studies which explains why this is the last time he wrote for academia. Kierkegaard's unconventional approach to academia is evidenced by his petition to the King of Denmark to write his dissertation on Socratic irony in Danish rather than Latin. While his dissertation was considered too unconventional in style, his committee members had no choice but to accept his dissertation for defense since to bring up his style would be more inappropriate. His first reader writes:

The exposition suffers from a self-satisfied pursuit of the piquant and the witty, which not infrequently lapses into the outright vulgar and tasteless. (A little sample of this can be seen in the remarks—noted by the Dean in pencil—seventeen pages from the end of the fifth booklet, as well as the sixth booklet, p. 10, where, as chance would have it, the author describes a period which had already been shaken out of its old ways by the French Revolution as a stagnant “still life,”) One could be tempted to make the removal of the worst [crossed out in the original: *crudest*] of these excrescences a *condition* for acceptance, were it not for the fact that negotiations about this would be difficult and awkward. Given the particular nature of the author and his preference for these elements, it would be fruitless to express a *wish* regarding

¹⁹³ *Brev og Aktskykker*, op. cit., p. 25 (p. 33). Postscript: The End or the Beginning. PJ 657.

this if not even the Dean will see the dissertation after it has been trimmed a bit in this respect.¹⁹⁴

Kierkegaard's second reader also anticipates that Kierkegaard would stubbornly refuse to make the changes requested. Professor Petersen writes:

This piece would profit a great deal by being reworked in order to gain more order and compression. But since I, too, share the view that this probably cannot be attained because, given his personality, the author neither can nor will undertake such changes, we must probably limit ourselves to suggesting what is lacking in this respect while still requesting that various excesses of the sarcastic or mocking sort be removed as inappropriate in a piece of academic writing.¹⁹⁵

These comments match the sour attitudes that Kierkegaard had for academia. The harshest comment comes from Kierkegaard's third reader, Professor Brøndsted who needed only one day to discover upon skimming that Kierkegaard's dissertation is a "remarkable treatise" but one that nevertheless needs some major stylistic revisions. Whereas the other two readers give up trying to make Kierkegaard edit his dissertation in anticipation of Kierkegaard's personality, Brøndsted tries to urge the Dean to convince Kierkegaard to edit out his vulgarity:

I cannot refrain from expressing the same wish already expressed by my colleagues, that the Most Excellent Dean will endeavor to have the author trim away certain excrescences, which in some places...burgeon into quite large growths and testify to the author's occasional inability to resist the inner temptation to leap over the boundary which separates both genuine irony and reasonable satire from the unrefreshing territory of vulgar exaggeration. Passages of this sort are many and crude. If a personal preference for tidbits of this sort prevents the author from

¹⁹⁴ In the Introduction to the International Commentary on Kierkegaard's magister degree, Perkins writes that "As the official readers of the thesis noted, Kierkegaard's thesis fulfilled the official requirements of *"insight and knowledge"* requisite for the degree. However, there was a consistently repeated criticism from all the readers that the thesis frequently violated standards of good taste and that its style was objectionable." "Introduction," Robert Perkins, *The Concept of Irony*, vol. 2, *International Kierkegaard Commentary*; (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2001), 6. For example, one of his readers, Professor Madvig writes: "With respect to the dissertation itself...it bears the stamp of such intellectual liveliness and fresh thought...Yet on the other hand, not only is it burdened with a certain free and easy carelessness of composition, but even the exposition of concepts lacks scholarly order, form, and firm focus." J. N. Madvig, 20 June 1841. Document 7. June 20, 1841—Prof. Madvig's comments on Kierkegaard's dissertation, added to Dean Sibbern's comment sheet. Kirmmse, "Socrates in the Fast Lane," 24.

¹⁹⁵ F. C. Petersen, Regensen 4th July 1841, "Document 9. July 4, 1841—Prof. Peterson's comments, added to Dean Sibbern's comment sheet, evaluating Kierkegaard's dissertation," in Perkins 25.

following advice in this regard, we can certainly take comfort in the fact that it is the task of the Faculty *only* to recognize *knowledge* and *abilities*, but *not in any way* to bring about better taste in those who, in keeping with their knowledge and their abilities, *ought* to have better taste.¹⁹⁶

Brøndsted's praise and disgust of Kierkegaard's writing echoes the reactions of the author's subsequent works. Perhaps Kierkegaard's parasitic metaphors for professors were derived from the analogies used in these correspondences. I find that Kierkegaard's penchant for what Brøndsted calls the "the unrefreshing territory of vulgar exaggeration" is the *refreshingly* valuable contribution that Kierkegaard makes to a tradition that has sought to anesthetize readers from the pain of religion and the limits of philosophy. What his dissertation readers characterize as crude aspects of his personal writing style are strategically integral to Kierkegaard's purpose for writing to sting his readers into feeling disgust or rapture over matters metaphysical. To separate his style from his insights would be to neuter the potency of his work. Just as his dissertation readers admitted defeat even before trying to convince Kierkegaard to change his style to suit the academic palate, later interpreters will do the same to recognize Kierkegaard as an exception for his innovative insights while at the same time enforcing the rigid boundaries of acceptable rhetoric within academia.

Ricoeur appreciates Kierkegaard's liminal location inside and outside of philosophy but warns against trying to make sense out of his writings. It seems that to allow his strangeness to affect the reader is threatening to the serious scholarly endeavor:

You cannot refute Kierkegaard: you must simply read him, consider, and then get on with your work – but 'with your eyes fixed on the exception.' What makes

¹⁹⁶ Brøndsted, "Document 10, July 7, 1841—Prof. Brøndsted's comments, added to Dean Sibbern's comment sheet, evaluating Kierkegaard's dissertation. Bruce H. Kirmmse, "Socrates in the Fast Lane: Kierkegaard's the Concept of Irony on the University's Velocifère. Documents, Context, Commentary, and Interpretation," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Irony*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), 25.

Kierkegaard awkward is that he belongs both inside philosophy and outside it at one and the same time.¹⁹⁷

Underneath the calls to move on from Kierkegaard, I sense an anxiety and fear that hints to the power of Kierkegaard's approach. Against Ricoeur's advice, I could not simply "get on with my work" since I was profoundly disturbed by his writings. Ricoeur puts up a warning sign to those receptive to Kierkegaard's seductive traps. Kierkegaard's exceptional status presents a dilemma for those who seek to read him according to conventional standards. Ricoeur further adds:

Kierkegaard does not fit his own categories. To understand him one would need to be able to grasp his unprecedented combination of irony, melancholy, purity of heart and corrosive rhetoric, add a dash of buffoonery, and then perhaps top it off with religious aestheticism and martyrdom...¹⁹⁸

Other scholars note that it is his strangeness that cannot be excised from Kierkegaard's corpus. A scholar recalls how Kierkegaard's strangeness gripped him:

I came across Kierkegaard by accident...A momentary confusion in a darkened corner of Glasgow University Library placed *Repetition* in my hands. I had been ill-advisably searching through 'unclassified philosophy' for a work on logic and thought I had discovered a slim volume on "Refutations"...I borrowed the book. It was unlike anything I had previously read. But I did not understand what it was about, and I could not explain why it was so interesting. Part novel, part philosophical psychology, wholly unclassifiable...I went back to the library and, rather slowly, read my way through the Kierkegaard section...I knew well enough that this kind of youthful enthusiasm should pass, to be replaced by a passion for opera or foreign travel...But, alarmingly, I seemed to be growing into, rather than out of, an author whose unfailing strangeness continued to unsettle me...¹⁹⁹

What unsettles this author has not failed to snare others who insist on his outsider status. Nielsen shares this sentiment when he writes of Kierkegaard's style:

¹⁹⁷ Paul Ricoeur, "Philosophy after Kierkegaard," in *Kierkegaard : A Critical Reader*, ed. Jonathan and Chamberlain Rée, Jane (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 14-5.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁹⁹ Harvie Ferguson, *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity: Soren Kierkegaard's Religious Psychology* (London: Routledge Press, 1995), vii-viii. Quoted in Scott Nielsen, "Love's Rhetoric: Irony and Upbuilding in Kierkegaard's Christian Anthropology" (Ph.D., June 2002).

[Kierkegaard's style] makes reading him different from reading all other things, namely the incantational disorientation posed by Kierkegaard's writing and rhetoric. Kierkegaard's work reads like nothing else in philosophy or Christian thought, yet commentators tend to recast and analyze his books as they would any other difficult but more or less orderly thinker.²⁰⁰

Not following Ricoeur's advice, these thinkers dug deeper into the Kierkegaardian corpus to try to make sense of his work. I argue that to approach Kierkegaard with the goal of making him make sense to academia will fail since this would cancel his efforts to remain the gadfly to an institutionalized tradition that takes itself too seriously. Kierkegaard's goal is not to hide that he was a real scholar underneath his strangeness, but to write so that his readers would find themselves mirrored in his works.

Kierkegaard wants to disabuse the reader to find the truth of his humor that requires not a conceptual grasping but a letting go; it is recognizing and resisting the temptation for unified closure just as I resist the need to claim that his humor is strictly antifoundationalist. It is a state of mind that challenges boundaries meant to control meaning by demarcating appropriateness. One must let go even of the wish for ridding this foundationalist need for truth or else one will be bound to a new unity of Antifoundationalism.

Beitchman writes that after 1846 when he finished CUP, Kierkegaard wrote edifying discourses that went against the art of irony in his pseudonymous works. According to Beitchman, by ironizing romantic irony's remedy to conventional and bourgeois complacency, Kierkegaard makes one stop to think. These "thought-stoppers...frustrate consciousness on the level of the Aesthetic, preparing it for the Leap to the next Stage of Life's Way."²⁰¹ I think humor can be these thought stoppers to

²⁰⁰ Nielsen 10.

²⁰¹ Beitchman 101.

frustrate one's complacency. Beitchman warns against Baudrillard's reduction of Kierkegaard as solely an incising seducer. I am sympathetic to Baudrillard's praising of Kierkegaard's "'seductive aesthetic' of suggestion"²⁰² not simply for its own sake but as a strategic method to catch those in love with language. Citing Baudrillard's *Les*

Stratégies Fatales, Beitchman writes:

[Baudrillard] finds thereby that Kierkegaard was thereby laying the foundation for a new and politically germane 'seductive aesthetic' of suggestion—which Baudrillard opposes to the prevailing (Hegelian?) ethic of *production* that enjoins compliance by intimidation (one form or another of 'chantage', or blackmail), obligation and command.²⁰³

Kierkegaard does not blackmail his readers into faith. He gives his readers more than enough reasons to flee from the calling. Against Beitchman and with Baudrillard, Agacinski writes that "[i]rony is troubling, unsettling, disturbing; it has no other effect than to initiate a 'love affair' between the ironist and his listener."²⁰⁴ The listener receives emptiness rather than substance. Beitchman writes that Agacinski is too enamored with irony's power to take Kierkegaard seriously even when he ends his writing career with the most didactic religious discourses. Yet Agacinski notes that Kierkegaard's irony is that no one, especially not the ironist, can have the final word. She refers to Socrates' relationship to his listeners, especially Alcibiades: "after having excited his curiosity and his desire, the ironist leaves him in the lurch."²⁰⁵ The torturous enjoyment of negativity creates an intellectual situation of "finding satisfaction in a lack."²⁰⁶ Reading Kierkegaard

²⁰² Ibid., 116.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ CI 85. Sylviane Agacinski, *Aparté : Conceptions and Deaths of Søren Kierkegaard Uniform Title: Aparté. English, Kierkegaard and Postmodernism*; (Gainesville, FL University Presses of Florida: Tallahassee, 1988), 50.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 51. "Alcibiades' growing impetuosity always met its master in Socrates' irony." CI 214. Ibid., 52.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 54. See CI 207 on Cynicism.

is a falling for his seductive ways that never fulfills one except to the extent that one becomes addicted to the tease of desiring what one cannot have.

Kierkegaard is a Christian thinker's attack on metaphysics. In the modern age in which metaphysics is thought to be over, Kierkegaard argues that it has taken over men's minds in the form of reason. Kierkegaard's challenge is to take humor as the new metaphysics; not to take humor seriously and provide lectures on humor, but show how the attempt to create a metaphysics or new foundation of humor will fail. In the failure of appropriating humor for any directed ends, one will always have the laugh on her side.

One can overly stress on finding a direct relevance of humor. The language of instrumentality to describe the importance of laughter and comedy makes a mockery of both laughter and the language of use. Treating humor as a science is itself comical. If the logic of essentialism is always present, then keeping the laugh on one's side will remind one to let go of the craving to conceptually grasp what humor is.

Humor infects all genres that tend to be taken too seriously. On studies of humor, there is a tendency to delineate that which humor is not in order to create boundaries between humor and seriousness. Even though I agree with Eastman that humor has been marginalized to the comic pages or comedy club in order that it does not affect the realm of life and death, I disagree about his contrast between humor and religion. For Eastman, "Humor is of all things most unlike religion."²⁰⁹ According to Eastman:

Religion magnifies the seriousness of our passions, but finds an object which is impersonal, or merely ideal, or in some other way superior to the vicissitudes of fortune, to which it may attach them—binding them all, or many of them, together into one fixed habit of indefeasible satisfaction²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ Eastman 24.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 24.

Kierkegaard would protest against this characterization of religion which he claims is adopted from a child's mythologization of Christianity. Moreover, Kierkegaard's humor has roots in gothic humor that has to match the gothic terror to achieve an equivalent affect.

To have a happy relationship with Christianity is to refuse to grow into a responsible faith from childhood fantasies.²¹¹ Those who sleepwalk through faith is living in childhood naivety: "Basically Christendom has made an attempt to let 'the child' decide what Christianity is—and then we exploit the child's transformation of Christianity into mythology—which was done innocently by the child—and we use it in order to shirk from whatever does not please us, and we wallow in sentimentality."²¹² This call for Christians to grow up may sound harsh but may be more acceptable than to say to Christians that their faith is wrong or that they believe in false idols. He is simply saying—: take responsibility for your faith that includes the element of doubt which cannot be wished away for convenience.

The problem of some studies on humor is that they take the topic too seriously. In order to draw a boundary of humor against seriousness, studies on humor recreate the very boundaries that keep humor marginalized to the periphery of intellectual thought. The assumed definition of humor as *not* serious is adopting the terms of what defines seriousness. As long as the two are separated, then attempts to revive "humor studies" will reinscribe the logic of foundational seriousness while the study of the "serious" topics will eschew the comical. One could raise the objection that to include the serious

²¹¹ Lewis Gordon illustrates this point in Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir in Lewis R. Gordon, *Bad Faith and Antiracism* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1995).

²¹² JP 2804 X4 A 519 *n.d.*, 1852.

topics of the tragedies of life and death would mean that one would see humor in everything. This may be only an objection for those who fear to lose in a world overtaken with humor. One cannot dissect humor with a scalpel. The effects of humor remain hidden from scientific scrutiny.

Lippitt seeks to reign in the effects of Kierkegaard's humor as "controlled irony." It is what Kierkegaard criticized the Romantic writers for using an "uncontrolled irony" rather than a "controlled irony" about a core message.²¹³ Kierkegaard prefers a "mastered irony" that "limits, finitizes, and circumscribes and thereby yields balance and consistency. Irony is the disciplinarian."²¹⁴ Kierkegaard uses irony after fleshing out the life of immediacy: "irony is and remains the disciplinarian of the immediate life."²¹⁵ Irony exposes the limits of an unrestrained life of the aesthete. Irony's positive function is giving freedom to life from mere worldliness; it gives "the bath of regeneration and rejuvenation, irony's baptism of purification that rescues the soul from having its life in finitude."²¹⁶ Irony's power is to allow the individual to entertain a sustained belief in "something beyond itself."²¹⁷ It expands one's life style to encompass more than what reason can justify. Irony refreshes the senses when the aesthetic life stifles: one can jump "into the sea of irony, not in order to stay there... but in order to come out healthy, happy, and buoyant and to dress again."²¹⁸ Lippitt's distinction between Kierkegaard's controlled and uncontrolled irony, which is based on Hegel's critique of the romantic poets "absolute infinite negativity" helps one to understand the modern day

²¹³ See John Lippitt, *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

²¹⁴ CI 326.

²¹⁵ EO I 120. Cited in Lippitt 148.

²¹⁶ CI 326, Cited in *Ibid.*, 148-9.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 149.

²¹⁸ CI 327.

understanding of “ironic detachment.” Lippitt highlights the crucial insight in *Concept of Irony*: “irony is a double-edged phenomenon: ‘Even though one must warn against irony as against a seducer, so much one also commend it as a guide.’”²¹⁹

Taking Lippitt’s lead, I argue that Kierkegaard’s corpus is itself a double-edged sword. He uses tactics that would seduce one away and into the three spheres of the aesthetic, ethical, religious as well as the intermediate spheres of irony and humor. He recognizes the danger of his readers trapping herself in any respective sphere, e.g. staying in irony rather than using it as a temporary refreshing bath.

Taylor via Rorty describes “Kierkegaard as an ‘intentionally peripheral’ philosopher”²²⁰ that exposes its own weaknesses rather than hides them in a presumptuous tone of detached objectivity. Taylor distinguishes between one’s ideal goal and one’s method of achieving that goal in dialectical writing. Roy Martinez illustrates that meaning comes through the heuristic meeting of the author and reader. Kierkegaard’s works are not moral blueprints but “the moral content that has been heuristically suspended by virtue of the egological abdication is only *formally* restored at the moment when the text encounters its reader.”²²¹ Pseudonymity suspends “I” from what the author really thinks so the reader is allowed to form her own interpretation of the significance of the story. Rather than be didactically told what the text signifies about moral and religious truths which cannot be proven, the reader must be first seduced into trying out a particular conviction *as if it may* be true long enough to evaluate whether it is worth buying. Hence, Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous works attempts to get the reader to identify

²¹⁹ CI 327.

²²⁰ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 369 cited in Taylor 181.

²²¹ Roy Martinez, *Kierkegaard and the Art of Irony* (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 2001), 15.

with the perspectives personified by the writer. The irony is that Kierkegaard wrote his pseudonyms in obviously exaggerated ways so that the reader will not completely identify with the personalities, but instead keep enough of a distance for coming out of the text to look for parallels with one's own life. The pseudonyms do not rely on any outside assumption except the force of one's own convictions anticipating the reader's critique from the beginning. Most will perhaps not read beyond the first few pages, but at least he will not prematurely turn away those resistant to revelation. But those who are moved by his words will end up engaging in the production of meaning. If not that, "the work merely demands to be enjoyed."²²² While I agree that the aesthetic elements of the text are enjoyable, it is important to not neglect that Kierkegaard also sought to discomfort his readers from finding pleasure in negativity.

According to Martinez, Kierkegaardian irony is doubled over. In the first instance, it allows room for the individual to believe in her potency in a world that may otherwise be overwhelmingly difficult to control. This "irony of resistance"²²³ allows the individual to act against the current of the times in pursuit of goals other than the worldly. However, for fear of unleashing an overly egocentric view of one's control in the world, a second irony is needed to temper the first. In the second instance of "ironizing irony,"²²⁴ Kierkegaard reminds the reader that despite efforts to resist, one will sometimes fail given the contingent uncertainties of the world. This doubling irony pulls one in opposing directions of self potency and helplessness that stretches the reader in a way to prepare for the decision of faith or else the individual is held too taut to bear. Irony and faith work together to give one a healthy dose of self delusional agency while helping one to manage

²²² Martinez 18.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

the feelings of despair in the wake of the vicissitudes of life beyond one's control. Faith allows one to meet the challenges of life head on. Faith is the "liberating force of irony" because even admitting that all may be absurd, one decides freely to believe anyway, thereby, reasserting agency in an acknowledged contingent world.

Having been seduced into reading Kierkegaard all the way through, one must then come to terms with the paradox of a groundless faith. It takes faith to read Kierkegaard all the way through as one slowly becomes aware that meaning will not be found solely within the text, but in one's intimate, honest engagements with what the text means for the reader that ultimately has no validity outside of one's convictions. Hence, by reading Kierkegaard's works, one becomes engaged in a groundless process of self renewal that finds authority in the self. Instead of Kierkegaard acting as author convincing the reader, the reader ends up convincing herself the internal validity of her interpretation. The reader can never rest as she finds herself returning to the text that in turn urges the reader to return to the world.

Martinez notes that Kierkegaardian irony serves a double function of negatively acknowledging the contingency of the finite world while positively asserting a transcendent order in faith. Irony is that which allows one to place less significance on the material world, to believe that one can achieve a degree of incredulity that there is something more worthwhile than the rewards provided by the finite world. Irony is the step before resignation which in turn is a step before the movement into faith. The irony is that one must turn inward in singularity from the outside world to be able to relate to that world in meaningful passion. Doubly ironic is that this independence from the social world requires a dependence on a groundless faith. However, it is a dependence on one's

choosing and hence not imposed from without. Geoffrey Clive calls this the “[t]he autonomy of theology, on the other hand, paradoxical as it may sound, is grounded in an attitude of dependency rather than self-sufficiency...”²²⁵ Whereas secularized ethical theory is grounded on self reliance, spirituality relieves the sole burden on the self to allow the individual to engage in the world to her full capacity.

Irony allows the possibility that there is more to life than tangible glories although one does not have ultimate proof of its existence. Irony is needed to bridge the gap that the intellect alone cannot cross with reason. It is an imaginative leap over to Kant’s second *Critique*. It is a humbling gesture that pays homage to that which cannot be known through intellect alone. It allows one to at least entertain the Socratic notion of another reality beyond the world of sense.

I argue that this theorizing of Kierkegaard’s “double irony” is an attempt to understand Kierkegaardian humor without letting go of the ironic as a standard measure. Some scholars note that not giving up on Kierkegaard requires tolerance for his often punching sense of humor. Agacinski reads Kierkegaard as an experience of the ironic pleasure of lack yet Kierkegaard would argue that this reading is problematic since he warns against finding pleasure in pain as “the most dangerous thing possible for a pleasure-seeking age...”²²⁶ Agacinski paints Kierkegaard as the emaciated ironist who lacks the heartiness and depth of a humorist. For Agacinski, reading Kierkegaard is to enjoy this lack through ironic detachment. But to find pleasure in pain is to Kierkegaard a manifestation of a perversion of desires that ends up numbing the senses. Kierkegaard would not want his readers to tolerate his attacks or convert them into pleasurable

²²⁵ Geoffrey Clive, "Introduction," in *Dimensions of Faith; Contemporary Prophetic Protestant Theology*, ed. William Kimmel and Geoffrey Clive (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1960), 25.

²²⁶ JP 3883 XI 1 A 537 *n.d.*, 1854.

experiences since he wanted his words to sting as well as to soothe—not for his readers to blend the two together with the effect of not feeling the difference. Another commentator writes that Kierkegaard should have taken more pleasure in writing. Josipovici laments that “Kierkegaard’s personal tragedy lay in the fact that he was not enough of a writer to take pleasure in the writing process itself, but too much of one ever to be a Knight of Faith.”²²⁷ If Kierkegaard took too much pleasure in writing, then he could not write to negate his authority. Kierkegaard wrote not merely to entertain himself or his readers but to help them through indirection that cannot be done solely for pleasure. But I am arguing too much in the vein of Anti-Climacus:

The incognito is his free decision. He exerts himself to the utmost, employing all his inventiveness and intrepidity to maintain the incognito. This effort is either successful or unsuccessful. If it is successful, then he has, humanly speaking, done himself an injury; he has made everybody think very poorly of him. What self-abnegation! And, on the other hand, what an immense strain upon a man! For he had it in his power every instant to show himself in his real character. What self-abnegation! For what is self-abnegation without freedom?²²⁸

Kierkegaard is somewhere in the middle of finding pleasure and not enough pleasure in being incognito. Kierkegaard is more than ironic; he writes that he is metaphysically humorous. Humor is not simply a tool within his seduction scheme; it surrounds all that one tends to take seriously: religion, ethics, and politics. Rather than incorporate Platonic dialogue partners in the text, Kierkegaard dialogues with the reader. If irony makes the reader impetuously paranoid and the author a bit masochistic as is Anti-Climacus, then humor makes one more patient so that one does not feel the need to rush to fill in the void. Humor sustains in passionate engagement while the ironist ends up merely enjoying in detached amusement. Humor allows the individual to sustain more

²²⁷ Josipovici, "Kierkegaard and the Novel," 126.

²²⁸ The Offence, TIC §2, 129.

intense contradictions not through ironically finding pleasure in lack which emotionally blends enjoyment with pain, but through humorously finding joy in horror which maintains a separation between the two extremes. It takes a sense of humor to be joyful standing seventy thousand fathoms above water. The ironist by referring to the horror religious as a gap or lack keeps the horror at a distance. The concept of the sublime is this ironic distancing to relieve the terrifying by standing at a safe distance. Kierkegaard's humor does not have the rough edges of irony's armor against feeling pain, but comes from the same source as pain. Pain gives birth to sorrow and humor. I argue against Beitchman and with Agacinski that Kierkegaard had his comic-tragic spirits about him until the very end. However, unlike Agacinski who reads Kierkegaard through an ironic lens, I read him through a humorous lens "whose birthpains are brought about through the sons of pain." Metaphysical humor are absolute birth pangs:

Irony is the birth-pangs of the objective mind (based upon the misrelationship, discovered by the I, between existence [*Existenten*] and the idea of existence).

Humor is the birth-pangs of the absolute mind (based on the misrelationship, discovered by the I [*self*], between the I and the idea of the I).²²⁹

It is painful to come up with humor in a sad world. One can study humor unhumorously. I argue that one cannot create boundaries to humor. One must surrender to this humorous failure that reminds one that one should let go of this craving for comprehensibility.

Humor is not all gaiety but comes from intense sources of pain. Mark Twain wrote that humorists write from a deep source of tragedy. To compound the degree to which humor is apart from irony, Kierkegaard remarks that:

When an ironist laughs at the whimsicalities and witticisms of a humorist, he is like the vulture tearing away at Prometheus's liver, for the humorist's whimsicalities are not *capricious little darlings* but the *sons of pain*, and with every one of them goes a

²²⁹ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates : Together with Notes of Schelling's Berlin Lectures*, 340-1.

little piece of his innermost entrails, and it is the emaciated ironist who needs the humorist's desperate depth.²³⁰

Kierkegaard would warn of the overly optimistic language of the comic liberating one from the tragedies of the human condition. Kierkegaard argues that the comic leads one to the authentic expression of the horror religious, but he may also agree that the comic makes it possible to live with the horror without being paralyzed by the dread. The comic suspends the rational faculty that seeks justification or groundedness in order to act; it makes sacrifice seem absurd and necessary without knowing quite fully why.

There is an inversion of the real and illusioned as the mock seriousness of the make believe world highlights the mock foolishness of the real world that upon reentering it, one can have a different perspective on one's daily activities. Berger discusses the potential of jokes: "If allowed to emerge in their full force, they are capable of inundating the serious concerns of everyday life with their alien logics."²³¹ The comic allows one to stay on earth with enough distance to ascribed identities that one can joke through and about them. It is not just occupying the borderline between the real and dream worlds, but moving as the sleepwalker in between dreaming and wakefulness.²³²

Ethics does not disappear if at times there is a need to question its basis. The Kantian in Kierkegaard never lets go of the ethical, more importantly, he uses humor to re-latch onto the ethical. But he is also attentive to the tendency of Christians to attach ethics to a sacred book, orthodox teachings, and acceptable behaviors as chipped out in stone. He wants to shatter the concretization of the living text, open to interpretation, as attached to only our spiritualized selves. He does not throw out the Bible, he plays with

²³⁰ JP 1706 II A 179 Oct 11, 1837. See EO I, p. 19.

²³¹ Peter L. Berger, *Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Human Experience* (New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1997), 12.

²³² Berger calls Don Quixote's travels sleepwalking.

the traditional allegories and rereads well read stories in anguished and delightful tension. Kierkegaard does not leave the ethical as an unquestioned protected space; he feels that surrendering judgment to priests and texts is self betrayal, in that one cannot trust herself to live spiritually. He condemns those who follow by the book, unquestioningly content with what is *given* as truth while the faithfully doubting Christian wrestles with one's own sense of moral superiority, humbling herself in the midst of sustained doubt. The center is sustained, fueled by doubt not substance, the centripetal force that keeps dogmatism and nihilism at bay, simultaneously maintaining separation and balance through a centering motion to keep the two countervailing 'isms' from pulling one's critical faculties away from one's spiritual center.

Humor allows the freedom from the discipline of ends and interests: "we enjoy the comic because in that moment of freedom from the discipline of ends and interests we recognize the ethical reality of our persons."²³³ In Kierkegaard's terms, the discipline of ends and interests is the ethos of the disbelieving age that allows reflection to reign over passion.

To portray the self as made up of competing, "battling," and "warring" wills is one way to deal with the conflict of the passions. But for Kierkegaard, this drains the individual from acting. Rather, one can comically portray the battling faculties as immature. One can portray desire, reflection, imagination, and conscience as each having a drive for dominance that if unchecked would take over the balance of a healthy self. Rather than rigidly denouncing any one motivation, Kierkegaard gives space for the expression of each at the same time as makes fun of the tendency of the wills to consider itself as most important.

²³³ Giulio A. Levi, "Il Comico" 1913. Quoted in Eastman 253.

Lippitt via Roberts via Ferrera shows that having a sense of humor conditions a perspectival flexibility that allows one to live outside one's own circumstances to identify with another. It allows one not to take one's own position too seriously so as to engage in make believe associations with characters in the joke or the joker. Such a distancing from one's own location is similar to adopting moral virtue. Yet I argue that this does not place humor as central metaphysical source of such flexibility. Lippitt's justification to see humor as Ferrera sees metaphor as a proper vehicle for mental training limits humor as a tool to be welded when need be, not a constant metaphysical reality underlying everything one holds as definite. Lippitt calls this "imaginative identification."²³⁴ Lippitt argues with Evans who views humor more as "intellectual understanding."²³⁵ The terrible does not necessarily mean it is not comical: "It would be a mistake to think of 'terror' and the comic as necessarily being incompatible."²³⁶ Lippitt objects that humor must be surpassed by faith in order to deal with the ultimate ungroundedness of the meaning of life. However, Lippitt agrees with Niebuhr that "laughter is not able to deal with the problems of the sins of the self in any ultimate way"²³⁷ Laughter is not the answer, it does not resolve, but according to Lippitt it instills the qualities necessary for sustaining belief which are "humility, patience and perseverance."²³⁸ I argue that humor is not simply a training tool for these qualities but contains a deeper metaphysical source from which these qualities derive but which also contain the infinite wellspring of other emotions. I agree with Lippitt but would push humor deeper as not only the vehicle for conveying

²³⁴ Lippitt 167.

²³⁵ C. Stephen. Evans, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Postscript" : The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1983), 196. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 167.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 173 quoting Niebuhr.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

religious truths, but as replacing truth itself. Humor is that which disrupts what has been secularized in the modern age. If truth is the ultimate source tends to be rigidified into an absolute category, then Kierkegaard would replace truth with humor for once someone tries to find the absolute ground of humor, one will come at a standstill and give up sooner or later or become a laughing stalk.

Roberts notes that “[a] sense of humor about oneself is a lack of defensiveness...and thus a kind of self-transparency, or openness to ‘seeing’ painful truths about oneself.”²³⁹ This quality allows one to identify with one’s weaknesses without too much despair as a first step to self improvement. Lippitt notes that humor cannot be transcended just as one can never be perfected. The path to moral improvement needs repetitive reinforcement.²⁴⁰ However, Roberts and Lippitt avoid the times when Kierkegaard may be serious.

I argue that Kierkegaard’s humor includes not only the strictly humorous, but also straight-faced seriousness. The Gospel must be exaggerated because one cannot argue ones way into the truth of a doctrine. It must be stated as plainly as it is revealed. Revelation is revealed truth, not argued or deliberated: “Paul must not appeal to his cleverness, for then he is a fool; he must not enter into a purely aesthetic or philosophic discussion about the content of his doctrine, for then he is *distract*.”²⁴¹ Revelation need not be stylized. Discussing the truth of the Bible is for those who demand proof. To portray Christianity as tragedy may cause the reader to search for historical grounding. This need can be suspended if Christianity is rendered a comic genre.

²³⁹ Roberts 142; Lippitt 173.

²⁴⁰ Lippitt refers to Aristotle’s *eutrapelia* as a model to navigate an in between space between shrilling laughter and “stupid seriousness.”

²⁴¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *On Authority and Revelation: The Book on Adler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), Ch. III, 2, p.108.

History is illusionary reality that grounds tragedy which is not demanded of comedy, and hence does not depend on historical grounding for certainty. Comedy does not depend on certainty to be believed. One simply takes it as is to get the point of the story which is to enjoy. This is similar to ethics in which the point is to be ethical and not wonder whether a doctrine of ethics is certain or not. Kierkegaard does not completely combine comedy and tragedy giving the former a more vaulted status for its freedom from history:

Why does tragedy require history more than comedy? Because tragedy is less probable. Comedy justifies itself metaphysically. It is a strange contradiction that tragedy seeks to depict the extraordinary and then, in order to make me believe it, links it to history. Is historical certainty a stronger argument than the certainty immanent in tragedy? Why are there so few wholly imaginary tragedies? –What an indirect evidence against the absolute reconciliation of poetry and art, that I do not believe them in and for themselves when they show the extraordinary but demand external proof; on the other hand, I believe the comic and demand no historical proof. If I am depicting a fool, I do not need to give him a historical name, because if I do, I weaken the effect; if I want to depict a hero, I must try to find a historical person, otherwise no one believes it.²⁴²

The comic contains its own justification. If religion is depicted tragically, one needs proof. If it is depicted comically, then one suspends this need. Since tragedy has to be linked to history, comedy is given more imaginative room without the need for ties to historical probability. Kierkegaard exaggerates the absurdity of religious duty so that one cannot take up a cozy relationship with God. Exaggerations keep concepts at an uncomfortable distance. For example, exaggerated sin magnifies in thought but it lightens the load in practice. The extreme version of absolute sin can paradoxically make one free of its entanglement.

The comic's importance is tied to laughter. Speaking of Beckett's humor, Critchley notes that "We realize in an instant that the object of laughter is the subject who

²⁴² JP 4837 IV C 121 *n.d.*

laughs.”²⁴³ Letting go of our own guard upon self authenticity is a critical effect of humor. Laughing causes the individual who laughs to call oneself as stable and authentic into question. This allows one to take himself or herself less seriously without feeling utterly threatened. Eastman notes that “we can all remember being seized with fits of ecstatically comic laughter, not unlike the entranced paroxysms of love and anger. They carried us out of reality, out of ourselves and our sureness of ourselves.”²⁴⁴ To free oneself from the “discipline of ends and interests” is to invest energy in something that may not yield a return; it is a faith in the foundationless absolute not knowing whether it will all pay out in the end. It is a letting go of the economics of belief and action that turns a utilitarian sensibility on its head. The ethical reality of going beyond self interest can make sense if freed from this exchange economy. These are modest implications for politics, but one that recognizes that listeners resist didactic approaches.

Humor in a nonbelieving age is believing in the nonsecular:

no poetic exaggerations will be required at all—as in Don Quixote—no, all he needs to do is to take any essentially true Christian life, not to mention simply taking Christ as an apostle. The comic element arises because the age has changed so enormously that it regards this as comic.²⁴⁵

The spiritual trial need not be embellished to reveal the contradiction of a life lived in faith and the present passionless age. His “serious” penned religious works still retain the notion of the comic by drawing out the incongruities of Christian virtue in a secularized world.

²⁴³ Simon Critchley, *Deconstructive Subjectivities* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 49-50.

²⁴⁴ Eastman 235.

²⁴⁵ JP 2: 274. Quoted in Eric J. Ziolkowski, "Don Quixote and Kierkegaard's Understanding of the Single Individual in Society," in *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community: Religion, Ethics, and Politics in Kierkegaard*, ed. George B Connell and C Stephen Evans (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1992), 137.

Chapter 4: Exaggerated Seriousness in *Fear and Trembling*

I start at an unlikely place for a discussion of humor in the story of Abraham/Ibrahim in Genesis in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic Torah, Bible, or Qur'an. It speaks to the more somber aspects of spiritual paradox. The main conversation is between Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes de Silentio and Emmanuel Levinas partly facilitated by Jacques Derrida. This discussion of faith represents the difficulties of anti-foundationalism in religion. I hope to use the moment of what Derrida calls the silent aporia, or what some Muslims would call "the greatest jihad," the war within Abraham to choose Isaac or Ishmael and God to approach the difficulties of the paradox of anti-foundationalism in religion, and its ramifications for political philosophy.

One can be seduced into Silentio's world without end. One can argue that the suspension of the ethical has been used to justify unspeakable crimes, but so has its absolute devotion. Infamous for his concept of the teleological suspension of the ethical, Kierkegaard is commonly regarded as marginal or dismissed as inapplicable for political theory. Silentio suggests that Abraham operated under the teleological suspension of the ethical. The text has been appropriated by theologians as a device meant to shock readers into the leap of faith. In other words, those who appropriate his works argue that such extreme statements should not be taken literally, but as rhetorical shock therapy for the disenchanted. I contend that Silentio's call to teleologically suspend the ethical should be taken seriously even as I am immediately haunted by the ethical risks involved. Bordering the limit of hyperbole, I suggest that every decision made is a suspension of the ethical. Put in another way, taking the suspension of the ethical seriously is a reminder that every decisive move is a potentially unethical move. It has gone through the deliberation of the

ethical but without coming any closer to an answer than when one started. This realization is wounding because I would like to justify the emotional labor spent on grappling with the paradox of ungrounded faith as part of the edification process. The danger of this line of argument is that one can take this effort too far in wallowing in unsolvable dilemmas as a substitute for performing the works of love. To suspend the ethical is time bound and should be done in the context of ethical deliberation. But given the unlimited tendency for internal critique, suspending judgment can release one long enough to act in the world. One can err of not thinking enough as well as too much that it paralyzes action.

For Kierkegaard, to go against ethical norms cannot be habituated since it does not have the same comfortable ground of universal maxims:

The positive resolution has the great advantage that it consolidates life and reassures the individual in his own mind, whereas the negative holds him *in suspenso*. A negative resolution is always much more laborious than a positive one, it cannot become *habitual*²⁴⁶, and yet it must always be maintained. A positive resolution is secure in its happy result, for the universal, which is the positive factor in it, assures that happiness will come and gives assurance to happiness when it does come. A negative resolution, even when the result is happy, is *always ambiguous*²⁴⁷; it is deceptive like good fortune in paganism, for good fortune *is* only when it *has been....*²⁴⁸

Habituation is the luxury of the positive rule makers. To make exceptions requires more effort because one cannot determine beforehand the exact conditions in which one breaks the rules. This flexibility is taxing to the mind that may depend on routine so it does not have to consider all possible choices at every moment. Groundlessness is entirely separate from resting on foundations. To not be disturbed with the vertigo of a “groundless ground” is to protect oneself from the wound of negativity. Discomfort, dis-

²⁴⁶ emphasis mine.

²⁴⁷ emphasis mine.

²⁴⁸ SLW 113.

ease is inherently wrapped up with antifoundationalism. Any effort to soften the terror of antifoundationalism is to give in to the craving for absolutes. It is living under the constant reminder that one's actions are based on a series of merciless maybes. The negative resolution leaves one in a state of constant sleeplessness over whether one has made the right choice. It does not get better with time as a positive resolution (married life) receives in positive relation to others. The negative choice is a double edged sword. It is always based on a "conjunctive mood" of not knowing whether one has made the right choice since there is no guarantee. There is a double anxiety of which a positive choice has only one: "the fear of not being true to itself."²⁴⁹ In the negative relation, there are two anxieties, one the same as the positive relation, the other the uncertainty of whether this choice is the right one will "hover" over the individual each day the choice is maintained. To be ambiguous but act outward as if the choice is not is to live a life of "withered glory" and "without reward,"²⁵⁰ For "he who has made the negative resolution sleeps uneasily at night, expects that the terror will suddenly erect itself against him, that he has chosen wrong, he wakes up exhausted to behold about him the golden heath, he is never refreshed in strength because he is constantly hovering."²⁵¹

One could argue that this is no way to convince anyone into this way of living. The stark tone may ward off those who are unprepared. Kierkegaard would rather tell the stark reality than cloak groundlessness with childhood sentimentality. Kierkegaard does not hide the ugliness, the discomfort, the unending sleeplessness of choosing to make an exceptional choice. Abraham, the exception, the one who resolves to sacrifice his son or the one who resolves not to marry his beloved "wherever he goes it is protested, he is an

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 113.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 114.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 114.

outcast from the race, and even though he is consoled by the eternal, he is yet remote from joy, in tears, perhaps in gnashing of teeth...”²⁵² To tease out the tension further, Kierkegaard adds: “But the man who is negative in relation to the temporal has no outlet for his sympathy, which accordingly, instead of being a refreshment to him when it pours out the benediction of its abundance and when it recruits itself anew, becomes to him a torment which consumes his soul because it is unable to express itself.”²⁵³

Kierkegaard is not advocating one to make negative resolutions to the magnitude of Abraham on a daily basis. The strain would tear the individual apart. The soul will not be nourished unlike cases when one can be understood by a community. It is meant to frighten those who are not prepared and inspire those who have taken up the call. Kierkegaard would rather ward off those with an exaggerated truth than produce followers who are deluded that the ethical-religious path is paved with comfort.

The whole idea of resting, being supported rather than holding it up in *suspense* is committing to a life of discomfort.

The individual has declared war upon human existence, hence there is no instant when he is through with it, he cannot, like one who made a positive resolution, learn to understand day by day more deeply the original ground of his resolution. A negative resolution does not support him who made it, but he has to support it; and however far it goes, even if good fortune favors him, even if the most important results come from it, he dare not deny the possibility that suddenly everything may receive a different interpretation.²⁵⁴

While aware of the risks of advocating suspending the ethical, I argue that there are benefits for political theory. Moreover, suspension is not the same as letting go of the ethical. A teleological suspension further emphasizes the attention to the timeliness of

²⁵² Ibid., 116-7.

²⁵³ Ibid., 117.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 113.

when and how to suspend the ethical in particular situations.²⁵⁵ The fear of suspending a central category (e.g. ethical theory suspending ethics, feminist theory suspending gender, political theory suspending theory) is a foundationalist fear that requires an unquestionable category to guarantee the internal logic of the field. Once this category is put up for questioning the fear is that the whole field will unravel. While a refusal to let go of the central category within ethical theory may feel safer than the riskier suggestion of its suspension, there are also dangers of holding on too tightly. Ironically, formulating a theory of ethics can become its own end thus taking away the practicalities of ethical conduct. Counterterrorist civilian casualties have been justified in the name of peace and security.

Relying on ethics is not enough. FT is not a tract on a suspension of the ethical so much as an enactment of the difficulties of such a suspension. While commentators have focused on the religious lessons of the work, I note that the text does not advocate a disregard of the ethical in fanatical devotion to God. Silentio never fully lets go of the ethical as Abraham's identity as a murderer or knight of faith is never concluded. In other words, Silentio's suspension of the ethical depends on a clearly defined realm of the ethical for its suspension to have meaning. Silentio's readers are meant to be forever uneasy with the lack of guarantee of when and how one is to suspend the ethical.

Silentio's suspension of the ethical within a sustained discussion of ethical duty is an intense momentary dropping of the ground of ethics. It performs an aporia in the reader not to leap to a new absolute religiousness but to keep the reader in skeptical awe of the unknowability of the divine. By insisting on the absurdity of acting from a divine calling, Silentio never relinquishes the ethical. It is in the context of reasoned actions that

²⁵⁵ Derrida recognizes that one has to suspend adherence to abstract justice long enough to act in the world.

Abraham's decision cannot be understood. To insist on God's absurd request is to negatively affirm the frame of rationality from which the request is understood as absurd.

Through inducing aporias or "thought stoppers" that suspends thought long enough to allow for action, Silentio's presentation of the suspension of the ethical is meant to paralyze thought not to prevent action but to allow a decision to be made. What is paralyzing for thought does not necessarily mean it is paralyzing for action. The emphasis of making the right decision fails to take into account the need to stop thought momentarily in order to act. The goal of moral philosophy to achieve moral perfectionism allows reason to continue indefinitely with the inverse effect of paralyzing one from making a decision. If politics requires acting, the fear of allowing paradoxes to paralyze reason may be a sign of the fear of silencing the mind to realize the need for action. Underlying the need to link thought to action is the assumption that thought grounds responsible action. While thought is necessary to an extent, this assumption may also be a function of reason's assertion of its superiority over actions deemed irrational. This means that dwelling on the dilemma of whether Abraham was a murderer or knight of faith is time bound.

Written to appeal to and simultaneously offend the intellect, FT was published on the same day as *Repetition* which deals specifically with the ethical sphere of existence. Silentio's rendition of the story of Abraham is stark, starker than the warmth of the ethical community. As if to balance the starkness of Silentio's work, Kierkegaard uses *Repetition* as an analogy to an individual's experience of groundlessness. In *Repetition*, the young man writes of the unique relationship a viewer must have in responding to the theater of farce. The affect of a farce on the audience is ultimately unpredictable as the

audience does not know beforehand what to expect. The affect is not deafening, obvious, or uniform. It is best when most subtle. The unpredictability of farce means that the audience has to suspend comfortable expectations:

it may so happen that the one time it makes the least impression it was performed best....The otherwise so reassuring mutual respect between theater and audience is suspending. Seeing a farce can produce the most unpredictable mood, and therefore a person can never be sure whether he has conducted himself in the theater as a worthy member of society who has laughed and cried at the appropriate places.²⁵⁶

To have categories of beauty is to oblige oneself to enjoy that which is a subjective experience of autonomous basis for enjoyment. Kierkegaard wrote to allow his readers the space to respond to his works in her own unique fashion. To read Kierkegaard to fit into any one canon or genre is to take away one's autonomy as reader. To read Kierkegaard is like playing the lottery, one may get lucky and stumble on the perfect sentence that speaks to the reader in an intimate way, or one may be so upset by his writings that she vows never to approach him again. Any attempt to restrict a reading of Kierkegaard is to take away the probability of hitting one's subjective jackpot. If his critics insist on making Kierkegaard agreeable, then they are better off with an educational novel that gives no freedom for the reader to grow on her own. To decipher Kierkegaard is to take away the shock value of his work to surprise the audience to give up on preconceived notions. Kierkegaard writes in farce philosophic, lyric, dialectical, and polemic language. His farce is not obvious and is better for its lack of widespread detection. The reader must let go of all authority to turn inward to find what is most appealing. Kierkegaard's works contain caricatures of philosophers "in general." Just as his pseudonyms are one dimensional, so are his portrayals of Hegel or Kant. Just as in enjoyment, one must make religion one's own. This analogy to farce and religion would

²⁵⁶ R III 198-199, p. 159-60.

upset his contemporaries, so Kierkegaard decided to place a rather large hint by publishing these two works on the same day without connecting the two in print. The agony of the groundlessness of faith is made comical by matching the language used in FT. Just as Abraham has no one to lean on for support, the audience member “seeks in vain to the left or the right or in the newspapers for a guarantee that he actually has enjoyed himself.”²⁵⁷ To enjoy a farce, one must not be emotionally rigid: “he will not come with a firm and fixed mood and make everything have an effect in conformity with it, but he will have achieved perfection in mood and will maintain himself in the state in which not a single mood is present but a possibility of all.”²⁵⁸ For those who look up reviews to double check that one has appropriately enjoyed a text or show, Kierkegaard would lament that she has given up her freedom to decide on her own. It is always keeping open the possibility of the moods either way that does not insist that others have the same moods about particular parts of the farce or the Book.

In an analogous way, the reader of FT must form an independent relationship to the text with nothing to rely on except one’s self. However, rather than not having the ground to experience *horror religiosus*, the viewer of farce has no one to rely on for when to laugh or find farce humorous. According to the young man, the viewer of farce must have “sufficient unconstraint to dare to enjoy himself entirely solo, sufficient self-confidence to think for himself without consulting others as to whether he has enjoyed himself or not.”²⁵⁹

By exaggerating the literalness of Biblical narratives he makes it impossible to be comfortably generalized. While the mental reflex of generalizing from the example will

²⁵⁷ Ibid., III 199, p. 160-1.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., III 199, p. 160-1.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 160.

take place, to do so on Abraham will make such a generalizing offensive to one's ethical instincts. By introducing Abraham as the suspender of the ethical, Silentio winds up the reader to experience the aporia of groundless action as well as pound out ethical consciousness.

Edward Mooney notes that Kierkegaard scholarship gives more weight to eliciting reader response than contributing grand thought systems. Mooney considers his arguments are explicated through “imaginative, narrative portrayal ... [and] lyrical dialectic.”²⁶⁰ I borrow Mooney's observation of Kierkegaard's technique of linking words to action: contradictions “are experienced and identified with, critique is experienced as self-critique, corresponding motivations to seek some sort of resolution, through further emotional, imaginative, and decisional labor, is experienced as *self-motivation*.”²⁶¹

In appropriating, farcing rhetoric and logic, and then dropping the ground of philosophy and theology, Kierkegaard manages to enact an “action moment” but one that requires the reader to be *in* on the joke. Action moments in Kierkegaard are equivalent to Sell's meaning moments. Sell's “meaning moments” are in terms of breaking the mental reflex, but I argue that leaving meaning moments within the realm of the mental does not translate into action. I call Kierkegaard's method as instilling action moments. If the reader does not detect the revocation or read all the way through, then the “action moment” is not achieved. There is a dependence on reader participation to fulfill the performance just as a comedian needs the audience to laugh at the joke for the joke to affect the audience. His foundationalism is his end of the set up of the joke. I contend that

²⁶⁰ Mooney 9.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

only in establishing a firm ground will the tension of an action moment be performed outside of the text. Kierkegaard's foundationalism affects the reader outside of the printed page. A reader of Kierkegaard cannot simply stay within Kierkegaard's philosophic, literary, or theological world before soon coming up to breathe if one takes him seriously and/or laugh if one takes him humorously.

By drawing out this tension, by beginning but never completing the revocation, he ends up leaving the reader in an increasingly wound up state. There is never a revocation of the horror, but the revocation comes in the form of a strained juxtaposition of standing above a void—but remaining in joy. Hence the void is not revoked, but one must come to terms with it in joy. The meaning moment never arrives in the text since one is not told how this juxtaposition of opposing emotions of horror and joy can stand together.

While Kierkegaard entices his readers into thinking that a resolution will give one an answer to the tension, playing into his readers craving for absolutes, he ends up disenchanting them leaving the reader to find a how for herself. Breaking the fourth wall, Kierkegaard becomes the gadfly that comes out of the text to sting the reader.

However, unlike the natural *pitié* of Rousseau's noble savage, Kierkegaard's ethical man is not natural. He will address how the Christian ethic of love is utterly alien to natural man in WL.

The knight of faith is on a journey whose end is not so far off in a distant destination. Silentio plays with the spatial metaphor that Kierkegaard in WL reduces the distance from seventy thousand fathoms to the other side of the door. One is lead on a wide goose chase in the pseudonyms. Mooney writes "If faith is a quest, Johannes also

correctly depicts it as ‘absurd,’ quixotic.”²⁶² What seems like an impossible, paralyzing gulf between ethics and spirituality in Silentio’s presentation of the Story of Abraham is reduced to simply opening the door to love one’s neighbor. However, the mental journey one goes through in FT is not entirely useless as it is the feeling of pain mitigated by joy that one “finds” God. One does not have to go anywhere or be lead to another plain of existence to experience the God-relationship. It is in the striving, in the moment of greatest despair that one feels “God is right beside him, very near, near on every hand, omnipresent near, but the seeker has to be changed so that he himself becomes the place where God truly is.”²⁶³ Converted to spatial terms, if God in FT is infinitely far, God in his edifying discourses is everywhere near. The distance is only reduced but not eliminated. God can be along side one in one’s search, but God is never reached. Moreover, there is no solace for being mistaken in the realm of the spiritual;²⁶⁴ there can be no satisfactory justification that ethics may have in relying on the community, the state, and pragmatic judgment of ends since faith can never be justified or convinced from external factors.

Freedom as an ideal that one will never reach, but must strive towards, makes the journey a never ending journey. But this ideal if seen in conventional spatial and temporal time may act against one acting in the instant towards the neighbors one sees now. This delays one from being ethically oriented towards the other to some future time. But Kierkegaard knows that it is more palatable to speak in the glorifying terms of knights, quests, and journeys than to state the task closest at hand.

²⁶² Ibid., 85.

²⁶³ Kierkegaard, “What it Means to Seek after God” 461.

²⁶⁴ FT 248.

Direct communication may relieve the conscience of the author in making her intentions transparent, but such sermonizing may have a negative impact on the reader. By redirecting the focus from thought to action, Kierkegaard can justify writing irresponsibly to incite readers towards responsible action which can be convinced to stay forever on the fence. Better to exhaust thought by enticing it into ‘entertaining paradoxes,’ so the *vita activa* can move on to do the ethical tasks. If Kierkegaard’s paradoxes of a groundless faith are unsolvable, it is because he wanted them to frustrate the overly reflective mind that has made sensibleness the arbiter of all decisions of indecisiveness. To act ethically, one must suspend such serious common sense to act against its interest. Understanding may appease the mind, but it hampers one’s ability to suspend the logic of seriousness in a secularized world. Rather than make things more clear and less confusing, he would make the paradox of faith more difficult.²⁶⁵ If “paradox is the passion of thought,”²⁶⁶ then Kierkegaard’s pseudonym Constantine Climacus would exhaust this passion to its full extent so action would seem easy by comparison. If explaining away the paradox is what preoccupies the professor,²⁶⁷ then scholars can identify with de Silentio’s agonizing exposition of groundless faith without end—delaying *vita activa* indefinitely.

According to Adorno, Kierkegaard’s conclusions are “repeated like a magic spell.”²⁶⁸ Adorno faults Kierkegaard for not being Kantian enough—Kierkegaard ends up supporting a Gnostic, mythic religiosity rather than a rationally derived religion. Adorno

²⁶⁵ Pseudonym A in EO vows to make understanding more difficult, not less. As a self identified aesthete, he is mocking the aesthetic tendency for the reflective mind to occupy themselves with the endless task of trying to solve paradoxes.

²⁶⁶ CUP 37.

²⁶⁷ Climacus writes “Take the paradox away from the thinker and you have a professor,” CUP, KW XII, 287 fn. 3.

²⁶⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2: 1962), 9.

writes, “the alleged dialogue in fear and trembling can be nothing other than the deceptive echo that answers back out of nothingness to a self-confined spirituality.”²⁶⁹ There is a deep conviction that what Abraham heard was his own “deceptive echo.” I argue that Kierkegaard parodies this “self-confined spirituality.” There is no guarantee that once one chooses spirituality, that she will not become mystical. However, since Silentio never resolves the tension, Kierkegaard warns that the most one can hope for is that the believer remains in doubt. Adorno insists on Kierkegaard’s “positive theology”²⁷⁰ as established through his paradoxes. Adorno is right to point to the danger of rhetoric in creating a mysticism that moves one away from social life. Kierkegaard is ambivalent, he seems to turn to Gnosticism, the foundational truth of the historical Jesus is about believing in miracles.²⁷¹ Adorno faults Kierkegaard for turning Kant’s transcendental justification for God into a Transcendental Absolute. Adorno quotes from religiousness A which is the new immediacy that Kierkegaard argues is not true religiosity which is to forever remain in doubt. Kierkegaard carried his dialectic but his rhetoric betrayed a merging with the divine.

I argue with Law that Kierkegaard is more negative than negative theologians. While Adorno notes that Kierkegaard not only did not “raise itself above mythology” but “it here falls entire to its mercy. For although the mythical images of transcendence are destroyed in the instant of ‘faith,’ in the same instant human consciousness itself usurps the power of the absolute through the paradox that it posits.”²⁷³ Adorno creates an

²⁶⁹ Ibid. 115.

²⁷⁰ Ibid. 116.

²⁷¹ “But the succeeding tranquility must not be such as to do away with the historical, for then everything will be Socratic” PF 133-4.

²⁷³ Adorno 118.

antagonistic relationship between mythology and human consciousness and the absolute. What is the fear of being held captive by mythology? Adorno is closer to Kierkegaard than the former thinks for Kierkegaard refers to mythologized Christianity as acceptable for children but not for seasoned believers who must deal with the uncertainty of faith in its full terror. Adorno is quoting from passages when Kierkegaard writes that God is nearer to man's soul. The debate whether Kierkegaard was a positive or negative theologian is useful since it speaks to how rhetoric can be dangerous to allow one's imagination to get ahead of itself and assume a Truth to the unknown. I argue that if Kierkegaard were a Gnostic, then he would have ended his edifying sermons with bliss. But he maintains the theme of fear, doubt, and uncertainty. There remains a little discomfort in finishing his texts. I argue that for spirituality to be useful to politics, this uncomfortable distance between the human and divine must be maintained. Kierkegaard brings God near, only to terrify his readers. Adorno criticizes Kierkegaard for being too seductive for his own good given the "mythical tone" in FSE. This is not the classical foundationalism of metaphysics in serio, but a metaphysics of humor. One can attempt to foundationalize humor only to no avail. But Adorno inverts Kierkegaard and calls him a Gnostic for inviting God back in to fill the void.

The implications of this work wounded my attempts to come to terms with its ramifications. Coming from the tradition of political philosophy that equates words with authorial intent, I was initially at a loss of how to interpret Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works and took him at his word. However, the more I dived into the corpus, the less I can make definitive statements about what the author was about. The most common thread of Kierkegaard commentary is that he was a religious writer who parodied philosophical

language to catch the Danish educated elites in their own game, particularly the use of dialectics to arrive at immanent truth. If this is so, there is another difficulty of appropriating Kierkegaard for political theory since he works from a religious tradition. Below is a personal response to Kierkegaard who has captured my imagination and renewed my commitment to ethics. Kierkegaardian commentary is exhaustive and the hope of finding a new interpretation of the author will be redundant.

To the outsider faith is absurd, unintelligible, and impossible. Yet if one acts, one finds that faith is closer than she first thought. This is an admission that I relate to Silentio's reading and admit my own attraction to describing faith in such grandiose terms. It reflects my own self regard to be recognized as a sacrificial agent. Even the language of the warrior without glory is gloriously stated. Silentio translates faith into glorified duty despite stating the opposite. The force of his rhetoric betrays his words. This shows my own reluctance to take in the simpler message, the naked message of loving neighbors as yourself is not as intellectually stimulating as the angst generated in FT. This is what I consider is the ultimate joke in reading Kierkegaard, one is seduced by the magic spell only to be awoken by a simple message in its pure simplicity in action. The moment arrives when one realizes that one does not need to make an actual leap but must transform the self. When reading his works is too hard to bear, Kierkegaard reminds the reader to not be too imprisoned with her work.

I continue with Mooney who writes that Silentio's depiction of the warrior knight is playing into the fantasy that one has complete mastery over one's choices:

These heroes of faith and resignation can seem to promote an absurd will to power, an overweening will to master mortality and time. Yet faith is cultivating the opposite: a trusting receptivity, an openness toward whatever may be given. It is the simplicity,

humility, and playfulness of the shopman: no hero, but a ‘poet of the ordinary,’ who gives his loving regard toward the least of finite objects.²⁷⁴

I argue that humor allows one to cultivate these qualities. Faith is having the humor to laugh at one’s grandiosity in wanting to be more humble than thou. The leap of faith is not to be crossed; having faith is not the same as acting in Christian love. To wait until one has absolute reasons to make the leap is to avoid living faithfully.

If FT is meant to frustrate the reflective mind with the impossible dilemma of sorting out the divine from the demonic, then Kierkegaard reminds the reader in his other texts to move on to easier tasks. In FSE, Kierkegaard comments on de Silentio’s relentless brooding commentary. De Silentio’s posturing is a delay tactic to do the hard tasks. But Kierkegaard again anticipates this misunderstanding and reminds the reader that “we do not disparage scholarship, no far from it...”²⁷⁵ Kierkegaard is constantly making asides to his reader that the text may not be speaking to her. While speaking to the scholar of the Bible to not be too engrossed with translations from the original language, he addresses the nonscholar so as not to lose him: “If you are not a scholar, do not envy him: be glad that you can start reading God’s Word right away!”²⁷⁶

To those who are paralyzed with the task of interpreting the whole corpus, Kierkegaard retorts: “God’s Word is given in order that you shall act according to it, not that you shall practice interpreting obscure passages.”²⁷⁷ Silentio admires the knight of faith and at the same time distances himself from acting in faith. Mooney states that Silentio represents those who lean towards putting faith on a pedestal to be done by others: “Were Johannes closer to faith, not merely an admiring outsider, he might have

²⁷⁴ Mooney attributes these lines to James C. Edwards.

²⁷⁵ FSE 28.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 29.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 29.

seen outright that faithfulness is distinct from the colorful world of warriors. Yet as unhappy romantics, poets in search of celebrity, adventure, and the spectacular, this is the world towards which we and Johannes so easily gravitate.”²⁷⁸ FT is written for those who tend to be attracted with intellectually stimulating paradoxes.

Those who have taken FT too seriously will succumb to paralyzing earnestness. Kierkegaard reminds the reader that while Jesus was suffering at the cross, he “toned down [earnestness] almost to a jest by introducing the lily and the bird.”²⁷⁹ In the moment of greatest suffering, Jesus does not want his followers to despair: “[i]n order...for us human beings the matter does not become all too earnest, deadly with anxiety...”²⁸⁰ Silentio’s despair of wallowing in doubt meant that he locked himself out of grace.

David A. Pailin makes an important insight in his study of seventeenth and eighteenth century interpretations of the story of Abraham as a hermeneutical study of how the nature of one’s faith structures how one understands the story. The point of reading the story is not to instill faith as much as reveal the content of one’s faith. There is no way to settle an original meaning of the text without committing intentional fallacy or ignoring the ways that one’s faith and cultural context shape how one gleans meaning from the text. For Pailin, Biblical stories do not have absolute intrinsic meaning; rather they stimulate one’s subjective (re)interpretation necessarily structured by one’s faith and cultural circumstances. The story of Abraham and Isaac has been debated many times over by theologians and philosophers alike, but what Johannes de Silentio offers is an agonizing read that provokes the reader to find meaning within. The significance of (re)reading the story through Johannes de Silentio is not to derive another authoritative

²⁷⁸ Mooney 87.

²⁷⁹ FSE 179.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 179.

stance on the point of the Abrahamic, but to wrestle with the feelings that each retelling evokes.

By urging his readers to consider Isaac's sacrifice literally, Kierkegaard encourages the reader to reach this limit in the understanding. The moment when I cannot "imagine literally killing for Christ's sake" is the moment when I cannot give up reason but recognize its limits at the same time. One commentator writes that the text "sharpens obligations [of the radicalness of the Christian ethic] to a breaking point and eliminates any false sense of one's ability to comply with God's 'commands.'"²⁸¹ One is pushed to faithlessness in the conflict between reason and faith.

Climacus says "It is true of all edification that it must first and foremost produce the *necessary adequate fear*, for otherwise the edification is reduced to an illusion."²⁸² For example, by reading Job's ordeal, the reader is lead to a fearful implication. Polk writes: "What Kierkegaard proceeds to do with the proverb in the Edifying Discourse, ... is exactly what the Book of Job does with the proverb: namely, narrativize it [The Lord gave, and the Lord took away; blessed be the name of the Lord.], fill it out with the story of a life that practices the wisdom it asserts."²⁸³ Kierkegaard fills out the anxiety of what Job or Abraham must have felt faced with the challenges of the ordeal. The ordeal is not simply an emotional response, but should be translated in the world of action. Abraham and Job typify religious ordeal: "In general, an ordeal is a situation of such apparent God-forsakenness and in which God's rule seems so unlikely that the God-fearer's response of clinging to God, madly clinging to the God-relationship and insisting on God's sovereign

²⁸¹ Ronald Green, "Developing' Fear and Trembling," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alastair Hannay and Gordon Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 277.

²⁸² CUP 231, 235.

²⁸³ Polk 179.

relevance, looks like Godlessness.”²⁸⁴ Kierkegaard insists on the terror of religious texts to instill this sense of Godlessness in the reader to keep her from achieving a comfortable merger with the divine. He challenges the false unity of oneness that takes away the radical alterity with the unknown. Kierkegaard is following a tradition of exaggeration and reversal found in Luther in which gothic terror is pushed to the extreme and eventually revoked. The approach is to keep his readers suspended over groundlessness. The humor comes from the differential of the saying and its reversal. The “parody of revelation” is stark but exaggerated to extremes and then revoked by the unwarranted assertion of therefore God’s grace will save us.

The text maintains the religious experience as horror. Like Luther’s Tower experience in which he writes, “we are irreparably doomed, nothing can save us, ergo God will save us.” Zwart writes that Luther was subverting the gothic terror of the Middle Ages with a comic “parody of revelation.” Kierkegaardian authorship also pushed the religious terror to the extreme. Via Delumeau, Zwart illustrates that:

Luther’s theology provided an answer, a solution to the general experience of fear and bewilderment that dominated the twilight of the Middle Ages by pushing gothic belief to its extreme and then turning it upside-down. That is, he relied on the ‘parodical’ devices of exaggeration and reversal.²⁸⁵

Luther’s transformation came about through the recognition that judgment need not be connected with punishment but with grace. In translating the Bible from Latin into vernacular German, Luther made the Bible accessible. “To familiarize, Bergson stresses, is always comical.”²⁸⁶ Luther’s solution is to reverse the horror through an unreasoned

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 181.

²⁸⁵ Hub Zwart, *Ethical Consensus and the Truth of Laughter: The Structure of Moral Transformations* (Kampen: Pharos/Louvain, 1999), 142. See also Delumeau.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 150.

assertion of God's grace. This move is different from developing a tolerance to the horror, but one is to be joyful over the horror.

Once caught in Silentio's dialectical lyric, one is seduced into his texts to seek resolution of the tensions he so expertly coils. But the tensions are not resolved as one nears the end of the texts. Silentio magnifies the tension by repeating the dialectic in numerous ways so one can never fall into complacency. Amidst increasing the level of intensity of wrestling with the dialectic between thought and faith, he invites the reader to reflect on her own life. In the end, one is left with a feeling that no reprieve can come from reading the text, rather one has exhausted all possible thought experiments and faces point blank one's (lack of) faith. The effort of grappling with Silentio's presentation of the paradox of a groundless faith leaves the reader in constant suspense.

Silentio notes that he cannot understand Abraham who is asked to perform the unspeakable sacrifice of his son. Silentio has a curious relationship to the figure of Abraham for in Silentio's words "Although Abraham arouses my admiration, he also appalls me."²⁸⁷ To take the story of Abraham seriously as a test of faith, one must either believe Abraham a "knight of faith" or a murderer for there is no middling mediation that what Abraham heard the second time was the saving voice of reason saving Isaac from Abraham's slaying hand. One must not tame the notion that Abraham works from a deep faith in the absolute that cannot be fully understood or made consistent with the categorical imperative of moral law. Derrida echoes Silentio: "Our faith is not assured, because faith can never be, it must never be a certainty."²⁸⁸ Therefore those who are without doubt, certain of the wishes of the absolute do not operate on good faith. When

²⁸⁷ FT III 110, 60.

²⁸⁸ Derrida, *Gift* 80.

one works “in good faith,” it is a trust based not on complete knowledge, but on the uncertainty that this person may not deliver or abide by his word. This is something that theologians and believers can share with secularists who recognize that faith can never be proven true beyond a shadow of doubt.²⁸⁹

According to Silentio, faith in God cannot be easily passed down through familial lines or be passively accepted through pastors within church walls. The conversion, the leap into faith, requires a continual renewal made by each individual. There is no way to inherit the Christian tradition without each person agonizing over the mystery of the absolute. One cannot be absolutely certain of one’s faith because some other person or text said so, since faith comes through passionate doubt that is constantly aware of the uncertain groundlessness of one’s belief. There is no comfortable place from which to believe in the absolute since this defies the definition of belief. It is a constant, repetitious consciousness of the absurdity of the absolute other that is wholly unknowable.

While Derrida is sympathetic to Silentio’s reading of the story of Abraham, Derrida via Levinas raises a critique of Silentio in that the latter’s text seems too narrowly focused on the first voice of God calling for sacrifice. Via Levinas, Derrida writes:

one can posit the contrary: the attention Abraham pays to the voice that brings him back to the ethical order by forbidding him to carry out the human sacrifice is the most intense moment of the drama.... It is there, in the ethical, that there is an appeal to the uniqueness of the subject and sense is given to life in defiance of death.²⁹⁰

However, Derrida is purposefully ambivalent as to whether he fully aligns with Levinas or Silentio on the main point of the Abraham story. Levinas thinks the main climax of the

²⁸⁹ See Arendt’s objection to the plague of Cartesian doubt and how this differs from spiritual doubt. If social scientists distance themselves from the natural sciences and religion, then they are missing important allies in the search for truth based on a method that can never get rid of doubt.

²⁹⁰ Derrida, *Gift* n. 6. 78.

tale is when God chastises Abraham for placing faith above familial law.²⁹¹ According to Levinas, *Silentio* focuses on the wrong place, for Abraham's absolute duty cannot be consistent with a generalized ethics. Levinas does not subsume the ethical into a lower category than the divine.

For Levinas: "The high point of the whole drama could be the moment when Abraham lent an ear to the voice summoning him back to the ethical order."²⁹² While the goal of getting the reader back to the ethical is shared by Kierkegaard, the latter resorts to a different strategy to get the reader to come to his conclusion through exaggerating the opposite.

Yet I argue that *Silentio* represents one who is fanatically caught in dwelling, even wallow, in the absurdity of what it means to be put in Abraham's position. One does not come away from *Silentio*'s reading with a renewed sense of certainty for the divine, rather one feels incredibly disturbed in agonizing over the reading of the text as he tries to fill in what might be going on inside Abraham's head, although he admits that the singular experience cannot be fully comprehended by an observer.

Derrida, I think, is similar to *Silentio* by emphasizing the silence, the aporia; the moment within Abraham when he does not know *for sure* this is God's will or the will of the tempter. Levinas' insistence on the ethical face of the Other *always* interjecting with absurd requests from God, e.g. murder, is comforting and has an immediate settling effect

²⁹¹ See Emmanuel Levinas, *Proper Names*, trans. Michael B. Smith (London: Athlone Press, 1996).; and Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990).

²⁹² Emmanuel Levinas, "Existence and Ethics," in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, ed. Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1998), 33.

that relaxes my critical faculties.²⁹³ Levinas's critique of Kierkegaard echo my own upon a first reading. Levinas faults Kierkegaard for his "hard masculine tone":

This hard and aggressive style of thinking, which had always been associated with the most unscrupulous and cynical forms of action, could now be taken seriously as a kind of justification for violence and terror. This is not just a matter of literary form. Kierkegaardian violence begins when existence, having moved beyond the aesthetic stage, is forced to abandon the ethical stage (or rather, what it took to be the ethical stage) in order to embark on the religious stage, the domain of belief. But belief no longer sought external justification. Even internally, it combined communication and isolation, and hence violence and passion. That is the origin of the relegation of ethical phenomena to secondary status and the contempt for the ethical foundation of being which has led, through Nietzsche, to the amorality of recent philosophies.²⁹⁴

Levinas' fear is that Kierkegaard's works "could now be taken seriously." While Kierkegaard shares this fear with Levinas, Kierkegaard recognizes that this danger is partly beyond his control. If a reader gets too carried away with the violent connotations of the work, Kierkegaard speaks directly to his readers to not be too trapped in her serious interpretation. Kierkegaard like Levinas shares the anxiety of the uncontrollable nature of reader response. Unlike Levinas, Kierkegaard surrenders in part to this uncertainty by leaving room for the reader not only to fill in the spaces left by what is unsaid but to challenge the implications of what *is* said in the text. Kierkegaard does not come out of hiding and say directly at the end of FT that such a work should be revoked. Perhaps publishing *Repetition* on the same day as FT is a signal for readers to find a connection to the comments on farce.

Levinas does not allow the room that Kierkegaard gives to his reader to form her own opinion of the text's meaning. There is no room to interpret Kierkegaard's tone as

²⁹³ Westphal performs a Kierkegaardian reading on Levinas by interpreting the latter as "suspending the religious." Westphal also identifies parallel paradoxes in Kierkegaard and Levinas. See Merold Westphal, "Levinas' Teleological Suspension of the Religious," in *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Levinas for Philosophy, Literature, and Religion*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak (New York: Routledge, 1995).

²⁹⁴ Levinas, "Existence" 31.

that of a mock heroic epic. Levinas gives Kierkegaard's text too much power to "force [the reader] to abandon the ethical stage." I argue that this is as unlikely as forcing one to be free. Levinas' interpretation of Kierkegaard has more of the characteristics of a "hard masculine tone." Silentio's powers of suggestion invite readers to contemplate on the possibility of Abraham as either a knight or murderer. The reader can decide to take up the suggestion of this extreme interpretation even as she ends up rejecting the violent implications.

For me, I find that there is comfort in having an unbendable rule that tells one to always choose the ethical in the subjectivity of the Other. It is easier to generalize, to take away from the story of Abraham a dogmatic stance that one should never privilege the religious over ethics or the opposite fanaticism of the divine always trumping the ethical, but as Silentio and Derrida insists, that would be too easy. Kierkegaard warns that this would not give adequate respect for the divine.

Moreover, Abraham does not have the luxury of hindsight and neither does anyone when making a decision of this magnitude. Not knowing how one's actions will be taken up in this world, whether one's interpretation of the gospel is the right one, whether God will appear in the last instance and perform a miracle is the dilemma that haunts all who dare to be faithful. The genius of the story is that it can be used in defense of both extremist positions but also suggests more in the silence of Abraham. This is closer to Derrida's method of reading ironic silences. As soon as one finalizes the meaning of the story, it loses its mystery. If the mystery is solved, as I argue Levinas tries to solve, one can be relieved that God was not *really* asking the believer to choose between a child and God or anything as absurd.

But for Silentio, simply thinking of the sacrifice of Isaac as an analogy to giving up what is most cherished in one's life is not enough to make people enthralled with the spiritual duty since it does not convey the ineffable agony of such a sacrifice. Plus, if Silentio took the Qur'an as the basis of the story, then God is asking for self-sacrifice or suicide. There is no ethical, universal justification for sacrificing one's child or suicide; just as there is no universal justification for sacrificing what is closest to us. He argues that if one takes away from the story of Abraham, the need to sacrifice what is best, then one will not go far enough and only think of sacrifice in terms of one's most cherished possessions. Loving faith in God must be taken not simply to the human extreme but to the spiritual extreme for one to face the enormity of absolute duty, even if one cannot fully comprehend its magnitude. In grappling with Silentio's reading of the story of Abraham, the furthest extreme in my own political terms is giving up personal and social privilege. However for Silentio this is too narrow even though it is a good goal in the ethical sphere of existence. There are some things that are easier to give than others. The rich can give to charity (although some forms of charity might as well be nil especially if the charity is counted as a tax deduction); they might actively work to change the capitalist system to create more economic equality; but will they give up their most cherished life blood? Will anyone? Silentio asks for more—God asks for life.

In other words, it is not simply a matter of giving, or giving up, but ultimately sacrificing existence. Pushed to such inhuman extremes, the reader is also pushed to consider the ethical alternative. For example, in reading the text, I constantly was brought back to the ethical imperative that human sacrifice is wrong despite my anti-foundationalist sensibilities. By pushing his readers to the edge of Godlessness, Silentio

also enacts the opposite consciousness of the need for the ethical simultaneously. In these moments, one realizes the inextricable unity between faith and faithlessness. Silentio is seeing to it that his readers confront this dialectic within, and interrogate one's hypocritical foundationalism. He reminds the reader in today's age, at least among the academic left, where the concepts of dialectic, contradiction, and paradox abound that believing in groundlessness is indescribably agonizing and that anyone who claims confronting these concepts is easy is suffering from self-delusion.

For Silentio, the process is necessarily painful, one that needs to be matched by the painfulness of sacrificing a beloved child, or destroying that which most consider their life joy. Here, Silentio will argue that I am still thinking of Isaac as an analogy because I cannot imagine literally killing for Christ's sake. At this point, I cannot help but feel animosity towards Silentio for making me think of the unthinkable.²⁹⁵ The implications of this text terrifies me as I find myself initially avoiding going where Silentio takes his argument. However, I find that I cannot stop reading as I become increasingly more upset and frustrated with the dialectic. This avoidance but concurrent attraction drives me to interrogate my (dis)relationship with the unknown.

Silentio considers faith more than commonsense; he is stressing the distinction between ethical and spiritual duty that may require more than giving up what one considers best. The spiritual cannot be rationalized into ethical or political terms; this does not convey the incomprehensibility, the agony of groundless belief. The act of the absolute sacrifice may not be what can be universally willed as law but must be decided

²⁹⁵ Kierkegaard is often thought of as that melancholic fellow from Holland, but books on the humor of Kierkegaard have come out to show that he is having some fun torturing his readers who should also have a little laugh out of the process as well. Ironically, Kierkegaard is often omitted from the canon as being too much of a fanatic nut case when he is probably responsible for helping readers find the nut job inside themselves.

on with fear and trembling since one cannot be sure that one is following the divine will or that of the demonic. Silentio insists, however, that while absolute duty to God may conflict with universal ethics, this does not mean that every man can crusade his or her own self-righteous cause in the name of the Lord. Silentio points out that a commitment to God does not mean a license to break loose of all bonds to the world. It is through a paradox of love that one acts in his relation to the divine since “the absolute duty can lead one to do what ethics would forbid, but it can never lead the knight of faith to stop loving.”²⁹⁶ However, this is like trying to resolve a paradox with another paradox. The idea of love that God commands is not of a human romantic sense, but in the absolute sense that may conflict with ethics. One is lead back to the dialectic without a redeeming force of love to synthesize the contradiction since Silentio fully embraces this distinction between love and ethics as a paradox. For Silentio notes that while one can easily understand the ethical, one cannot fully comprehend love towards the absolute. Silentio anticipates the dangers of separating the spiritual with the ethical but he is prepared to suffer the “martyrdom of misunderstanding.”²⁹⁷ He guesses that future commentators will find him responsible for inciting a fanatic devotion that justifies killing in the name of God. However, rather than shy away from Biblical passages that may highlight not only the absurdity, but also the danger of promoting an uncertain faith over a safe, universalizable ethics, Silentio admits such implications as possible but not necessarily likely and may be more a projection of society’s anxieties.

²⁹⁶ FT 74.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 80.

When speaking of similar difficult passages in the Bible, e.g. that followers have to hate one's self and his or her own family to love God,²⁹⁸ Silentio remarks that “[a]s a rule, passages such as this one in Luke are not quoted. We are afraid to let people loose; we are afraid that the worst will happen as soon as the single individual feels like behaving as the single individual.”²⁹⁹ Silentio notes that existing as a single individual, in faithful solitude, is misunderstood as rather simple when compared to compelling people to obey to universal wills. Silentio stresses that there is a difference between living the life of the aesthetic individual and the singular individual of faith for the path of living singly with the divine does not bring one pleasure or glory that an esthete or a tragic hero would receive for indulging in or giving up personal desires for ethical duties since the universal is easily knowable, comprehensible, and by definition, general. For the “knight of faith,” the warrior, the brave doubting soul, he will live a life of suffering without glory.

Silentio recognizes that not everyone can be a knight of faith: “It may well be that there are those who need coercion, who, if they were given free rein, would abandon themselves like unmanageable animals to selfish appetites.”³⁰⁰ He would not promote a world of “knights of faith” in the Hobbesian world of all against all, but he notes that the faithful “knows how to speak in fear and trembling, and speak he must out of respect for greatness...”³⁰¹ Silentio keeps this distinction vague as he does not give his readers the comfort that one can easily delineate a person who is worthy of faith or is simply

²⁹⁸ Luke 14:25-6. “Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.”

²⁹⁹ FT 74-5.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, III 123, 75.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, III 124, 75.

suffering from self-delusion. In fact, Silentio collapses them as de facto indistinguishable as he shows that one cannot have a consistent admiration or sympathy toward Abraham:

One cannot weep over Abraham. One approaches him with a *horror religiosus*, as Israel approached Mount Sinai. What if he himself is distraught, what if he had made a mistake, this lonely man who climbs Mount Moriah...³⁰²

The knight of faith may suspend the ethical for the absolute, but his decision of when to do this is his decision alone to make and ironically his decision must not be absolute for fear that one is not following the divine call but that of the demonic within. The terrifying suggestion that Silentio implies is that there is no concrete way to tell which voice to listen to except to remain in love. But this does not give solace either since love of God is so great that it is equated with hating one's self and family by comparison.³⁰³

Levinas judges the story by the ending in which God saves Abraham and Isaac from themselves. Silentio would object to Levinas' reading of the story because of Levinas' focus on judging behavior based on the end result. It is easy to judge actions after the results are in, all risks seem justified if in the end God calls out to stop the killing or in some Islamic versions God stops the knife from cutting. To deal with the paradoxical collision between the ethical and the spiritual by deferring actions until one knows that God or Allah will step in is not possible since one acts without knowledge of what the future brings. If Levinas thinks that the primacy of the ethical is the point of the Abraham story, he is relying on the luxury of hindsight to judge Abraham's decision. He reads the result back onto the story to make his narrative of the primacy of ethical responsibility consistent. Although Kierkegaard promotes ethical responsibility as a

³⁰² Ibid., III.

³⁰³ Ibid., III 120-1, 71-2.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., III 113, 63.

necessary second 'step' higher than the aesthetic, pleasure seeking, single individual, ethical existence is ranked lower than the religious absolute singular individual.

Commentators have noted that he does not literally think that the spheres are fully separable into stages but are necessarily overlapping. This means that at any moment one has to choose between the three. So, although Kierkegaard places a high regard for the ethical realm, he cannot advocate an absolute ethics always trumping spirituality when the ethical and the spiritual conflict. While Levinas at least confronts the paradox that ethics and spirituality may collide, (some commentators of Kierkegaard, particular those who focus on his politics, collapse the latter two spheres into the "ethico-religious" sphere and avoid the crucial paradox) Levinas relies on resolving the paradox by judging retroactively the ultimate meaning of God's second voice calling out to Abraham to stop the sacrifice. In psychological terms, Silentio understands this tendency for "we are curious about the result, just as we are curious about the way a book turns out. We do not want to know anything about the anxiety, the distress, the paradox."³⁰⁵ He retells the story in his terrifying way since the story has been deradicalized by priests and fellow believers. Silentio does not just attack churchgoers but assistant professors as well for being the primary group to argue intellectually for the pragmatic, whatever-works-in-the-end method of resolving the paradox of faith.

Silentio wants to interject these neutered interpretations by dropping the ground from within when he points out that there is no grounding to even his own interpretation of Abraham, or more importantly, Abraham's interpretation of God's will. Silentio insists that the second time Abraham hears God is not as Levinas stresses the call of the ethical, familial love, or voice of reason, but the same absurd voice inside Abraham's head that

told him to sacrifice his son in the first place. In one of his journal entries, Kierkegaard proposes an alternative ending that Abraham actually goes through with the sacrifice because he chose not to hear the second divine call and thought it was that of the tempter working against God's will. Abraham slain Isaac—no miracle happens as in the Islamic version. When God calls to ask why Abraham did not hear him the second time, Abraham explains that he did not think God would change his mind in the last second. Kierkegaard warns that it is this arrogance and stubborn dogmatism of only listening to the first voice, or only listening once; freezing all subsequent moments of potential divine calling that would be more terrifying.

It is important to emphasize that while *Silentio* deals with the second voice, he differs from Levinas' interpretation. Again in a passage from his journals, Kierkegaard writes that the last instance is just as absurd as the first since the execution of God's will and His own retraction of His Will has to be *heard* and *believed* by Abraham with nothing to rely on except his faith. While Levinas would see the retraction of familial sacrifice as the primacy of the ethical in the last instance, Kierkegaard would argue that this is taking out the divine lesson from the story. Abraham can never be completely sure of his belief in God's will since if he was completely convinced or took the first call as absolute in the first place, he might not have heard God's retraction. Also, one cannot think that God never changes his mind or demands the contradictory, since Abraham might have thought that the second voice was that of the father's wish. Kierkegaard has Abraham ask "how would I have dared believe that it was yours [voice]?"³⁰⁶ Kierkegaard's only semblance of an answer, which is equally disturbing is that one should believe with fear and trembling.

³⁰⁶ JP III 3020 (*Pap X A 338*) *n.d.*, 1851. in FT 267.

This leads one back to Derrida's reading of the story of Abraham. In *Gift of Death*, Derrida interprets Silentio's text to grapple with the implications of the suspension of the ethical in the story of Abraham by considering the place of humor in the work. According to Derrida, when Isaac asks his father why he is taken up to Mount Moriah, and Abraham decides not to answer Isaac to keep his decision a secret, there is humor in the not saying.³⁰⁷ Derrida says this is similar to "the incongruous yet familiar humor, the *unheimlich* or uncanniness of the story."³⁰⁸ If it is hard to find humor in the Abrahamic, Derrida gives a lighter example of the secrecy of sacrifice by asking, "How would you ever justify the fact that you sacrifice all the cats in the world to the cat that you feed at home every morning for years, whereas other cats die of hunger at every instant? Not to mention other people?"³⁰⁹ For Derrida, by caring for the one, one necessarily sacrifices the others.

To ask the rhetorical question, "How can one believe this history of credence or credit?" is to "disrupt the structure of it. As often happens, the call of or for the question, and the request that echoes through it, takes us further than the response."³¹⁰ Here Derrida comes back to Silentio who wants to raise questions and make the reader more confused.³¹¹ To reply in definitive terms to this rhetorical question is to settle the tension raised. To leave a question unanswered intensifies the anxiety of not being able to answer without struggle and contradiction. The effect would agitate further thought that keeps

³⁰⁷ Derrida compares Abraham's silence to that in Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener" who "prefers not to say."

³⁰⁸ Derrida, *Gift* 77.

³⁰⁹ Jacques Derrida, "Whom to Give to (Knowing Not to Know)," in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, ed. Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 164.

³¹⁰ Derrida, *Gift* 115.

³¹¹ In EO, Kierkegaard states that his goal unlike that of most philosophical text will be to make his readers more confused. Interesting aside to add: Derrida is critical of Nietzsche's "denunciation of Christian belief economy."

one from closing the book completely. In an age without humility before God, human drama is reduced to internal battles with the self. An answer to the question would not humble men before the paradox separating faith and reason. Silentio's inability to give an answer is not to make the reader conclude definitively for herself either, but to keep open this negativity to "make us feel vividly the lack of it."³¹²

One would want closure and read the Bible with romanticized nostalgia of the wonder of the divine on earth. For Silentio this is forgetful and irresponsible, cowardly to soften the utter terror of seeing Christ on earth. He reminds Christians, I add Jews and Muslims, that they might be wrong as he asks, "Was it such a simple matter not to make a mistake? Was it not terrifying that this man walking around among the others was God?"³¹³ Silentio ends the first section with the horror of the paradoxical in the figure of Abraham and reminds the reader that they cannot rely on a happy ending for comfort:

During the time before the result, either Abraham was a murderer every minute or we stand before a paradox that is higher than all mediations. The story of Abraham contains, then, a teleological suspension of the ethical. As the single individual he became higher than the universal. This is the paradox which cannot be mediated. How he entered into it is just as inexplicable as how he remains in it. If this is not Abraham's situation, then Abraham is not even a tragic hero but a murderer.³¹⁴

In order to be a true believer, one has to live with the uncertainty that he or she may be completely wrong since Abraham may be the knight of faith, the ancestral link that ties Jews, Christians, and Muslims to a homeland in Israel or he might be a lunatic killer. As a believer of faith, one is either right or really really wrong. Only through pushing Christianity to the extreme horror of madness will God's words have the power to humble.

³¹² Josipovici 118.

³¹³ FT III 115, 66.

³¹⁴ Ibid., III 116, 66.

One cannot “will-to-believe or will-not-to-believe” without doubt since there are no guarantees in interpreting the actions of a man of faith as either absolutely right or wrong; it would not be in good taste for God to confirm or deny. If one waits until the end to decide to live a life in faith, then it is too late, since the moment is never revealed in one’s lifetime: perhaps God, Jesus, and/or Sophia existed—perhaps not. This is the uncertainty that one must face without being paralyzed. Although Silentio points out that the struggle is internal, this does not stop him from using external metaphors to describe the effect of the struggle. He uses metaphors of the oppressed to live in dignity as much as possible given the circumstances of their oppression, and the faithful as having the equivalent status of a quixotic spiritual warrior. While for the tragic hero there is comfort in the community of the universal, the faithful knight “has no one to advise him—no one understands him.”³¹⁵ In the community, the knight of faith will be seen as either a prophet or a murderer. Not everyone, not even the writer himself can step up and be an Abraham; but everyone has the potential since “Faith is a marvel, and yet no human being is excluded from it; for that which unites all human life is passion, and faith is a passion.”³¹⁶ It is this passion that Silentio attempts to sustain in the loving doubt of faith so believer and non-believers do not forget the constancy of their devotion as decisions upon decisions of (dis)belief.

While Silentio provides the experience of the agony of groundlessness, Levinas provides a comfortable reading by insisting on the primacy of ethical care for the Other. Specifically, Levinas develops an ethical foundation in which the Other stands as judge to

³¹⁵ Ibid., III 116, 66.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 67.

the meaning of one's experience.³¹⁷ For Levinas, the ethical commitment to being sensitive to the face of the other comes prior to morality and duty. Without the former, the latter will have no reference point from which to judge.³¹⁸ It is an ethical responsibility embodied in a subjectivity that is specific and universally tied to the other. In an interview with Richard Kearney, Levinas explains a version of the ethical that sounds similar to the restlessness of Silentio's spiritual existence in faith:

I have described ethical responsibility as *insomnia* or *wakefulness* precisely because it is a perpetual duty of vigilance and effort which can never slumber. Ontology as a state of affairs can afford sleep. But love cannot sleep, can never be peaceful or permanent. Love is the incessant watching over of the other; it can never be satisfied or contented with the bourgeois ideal of love as domestic comfort or the mutual possession of two people living out an *egoisme-à-deux*.³¹⁹

Levinas would not want Abraham to sleepwalk his way up to Mount Moriah. For Levinas, ethics is synonymous with caring which in the story corresponds to Abraham seeing the face of his son. Caring takes a constant vigilance that cannot rest. Also, in caring for others one cannot expect that one will be cared back in return. The ethical moment arrives as soon as that expectation to be given back leaves one's consciousness. Hence, according to Levinas, ethics is a sacrifice in which one gives up the primacy of the self for that of the other. It all sounds pretty similar so far. But to Silentio, this sacrificial aspect of the ethical is just another form of the glorified duty of tragic heroes. Thus, while they both share the notion that the highest sphere of existence encompasses a feeling of uneasiness, Silentio goes beyond Levinas' ethical commitment to stress that

³¹⁷ See Emmanuel. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity; an Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

³¹⁸ See Richard Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers : The Phenomenological Heritage : Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, Herbert Marcuse, Stanislas Breton, Jacques Derrida* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

spiritual faith is done in solitude, with nothing external, not even the face of one's son to lean on for judgment except one's faith in doubt.

After grappling with Silentio and Levinas, I find myself wishing for easy answers and to resolve this dilemma by asking why it cannot be both. Are not the ethical and the spiritual spheres a difference in semantics? For Silentio, the two spheres cannot be collapsed because the former is always understandable, while the latter can never be or else it ceases to be absolute. Somehow, everything hinges and is linked by loving which, too, cannot be fully comprehended. Yet Silentio also questions the conflation between love as understood in human terms and love of the absolute. Love of the former kind, the rosy, bourgeois ideal, as Levinas calls it, is a popular conception but not what it means to remain in loving faith to God. Here Silentio complains about this lack of attention on the latter form of absolute love as well as attack Danish Hegelians for trying to belittle what it means to believe in the face of paradox. Silentio points out that:

Love indeed has its priests in the poets, and occasionally we hear a voice that knows how to honor it, but not a word is heard about faith. Who speaks to the honor of this passion? Philosophy goes further. Theology sits all rouged and powdered in the window and courts its favor,³²⁰ offers its charms to philosophy. It is supposed to be difficult to understand Hegel, but to understand Abraham is a small matter. To go beyond Hegel³²¹ is a miraculous achievement, but to go beyond Abraham is the easiest of all. I for my part have applied considerable time to understanding Hegelian philosophy and believe that I have understood it fairly well; I am sufficiently brash to think that when I cannot understand particular passages despite all my pains, he himself may not have been entirely clear. All this I do easily, naturally, without any mental strain. Thinking about Abraham is another matter, however; then I am shattered. I am constantly aware of the prodigious paradox that is the content of Abraham's life, I am constantly repelled, and despite all its passion, my thought cannot penetrate it, cannot get ahead by a hairsbreadth...³²²

³²⁰ This is an interesting analogy of theology as the arm ornament of philosophy; one ripe for feminist gripe.

³²¹ Kierkegaard is referring not so much to Hegel as to Danish Hegelians, FT 340, n. 1.

³²² Ibid., III 84, 32-33.

Paradox in the Danish version of Hegelian philosophy which sought to eliminate the divide between reason and religion may be hard but resolvable as the fault of misreading or lack of clarity on the part of the author, and hence subject to critique; but when meeting paradox in the theology of faith, there is no exit. There is no winning in the wrestling match between intellect and faith. Theology should not hide behind philosophy because it wants to be subject to the same standards of verifiability. Silentio shatters any rosy versions his readers may have of God's love.

Silentio acknowledges that it is terrifying to continue this line of thought since one may feel that if a person with murderous tendencies were to read this, it would justify her or his actions. This line of reasoning can lead to Climacus' fearful suggestion that "at the very bottom of devoutness there madly lurks the capricious arbitrariness that knows it itself has produced the god."³²³ Silentio insists that one must keep in mind the terror of the paradox. For Silentio notes that it is the only way to tell of "the horror:"

The reader will almost shrink from the frightful pathos in the book. But when it was written, when the person thought to be the author was going about in the incognito of an idler, appearing to be flippancy, wittiness, and irresponsibility personified, no one was able to grasp its earnestness. O you fools, the book was never as earnest as then. Precisely that was the authentic expression of the horror.³²⁴

The horror has to be conveyed though wit because portraying it in anguish is ironically inauthentic to the absurdity of the divine paradox. This suggestion of the paradox itself sounds paradoxical as Kierkegaard states that earnestness rests behind the *appearance* of the comic, but this *appearance* is necessary to portray the terrific in both senses of the term as extraordinarily good and extremely terrifying.

³²³ PF 45.

³²⁴ FT III.

While Levinas conflates Silentio and Kierkegaard, it is important to keep the two apart. Kierkegaard does not take the story as literally as Silentio. While Silentio's understanding of the ethical as universal is considered as a mockingly distorted version of Danish Hegelianism,³²⁵ Silentio's position may be used to anticipate Levinas' critique as he forewarns that many will try to take the bite out of the Abrahamic, or neutralize the difficulty of the paradox of groundless faith. As literal as Silentio seems to take the Abraham story, there is some indication albeit outside of the text when Kierkegaard admits that he may not be taking the story as seriously. In one of his journal entries, Kierkegaard reveals that although the issues of faith may seem like a "pious fraud," one has to *assume* the literality of the sacrifice of Isaac in order for the full effect of the horror to sink in:

When the price of cloves became erratic in Holland, several shiploads were burned— it was a pious fraud; is a pious fraud really needed in our time?

Let us check the market in order to make sure that faith is something other than a bit of worldly wisdom, that it is a power of which few, perhaps, have any idea. *Let us* run through its dialectic and not talk loosely, *as if* sacrificing Isaac were merely a poetic expression for sacrificing the best. How many are there who have really tried themselves in such a struggle, and yet people in our day want to go further,³²⁶ as if it were an easy matter to bring about a more unbelieving, more correctly, a less believing, age than our own, whose insipid rationality has pumped all passion out of life."³²⁷

Kierkegaard is trying to guide his readers into this stark reading as he asks, "Let us" imagine. In his own footnote to the rhetorical question, "is a pious fraud really needed in our time?" Kierkegaard adds, "Or rather a frank truthfulness that could discipline a no

³²⁵ Kierkegaard had a love-hate relationship to via the two Hegelian scholars prominent in Holland at the time Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791-1860) and Hans Lassen Martensen (1808-1884) who was a student of the Hegelian theologian Carl Daub.

³²⁶ Hegelian scholars in Kierkegaard's time wanted to go further than Hegel to propose a Hegelian philosophical system.

³²⁷ Emphasis mine. JP II 1109 (*Pap.* IV B 76) *n.d.*, 1843. in FT 256-7.

less than pious fraud that has preceded.”³²⁸ Kierkegaard is admittedly dialectical in his approach to speak to a disenchanted age that resists authoritative sermonizing. As a corrective to the less faithful temper of the times, Kierkegaard asks whether a pious fraud *or* a frank truthfulness is needed. This *or* is crucial for Kierkegaard leaves the question unanswered. Leaving the truth of the story open ended, Kierkegaard can speak to readers in various degrees of faith or faithlessness. Whatever the answer, Kierkegaard urges readers to let in the unthinkable for the dialectic of faith to pull on one’s passions in either way. For it is through taking the story of Abraham to the literal extreme, reading the Gospel in a captivating way, that one will at least be passionate in a passionless age.

Silentio also represents the religious enthusiast who glorifies anti-glory. To be literal about religion in today’s secular age is itself a jest. I emphasize that Silentio cannot get away from the gallant or chivalrous metaphor in portraying the knight-errant of faith. There is an exaggerated seriousness that betrays a mocking tone given the context of an age that no longer takes the works earnestly.

Martinez notes that Johannes de Silentio plays with the contraries of the “transparencies of philosophy with the opacity of poetry.” He adopts the Aristotelian insight that poetry is best done incognito so the reader is more free to roam in the imaginative space apart from the authority of the poet.³²⁹ By trying to identify with Abraham, Silentio is “cognitively paralyzed.”³³⁰ FT raises the paradox to thought because Abraham is an exception to the rule which throws off the cognitive function of generalization. When Abraham’s decision does not translate into a generalizable rule, the

³²⁸ FT 257.

³²⁹ See Aristotle *Poetics* 1460a5 where he says that “The poet should say very little in propria persona.” Quoted in Martinez 68.

³³⁰ Martinez 73.

understanding meets its limit. To not believe in the wondrous and paradoxical but only the safe and probable is a “philistine-bourgeois mentality.”³³¹ Anti-Climacus notes that these include politicians who without passionate wonder are bound to the realm of the probable. Imagination needs room to roam beyond the confines of the world of necessity so as to “teach him to hope and fear...”³³² Silentio fails to understand Abraham precisely because he attempts to understand that which is meant for the imagination. Silentio as oscillating poet and philosopher cannot achieve beyond the impasse that thought and imagination alone can conceive. While the poetic imagination can step into the realm of the absurd that philosophy cannot, the poetic stage is restricted to the world of make believe idealism that does not lead to action. Only through spirituality will the ideal have a chance to actualize through one’s actions. The ideal becomes actualized “if we are able to take initiatives, make and keep promises, plan and undertake projects, make commitments and own up to them...”³³³ Far from a retreat into the self, a religious orientation gives one the impetus to act in the world however conceived as impractical by the understanding or unidealistic by the imagination. Without the world of the spirit, man has recourse to Aristotelian dialectics and/or Romantic poetic imaginations. To be lyrically dialectic is not enough to step into faith since dialectics and poetry working in concert lead only to a standstill at the threshold of the paradox of faith. Silentio is enraptured with the sound of the religious doctrine of hope.

Kierkegaard does not simply assert the need for passionate faith; he causes the reader to experience the trial of faith through reading. One cannot be complacent with the implications of the text. As Silentio both admires and is appalled by Abraham, so is the

³³¹ SUD 41.

³³² SUD 41.

³³³ Martinez 75.

reader. Sacrificing one's son can be a metaphor for sacrificing the comfort of absolute standards of ethical behavior. Silentio takes the story to literal extremes, but Kierkegaard refers to the sacrifice as an analogy for the suffering that one must endure to "wound selfishness at the root. Following the agony of Silentio, is a training in following the path of living faithfully, risking certainty for contingency, for "[t]he passion of faith is the only thing which masters the absurd."³³⁴ Mooney takes the load off of a literal interpretation: "If the willingness to sacrifice Isaac is roughly equivalent to a willingness to suspend a broad moral stance, then some of the terror of the upraised knife will be diffused."³³⁵ Yet, this goes against Kierkegaard's insistence that it is in the how that a reader will be affected.

Dooley illustrates that "Abraham personifies the trauma of passionate concentration."³³⁶ The mental strain is an exercise in living out the endless marathon of an open ended spiritualized ethical existence. Dooley modifies the "suspension of the ethical" to the "suspension of the 'assimilationist' ethic of *Sittlichkeit* and an affirmation of a radically responsible ethic that resolves in concrete political and responsible action."³³⁷ These commentaries take away the horror of the Christian duty; they seek to neutralize the fear or close the infinite gap between understanding and faith.

To sacrifice a safe ethics for a more responsible ethics is to be self sufficient and dependent at the same time. It is to be self sufficient from the conventional wisdom and dependent on the hope of an eternal realm to guide one's actions. This reading is closer to

³³⁴ JP 10, vol. 1, p. 7. Quoted in Dooley 66-7.

³³⁵ Edward F. Mooney, *Selves in Discord and Resolve : Kierkegaard's Moral-Religious Psychology from Either/or to Sickness Unto Death* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 57. Dooley 68.

³³⁶ Dooley 69.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

Levinas' analogy of ethics as sleeplessness. Yet, what Silentio implies is that no amount of sleeplessness will make one bridge the gap with the radically different God.

To deal with the comic in fear and trembling, to maintain the conception of responsibility rooted in ethical and religious earnestness together with the delight of jest, to bind oneself forever to the charter of duty and at the same time be able to go on adventures as a young soldier of fortune does in legends.³³⁸

Collins refers to Kierkegaardian stages as spheres of existence that can “overlap”³³⁹ simultaneously occurring within an individual. Humor is the method to maintain the state of not being at home. The middle ground can only be maintained by a double consciousness of the potential pull of both sides, simultaneous consciousness so as not to weigh one side over another at any one moment. This allows one to arise out of apathy without going overboard, or arise out of righteousness without going towards nihilism that translates caring less with not caring at all. Humor prevents one from giving up at the same time prevents one from giving all. Both are self-destructive impulses. The two ends are connected with a desire to be perfect—perfectly righteous or perfectly apathetic. The all or nothing attitude must necessarily will its own destruction.

Reading FT makes ethics seem easy by comparison. The attention on Abraham's sacrifice makes the other tasks seem less difficult. Compared to being asked to sacrifice one's child, one is relieved when one is only being asked to give up privilege.

Kierkegaard notes that there are easier passages in the Bible that needs no deciphering, like opening one's door to find one's neighbor to love. One need not travel far at all—physically or mentally. Those who spend lifetimes deciphering the Bible, Kierkegaard, or cryptic love letters are more seduced by the written word than performing the works of love.

³³⁸ COR 178-79.

³³⁹ James Daniel Collins, *The Mind of Kierkegaard* (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1953), 44.

The more literal I take the suspension of the ethical, the more I maintain ethics in my consciousness. Kierkegaard operates on a deep faith of the inherent ethical sensibility in man that the mention of its suspension keeps ethics in the foreground of thought. If his writing sparks waves of critics to denounce him as irresponsible, he gladly sets himself up to be sacrificed. If his writing can inspire a Levinas, then he has martyred his pseudonym to midwife someone to act, including writing a tract on ethics against Silentio's suspension of ethics. Not only does he disappear as a teacher, hiding behind a dash, he has set up his pseudonyms as straw men to serve the moral teaching of his future readers. The buffoon of philosophy may have the laugh on his side after all. His foundationalism may be meant to be rejected. Given the option of beauty, fame, money, or recognition, Kierkegaard would rather have laughter which unlike the above possessions is the ability to let go of possessiveness.

Kierkegaard is usually seen as either a melancholic or comic Danish philosopher who perhaps was too Christian (or too ironic for his dissertation on *The Concept of Irony* is written in a mock Hegelian dialectic) to be taken seriously as a canonical political theorist. I will argue, however, that he encompasses the spirit of anti-foundationalism which is to say that he is both paradoxically comic *and* tragic. One is transformed through the process of reading Kierkegaard's works to engage in a double movement, first away from and then being confronted to either keep moving away from or decide to live in faith. There is no way to directly teach faith. One must not only accept the absurdity, but insist on it: "admitting the absurdity, maintaining the pressure on the other to regard it as the absurd."³⁴⁰ To ground one in absurdity is Kierkegaard's method of sustaining the tension. For Kierkegaard to write a treatise on God is "to sew without

³⁴⁰ JP 482.

fastening the end and without tying a knot in the thread.”³⁴¹ The knot is a metaphor of the dialectic that Kierkegaard uses to anchor his humor. It does not consist in an absolute grounding. It is not made transparent for a knot represents tension, confusion, opacity, rather than knowability. Kierkegaard’s foundationalism is rooted in a negative assertion of the discontinuity with what can be known. The place holder, the knot at the end of the string, the utterly divine is what allows for the individual to be anti-foundational in the world of the political. Rather than admit faith is absurd, he insists on it.

³⁴¹ SUD 93, POV 158, PIC 113.

Chapter 5: Mocking Teleology in *Stages of Life's Way*

He who is not willing to undertake anything, might nevertheless, if he had an open eye, lead a life rich in enjoyment merely by paying heed to others; and he who has also his own work to do, would do well to take heed that he be not too much imprisoned by it. But how pitiable if there were many who miss what costs nothing, no entrance fee, no expenses for banquets, no dues to one's society, no inconvenience and trouble, what costs the rich and the poor equally little and yet is the richest enjoyment, who miss an instruction which is not obtained from a particular teacher but *en passant* from any person whatsoever, from conversation with someone unknown, from every accidental contact.³⁴²

To violate the seriousness or ethics of telling a joke, I will give the punch line first. Kierkegaard in SLW ends with this simple message. After moving through the stages of existence from the aesthetic, ethical, to the religious, one is brought back to a simple task. As one proceeds through the text, the works seem to lend itself to a grander conclusion as one would expect in a teleological work.³⁴³ I present SLW backwards to show that the sections compiled by the Hilarious Bookbinder seek to return the reader to less lofty expectations. If idealism seeks unattainable perfection, Frater Taciturnus, the brother who remains silent in Latin, reminds the reader to stay on the ground even if she decides not to will anything. If the ending is a frame to interpret this compilation, the “stages” reveal themselves to be more like mock stages meant to present the reader with one-dimensional caricatures who impossibly live solely within each sphere. Taciturnus’ commentary shows the fanaticism of the Quidam of his psychological experiment to remain in the dialectic of not deciding whether he is guilty or not of being the negative exception for breaking off an engagement with his beloved. Taciturnus writes “the erotic and erotic relationship is of minor concern to me. Essentially I employ it for orientation

³⁴² SLW 439.

³⁴³ Lippitt notes that Kierkegaard’s works builds up only to deconstruct each step as one passes through seeking to climb to higher stages. The reader finds herself closer to where she started after coming full circle after a mock quixotic journey.

in the religious sphere, in order that one may not get all mixed up and suppose that religion is the first immediacy.”³⁴⁴ Quidam represents the lower form of the religious in which one becomes fanatically paralyzed in a direct relationship to God, which for Quidam is symbolized by his beloved. Taciturnus thinks that a religious fanatic has a relationship to God similar to one having a purely erotic relationship to one’s lover.

Torn over the break up of his engagement, Quidam has been brooding for over a year as he documents in his diary. Taciturnus excuses this behavior from the young, but not from a mature adult:

To take seriously all that which everybody knows about loving only once, making one another happy; and to act in virtue of it with the utmost expenditure of exertion, in such a way as only in a very young man might be pardonable, and that only for half a day; to work oneself to death in such an empty ceremonious service which aims at introducing ways and customs which are entirely antiquated—that indeed would be rich material for laughter.³⁴⁵

To make sure his readers do not become fanatical about her reading of the text, Taciturnus negates his role as author as well as mocks those who are fanatical about reading this work as actual stages. Taciturnus ends his reflections with the hope that luckily he would have lost his readership: “Ah, what luck that there is no reader who reads the whole thing through!”³⁴⁶ He hopes that his readers will not take these stages too seriously. If they do, he reminds the reader with a simple message to come back down from one’s imaginary ascension into the illusion of higher spheres: “I make public the peerless prediction that of the few readers of the book two-thirds will fall away before they are half way through, which may also be expressed in his wise, that they will stop

³⁴⁴ SLW 364.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 365.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 444.

there and throw away the book for boredom.”³⁴⁷ Taciturnus hopes that the reader stops reading as she becomes bored with Quidam, any one in Latin, who has been endlessly deliberating over his culpability as a fanatical religious enthusiast. If the reader insists on moving until the end, Taciturnus has isolated those who may have affinity in this direction. In this case, his warning signs are directly stated to this reader.

Rather than be self-deprecatory for its own sake, Taciturnus notes that it may be a better position to be a less well known author so one can make such assertions as “the negative is higher than the positive.”³⁴⁸ Taciturnus finds joy in being obscure. He defies the aspirations of most authors in anticipation that his work will not receive a large audience. But if his goal is neither to be popular, liked, or make money then this provides him a degree of freedom from writing a grand treatise: “How lucky to be an obscure author when one experiments with such thoughts!”³⁴⁹ To remain incognito has its benefits if one does not only value material possessions of receiving fame and fortune. His peripheral status also gives him reprieve from inciting a mass following which risks misinterpretations of his work. At least by remaining insignificant to most readers of philosophy, he would lessen the damage of inciting a generation of scholars who misinterpret his works into a hidden grand system.³⁵⁰

If the reader is looking for a tightly woven treatise on how not to be fanatical, then she would have missed the joke. His incompleteness is his approach to disabuse the reader from expecting a neatly packaged system. Instead of weaving the text into a completed whole, Taciturnus will loosen threads lest one takes any of the stages too

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 363.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 401.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 401.

³⁵⁰ Kierkegaard may have liked that there is not a Neo-Taciturnus or Neo-Kierkegaard school of thought.

seriously as a blueprint for living. Taciturnus does not remain faithful to writing a linearly consistent text but neither should the reader be so faithful to the author. Reading should not become a detached passive activity in which the reader evaluates the author only for consistency. Grand theory can pride itself on being faithful to itself: “After all there is nothing so fortifying as consistency and nothing so consistent as consistency itself.”³⁵¹ This does not relate to the contingencies of people living in the world. If one insists on consistency in the world, then it will be on that fact that men are inconsistent:

After all there is nothing in the world so reliable as a friend of whom one knows to a certainty that he will betray everything that is confided to him—nothing more reliable if only one takes care what one confides. If one were to beseech a friend to say this or that, there is no assurance that he will do it, but when one confides to him under the pledge of secrecy something which one would have come out, one is perfectly secured, for then it is sure to come out.³⁵²

Security is brought at the price of expecting the worst in people. The certain facts of life are the banal. To reduce the difficulties of life so that living is reduced to a set of postulates does little to deal with individuals with muddled wills means to live without faith in the possibility for improvement.

Taciturnus is aware of his role as a puppet master. He does not hide the fact that Quidam has been conjured as an extreme analogy of religious fanaticism. Besides canceling his authority so the reader will not be reactive to such a contrived experiment, Taciturnus addresses those who do not buy into this self-conscious self-negation.

Taciturnus anticipates that his countryman will say to his readers, “Pay no attention to such an author, do not listen to him, he is a seducer.”³⁵³ His reading public may accuse him of being an inward fanatic. Taciturnus neither confirms nor denies but adds that if he

³⁵¹ Ibid., 214.

³⁵² Ibid., 231.

³⁵³ Ibid., 442.

is considered a fanatic than he is more dangerous than the slyest of seducers since his fanaticism is that “he would delude everyone into the belief that the individual possesses an infinite importance, and that this is the significance of life.”³⁵⁴ Taciturnus does not argue against this hypothetical skeptic. He does not make justifications to reason which cannot be persuaded to believe in a self made illusion. To ask reason to be consciously deluded will cause reason to rise up in defense that such delusions are false and hence not to be believed. Reason believes based on proof which in turn is based on observable, quantifiable criteria. Taciturnus writes that such a system of measurement does not apply to the evaluation of true religiosity:

for the aesthetic is not so material that it essentially gives attention only to the shedding of blood or the number of murders in order to determine accordingly whether he is a hero. It has regard essentially to passion, only it is unable, because it is not emancipated from the external, to press on to that merely qualitative act of determination which is reserved for the religious, where a farthing *counts for just as much as* empires and kingdoms.³⁵⁵

It may sound offensive to reason to make this claim that makes equal the quantitative distinction. To say that what to reason is quantitatively different as counting just as much is offensive to reason. In the beginning of the text, William Afham writes, “to reflect oneself out of all illusion is not so difficult as to reflect oneself into illusion, allowing it to affect one with all of illusion’s power, in spite of the fact that one does it knowingly.”³⁵⁶ Afham dares his readers to believe in a self made illusion as if it is just as real to exert force on the reader. To let an acknowledged illusion have power over one is a way to be superstitious without being immediately superstitious. In other words, one cannot be superstitious by being consciously so. As soon as one is aware one has gained a degree of

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 443.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 411. Emphasis mine.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 30.

distance from being blindly superstitious. This distance should not neutralize its power to instill fear. To make illusions just as powerful does not diminish the force of the mediated superstitions. But it requires a suspension of reason to appeal both to imagination and memory as if one has forgotten that one has made up one's own ghosts. One cannot explain this process fully or in strict seriousness. To remind oneself to forget is a pretense, just as speaking about silence. But to pretend may not deserve its negative connotations if it can be seen as a means to an end of saving one from despair. Reason will claim that pretense is false; however, Taciturnus does not fret over believing in something as false to reason's standards. To pretend that everyone is of infinite worth is to acknowledge its ungroundedness but to believe nevertheless. This pays respects to reason on one level without satisfying it since to believe in make believe goes against reason. To believe in illusions with the force of superstitions is a hovering maneuver of not believing and not canceling fully. One remains somewhere between immediately superstitious and indifferently disenchanted. This ambivalent vocabulary will not satisfy reason that needs to shed light on the how in clearly written maxims. Taciturnus cannot write a maxim of how to be a skeptical believer in miracles. There is no way to convince reason or make the contradictory palatable for debate since these statements violate the logic of grammar. The predicate does not match the rest of the sentence. The rules of grammar deem as incorrect the sentence: "I know this is an illusion, therefore I believe." Zwart writes that the Lutheran catechism "The world is doomed, ergo God will save us" is a deliberate faulty predication when the subject and the rest of the sentence do not match. This is contradictory to the logic of grammar and hence religion may be at base impossible to be written without violating the rules of logic. Without argument,

Taciturnus will say that a farthing counts just as much as kingdoms. Taciturnus is silently writing about that which should remain silent. However, the reflective age cannot stand silence; Taciturnus presents the reader words for reason to hold on to. Yet the joke is that reason cannot take these words for clarification, but becomes increasingly more confused.

Taciturnus' dialectical approach does not banish reason. Reason must be an ingredient in the mature religiousness. If reason is to be banished, Taciturnus can simply assert that one should believe in spite of reason. Yet Taciturnus asks his readers not simply to believe in the fantastical, but to *make* believe, to pretend to believe as if the illusion is real. This is not merely asking his readers to step in the world of the subjunctive imagination leaving reason out, but somewhere in between imagination and reality in which the individual has a role in the fantasy's own construction yet is not in complete control. One can achieve a sense of superiority over illusion as one knows that the illusion is created, but Taciturnus asks the reader to give up this superior perspective to respect the illusion as if there is a degree of distance from the creator. Giving illusion a just as real status creates another category that is not entirely made up or real in scientific, literal terms. This force is still attached to the two ends, but is separate from the ends with no definitive borders as to when it begins or ends. This is analogous to Taciturnus' description of the "invisible unity of jest and earnest."³⁵⁷ One does not waffle back and forth but lives in the force in between. Taciturnus describes his experiment as "not the same as being at once comic and tragic; on the contrary, the contrast is the separating factor which by the same pressure whereby it thrusts down the burlesque lifts up the

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 403.

lyrical.”³⁵⁸ Taciturnus’ description of this unity is not spatialized which makes one locked into a static representation of a middle point. The unity is written as a pressure force that holds the two ends in tension. To contrast this invisible unity as force with the spatial imagery as indicated by the title “Stages on Life’s Way” signals the reader that life is lived in movement not in static locales of bounded rules written on paper.

The mature religiosity is an invisible force not contained within a spatial location within church walls, monasteries, or a written text. Nor is it contained in living for a future time that neglects the present. The inward religiosity violates the linear notion of time by insisting on simultaneity. The simultaneous call to remember to forget that one has created an illusion is to endow illusion with its own power to hold the creator in wonder: “It undoubtedly is the most difficult enigma, and is also to be accounted the profoundest wisdom, to arrange one’s life as if today were to be the last one has to live, and at the same time the first in a series of years.”³⁵⁹ To live keeping in mind the finitude of the present and the eternal future violates the concept of linear time. But Taciturnus requires this sensibility to be able to be joyful in radical uncertainty:

The aesthetic sphere is that of immediacy, the ethical is that of requirement (and this requirement is so infinite that the individual always goes bankrupt), the religious sphere is that of fulfillment, but note, not such a fulfillment as when one fills a cane or a bag with gold, for repentance has made infinite room, and hence the religious contradiction: at the same time to lie upon seventy thousand fathoms of water and yet be joyful.³⁶⁰

The religious “sphere” explodes conventional spatial and temporal metaphors that seek to contain its affects since it has exploded space to infinity and collapsed time to simultaneity. The rules of logic that one cannot occupy the same space at the same time is

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 379.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 351.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 430.

violated in the religious sphere which the algebraic (meta)physician Anti-Climacus calls religiousness B. It is to be joyful *at the same time* as one over the abyss of the unknown defies sense. Taciturnus does not use this abstract language of the abyss or the unknown which takes away the horror. Infinity has no affect on the reader as much as the concrete imaginary of seventy thousand fathoms of water. Taciturnus returns to spatial metaphors for effect only because he anticipates that the cunning of reason can escape feeling fear by reducing the horror of infinity to abstractions.

The mature religiousness is instilled with a new passion that is somewhere between the true and false, history and imagination, time-boundedness and timelessness:

The religious seeks no support in the historic, still less than does the comic, and for a higher reason; it presupposes the unity of the tragic and comic in passion, and with a new passion or with the same it chooses the tragic, and this situation again makes every historical support meaningless; it is never finished, at least not in time, and hence only as a delusion can it be so represented.³⁶¹

The new passion chooses the tragic but a tragedy beyond time. Passion is necessary to instill people to sacrifice, but unchecked passion, not enough distance from passion can easily turn into a “fanatic devotion” that imprisons one into a demonic embrace. The “passion of infinity” is always a “double movement” in which one is connected with passion, but is free enough from it through reflection that at the same time does not kill passion. This is a “spirit dialectically infinitized” that sees both the comic and tragic in the same moment, yet is not tormented by remaining in the dialectic. It remains in fear of guilt that one may be wrong at any moment with no ground to stand on for safe bets, but at the same time remains joyful. The dialectic of infinite passion must

³⁶¹ Ibid., 403.

be able to sustain the comic and tragic sensibilities without being locked in as a “fanatic enthusiast.”³⁶² The tension is both “agreeable and disagreeable.”³⁶³

Radical skepticism combined with faith is uncomfortable. It is the space between imagination and memory that chooses to forget what is known to reason to be an illusion. The text asks the reader to let go of the intellect to let in the contradictory. But like remembering to forget, or forcing one to be free, one cannot be told to let go of reason. Rather, Taciturnus insists the reader to hold on to the tension to almost the breaking point. The reader is told the opposite: to hold on tight to reason but remain in joy. The process happens enigmatically. If one asks vehemently one will not be able to let go enough to hear the answer. In trying to get closer to God through the intellect, one goes on a quixotic journey. But when one decides to suspend reason, she finds God omnipresently near. To be in fear and trembling *and* remain in bliss happens when one is willing, not when one is merely thinking. If one remains in joy standing over seventy thousand fathoms of water then one has already done what thought with an infinite number of words at its disposal cannot do.

Reading cannot be an activity in itself. Taciturnus leaves the readers wanting a resolution but finding the lack thereof if one stops at reading. Words are made to confront its own limits so the reader cannot be complacent that the written about world can contain the dialectic of living. To express in words the invisible unity will always be felt as lacking what action can satisfy. Reading his works can never be fully satisfactory or enjoyed as pure entertainment. Just as one must resist enjoying pain, one must resist making the text palatable. Taciturnus is writing for those who are already snagged by

³⁶² Ibid., 394.

³⁶³ Ibid., 379.

deliberation to act. In WL, he reminds the nonscholars to be thankful that they can move on to perform the tasks required. For those too sophisticated to commit to action, Taciturnus stumps the understanding by giving the clever deliberator more words than she can chew. Since one cannot be told to suspend reason, the reader has to do it herself when the understanding cannot bear the weight of the dialectical pull of the paradox of groundless faith.

In turn, Taciturnus has to let go of controlling the reader:

My dear, thy cunning distresses me. I do not understand thee....But be this as it may, I perceive that thou must have thy freedom; I am fearful on my account if I were not to give it to thee, and I love thee too dearly to refuse it to thee. So take it, without any reproaches, without anger between us, without thanks on thy part, but with the consciousness on my part that I have done the best I could.³⁶⁴

Freedom involves letting the reader try to hold still that which is forever beyond her grasp. It may be necessary at times to let go if reason is smothering the reader with indecision: “When one is stumped by something and does not know which way to turn, when everything has become deadly relative as if one were being smothered, it may be expedient to act suddenly at a single point merely to stir up life in all that dead clot.”³⁶⁵ To be “deadly relative” is to not be able to judge the best course of action in any moment in which case one must take the plunge to stir the still waters. Yet, this should be done at a “single moment” not to be habituated. In case reason stands to protest, Taciturnus reminds the reader that to be stuck in indecision is already to have paid respect to reason: “When one does not know whether one is sick or well, when this situation begins to be

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 427.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 429.

nonsense, one does well to venture upon something desperate. But notwithstanding one acts without deliberation, there is a sort of deliberation after all.”³⁶⁶

Quidam’s indecision of not knowing whether he is guilty or not of making the right decision qualifies as the sin of self torture. To force one to convert into a way of life is like the preacher who ineffectively preaches in a forceful tone. If one is willing, then the result will come. There is no use in torturing oneself over matters out of one’s control. However in replacement of fate, one should fear guilt of not choosing. Moreover, there is no use arguing over a universal standard since a reader can always find reasons to disagree. Rather than appeal to an abstract ethics, Taciturnus evaluates decisions based on matters of taste. He is not afraid to insult the intellect by calling it cowardly to not recognize human misery. It is “stupidity or cowardly obduracy to wish to be unaware that poverty and sickness exist because for one’s own part one is in good health.”³⁶⁷ Abstract ethics is too proud to show respect to anything other than itself. Abstract ethics in appealing to a universal standard cannot appeal to the aesthetic. The abstract does not react to insults. It only has eyes on the strictly ideal. Those who only follow rules of conduct to live are like the Young Man who is wise too young. She is the young ethicist who has locked herself out of living. Eremita reasons that “[t]he man who is twenty years old and does not comprehend that there is a categorical imperative: Enjoy yourself—that man is a fool.”³⁶⁸ To write a grand system of ethics tranquilizes the individual by “abbreviating” and hence anesthetizing the heart to the ethical. To not deal with the ethical ambiguities of life is “ridiculous” according to Taciturnus. He does not use the language of right and wrong to avoid appealing to the resistances of the intellect. He calls

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 429.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 417.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 83.

the rule bound ethicists foolish to offend his readers based upon a subjective standard of taste. If the reader does not agree that it is ridiculous to be so “stupidly serious” in matters of ethics then the reader will have to do the labor to justify why. Taciturnus does not waste his time on the “intermediate tone of persuasion.” He asserts that to not be sympathetic to another’s suffering amounts to “narrow-mindedness.” He does not engage in a detached scientific discussion but rather insults the reader to stimulate her to act or defend her position.

For Taciturnus, the mature religious individual will not be detectable under visibly measurable qualities. The religious crusader clearly marks himself as the patriot who must outwardly prove his patriotism. The true religious individual will not be recognized externally. His interior world is what counts. Hence, it would not do good to proselytize to his readers if mature religiosity is indistinguishable from those who lack faith. Since “the religious is in the interior...scruples have essential importance.”³⁶⁹ These scruples must be ultimately dealt by the individual.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 410.

Chapter 6: Releasing the Stranglehold of Reflection's Envy in *Two Ages*

While de Silentio calls for suspending the ethical, Kierkegaard in *Two Ages* will suspend reflection to pound ethics out. The problem with concerning oneself with the topic of ethics is its ultimate significance and its matching difficulty of approaching the matter delicately. Ethics cannot be simply pushed aside. For Kierkegaard, the natural sciences must admit that it dodges the most significant questions:

And when the physiologist has written the extraordinary, the most extraordinary four volumes full of the most amazing observations, he nevertheless personally admits—if he is truly honest and brilliant—that he has not explained the ultimate, the ultimate which is the beginning and the end of ethics.³⁷⁰

For Kierkegaard, ethical passion can weaken when drained with extraneous scholarship of the ethical. Gaining scientific knowledge may adversely impact one's ethical passion. Scientists can claim value neutrality in the pursuit of filling a knowledge niche to manipulate natural phenomenon. Kierkegaard does not dismiss science wholesale, it is its absolutization. Kierkegaard writes:

No, precisely when 'science and scholarship' has become unconditionally the highest, precisely then religiousness is as good as completely gone. These are the two poles, and with respect to the ethical-religious one can accurately cast the horoscope of a generation by finding out what it judges of 'science and scholarship' in the realm of the religious. 'Minerva's owl flies only when it is dark,' and 'science and scholarship' always follows after.³⁷¹

However, just as one cannot ignore the ethical, neither can one be too preoccupied with it. As soon as one's doctrine of ethics becomes more difficult than the duty, then one is unethically avoiding the duty. To avoid ethical egoism, one must not be too preoccupied with ethical perfection. Scholars have remarked that too much emphasis on ethics can be an aesthetic end in itself. Mooney writes that too much "critical self-

³⁷⁰ JP 2807 VII¹ A 182 *n.d.*, 1846.

³⁷¹ JP 1059 X² A 439 *n.d.*, 1850.

consciousness....can in fact be aesthetic self-regard.”³⁷² For Wisdo, “the sophisticated moral agent, who possesses a rich and highly nuanced vocabulary to describe his actions and give shape to his moral life, runs the risk of making this kind of activity an end in itself.”³⁷³ The ethical Judge Wilhelm’s obsession with his own moral virtue becomes a fanatical devotion to one’s self image. To suspend the seriousness of the ethical allows one room to err without being overly discouraged. Kierkegaard’s authorship has been to negotiate the line between not falling more in love with ethical language and urging his reader to perform the task. Kierkegaard writes “to ask with infinite interest about a reality which is not one’s own, is faith, and this constitutes a paradoxical relationship to the paradoxical....the sole ethical interest is the interest in one’s own reality....the believer differs from the ethicist in being infinitely interested in the reality of another.”³⁷⁴ To be only interested in ethics aggrandizes the self over other one deems ethically inferior. Too much talk of virtue does not necessary mean one is more virtuous. To be morally perfect is a conceited notion that one will never fail. Mooney reminds one “To recognize the limits of one’s virtue is a virtue.”³⁷⁵ To assume that one can make eternal promises to be forever good is to set oneself up for hubris. Mistrusting oneself is more honest. Kierkegaard argues that this is the more responsible action for it focuses on the manageable instant rather than on the accumulated weight of all future instances. It is

³⁷² Edward F. Mooney, *Knights of Faith and Resignation : Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

³⁷³ David Wisdo, "Simone Weil on the Limits of Virtue," *Religion and Intellectual Life*, July 13 1989.

³⁷⁴ P 288.

³⁷⁵ Edward Mooney, "Getting Isaac Back: Ordeals and Reconciliations in Fear and Trembling," in *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community : Religion, Ethics, and Politics in Kierkegaard*, ed. George B Connell and C Stephen Evans (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1992), 85.

recognition that there will be moments of weakness that one will need help. It does not fantasize over one's "inflated presumption of self-sufficiency."³⁷⁶

Kierkegaard's complaint about turning Christianity into a doctrine can be applied to political theory. Those who are up to the calling must keep in mind how one affects the reader:

By making Christianity into doctrine, an object for passive, brooding meditation, there has arisen this confounded brand of thinkers who use forty pages for their flights of fancy and then on page 41 add: However, this is still somewhat beyond full comprehension. O, miserable waste of time, And even an Augustine is like this!³⁷⁷

The effort to pound a particular jargon filled ethics, complete with a new vocabulary, may be an avoidance of performing what one preaches. In matters of ethics, pedagogy matters since to communicate unethically would undermine the project of drawing ethics out. In the effort to link theory to action, theorists find it hard to take in Kierkegaard's critique that theorizing as an activity may conflict with acting in the world. Kierkegaard posits that the effort to theorize the ethical may be unethical. Ethics belongs to the sphere of action. Kierkegaard does not disregard the ethical when he has *Silentio* suspend it. Kierkegaard is acutely attuned to his method of ethics not as a discipline to be instilled from without, but an art to be drawn out of the individual, for "[s]cience probably can be pounded into a person, but the ethical has to be pounded out of him..."³⁷⁸

TA is one of the most political of Kierkegaard's works. Yet Agacinski notes that in resisting the Prussian imperialism on Denmark in 1848, Kierkegaard suffered from a political naiveté in fear of all popularized forms of government.³⁷⁹ In a mock teleology

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 85.

³⁷⁷ JP 3864 X⁵ A 134 *n.d.* 1853. This frustration is comically directed at himself who spends a copious 600 pages to write *EO*.

³⁷⁸ JP 649: 6.

³⁷⁹ Agacinski, *Aparté* 204.

that matches the immanence of Marxist historicity, Agacinski notes that Kierkegaard prefers monarchy to democracy since there is no question of who rules. When politics is left to the kingship, it will be easier for the individual to confront the religious choice without political contamination. Contradictorily, if mob rule were to take over, an anarchist revolution would prepare the masses for a religiosity to again take hold of men. Christianity is the next step after the punishment of anarchy to leave each one alone without “indulgence of having leaders and rulers.... The next step forward will be religious, and the tension will be that everyone must carry within himself the ambivalence of realizing that Christianity conflicts with the understanding and then still believe it.”³⁸⁰

While Kierkegaard writes TA in his own name, the form of a literary review makes his comments one degree removed from direct propositions. Lest his readers reject Kierkegaard’s polemics as smug, he reminds his readers that the author’s direct indictments of an age are projections of what he means to say to himself. While scholarly prose frowns upon the first person tone, Kierkegaard chastises those who write as if their personal attachments were not driving their content. Objectivity masks what is of personal concern to the author. Kierkegaard discusses that to be wise is to detect the author’s implied projections:

what the wise man does not fail to realize, that everything he says concerns himself (so egotistic is he!). Unlike the wise man, who understands everything as applying to himself and always understands himself as implied, the young man makes the demand and does not understand himself as implied...³⁸¹

In this work, his main focus is on the age of reflection which has been given free reign to negatively drain the active potential for men to commit to living in passionate

³⁸⁰ TA 150.

³⁸¹ Ibid., 9.

resolution. Kierkegaard hopes to recoil the active tension back into the well spring of deenergized souls to make his reader responsive if not responsible. His literary review shows how inward enthusiasm has been suppressed by the tyrannical forces of unbounded reason. Rather than chastise an age for its lack of commitment to particular ideologies, Kierkegaard begins his critique on the present age's lack of decisiveness. Kierkegaard does not blame one social-political group for its particular goals, but rather the lack of enthusiasm in any sphere of human relationships.³⁸²

After centuries of reasoned discourse attacking religious absurdities,³⁸³ Kierkegaard challenges reason for taking away decisiveness. Kierkegaard would say that rather than prevent men from becoming overzealous in religious matters, reason has taken energy out of all endeavors.³⁸⁴ Kierkegaard may congratulate the sensible age for being more clever than passionate, yet he portrays life in the present age as lifeless. Devoid of passion for anything even the "rapture of erotic love," the present age distrusts those who dare to be infinitely enthusiastic. If the fanatical right is to be feared, it is because they have passion where the left has infinite reflection. To dismiss the right's

³⁸² While those in academia are debating over whether identity group politics is too divisive for liberal democratic societies, Kierkegaard focuses on those who lack the enthusiasm to belong in any group. For Kierkegaard, the matter of which group membership one belongs to is besides the matter, since passion in one area can be made to spill to another. For academics to argue over which groups are legitimate depositors of one's enthusiasm is to assume that political energy is finite that prevents individuals from participating in multiple groups. It also shows a deep distrust, what Kierkegaard called ethical envy, for the politics of specificity. In Kierkegaard's case, this distrust applies to religious identities. Perhaps identity groups who are under the onslaught of criticism as too exclusive do not have to mimic this attitude by excluding non-secular forms of identity.

³⁸³ Locke writes, "Men worship the Idols that have been set up in their Minds; grow fond of the Notions they have been long acquainted with there; and stamp the character of Divinity, upon Absurdities and Errors, become zealous Votaries to Bulls and Monkeys; and contend to, fight, and die in defence of their Opinions." Locke, *Essay*, I, 3, 26. Quoted in Zerilli 150.

³⁸⁴ Translated in the language of American political thought, the celebrated American experiment of adopting Lockean principles, Madisonian institutionalism, and Hamiltonian safeguards against class riots created a perfect combination of promoting an apathetic populace. The solution to the degenerative cycle of regimes is to take energy away from citizenship so eventually no one but those ruling will care about governance.

religious bases is more a sign of what Kierkegaard calls “reflection’s envy.” If the founding fathers have successfully reduced citizen participation to voting and jury duty, then Kierkegaard would call this form of equality in “counting and counting”³⁸⁵ an emptiness or leveling mediocrity. His personification of reflection as actively seeking to dominate all other spheres of the human spirit can be seen as strategic as a corrective to the times. Kierkegaard personifies the battling faculties in ways that give characteristics to reason. For example, understanding can envy the lone warrior of action. By giving the faculties dimensions of human characteristics, Kierkegaard allows the reader to gain some distance to discipline these wills. Kierkegaard takes this personification to another level. Rather than static caricatures, the inclinations are given room to remain in the “infantilized” stage or grow into maturity. By using child rearing analogies, adults can relate when their inclinations are overly “coddled.”

Kierkegaard is admittedly dialectical in his approach. He will preach what is appropriate for the times. He would not have written about knights of faith during the Crusades, but Kierkegaard will lay out his plans to mimic the rhetoric that exalted reason to bring back passion:

The wild sensuality, the violence and aggression etc., which Christianity once zealously opposed, has now become shrewd prudence. In order that Christianity may come again, or through its coming again, we will learn to detest shrewd prudence just as mankind was trained to detest violence.³⁸⁶

Kierkegaard demotes prudence into a parasite that takes itself too seriously. Critical theorists think that Kierkegaard supports a benevolent monarchy, but this passage shows that he would not look down on a passionate age although he does not ignore its faults:

³⁸⁵ TA 92.

³⁸⁶ JP 3884 XI² A 20 *n.d.*, 1854.

The age of revolution is essentially passionate; therefore it must be violent, riotous, wild, ruthless toward everything but its idea, but precisely because it still has one motivation, it is less open to the charge of *crudeness*. When individuals (each one individually) are essentially and passionately related to an idea and together are essentially related to the same idea, the relation is optimal and normative.”³⁸⁷

A revolution must retain an ideational, if not spiritual dimension in order to keep the relations from becoming merely contractual. Only in this way can individuals come together yet remain separate in case a charismatic leader or the force of group mentality seeks to eliminate internal dissent. Whether one is referring to political parties, interest groups, identity groups, town hall meetings, inward or religious congregation, it is crucial to prevent individuals from merging with each other into an abstract aggregate.

Unlike the social contract theorists, Kierkegaard does not start with how to instill and maintain ethical standards to conform to the General Will. The present age needs another corrective to unsnarl the *vita activa* from reflection’s grip. Rather than to focus on how to make his readers conform to particular wills, he focuses on how the sensible age has eliminated enthusiasm all together. He will tackle the tricky problem of an unbounded Reason on one’s active potential.

While the present age prides itself for breaking the bounds to irrational religiosity, Kierkegaard interjects an ancient fear that predates the fear of believing in the unknown: “Even less do people seem to have above all a Socratic fear of being deceived by themselves.”³⁸⁸ In an age that prides talkativeness as a sign of active engagement, Kierkegaard claims that the crowds are “slow to listen, quick to judge...drawing arrogant (instead of moderate conclusions) from the little they understand.”³⁸⁹ While the age is quick to judge, they are also quick to make up verbal and written contracts that are easier

³⁸⁷ TA 62.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

to say than keep. Its dogmatically written form makes the task seem unbearable from the beginning, discouraging those who might otherwise work in moderate fashion towards the ideal. In other words, the age is quick to condemn, making grand plans carrying enormous normative weight but does not consider how it might shoot past man's own moral capability to achieve this level of perfectionism. Idealism may end up dissolving enthusiasm rather than energize one to work towards the ideal. Kierkegaard asks, "Is it faithfulness at all to promise much more than any human being can keep."³⁹⁰ If human fallibility is a given, why set up an impossible task to discourage the reader from the outset?

Zwart illustrates that in order for modern society to avoid the religious clashes of the previous centuries, ethical consensus, what Zwart calls a "moral regime" was sought to eliminate any type of moral subjectivity that could not be made to conform to the ethical consensus model of liberalism.³⁹¹ This "moral regime" excludes those whose moral grounding is not reducible to liberalism's consensus model. In Kierkegaardian terms, modernity has made reflection and deliberation the sole grounding for moral truth claims which excludes premodern modes of spirituality that does not conform to liberal standards of compromise and negotiation. The assumption that action will follow after careful deliberation is to delude oneself into thinking that there exist a perfect solution as long as one debates long enough. This would be disingenuous since it would merely satisfy reason's over coddled sense of superiority over the decision. Fearing a slippery

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 11.

³⁹¹ Zwart 21-30.

slope from passion to fundamentalism, those championing deliberative democracy may sound more like they are caught in reflection's envy of the "paltry decision."³⁹²

Kierkegaard is referring to the thinning communities in capitalist societies. Media images of fervent fundamentalists end up supporting reflection's justification to insist on deliberation over decisive action. If media images are portraying the violent clashes of the less than "enlightened" religious fundamentalists, then Kierkegaard writes that "[n]either the powerful, inspired, excited call to battle, to enjoy, to flout life's opposition, nor the shriek of despair is heard here."³⁹³ The reflective age is envious of such passions refusing to give in to them, calling the enthused deluded and impractical when all that one experiences in the present age is a "careful watching over one another" making sure no one steps out of the bounds of reasoned behavior. It is as if contingency is promoted as long as it stays within the bounds of inaction. The fear should be directed at the lack of enervated relationships "in a sort of slouching, semi-somnolent non-cessation,"³⁹⁴ not fanatical devotionism. Reflection can turn into an "unhappy infatuation with envy"³⁹⁵ that "stifles and impedes" the passionate individual to a "deathly stillness [when all individuality is leveled to] a quiet mathematical, abstract enterprise"³⁹⁶ and the crowd becomes equal—equal in impotency.

Reason will try to convince the individual that anything short of perfection is not ideal, that one must deliberate until the perfect solution is found. Yet, this type of restricted perfectionism will run itself aground with the impossible task. There should be

³⁹² TA 82. To those who are concerned with the violent clashes between religious fundamentalists, this does not mean that passion for spirituality should be avoided. Ben Barber's *Jihad vs. McWorld* illustrates the dual process of thickening and thinning communities.

³⁹³ Ibid., 19.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 80.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 83.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 84-5.

contentment with the next best not as “resignation.”³⁹⁷ Seriousness would not be able to let go of the faults of a “resigned” choice in a defeatist refusal to suspend measurements against perfection. Kierkegaard is neither an idealist nor a nihilist, but a philosopher of the just as good, not the next best or the good enough decision. There is no where to go but fall if the standards are raised to impossible heights. There is more freedom in this less restricted form of perfection.

Rather than despair over the inability to attain the ideal, Kierkegaard transvalues resignation to overcome rigid perfectionism. One can still maintain hope “by the resignation that gives up—not everything, but the highest—and by the contentment that changes the next best into something just as good as the highest.”³⁹⁸ To be satisfied that one cannot refashion a perfect world, one can let go of strict perfectionism to attain a looser form of perfection that is “just as good.” While this concept is similar to saying that one chooses the lesser of two evils, Kierkegaard’s way is more hopeful than cynical. Anticipating those who resist this seemingly unreasonable illusion by asking “by what means,” Kierkegaard does not try to convince the reader with logic but appeals to affect by responding that it “just happens...if one gives oneself to it.”³⁹⁹ If one does not resist against this form of perfection, one can let the strictness go. He is not asking his readers to delude themselves in forgetting the difference between the ideal and actuality. He is asking his readers to willfully believe that it is just as good despite knowing the difference. This is not to abolish reason, but to acknowledge the unreasonableness of the “just as good” but believe nevertheless. It is when reason can be made to harmonize with that which reason knows is wrong, when one refuses to resign to the least worse choice,

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 19.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

but resign to a choice that is just as good as the highest. The standards of good do not have to be in competition with the highest ideal. For those who still do not believe, Kierkegaard will grant the reader every right to ask how reason can stand by the sidelines while an individual believes something despite its unreasonableness. The reader has to let go of the resistances set up by reason to be receptive to his reply: “All will be well again. By what means? Yes, do ask properly, for even if you ask correctly, by asking vehemently you will make it impossible for yourself to appropriate the answer.”⁴⁰⁰ Reason may pout in being pushed from the central focus of man’s source of belief. But it is the only way for one to believe the just as good with enthusiasm.

To claim that one’s choice is just as good as the highest cannot be stated in the “intermediate tone of persuasion.”⁴⁰¹ It is not the same as saying that a decision is good enough. This keeps the standard of strict perfection as the highest as one still longs for what is not met. To call the decision just as good is to rearrange the desire of the highest as the good. It is not a resignation from ideality to actuality, but a transvaluation of that which is not highest as aesthetically the new ideal. This is not to blind oneself to the highest. Rather than generate pessimism that one can never reach ideality, one can be energized that the less than can be willed to be equal to the highest. How to do this will be a letting go of absolute perfection at its highest. Thought can entertain perfection in theory, but to live in the world is to give in to the difference between the ideal and the real.

Only in this way will action not be seen as less than ideal. The ideal is what hovers between the theoretical ideal and the lived reality. Choices to act are not second

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

best to ideal choices in thought. Who would act if one were constantly reminded that the perfect goal would never be reached?⁴⁰² Kierkegaard wants the theoretical world where it thinks is the only home to perfection to let go of its foundationalism to allow a new lived musical perfection which cannot be dissected with science, logic, or abstraction. It will be more beautiful because it resonates with the individual. Its beauty will not be due to its internal consistency as in logical abstracted ethics. Its beauty derives from not being able to fully light a torch to why it is beautiful. The mystery of the beauty of a smile cannot be found by exposing the muscles of the face. There cannot be an objective standard for this beauty but it is indescribably immeasurable. Mathematical perfection is bland compared to perfection that comes alive with all its “imperfections.” Love cannot be restricted to the perfectly lovable—that would be a set up for disappointment. To be passionate for the “less than” or “good enough” will be counterproductive. Prudence will always measure action against these impossible standards creating the situation that one would rather not act for fear of not achieving the ideal: “Dry morality would merely teach men that he cannot do it, mock his impotence.”⁴⁰³ By quieting prudence by going against it, Kierkegaard’s lived perfectionism lifts the standard by freeing one to value the decision as equal to the hypothetical ideal. Prudence is given place next to but not over resolution in passion. Kierkegaard is not saying that the resolution is better than reflection; this will reintroduce the comparative standard albeit turned upside down. Instead of putting down prudence or banishing it, Kierkegaard harmonizes intellect and action so neither is ranked as higher.

⁴⁰² Those who call for the elimination of affirmative action programs because it cannot be made theoretically perfect are speaking from this desire for the theoretically, but practically impossible decision, hence excusing inaction of the dilemma indefinitely.

⁴⁰³ PAP 43 IV A 234, p. 165.

There are no proofs to this move since one must willfully stop making reason and action stand opposed. Those who only have room for true and false types of ethics will not make room for a space in between.⁴⁰⁴ Kierkegaard not only opens up the space between the binary relation between true and false, but also infinitizes it to include the varying versions of beauty by and for each individual reader. Beauty in this sense is boundless, unlike the straightjacketed form of beauty as mathematically pure. The just as good decision allows one room to risk to love without guarantee. Applied to politics, it is to be infinitely enthused with the set of possible plans of action rather than be discouraged with any for not meeting the theoretically perfect. The tone of reasonable persuasion based on Order and Clearness will never lead one to buy into this new type of perfection. This tone does not move men as in the epic age of heroes. The more impassioned age can entertain a moral subjectivity that is not suffocated by reason's stranglehold: "[p]ersuasion presupposes that there is a difficulty, an obstacle, an opposition; it starts with this, and then persuasion clears it away."⁴⁰⁵ Kierkegaard will not clarify this new perfectionism but refers to it as enigmatically achieved. One does it "somehow." It will frustrate those used to didacticism. Kierkegaard does not reveal how one is to remain in joy standing over groundlessness. He does not provide an instruction manual for he leaves room for the reader to find the answer by experimenting with the suggestion. For those who seek a manual, he provides one in the opposite direction of

⁴⁰⁴ This black and white classification of true and false morality could be applied to Derrida's example of sacrificing all the other cats to feed the one cat at home. Theoretically to reason, one saves all or kills all in the service of the one. No middling mediation in between the all or nothing perspective will make one content with saving the one at home, but will always make one feel impotent with not being about to help all. Hence this line of thought can be entertaining for thought to make objections to all types of practical decisions as the least worst choice but far from abstractly ideal.

⁴⁰⁵ TA 20.

leading the reader to despair. His edifying discourses will terrify the reader to the lowest point of despair.

The age of reflection is one step up from the age of immediacy when individuals merged with the divine. In the present age, “the intrinsic, immediate coherence of happiness and immediacy is broken, but the break neither eventuates *meaninglessly* in despair nor does it become the beginning of a qualitatively new life.”⁴⁰⁶ This captures the state of the modern intellectual—well informed, but whose overly idealistic version of revolution can entertain no alternative except to give up in desperation. Since anything in between idealism and nihilism will not satisfy reflection, one refuses to believe in less than strictly perfect decisions.

The present age needs a jolt to become inwardly passionate. Persuasion gives too much time lag for doubt to let action follow at the heels of reflection. Everyone regardless of intellectual capability can commit to loving one’s neighbor as themselves. Just abiding to those words, one has read enough to be spiritual. Kierkegaard stresses the need to preserve the momentum from initial inspiration, reflection, to action. Reason may try to persuade one into thinking she is not capable of committed action. To counter this delay tactic, Kierkegaard writes, “spirit must not be considered identical with talent and genius by no means, but identical with resolution in passion.”⁴⁰⁷ Spirituality should not be seen as only possible for the extraordinary individual. One can distance herself from genius by qualitatively distinguishing herself from the extraordinary. Spirit is nothing so extraordinary as sustaining resolution in passion. Kierkegaard does not want the reader to confuse resolution with “dogged tenaciousness” that stubbornly thinks herself never

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 22. See JP III 3125-33 and notes, ref. to CUP.

being wrong. Passion is the sleepless energy that keeps nihilism and dogmatism at bay. Resolution is not pure instinct or unreflexive pure immediacy. To have resolve is not to freeze a path of action for all circumstances. It is a resolve that allows one to follow divine orders but still be open to another call even in the last minute. To be continuously passionate in resolve is also to be open to the possibility of being wrong.

Kierkegaard does not want to give the impression that the age is hopeless.

Kierkegaard does not want to judge the present age out of hope for repair: “the reflexion of the present age is depicted but not judged, and therefore hope is not denied either.”⁴⁰⁸

To make me believe with enthusiasm despite being repeated disappointed will be a delicate task. He asks if a “bent and bruised flower”⁴⁰⁹ is too delicate to stand on its own, using a stalk to support its weak stem does not take away the flower’s agency. With nurturance, it can slowly grow in strength. Someone can be morally bruised and bent to such a degree that she needs external support to hold her up. He is providing resources for the weak stemmed so eventually she can stand on her own. Spirit can support the flower with the purpose of helping the plant gain independence. The metaphor of speaking about men’s soul as a flower is to denote strength in weakness, to signal its sensitivity, responsiveness, and delicate nature. Easily bruised, the flower metaphor of ethical man departs from the image of an impervious stone that remains unscathed despite repeated abuse.

Using the flower metaphor, Kierkegaard reminds the reader that our capacity to be good can be easily damaged. Its beauty does not comprise in being flawless but despite its imperfections is beautiful nonetheless. If the flower is helped with the stalk,

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 20.

this does not mean that her past is erased for the now independent flower “still bears the mark of having been bruised.”⁴¹⁰ One can easily be bruised again; one needs “the support that sustains the bruised and broken one until he recovers again.”⁴¹¹ Kierkegaard achieves this balance of helping those who are damaged without taking away their dignity in a graceful appreciation of the bruised soul.⁴¹² His role is seen as repairing the dignity of the individual, not through perpetual patronage, but through helping to instill spirit into men’s delicate moral stem.

Passion is not a complete merger with one’s immediate desire. Burning out quickly, passion in the aesthetic realm “is the accelerator [erotic love], infinity’s advance payment on which they will live for many or for a few weeks.”⁴¹³ The beginning of an erotically passionate relationship may seem to be able to last an eternity but its hopeful promises ends up lasting for only a few weeks. This type of passion is “willing its own downfall” since it knows the height of intoxication is only as long lasting as its newness. Pure eroticism naturally degenerates as initial newness will succumb to the “sluggishness of habit.” If the only form of passion is restricted to the interesting or aesthetically pleasurable, then all efforts to make a commitment would be seen as an unwelcome compromise. For example, marriage would not be decided upon enthusiastically; it would be a reluctantly decided upon last resort. Kierkegaard describes such motivations:

A marriage, which should be a hyphen for him, assumes a formidable shape, and he becomes afraid—instead of action and an essential continuity of passion, there is a desperate once-and-for-all decision. The apparent power that is involved in making the decision is actually only the expression of weakness, and therefore the reason he gives is basically incidental. He could just as well have given any other reason,

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² Kierkegaard does not seek to keep followers in permanent tutelage as Emile desires of his tutor. See Rousseau’s *Emile*.

⁴¹³ TA 50.

because the reason is really the misrelation between possibility and actuality that grasps at this particular as if it were the reason. His desperate decision and resultant action are therefore meaningless, and if things were to go as he wanted them to, he himself would amount to essentially nothing.⁴¹⁴

Acting out of reasonableness is an oxymoron as reason merely stands in the way of action. Reason highlights the disconnect between ideality and reality which reflection would protest as imperfect because it is never ideal. Kierkegaard distinguishes between a passionate and a desperate decision which is a weakened surrender than an empowered move to embrace actuality.

Kierkegaard wants the present age to avoid mob like behavior by keeping space between individuals and others. To be inward does not mean that the single individual turns away from others. Collective action without individual inwardness leads to unreflexiveness in which individuals rub against each other without a space of inwardness. Social contract theory is based on this mutual distrust when each is suspicious of another. Assuming the worst, a society will only be selfishly looking over one another. Collective action is sabotaged as individuals, colleagues, or movement members may distrust one another, will not share, and “mutually thwart and contravene each other.” In a dispassionate age, there is “sniveling discontent” rather than “joy”; “garrulous common sense of experience, talkativeness” rather than “enchantment of enthusiasm,” or the “rebirth of passion.”⁴¹⁵ Kierkegaard insists that only by preserving a space for solitude can one engage in meaningful group activity.

The characteristics of this age lead to a lazy, “dilatoriness of irresolution” in which “abnormal common sense uses reflection in advance as a crutch and comes to its

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 52.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 63.

own aid afterwards with reinterpreted action.”⁴¹⁶ Actions become “strangled by calculation.”⁴¹⁷ Rather than accepting inaction as the norm to try to persuade his readers with reasons for passion, Kierkegaard shifts the focus to make those who are stuck in reflection to justify their inaction. Kierkegaard does not treat inaction as the passive neutral position but as the result of self imprisonment:

The individual must first of all break out of the prison in which his own reflection holds him, and if he succeeds, he still does not stand in the open but in the vast penitentiary built by the reflection of his associates...and to this he is again related through the reflection—relation in himself, and this can be broken only by religious inwardness however much he sees through the falseness of the relation.⁴¹⁸

After breaking out of one’s own reflective prison, she has to break out of the watchful gaze of “courteous peers keeping a careful eye on each other.”⁴¹⁹ The present age maintains relationships lacking the resilience of individuality so that one person’s excellence is automatically threatening to the other. One’s peers will be envious of the inwardly autonomous individual. In political terms, the friendship metaphor can be translated to relations among citizens who only watch over one another in suspect of enthused radical action. The citizen no longer lives in coiled anticipation ready to react when authorities step out of line. Without inwardness the citizen no longer considers herself an active participant in her own ruling. The political is considered a chore out of necessity—paying taxes, voting, and jury duty become reluctantly obligated duty made meaningless without passion. In friendship and citizenship, individuals see each other only as “rivals in a game.”⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 68.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 81.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 78.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 79.

Without inward spirit propping up coiled passionate relations, citizens in public and even friends in private will be “outsiders looking at, comparing, envious of one another in distrustful relation, stale cohesion, can’t stand alone, nor can they stand in passionate association in a movement stuck in between reflection and action.”⁴²¹ They will be merged into a coiless relation, holding each other down from passionately enthused actions⁴²²:

With respect to goodness, the person who is enmeshed in reflection certainly can be just as well-intentioned as the passionate, resolute person, and conversely, the man who goes astray in passion may have just as good an excuse as the person who shrewdly realizes that he is letting himself be deceived by reflection even though his fault never becomes obvious.⁴²³

Intentions do not translate into the world if reflection keeps one from acting. Just as passion can be blamed for going astray, reason can give one ample excuses to remain on the sidelines. Transvaluing idealism into a less rigid form is not just a luxury. Not having a space between actuality and possibility or a distance from idealism can lead to a heightened valuation of the pure that has been used to justify heinous crimes. Reiterating Susan Sontag’s insights in “Fascinating Fascism,” Rey Chow writes that idealism is not far behind fascism. Quoting Pascal, Chow reminds the reader that “Evil is never done so thoroughly and so well as when it is done with a good conscience.”⁴²⁴ The over-reliance on conscience is more a projection of the author’s good will filling in the vacuum left by an abstract morality. Challenging popular conceptions of fascism, Chow writes that its aesthetic ideals are not so different from those of the left: “fascism is about love and

⁴²¹ Ibid., 79.

⁴²² The implied reference to legally binding relations, e.g. prenuptials, business contracts, is strong. All risks are reduced to liabilities. The passionate individual is seen as the uninsurable fool.

⁴²³ TA 76-7.

⁴²⁴ Blaise Pascal, *Thoughts of Blaise Pascal* (London: Kegan Paul, 1888), 279. Quoted in Rey Chow, *Ethics after Idealism : Theory, Culture, Ethnicity, Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 14.

idealism. Most of all it is a search for an idealized self-image through a heartfelt surrender to something higher and more beautiful.”⁴²⁵ Writing about identity politics, Chow warns that “the (fascist) longing for unity is still felt.” Unity as in the goal of this pure sense of perfection with the ideal can lead to violence. This attachment to purity gives reflection the justification to deceive one into committing violent acts in the name of idealism.

This is where Kierkegaard can be useful since keeping in mind that one *might* be wrong can leave open a space for internal critique. Admitting one’s imperfections may be less terrifying than insisting that one is *always* in the right as long as one has deliberated enough. Kierkegaard notes that deliberation never ends, it may end on a good or evil note leading the individual to have a false belief in the delusion that such an end came through an immanent conclusion when such “conclusions” are mere arbitrary stopping points that depends on the thinker’s level of fatigue, not moral acumen: “Another danger in reflection is the deliberation that saves a person from doing evil or whether it is fatigue brought on by deliberation that weakens one and prevents one from doing evil.”⁴²⁶ This brings the distance between good and evil terrifyingly close. One does not know whether one stands on the side of good or evil even after careful deliberative efforts.

Unlike the age of revolution, the reflective age transforms existence into an endless deliberation: “rather than culminating in an uprising, it exhausts the inner actuality of relations in a tension of reflection that lets everything remain and yet has

⁴²⁵ Chow, *Ethics* 16.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.

transformed the whole of existence into an equivocation that in its facticity is—while entirely privately...a dialectical fraud.”⁴²⁷

Kierkegaard sets the difficult tasks for those enmeshed with reflection:

But one thing is sure, reflection, like knowledge, increases sorrow, and beyond a doubt there is no task and effort more difficult for the individual as well as for the whole generation than to extricate oneself from the temptations of reflection, simply because they are so dialectical, because one single clever fabrication is able to give the matter a sudden new turn, because reflection is able at any moment to reinterpret and allow one to escape somewhere, because even in the final moment of reflective decision it is possible to do it all over again—after enduring far more strain than any resolute person needs in order to be in the thick of things.⁴²⁸

Mental strain becomes a stand in for passionate decisions as one refuses to give in to the just as good decision. Thinking about this too much will not be able to coax the parasite out as external assistance is needed to quiet the mind.

Kierkegaard writes that it is separation that leads to a sustained unity. It is only when individuals are separated by an inner spirit can people organize into a larger collective. Otherwise, the gathered throng is simply an aggregate displaying an illusion of wholeness without obligation. This is citizenship in the apathetic age, when individuals are not responsive to each other but are too preoccupied with indulging in their own private affairs. It is counterintuitive to think that cultivating the “quiet mind” leads to more substantive forms of connection with others. To escape the entrapment of reflection, one needs “religious inwardness however much he sees through the falseness of the relations.” Reflection is to be feared more than “tyrants and secret police.”⁴²⁹ Religious inwardness is the cure for parasitic reflection. The individual trapped in indecisiveness

⁴²⁷ Chow 77.

⁴²⁸ TA 77.

⁴²⁹ TA 82.

may think it a better alternative to be inactive than to risk making errors in judgment, but this process extended too long has the negative effect of draining one's active potential.

While reflection is a necessary step before the final decision, one has to stand guard that the reflection does not dominate the passions of resolve. Kierkegaard does not chastise reflection so much as argue that any stage if not controlled will seek to make itself the ruling principle. One is all too sensible to believe that she can make a difference in the world. One is too sensible to take a stand one way or the other: "neither one nor the other, and it is existential equivocation when the qualitative disjunction of the qualities is impaired by a gnawing reflection."⁴³⁰ The reflective age has even drained energy away from taking pleasure in the aesthetic realm no less in the ethical or religious realm. In all three existence spheres, reflection threatens to take away enthusiasm:

If ten persons could agree to affirm the full and unqualified validity of erotic love or, with no crippling considerations, the limited justification of enthusiasm, it would not therefore follow that each of the ten would be able to do it, for they still would ambivalently love reflection's judgment even more than the rapture of love and the witnessing of enthusiasm with their spirit.⁴³¹

The reflective age snares those who have more love of reflection than action. Since reflection has turned inward away from the *vita activa*, "ambiguity and equivocation are titillating and stimulating and have many more words than are possessed by joy over the good and the loathing of evil."⁴³² We are brought up to be social, agreeable, not to raise uncomfortable questions. To be enthusiastic is relegated as an allowance of youth.

In terms of communication, the present age has "annul[ed] the passionate disjunction of being silent and speaking."⁴³³ Passionate inwardness allows the individual

⁴³⁰ TA 78.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 85-6. See Romans 8:16.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 97.

to negotiate when to speak and when to remain contained. Kierkegaard redefines passion not as the type that burns out in friction, but a passion to maintain a space between individuals that does not depend on merging with the group. Like the indirect method of communication that maintains the absolute distance between silence and speech, passionate relation floats between misanthropic asceticism and burned out friction of chattering peers. To preserve individuality does not threaten one's ability to connect with others. Their difference maintains a tension that allows for a unity based not on abstraction but on their infinite difference from each other. Politically, strength in numbers cannot eliminate the absolute difference between each individual. Otherwise, their unity will be simply a matter of sticking together without meaningful cohesion. If individuals only count as abstract numbers then all type of specificity will be suspect as derisive to group unity.⁴³⁴ Kierkegaard warns against this mathematical reduction of individual difference into numbers: "All the daily press does, day in and day out, is delude people with this highest principle of falsehood: that numbers are all that matters. And Christianity rests on the idea that the truth is the single individual."⁴³⁵ If one is comforted with news of human tragedy in the aggregate, then bringing back the infinite importance of the single individual will counter this numbing abstraction.

Inwardness is the key to promoting community; otherwise man is reduced to the "basest kind of leveling, because it always corresponds to the denominator in relation to which all are made equal."⁴³⁶ It is a race to the bottom of equalizing all according to banal impulses of selfish boundlessness that immaturely eschews any authority that limits

⁴³⁴ This counters criticisms that identity politics is too specific when Kierkegaard would argue that politics is not specific enough to speak to the individual in the fullness of her irreducible specificity.

⁴³⁵ PAP 50 X 3 A 231. PJ pp. 501.

⁴³⁶ TA 96.

freedom from constraint. To achieve equality in this way is to eliminate the distinctions that make each one a unique individual. What passes for connection terminates in staticity. Unity without coiled tension in difference is in actuality the “termination of the relation”⁴³⁷ when individuals are no longer responsive to self or other.

While promoting inwardness seems like a counter corrective to the lack of political participation, Kierkegaard notes that preserving inwardness is what will give resiliency to the group. He is nostalgic for the times when “there still are people who in full passion, want to be, each individually, and the specific person he is supposed to be.”⁴³⁸ To preserve one’s solitude is what keeps tensions from deflating into mob violence or apathetic indifference. Kierkegaard urges those who tend to dissolve one’s particularity when in association with others to preserve a space of inwardness and singularity.

Inwardness keeps distinctions between individuals from collapsing. Public opinion polls by the press give the impression that one is connected to a larger group but it does not oblige one to act with actual groups. This is the dialectic of group behavior. The question is not how to make people behave collectively, but how they should come together that would preserve their individuality at the same time as obliging them to engage in meaningful activity with others. The public provides the illusion of unity without substance. The space of vigilance over self and other disappears as one becomes reflective yet apathetic to reaching out: “Only when there is no strong communal life to give substance to the concretion will the press create this abstraction ‘the public,’ made

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 78.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 79.

up of unsubstantial individuals who are never united or never can be united in the simultaneity of any situation or organization and yet are claimed to be a whole.”⁴³⁹

For Kierkegaard, religiosity is the *most* the modern age can strive for but ideally, he would rather have a resiliently bonded community. Ideally, inward religiosity is not enough without community, without a striving towards excellence. Rather than escaping into the internal world of religiosity, Kierkegaard is doing what he can given the circumstances of the passionless times. At least in ancient times, the tragedy was that not everyone could rise above the fray to be a Socrates: “[t]he bleakness of antiquity was that a man of distinction was what *others could not be*; the inspiring aspect [of the modern era] will be that the person who has gained himself religiously is only what *all can be*.” Religiosity is as good as what in the ancient world was Socratic excellence.

Kierkegaard’s religiosity is but a practical prescription for the ailment of the reflective age that can only reflect in apathetic publicity. The present age cannot expect the same socio-political or educational conditions as present in the golden age of Athenian democracy. To have a goal unattainable by most is better than to lower the bar to only expect the bare minimum standard for human motivations. Without solitude, the crowd will merely bounce off one another unable to organize or be committed to a higher cause. To speak in the aggregate without touching a single soul is a tragedy in modern times: “One may speak to a whole nation in the name of the public, and yet the public is less than one ever so insignificant actual human being.”⁴⁴⁰ Public safety and national security become empty catchwords meaningless to the single individual. Religiosity is the corrective to an age that has outwardly obliterated all signs of individual inwardness.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 91.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 93.

Kierkegaard thinks this is not the highest ideal, but the most that the age allows. While Kierkegaard is known to write in order to make his readers convert to his brand of religiosity, I contend that his underlying focus is towards enervating a deflated public with a modern skeptical brand of ancient spirit in order to create responsible relationships within the private and public sphere. For Kierkegaard, “[t]he aim of the sermon is not to lull, not to win a metaphysical position, but to set action free.”⁴⁴¹

He emphasizes religion as a corrective to an age in which passion has been drained out of all activities, not only the political. In TA, he rewrites Biblical narratives with contemporary analogies to speak to the reader least she is averse to returning to the old text. His commentary provides insight into the underlying causes of passionless apathy that can be applicable for those concerned with citizen participation, or participation in any sphere of human relationships.

There is no trust in the public to preserve a realm of solitude not controlled by external authorities such as church, state, or school. The assumption is that left to her own devices, an individual will eventually follow bad inclinations. In ancient times, there was more faith in individuals to preserve inward solitude that does not automatically mean anarchic licentiousness. Kierkegaard reminisces that antiquity educates “yet without shaping him entirely” while modernity’s “alienating abstract equality helps him to become wholly educated.”⁴⁴² Lacking the virtue of ancient education, the modern age distrusts the individual in making her own choices. This educational model destroys individuality emptying one from any unique qualities that goes against the grain of the common crowd. This reluctance to give interpretive power to the reader for fear of

⁴⁴¹ PAP 43 IV A 234, p. 165.

⁴⁴² TA 92. This shows up in MacIntyre’s fear of the criterionless choice.

leaving room for misinterpretation is manifested in the rationale for making words mean exactly what is intended. The distrust of unconventional writing and reading stems from this desire in modern pedagogy to educate the individual entirely, making copies of the authority into an undifferentiated whole. The rationale is that if everyone were made to consent then there would not be the violent clashes of religious wars of the Middle Ages. Yet Kierkegaard shows that making people into copies of each other results in a different type of clashing—a frictive clash of immaturely developed competing wills standing over and above one another in the fight for material gain.

While Kierkegaard shares complaints about commercializing society with Marx,⁴⁴³ Kierkegaard's approach is not to appeal to the ethical but to immediate taste. Rather than denounce bourgeois values outright, Kierkegaard takes a taciturn approach. He diverts the criticism of bourgeois society from an ethical question to an aesthetic one. For example, rather than proselytize that man should not be used as a means to an end, Kierkegaard takes a more lighthearted approach when he has one of his pseudonyms state, "if it wasn't in bad taste to use another person as a means to an end, then a way to get over a love affair is to move on to the next one."⁴⁴⁴ A serious science of ethics would eschew such aesthetic matters of subjective taste on ethical matters. One commentator argues that Lukács via Lucein Goldmann thought Kierkegaard as justifying a bourgeois retreat to the private sphere away from the public. But as Beitchman retorts, the worst in Kierkegaard's present age was not able to eliminate the quiet moments of inwardness that

⁴⁴³ "As a result, therefore, man (the worker) only feels himself freely active in his animal functions—eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal." See Marx, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, 108-10, tr. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. Frederick Engels, 3 vols. (New York: International Publishers, 1967) 1:35-46, 146-230; 3:25-40. Quoted in James Marsh, "Marx and Kierkegaard on Alienation," in *A Kierkegaard Commentary: Two Ages*, ed. Robert Perkins (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1984), 157.

⁴⁴⁴ SLW 100.

the present age so thoroughly invades. The following gives one a glimpse of the level of exploitation that permeates one's illusion of free time:

Even the most exploited subject of the last century had surely certain mental recesses that were still fallow and uncolonized. These were places and moments of reverie, sleep, intoxication, anger, passion or festival where shelter could be found from an economic system, which in our own epoch of total production-consumption and unending technological-psychological manipulation, intimidation and conditioning of work *as well as* leisure, has truly abolished solitude.⁴⁴⁵

It makes sense to distrust leaving individuals to their solitude if the individual has been colonized by economic forces that leisure is reduced to freedom of capitalist consumption. As Beitchman writes, to provide a space of inward reflection is necessary in an age where freedom is “*mis*represented by ‘choices’ of vacations, hobbies, purchases...”⁴⁴⁶ Those who complain that Kierkegaard's call for inward subjectivity fearing that the individual as single individual will behave selfishly are projecting their worst fears.

In one of his most Kantian moments, Kierkegaard posits a rational basis for religion. Kierkegaard claims that religiosity is the prescription needed in the reflective age that has lost the virtues of ancient education. This move can also be interpreted as his most Rousseauian whose pragmatic constitutionalism favored prescribing different sets of rules for different cultural climates.⁴⁴⁷ For Kierkegaard, religion is the corrective to the leveling forces of the modern age. He does not take religion as seriously since it is a pragmatic prescription for the disbelieving times. His fear of the disenchanting masses leads him to claim that “the public is the cruel abstraction by which individuals will be

⁴⁴⁵ Beitchman 117.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Rousseau prescribes different constitutions for Switzerland than for Poland in *The Social Contract*.

religiously educated—or be destroyed.”⁴⁴⁸ While the creation of the abstract public continues to eliminate individuality, Kierkegaard warns that the present age will destroy itself through reflection if God is not brought back to bracket the single individual from the leveling forces of envy. God must be the cure to fight against the hardening of souls into a cruel mass. Kierkegaard is willing to concede that God may be a fabrication; he will not explain away doubt as the unbelieving age explains away things that it cannot verify with scientific proofs. If seeing Christianity as a jest is what will make his cynical audience listen, then he will push this comic element to the extreme. To maintain the inwardness of religiosity in a cynical age means that one should not display the cure in open earnestness.

If Kierkegaard brings back religiosity to disenchanting times, he wants to do so in less thumping tones than those who like Locke pointedly proclaims the triumph of reason over religion. Returning to the theme of quiet spirituality, Kierkegaard values the soft whisper of spiritual inwardness rather than the clamoring of the less passionate age that finds occasion to loudly proclaim what it does or does not believe. Bible thumpers do not have reverence for the easily mistakable voice of God, “for the voice of God is always a whisper.”⁴⁴⁹ Claiming God’s voice as a whisper is to admit the possibility that such a

⁴⁴⁸ TA 93.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 10. Kierkegaard’s words are a repackaged version of Biblical passages. See 1 Peter 3:1-10 which has particular significance for a strong feminist reading of Kierkegaard who may be parodying the woman as vessel reference in this passage from Peter. “In like manner, wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; so that, even if any don’t obey the Word, they may be won by the behavior of their wives without a word; seeing your pure behavior in fear. Let your beauty be not just the outward adorning of braiding the hair, and of wearing jewels of gold, or of putting on fine clothing; but in the hidden person of the heart, in the incorruptible adornment of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God very precious. For this is how the holy women before, who hoped in God also adorned themselves, being in subjection to their own husbands: as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose children you now are, if you do well, and are not put in fear by any terror. You husbands, in like manner, live with your wives according to knowledge, giving honor to the woman, as to the weaker vessel, as being also joint heirs of the grace of life; that your prayers may not be hindered. Finally, be all like-minded, compassionate, loving as brothers, tenderhearted, courteous, not rendering evil for evil, or reviling for reviling; but instead blessing;

voice can be mistaken.⁴⁵⁰ Kierkegaard will insist throughout his authorship that God's voice is always soft and of unclear origins. One will not hear a clear voice shouting from the sky because this would take away the occasion for faith which rests on the restlessness of doubt. However, this does not mean that one can wallow infinitely on the undecidability of God's presence. While his whispers may be hard to hear, his demands are clearly posited in the old book. Any too rigidly serious message has to be given a degree of distance in the likelihood that God's "true" voice is lost in the transmission.

This new religiosity is not a new doctrine to fill one's soul completely. Just as ancient education left room for individuality to develop in its own ways; modern religiosity should allow room for the individual to define what this religiosity means. Unlike religious zealots who seek to completely convert followers, Kierkegaard hopes that the person who cultivates inwardness would "still [have] something to recollect, something to think about in silence." This is threatening to the sensible age, in which all talking is reduced to chattering that "dreads the moment of silence, which would reveal the emptiness."⁴⁵¹ Rather than emptiness, religious inwardness promotes more meaningful speech which is not opposed to silence. In this new disjunction between silence and speech, ideality becomes manifest. This type of ideality cannot be chattered about. It must be cushioned by silence for "ideality is the equilibrium of opposites." This

knowing that to this were you called, that you may inherit a blessing. For, He who would love life, and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit." Kierkegaard would disobey this last rule in the service of good.

⁴⁵⁰ In FT, *de Silentio* would reduce this voice to an inaudible one terrifyingly indistinguishable from the demonic or one's inner voice. To *de Silentio*, Abraham's hearing of God's call is both inwardly and outwardly no different than a madman mistaking his own voice inside his head for that of the divine. While the difference between a soft and inaudible voice may at first seem slight, there is an infinite difference cognitively, emotionally, and spirituality. This shows why Kierkegaard was adamant on not being considered the same as *de Silentio*.

⁴⁵¹ TA 98.

new ideality is not the strict perfection that can be measured as the highest but hovers between the pure and impure:

someone who has been motivated to creativity by unhappiness, if he is genuinely devoted to ideality, will be equally inclined to write about happiness and about unhappiness. But silence, the brackets he puts around his own personality, is precisely the condition for gaining ideality.⁴⁵²

Without inwardness, a sullen, sniveling writer cannot write about happiness. This is the ideality of keeping in tension and avoiding the two extremes of only thinking the best or the worst. Silence is the space of inwardness that gives one space from merging completely with her immediate emotions. With inwardness, the writer can achieve a degree of separation from his current mood to imagine the space of ideality that keeps the disjunction of the opposed emotions in equilibrium. Since this disjunction cannot be made intelligible by common sense, the sensible will dismiss this form of ideality in favor for that which is without contradictions, pure on paper and in principle. For Kierkegaard, ideality is not in achieving the perfect theory, doctrine, or logical proof, but is in keeping the tension between perfectionism and its opposite. This ideality does not strive for all or nothing. To create a doctrine of idealism would destroy the delicate equilibrium that cannot be frozen in speech or writing. Ideality is not about a measurable, provable form of perfection but one that takes in the just as good.

In similar ways, ethics when turned into a principle will mean that “everything is permissible on principle...we can do everything on principle and shirk all personal responsibility.”⁴⁵³ The rigidity of duty turns ethics into dogma regardless of harm done to self or others. Ethics is the messier balancing act of negotiating between possibility and actuality:

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 102.

The existential expression of nullifying the principle of contradiction is to be in contradiction to oneself. *The creative omnipotence implicit in the passion of absolute disjunction that leads the individual resolutely to make up his mind* is transformed into the extensity of prudence and reflection—that is, by knowing and being everything possible to be in contradiction to oneself, that is, to be nothing at all. The principle of contradiction strengthens the individual in faithfulness to himself, so that, just like that constant number three Socrates speaks of so beautifully, which would rather suffer anything and everything than become a number four or even a very large round number, he would rather be something small, if still faithful to himself, than all sorts of things in contradiction to himself.⁴⁵⁴

Without this passionate disjunction, no decision can be made since reflection will always doubt the decision as imperfect. All actions will be the desperate resignation that results not because of passionate resolve despite the disjunction between actuality and possibility but because of fatigue of failing to come up with the ‘perfect’ solution. Rather than “catapult”⁴⁵⁵ a decision, the individual is paralyzed from making any meaningful decision. Any action that aims beyond the finite will be suspect as irrational. The principle of contradiction is the backbone of committed action without adherence to strict dogma. To use logic to eliminate that which is contradictory is to eliminate passion in resolution.

Knowledge is the only thing that the reflective age can pride itself on. The overeager activist becomes a circus act for the rest to watch in detached amusement. While the planners sit smug in deluding themselves out of irrational motivations, they have lost the potential to be actors themselves. Activists become an object of investigation. The problem of the age is that “everyone is experienced in indecisiveness and evasions and waits for someone to come along who wills something—so that they may place bets on him.”⁴⁵⁶ It is important to note that Kierkegaard is dialectical enough

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 97.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 89.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 105.

that he does not blame reflection: “Reflection is not the evil, but the state of reflection, stagnation in reflection, is the abuse and the corruption that occasion retrogression by transforming the prerequisites into evasions.”⁴⁵⁷ What is required in the preliminary stage of decision making may be counterproductive if one remains in the state of reflection in stagnation. Acting against prudence does not mean reflection is banished. For Abraham, he goes against reason but he does not banish reflection. This is different from the imprudent decision without going through reflection: “It is on this point that prudence gets caught in the verdict of its own reflection and that of the surrounding world. It fears that acting contrary to prudence will be confused with acting without prudence.”⁴⁵⁸ It goes without saying that prudence is a precondition for action. Abraham’s decision was not a result of deliberative efforts. He had to work against the understanding. This goes against Johannes de Silentio who reflects on what was going on Abraham’s mind without end. This may not necessarily be bad in the case of human sacrifice, but for tasks less controversial, sometimes one has to halt the temptation to act always in accordance to the understanding. Kierkegaard pays respects to prudence but only up to a point. If immediacy, reflection, or action is left to dominate the others, then it will destroy the delicate balance that leads to responsive acting in the world.

For Kierkegaard, acting by going against prudence will never be “obvious.” Just as Socratic irony is never obvious; Kierkegaard’s humor may sometimes hide behind the serious. Inward enthusiasm should not be always externally noticeable. The opposite of inward enthusiasm is exhibitionism that announces one’s goodness in fear that one’s peers will perceive otherwise. Kierkegaard identifies the underlying rationale: “The

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 96.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 111.

exhibitionist tendency is the self-infatuation of the conceit of (selfish) reflection.”⁴⁵⁹ This is to be infatuated with the self to such an extent that one desires to display one’s goodness in vain glory. The self-proclaimed ethicists or religious enthusiast is manifesting an exhibitionist fantasy that cannot remain silent in containment. To tout one’s principles may not make one into a more moral being; rather it converts ethics into dutiful doctrine that works against morality. Principle can take away the moral dimension. For example, one can be principled to growth only to become a parasite. Anything can be justified based on principle. Duty seems to permit every type of behavior eliminating individual inward accountability. The passionate agony of being responsive, making difficult choices, or sacrificing immediate comfort is resolved if one can rely on principle to relieve one’s moral compunction. On principle, science can be both good and bad, yet this type of principled abstraction may harden oneself to the lines of responsibility. By calling for silent inwardness, Kierkegaard allows compassion to soften the otherwise exhibitionist duty bound individual who may use reflection to save him from feeling responsible when duty conflicts with mercy. The sensible man becomes hardened to contingency. His humanity is reduced to what can fit into iron-clad rules of behavior. Sensible speech, saying the right thing, being mechanical about the right way of being will turn one into a “pure abstraction.”⁴⁶⁰ Humanity will become cruel if hardened to the sorrows of life. The infinite potential of individuality will be turned into an anonymous vacuum objectively identical to the rest. Emotions would be reduced to binary codes in which contingency is sacrificed for objectivity: “the sensibleness of the present age could be personified as one who inquisitively, courteously, and prudently

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 102.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 104.

would at most have sufficient passion to make a bet.”⁴⁶¹ The only risks one takes will be at the lottery. To bet against the odds in any meaningful activity will be seen as recklessly irrational. For Kierkegaard, to take away the illusion that one is “capable of asking anything of actuality” is to eliminate what can give infinite meaning in one’s life.

Kierkegaard’s religiosity will not be in bringing back bourgeois Christianity; he wants his readers to instill an inward sense of faith that is contained enough to not need to proselytize. To challenge the focus from elucidating the mystery of the divine, Kierkegaard will call for more secrecy, opacity, and hidden inwardness. To go back to the old book in repetition is not to return to the days of blind immediacy.

If the public only rests on the principle of coming together without each individual preserving infinite inwardness, then all associations will be based on banal self-interest. For Kierkegaard, association without inwardness is backwards: “Not until the single individual has established an ethical stance despite the whole world, not until then can there be any question of genuinely uniting.”⁴⁶² Not until then can one join in with others since without an ethical stance, relations become merely “sticking together.”⁴⁶³ Without inwardness, unity will not endure the clash of self-interest. To be united in difference is to maintain a distance between individuals that makes the unity more than a mere mutual seeking of material gains. If one starts with the assumption that there is nothing one can do about self-interest, then one has given up on the goal of genuine community. If one is only interested in numbers, how to make people stick together, then the organization would not last beyond what is materially beneficial for the group. Social justice organizations would be reduced to the interest group.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 105.

⁴⁶² Ibid., 106.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

Without the silence of inwardness to bracket one's immediate emotions, vengeance will result when pain "vitiates one from personal responsibility." Pain becomes the reasoned justification for violent retaliation. In a world in which *qui pro quo* is justice in terms of fairness, an eye for an eye, vengeance will be seen as reasonable. One can understand when one acts to equal the score. When each becomes a number, it is easy to sacrifice one for the other. Instead of maintaining the illusion that each is infinitely irreplaceable, the vengeful can claim that one's pain gives her reason to exact justice. The mark of evil becomes only reserved for those who perpetrate crimes for no reason. To have a reason can be used to justify causing pain to others. Reasons can harden the heart from feeling sorrow if deemed legitimate. One can justify numbing oneself to others' suffering, to reduce others to enemies whose pain is perceived as just desert.

Without the space of ethical compassion, associations will not genuine connect one to others. The sensible age has made all relationships slack with unresponsive elasticity. The sluggish crowd no longer reacts to suffering as the individual is turned into anonymity no more deserving of care as the next. Each encounter with one's peers is seen as a means towards instrumental ends. For Kierkegaard, just as "there are no assets of feeling in the erotic sphere," there are "no assets of enthusiasm in the political sphere."⁴⁶⁴ If feelings were only considered as assets to be felt only in guaranteed transactions, then no one would risk relationships that do not guarantee a high yield prospect of return. Whether it is investing in the market of love or politics, the individual would rather wait for fate to present one with the perfect choice. The only betting involves the lottery, when one completely gives up agency to be dictated by pure chance.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 129.

If enthusiastic optimism were suspect as naïve, if all actions were undertaken in strict calculation of the probability of success, then prudence would have dissolved humanity into cynical apathetic spectators living vicariously through detached amusement. The risk involved in acting from passionate resolve is transformed to that of betting on the game of chance. Having given up on individuality, the world will not longer become passionately participating individuals as each becomes too mired in sensibility to believe in anything to fight for.

Chapter 7 Jestng Despair to Extremes in *Sickness Unto Death*

Augustine speaks in a latter book about his earlier passion for the theater. He points out the self-contradiction of esthetic grief in that one involuntarily breaks off where action should begin. He says that tragedy is supposed to awaken compassion, “but what kind of compassion is it when the onlooker is not called upon to rush assistance but is only invited to enjoy the pain..... Miserable me, I loved this enjoyment of pain! But what kind of love is love of pain! For I did not wish to suffer what I might see performed but only let myself be moved a little by it superficially, and thereafter there came an inflammation just as when one scratches himself with his fingernails. This was my life, O God!”⁴⁶⁵

Kierkegaard, through Augustine, suggests that the seriousness of an all tragic portrayal of life causes one to be numb to the suffering of others in real life. Kierkegaard finds it disturbing that tragedy moves one not to help the other but to commiserate in another’s pain. Too much realism in tragedy develops a warped sense of compassion for witnessing other’s pain. Watching horror presented on stage trains the audience to dissect feelings of sympathy from action. The sensible age has dulled its responsiveness to pain. Kierkegaard returns to the Lutheran extremes of presenting Christianity as terror to wake the anesthetized age to reconnect emotion with action, rather than detached amusement.

Kierkegaard turns the seriousness of dread into a sickness to be scientifically diagnosed by the meta-physician Anti-Climacus. The title *Sickness unto Death* signals the reader to be prepared for torture, yet this passage warns against taking the work too tragically. In SUD, Anti-Climacus transforms ethics to the level of mathematical abstraction if that is what will get his readers to see the humor of creating an abstracted ethical algebra. SUD is Anti-Climacus taking God to categorical heights. Anti-Climacus argues that this is not true religiousness: “it seems presumptuous ‘for someone to venture to interpret the demands of ideality with respect to being a Christian, someone who in any

⁴⁶⁵ JP X⁴ A 160 *n.d.*, 1851, See Friedrich Böhlinger, *Die Kirche Christi und ihre Zeugen*, I, pt. 3, p. 110.

case....is imperfect.”⁴⁶⁶ If Anti-Climacus represents Religiousness B (The abstract name signals the categorical form the text takes.) I do not argue that Kierkegaard did not take Christianity seriously. His foundationalism is the mercilessness of his incessant command to follow the word. His horror and humor is not to be taken lightly.

In exaggerations there is truth if it magnifies and hence makes one question what was taken as unquestionable. According to Critchley:

Adorno famously writes that the only thing that is true in psychoanalysis is the exaggerations. But this would seem to be even more true of satire. ... The truth of satire is obviously not to be assessed in terms of literal verifiability, but rather to warn us against a danger implicit in our self-conception. To have an effect, the warning signals have to be deafening.⁴⁶⁷

To say that exaggerations are true is to defy what truth means; it detaches it from reality or attaches it to hyper/surreality. Exaggerations fit somewhere outside of reality and fiction. I would argue that exaggerations take one away from figuring out truth, but has the effect of letting one acknowledge but then move on without being weighed down by trying to figure out whether such exaggerations are true or not. In his journals, Kierkegaard refers to the benefits of exaggeration over lukewarm versions of sin:

Christianity makes sin the most dreadful thing—and then wants to have it removed. A more lenient view (Leibniz, for example) wants to make sin more benign, defends it—and then, quite properly, we remain hung up in it; it becomes an everlasting imperfection inseparable from being human. The result is to take sin off our hands.⁴⁶⁸

Exaggerating the dread of sinfulness makes one more responsive to the call to actively work against sinfulness. To present the case in more palatable terms would make one complacent. It is by treating these topics with exaggerated seriousness that he induces

⁴⁶⁶ SUD 160. Crites 147.

⁴⁶⁷ Critchley 36.

⁴⁶⁸ JP X2 A 403 *n.d.* 1850. Leibniz refers to his *Theodicy*, para 20-7; *Theodicee* (Hanover, Leipzig: 5 ed., 1763), pp. 271 ff *ASKB* 619. Reference in note in Hong ed of JP.

his reader to revive the comic reversal. If modern man insists on deluding herself into seriousness, then Kierkegaard will push that seriousness to the extreme.

Humor can also be found in the literal since Kierkegaard writes that Christian ethics without exaggeration is comical in an unbelieving age. Hence, in his veronymous writings, there is the familiar tension, that requires and instills a sense of humor as Lippitt notes even in the most despairing passages on sin and guilt.

While Kierkegaard did not think music should be mathematicized, this did not stop him from parodying this abstraction on religiosity. Kierkegaard does not limit himself to emotional shock value alone. In SUD, Anti-Climacus notes that another technique is to convert the religious sphere into algebra. If one is not predisposed to beautiful rhetoric, Kierkegaard can satisfy the mathematically inclined with abstract math. While Kierkegaard can shock through the rhetoric of passion, he can also shock through representing despair in cold mathematical abstraction. Kierkegaard writes that “[a]s a definition it is algebra.”⁴⁶⁹ An example of Anti-Climacus’ algebraic versus diasalmata or dialectical lyric is the following:

The preceding section concentrated on pointing out a gradation in the consciousness of the self; first came ignorance of having an eternal self (C, B, a), then a knowledge of having a self in which there is something eternal (C, B, b), and under this, in turn (α 1-2, β), gradation were pointed out.⁴⁷⁰

He speaks of immature religiosity as Religiousness A and mature forms as Religiousness B. Kierkegaard insists that he is not the abstract, ideality of Anti-Climacus, not quite someone who can take human projections from the idea of God. Kierkegaard does not always think rhetoric an appropriate vehicle for religious concepts. For the case of despair which in universal extreme generality the form of symbols would do the trick. In

⁴⁶⁹ SUD n. 13, 178.

⁴⁷⁰ SUD XI 191, 79.

discussing the structure of SUD, Kierkegaard writes in his journals that the text should not be written rhetorically:

There is one difficulty with this book: it is too dialectical and stringent for the proper use of the rhetorical, the soul-stirring, the gripping. The title itself seems to indicate that it should be discourses—the title is lyrical. The point is that before I really can begin using the rhetorical I always must have the dialectical thoroughly fluent, must have gone through it many times. That was not the case here.⁴⁷¹

This illustrates Kierkegaard's refusal to foundationally exclude certain forms of rhetoric. The dialectical lyric was repeated throughout FT, but in SUD, Kierkegaard uses the algebraic form. The task of recognizing despair in all is too universally great to be treated emotionally; an equation works better and must not overwhelm the reader with more heart tugging than necessary: "But the point is that the task is much too great for a rhetorical arrangement, since in that case every single individual figure would also have to be depicted poetically. The dialectical algebra works better."⁴⁷² In another entry, Kierkegaard discusses his plans to give feelings to numbers so as to add up the contradictions in ever increasing intensity. This passage also shows Kierkegaard's penchant for poetry but makes himself conform to a stricter, emotionless dialectic for the interest of the effect on the reader. He will tone down the symphonic by resisting playing to his reader's heart strings in favor of the formulaic. This would achieve an even greater resonance by mocking the anesthetized age. His original intentions to write another lyric fell with his realization of the need to form the paradox into the cold abstraction of math.

⁴⁷¹ JP V 6136 VIII1 A 651 May 13, 1848.

⁴⁷² JP V 6137 VIII1 A 652 *n.d.* I have no idea why this is interesting, but Kierkegaard raises my eyebrows when he writes "Everyone who sins is a slave of sin. The thralldom of sin." Perhaps, if there was too much rhetoric with sin, the individual is more tempted to commit sin just as anti-smoking ads causes people to want to smoke more. The cold algebra would makes one less seduced by the language of prohibition since this would cause the individual to be more tied up with *not* committing sin, increasing the tension to commit it. JP V 6138 VIII1 A 653 *n.d.*, 1848.

In his journal entries, Kierkegaard provides a window into his thought process to best treat his ideas:

Under this title [SUD] I have a mind to sketch something lyrical. The point, of course, would be that by means of strictly dialectical computations and by combinations of feelings and by coursing passions one would arrive at what could be called the combined numbers. 'The mixture' will therefore signify the intensity, for the greater the compounding into oneness the greater the intensity, the more contradictions, indeed, and yet all the richer harmony.

Incidentally, it would be interesting to compute the whole area of feelings and passions this way, something no one has thought of, even less than the secret is simply to do it dialectically, not lyrically, but dialectically and then lyrically.

As an example of a number of compounded feelings, use could be made of the sketch 'Something about Loving.'⁴⁷³

If one is not offended at his consideration of compounding feelings as one would compound numbers in a calculator, then one's heart is cold as stone.⁴⁷⁴ The important part is the mixture of hot feelings and cold calculations that generates the pent up potential. Kierkegaard can have a new title as the alchemist of the soul. Unlike in apophatic mysticism that tries to achieve this oneness of ultimate intensity through writing a proposition and then immediately revoking the former, Kierkegaard will use the more explosive technique of detonating one's internal explosion with dialectical algebra to spark a reaction in the reader.

In SUD, the conflict of the wills is pushed to the extremes. The battle of the mental and physical faculties is pushed to the seams so that one stands before a decision or else risk being torn apart.⁴⁷⁵ Martinez argues that Kierkegaard in *Purity of Heart is to*

⁴⁷³ JP V 6140 VIII 1 A 679 *n.d.*1848.

⁴⁷⁴ This is similar to Kandinski's discovery of the tonalities of color in exciting the emotions.

⁴⁷⁵ This is similar to Augustine's *Confessions*. See Book VIII, Chapter 10 & 11. "The point is that for Augustine *knowing* about this cosmic arrangement is a precondition of *faith*. Martinez 37. Compare with book 8, chapter 9 in Augustine's *Confessions*. When the secondary literature makes comparisons to Kierkegaard's theological debt to earlier masters, I think of Kierkegaard's journal entry about how everything has been said under the sun but everything that has been said is also new, as in there is always a new way to turn an old phrase.

Will One Thing challenges faith as acting rather than knowing. Faith is will that overcomes the “doublemindedness” of indecision.⁴⁷⁶

The thought experiments are to tax the mind to exhaustion, to make the understanding step down in the moment before decision. But Kierkegaard emphasizes that one needs to come back to the understanding to judge actions in a constant repetitious movement so that one does not become stagnate in righteousness: “powerful the depth of their psychological acuity, deal specifically with the process leading up to the act of faith that defines the Christian way of living.”⁴⁷⁷ Faith is not a math, not made probable. The reduction of the absurdity of faith into a mathematical probability ends up eliminating faith. A thinker would like to think that thinking gets one further towards truth than those who simply decide to believe without having gone through the deliberative effort. Those who take this route are farther, if not locking herself out of faith. Immanence locks one out of faith rather than close the distance.

The wonder of the changed man is the moment when he realizes his complicity with evil, a la Kant’s notion of radical evil in man. Yet, this is not a comfortable place of change for once he is changed “how a man loses ground!” “And the changed state in which he is we call sin.”⁴⁷⁸ “The state of the soul when it comprehends this is fear and trembling in the guilty one, its passion is sorrow over remembrance, its love is repentance in the man of perdition.”⁴⁷⁹ Kierkegaard does not want to scare his reader or trick them into belief since doing so would cause a distorted form of fear and trembling that comes from without. It cannot hold and may be easily rejected. Kierkegaard exposes every trick,

⁴⁷⁶ Martinez 38.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 24.

⁴⁷⁸ Kierkegaard, “What it Means to Seek after God” 464.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

concedes all objections to the contrary, in essence, violates all the rules pertaining to a sermon or philosophical treatise. He gives a place to reflection so that one can “clear the ground” of one’s doubts:

Let the understanding condemn what is transitory, let it clear the ground, then wonder comes in the right place, in ground that is cleared, in the changed man. Everything appertaining to the first wonder the understanding can consume let it do so, in order that enigmatically it may help one to wonder, for it is indeed enigmatical, since it conflicts with the judgment of the understanding concerning itself. But if a man gets no farther, let him not accuse the understanding, nor let him be triumphant because it has been victorious.⁴⁸⁰

The understanding clears the ground for the higher form of wonder. The understanding cannot lead one to come closer to this type of faith. The understanding is useful in eliminating the childish conceptions of religiosity, but after that point, it becomes powerless to reach a higher form of religiosity that goes against the understanding. The second wonder must keep in mind the absurdity of a faith but still believe it. Understanding is not banished, but understanding is the counter force to the new faith. Rather than cover the eyes with new blindfolds, this wonder believes with eyes open in utter wakefulness to the possibility of madness. He validates claims that annihilate the first wonder, but he dares his readers to not stop there. Reflection is not to blame or be overly defended since one can wallow in the fanaticism of reflection that drains all efforts to act.

While Kierkegaard notes that this conversion cannot come from without, he allows others to “remind him of his own responsibility to God.” Kierkegaard’s role is that of the reminder for one to take personal responsibility, not to seduce anyone with tricks to believe in God and one’s sinfulness. Kierkegaard acknowledges that sin is a “depressing word,” and the admittance that one is a sinner is hard to bear the weight of eternal

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

guiltiness. Kierkegaard follows through with the ramifications of Kant's recognition of the potential of men to perform radical evil.

The price of wonderment is the acknowledgement that one sins. To emphasize this point is to make sure the "enlightened" do not feel superior to others because they achieved religiousness. It is a humbling acknowledgement that all are potentially doers of evil if one is not vigilant over creating a bounded existence that pays attention to how one's actions may cause suffering to oneself and others.

Through *Anti-Climacus*, Kierkegaard spells out the harshest lesson of going through agony to find God: "When despair is the greatest, help is the nearest."⁴⁸¹ At the moment when one realizes her complicity with evil is the moment one needs help from God. Only through the acknowledgement of our potential weakness for perpetrating radical evil will the despair lead one to leap into faith. Only when one conceives of the possibility of radical evil will the self come to terms with a dependency on faith. Crites spells this out: "It is easy to say that the antidote [to despair] is to turn to God. But *Anti-Climacus* suggests that such a turning is not serious 'until a person is brought to his extremity, when, humanly speaking, there is no possibility. Then the question is whether he will believe that for God everything is possible, that is, whether he will *believe*."⁴⁸²

One must be brought to the point of mental and existential exhaustion of the extreme horror to find true bliss. This is the moment when the tragic and comic meet, when one comes to the dead end of thought, of imagination, and willing the impossible to be possible: "Potentiated self is active, not because it believes it has succeeded in purging its pathologies, but because it believes in miracles. For in the end only

⁴⁸¹ Beitchman, Appendix, Journals

⁴⁸² SUD 38. Crites

miraculous possibility is the solution to the sickness of despair.”⁴⁸³ Anti-Climacus finds a purpose to despair: “there is no *immediate* form of spiritual health’; that ‘in order to reach the Truth one must go through every negativity.”⁴⁸⁴

As Crites points out, Climacus and Anti-Climacus pull on the reader in different ways. The former presents the reader with a detached choice and allows the reader to choose without judgment. Anti-Climacus has chosen faith for the reader as the physician who “does not invite the patient to ponder the choice between life and death, as a philosopher might on a cool afternoon. The physician’s diagnosis creates quite a different tension.”⁴⁸⁵ If Climacus is the detached ironist and Anti-Climacus the (meta)physician, then Kierkegaard is somewhere in between. The humorist in him does not seek to catapult his readers to be converted. Kierkegaard writes that SUD is addressed to himself and hence is written directly to himself:

The little work book *On My Work as an Author* declares: ‘It must end with direct communication,’ that is, I began with pseudonymous writers representing the indirect communication I have not used under my signature. And somewhat earlier (in my preface to *Practice in Christianity*, whose author, the last pseudonymous writer, Anti-Climacus, again discourses on indirect communication) there is a statement: I understand the whole (whole book) as addressed to me so that I may learn to resort to *grace*. Consequently, it ends with direct communication.⁴⁸⁶

Kierkegaard acknowledges the dual “ambiguous” nature of this second wonder as it “comprises fear and bliss.”⁴⁸⁷ He cannot argue with understanding since the second wonder goes against reason. Wonder cannot be told to exist; it must be experienced by the individual. The power of rhetoric can elicit fear and wonder yet it is not the same as one’s personal (dis)relationship with the divine. He asks was it not fearful to be so near to

⁴⁸³ Crites 158.

⁴⁸⁴ XI, 139, 156. Kirmmse, 169.

⁴⁸⁵ Crites 159, n. 8.

⁴⁸⁶ JP VI 6786 (*Pap. X⁶ B 145*) *n.d.*, 1851, Supplement in FSE 241.

⁴⁸⁷ Kierkegaard, “What it Means to Seek after God” 462.

God, to know that God was seeking him instead of the other way around. The concentration on the leap of faith is in clearing the resistances to being found as agency and dependency are inverted as one finds oneself as the object of divine quest rather than going out to find the divine elsewhere. Kierkegaard reminds the reader that “the wonder is in the changed man.”⁴⁸⁸ The analogy of the leap signals a spatial journey that one ascends through ‘stages,’ yet the wonder is in self transformation. One does not have to move elsewhere. To be faithful does not mean that one runs away from understanding. The Lutheran suggestion is so absurd that one is forced to jump with eyes open. Grace must be the solution or else Christianity must be a sort of madness or the greatest horror.

Christianity must be stated in extremes. The extreme despair is that all are imperfect and hence need external assistance. After this admittance, the task is to love thy neighbor as thyself. After the initial humbling of man to God, one is to return to the world renewed by God’s grace. To insist on the duty in ethical precepts would be too hard to bear, “for the terrible language of the Law is so terrifying because it seems as if it were left to man to hold fast to Christ by his own power, whereas in the language of love it is Christ that holds him fast.”⁴⁸⁹ Ideality is meant to humble one to seek for help, not to give occasion for self-torture over one’s imperfections. Hence ideality is to be repeated to remind the individual who may become too comfortable in being a Christian. The demand must be stated in chilling terms. If sin is reduced to a doctrine, one can treat it as a subject of detached study to be learned and accepted. Kierkegaard insists that Christianity “must and will display itself as madness or horror” in an age that has found a way out of paying respect to the divine. The horror of Christianity is to be presented to

⁴⁸⁸ Kierkegaard, “What it Means to Seek after God” 463.

⁴⁸⁹ TIC 71-2 The Moral.

the sophisticated; the cleverer, the more horrific religion has to be experienced. One can ask:

‘But if the Christian life is something so terrible and frightful, how in the world can a person get the idea of accepting it?’ Quite simply, and, if you want that too, quite in a Lutheran way: only the consciousness of sin can force one into this dreadful situation—the power on the other side being grace. And in that very instant the Christian life transforms itself and is sheer gentleness, grace, loving-kindness, and compassion. Looked at from any other point of view Christianity is and must be a sort of madness or the greatest horror.

The process of this reversal is “enigmatic” and cannot be convinced in logical steps. Kierkegaard engaged in what Law calls “existential dialectics”⁴⁹⁰ Rather than rely on the safety of an immanent grounding of a hidden God. Kierkegaard takes contradiction all the way. Law puts it thus:

In this dialectics discontinuity and contradiction are taken seriously. They are overcome not by immanent and continuous progression but by a passionate ‘leap.’ This leap, however, does not cancel out the contradiction but merely temporarily brings together the disparate elements of thought and being in the moment of passion.⁴⁹¹

Thought and being, idea and existence, theoretical and existential truth are kept separate, discontinuous, where being is left without a ground. Hence even though the imagery that Kierkegaard leaves one to fill in the void is misleading since what one fills in is not substance, but the joining of unmatched opposites—of fear and bliss.

Moreover, one is not closer to God but qualitatively different from him. The recognition of radical evil within oneself is a leap not into God, but away from the likeness of God. It is not finding God wholly within, but to separate God from the self. The connection is the recognition of sin. Ironically, the upbuilding discourses lets down at the climax when one becomes faithful not when she has grasped some higher truth, but

⁴⁹⁰ Law 211.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

when she has demoted her self righteousness to the point of always being cognizant of wrongdoing, fanaticism, envy, smugness. Despite the imagery of a leap of faith into a higher existence sphere, the leap is a leap back down to one's humanness; her status as an imperfect being capable of illusions of grandeur on the one hand and self immolation on the other. The leap into faith is not about having enough knowledge.

Even if one does not make the leap, the questioning of the (im)possibility of remaining in joy is itself part of the experience: "We ask with personal urgency how such repetition is indeed possible. To the degree we do, edification may already be under way."⁴⁹² The questioning is not a step before the leap since the questioning never ends. Edification is the act of repeatedly going back and forth in faithfulness and faithlessness.

Kierkegaard urges one to keep one's eyes open but to remain in joy. Humor as the intermediary step between the ethical and religious stages is never overcome since humor is required to sustain one overlooking the abyss of one's convictions. To be overly serious about the paradox of an unjustifiable faith is self torture. "If self-torture as viewed aesthetically is comic, as viewed religiously it is culpable. A religious healing of this ailment is not attained by laughter but by repentance, by the recognition that 'self-torture is a sin like other sins.'"⁴⁹³ In other words, taking despair to anything but extreme seriousness is an exercise in self-torture. To take oneself too seriously in the aesthetic sphere is laughable, but to agonize too much about antifoundationalist faith without remaining joyful is sinful. A doctrine of the good will mock the individual in her "impotency" to be perfect. But "consciousness of sin" does not mock but humbles the individual to respect the divine.

⁴⁹² Polk 173.

⁴⁹³ SLW 423.

Chapter 8: Suspension of Infinitude in *Works of Love*

Theory, doctrine, is there to hide the fact that practice is wanting.... Make the ethical as brief as possible—then attention will immediately focus decisively on whether one does it or does not do it, and if one does not, he is exposed in all this nakedness.⁴⁹⁴

If the other four works illicit intense emotions through infinitude, WL brings the reader back to the finite although no less difficult task to love one's neighbor as herself. If in other works, Kierkegaard's pseudonyms are preoccupied with the dialectic of faith, choice, reflection, and despair, here Kierkegaard is directly speaking of the duty to love. WL signals a collapse of the spatial metaphor used in FT. Kierkegaard's baseline assumption is choosing or not choosing the ethical—not putting the issue of whether one should or should not be ethical. Kierkegaard would not want his inheritors to spend time arguing how to argue the ethical since the choice comes not through persuasion. However, brief does not mean that the ethical is made an easy task. Rather it must be stated in its most difficult simplicity. For example, Kierkegaard states that neighbor is what philosophers call the other. To deal with a reflective age, an individual has to out reflect the age: "The person who is to be used in this way must possess what the age prides itself on, but to its own misfortune. But he must not misuse his sagacity to be of assistance into a new sagacity; with the aid of sagacity, he must affect a return to simplicity."⁴⁹⁵ To exhaust the understanding to its maximum capacity by tuning the task to its highest frequency makes the other tasks seem less difficult. What Johannes de Silentio sought to make difficult, Kierkegaard will seek to make simple again. To capture the imaginations of his readers is not hard. His talents at rhetorical distortion are well known, yet to break the spell of disenchantment requires another medicine all together;

⁴⁹⁴ JP 3870 XI² A 117 *n. d.*, 1854.

⁴⁹⁵ JP IX A 215 111-2, *Pap.* IX A 215 *n.d.* 1848.

one that would go under the radar of the most astute cynics of the cynical age, who will not be easily flattered into believing in false idols, who will not buy through cheapened forms of manipulation. If the modern age refuses to believe in fairy tales, then Kierkegaard will not play the deceiver but merely present the discontented world with the simple Christian message—a message comical even without exaggeration. Kierkegaard defies humor theorists by not dressing his humor with gaudy obviousness but with sincere earnestness. If one can imagine being in Abraham's place in the process of reading FT, then one might find the other tasks less difficult to perform by comparison. Kierkegaard illustrates that to make things difficult does the reader more good than to write to appease.⁴⁹⁶ Johannes Climacus remarks that: “the church is the very place where the difficulty must be presented, and it is better to go from the church discouraged and to find the task easier than one thought than to go from church overly confident and to become discouraged in the living room.”⁴⁹⁷ The goal of writing should be to lead a reader into performing the ethical duty not by false promises of cozy comfort since she will be quickly disillusioned by the first obstacles on her path.

⁴⁹⁶ Ricoeur attributes the distinction between theory and practice in the realm of ethics to Fichte who separated act (*Tathandlung*) and fact (*Tatsache*). For Ricoeur, “Fichte and Schelling are the most misunderstood thinkers of their period, and the most constantly plagiarized. Everything that is strong and valuable in modern philosophy, everything that did not reach us through Hegel and Kant, must be due to Fichte and Schelling; and I am convinced that closer attention to them would transform our understanding of Kierkegaard.” Kierkegaard put into words what Fichte problematized. Ricoeur also reminds the reader that German idealism is not about the ideal so much as “reality: fundamentally, idealism is the doctrine that the distinction between the ideal and the real is itself entirely ideal.” “Philosophy After Kierkegaard,” 17. Kierkegaard cannot be evaluated on his caricatures of those who came before, since he sought to exaggerate his difference from them in order to shock his readers from her own misreadings of these thinkers. Stewart notes that Kierkegaard's caricature of Hegel stressed his *Philosophy of Right*. Green illustrates that what can be construed as plagiarism of Kant in Kierkegaard can be Kierkegaard's way to speak to Danish Hegelians who thought they have moved beyond Kant. Without citing Kant, Kierkegaard may be able to lead his readers into the Kantian maze that they have rejected.

⁴⁹⁷ CUP Hong VII 405, p. 465.

Anticipating that this work may be taken to judge others rather than encourage self reflection, Kierkegaard reminds the reader to turn inward. Kierkegaard speaks to himself as well as the reader:

But the holy words of our text are not spoken to encourage us to get busy judging one another; they are rather spoken warningly to the individual, to you, my reader, and to me, to encourage each one not to let his love become unfruitful but to work so that it is capable of being recognised by its fruits, whether these are recognised by others or not.⁴⁹⁸

Kierkegaard makes himself equal to his reader: he is talking to himself as much as he is talking to the reader.

Kierkegaard admits from the outset that Christian love is not natural. It goes against the instinct to love one's neighbor. It does not make sense to reason, but actions based on sense leads to a downward spiral of cynical distrust. In exchange for sense, Kierkegaard provides meaningful freedom from fate. Whereas human love is based on chance, meeting the right person at the right time whether that person is a friend or a lover, Christian love transcends these spatial and temporal dimensions of finitude in order that one can love all that comes to one's path without having traveled at all.

But before one can love neighbors, one must love oneself rightly. There is no other regarding without the simultaneous self regarding gesture that holds the dialectical nature of this type of love in tension. Just as political movements cannot be a mere "sticking together" of the crowd as Kierkegaard explains in TA, love of one's neighbor cannot be a complete merger with the other. God becomes the placeholder between each and every. In this sense, Kierkegaard shares much with Levinas who claims that love between men is always a threesome with God in the middle.

⁴⁹⁸ WL 31.

Kierkegaard inverts the logic of finitude in which giving is only done in expectation of return. Money as the god of the finite world cannot compare to God's love which is infinitely conferred onto the individual to love one's neighbor. According to Kierkegaard, loving neighbors in itself is to love God. God is implied in the act of loving the neighbor beyond one's close circle of kin and friends.

The most difficult task is not loving one's neighbor who one can give having the hope that she is deserving of such love. The highest form of loving is to love one's enemies since one has to willfully forgive another's transgressions. Genuine forgiveness does not retain past wrongs and hence must be a willful blindness to past deeds. This would be most offensive to reason. Vengeance makes sense; forgiveness seems absurd in a world where justice only makes room for fairness.

In WL, Kierkegaard asks his readers to consider the novelty of the one commandment in the New Testament: "How seldom, perhaps, does a Christian earnestly and gratefully ponder with comprehension what his condition would have been if Christianity had not come into the world! What courage it takes to say for the first time, "You *shall* love..."⁴⁹⁹ WL is a treatise about the utter alienness of the command, "Love thyself as thy neighbor." For Kierkegaard this radical notion did not come from natural man. It goes against man's instinctual desires. It is not an easy command that flows from the natural pleasure seeking individual. Kierkegaard admits that he moves further and further away from finding salvation within man. While all have the capacity to love, to love in the spiritual sense is alien. It is alien because it requires one to love strangers. Moreover, to love enemies, one must forgive transgressions to believe in his underlying

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 40.

goodness, a much harder task than if one did not know the other as friend or foe:

“Blessed is the man of faith; he believes what he cannot see. Blessed is the lover; he believes away what he nevertheless can see!”⁵⁰⁰

Mistrust is to believe in nothing; love is to believe in everything and everyone even those who one knows are bad. To love your neighbor is to love him equally with every man without recourse to how much blood is shared.⁵⁰¹ To love neighbors is not to ignore differences between humanity, but to love despite knowing the difference. It is a willful not seeing: “Christianity is not blind, nor is it one-sided; with the quietness of the eternal it looks equably on all the distinctions of earthly life, but it does not contentiously take sides with any single one.”⁵⁰²

The dilemma of this alien form of love is resolved if one thinks that love is not a theory but a call to action. Kierkegaard is ultimately talking about love as a fulfillment of law which can never be positively stated. Understanding is contrasted with faith; law with love. One can understand the law—it can be made intelligible by reason. Love is not so easy to understand. One can give reasons to abide by the law, but as soon as one has to give reasons why a person loves, then this love is instrumentalized. Love is more than the sum of one’s reasons to love. Law can never spell out how to love in each unique situation. This is how love is a secret since it is beyond formal explication. No poet can approximate the infinity of the feeling: “With every provision the law demands something, and yet there is no limit to the provisions.”⁵⁰³

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 274.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 72.

⁵⁰² Ibid., 81.

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 112.

Kierkegaard deals with the agony of loving one's enemy. Meditative deconstruction stresses calmness, whereas Kierkegaard stresses the storm before the calmness as well as the eventual eternal calmness of winning the higher love from an enemy that has been vanquished. Loving one's enemy is more than forgiveness. It is to set the enemy free from feeling that he has been forgiven, and hence, owes the forgiver. The difficult task is to free this individual from "being humiliated," and "thinking dejectedly about forgiveness."⁵⁰⁴

If Levinas is critical of de Silentio in FT, then he shares many points with Kierkegaard in the need to regard the other. The Other in Levinas is personalized as neighbor by Kierkegaard: "Neighbor is what philosophers would call the other."⁵⁰⁵ However, Kierkegaard warns that too much focus on the other without a simultaneous love of self would be uneven. The call to sacrifice must be balanced with loving oneself. Sacrifice may be necessary at times, but Kierkegaard reminds the reader that gaudy sacrificial displays do not automatically make one into a religious individual. One can do too much sacrificing and not love oneself "in the right way." He does not want his readers to forget to love the self. Martyrdom would be sinful if one forgets self-love. Kierkegaard would not advocate that one commit to self sacrifice selflessly:

When the activist wastes his time and powers in the service of vain, inconsequential accomplishments, is it not because he has not rightly learned how to love himself? When the frivolous person throws himself, almost like a nonentity, into the folly of the moment, is it not because he does not understand how to love himself rightly? ... When a man in self-torment thinks to do God a service by martyring himself, what is his sin except not willing to love himself in the right way? ... but still let us never because of this forget that every man has in himself the most dangerous traitor of all.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 316.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 37.

This treachery, whether it consists in selfishly loving oneself or in selfishly not willing to love oneself in the right way—this treachery is certainly concealed.”⁵⁰⁶

Whereas in TA Kierkegaard wants to jumpstart enthusiasm for concerted action, in WL, he asks his readers to be more vigilant to her internal motivations to act selflessly.

If one sacrifices for the wrong reasons, then one commits sin.⁵⁰⁷ One can be committing acts of treacherous self-sabotage. Radical evil can be directed towards the self as feminist theologians remind theologians who stress giving up for the Other over the self.

If FT is about Abraham’s relationship to God, then WL is about man’s relationship to each other through love. Rather than dive into a never ending debate about the essence of God’s love, Kierkegaard reminds the reader that one is move on to what one can know in this world: “Yes in this little book we are continually concerned only with the works of love, and therefore not with God’s love but with human love.”⁵⁰⁸ The *vita activa* is more important than dwelling on the uncertainties of the *vita contemplativa*. One must not forget that self love is just as important as love of one’s neighbor. Otherwise this love will not be dialectically held in tension: “If anyone, therefore, refuses to learn from Christianity how to love himself in the right way, he cannot love his neighbour either.”⁵⁰⁹ Kierkegaard does not want to eliminate healthy narcissism. For

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 39-40.

⁵⁰⁷ A joke in the companion text to the Koran shows how sacrifice can be done for the wrong reasons: A man said to the Prophet: “Will God forgive me my sins if I shall sacrifice myself patiently and shall be killed in the way of God (i.e. by taking part in the jihad)?” The Prophet said: “Yes, with the exception of your debts. This Jibrīl has told me before.”⁵⁰⁷ Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1996), 30. Averroes (Abū al-Walīd Muhammad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Rushd), *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid wa-Nihāyat al-Muqtasid* (Averroes is short for “The beginning for him who interprets the sources independently and the end for him who wishes to limit himself.”) Tradition of the Prophet. Djibrīl (Arabic for archangel Gabriel) “According to the Islamic doctrine, God’s words were revealed to Mohammed through Djibrīl.” Peters 174, n9. Averroes wanted to write a legal handbook to objectively lay out who may and may not sacrifice for jihad. For example, those eligible include “adult free men” who are not sick. In his commentary, Peters writes that a person does not have to consult his creditor if the debtor leaves a payment before making the final exit.

⁵⁰⁸ WL 280.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 39.

Kierkegaard, the sin of treating oneself as a “nonentity” must not be forgotten. This corresponds to feminist theologians who warn against women who form identities as selfless martyrs. Kierkegaard complains that “No outcry goes up about [selflessness] such as otherwise goes up in cases of treachery and faithlessness.”⁵¹⁰ In EO, Kierkegaard is as concerned about the selfless confidant as he is of the seducer. If this dialectical tension of love between self and other is abandoned then love becomes self destructive idolatry: “What is daemonic about idolatry of this sort is the self-destruction of the person presumably fulfilling himself through a particular attachment to someone else.”⁵¹¹ Instead of love, the relation becomes that of dependent attachment.

The search for the perfect companion masks the deep seated despair of loneliness in a world without God: “Deep within every man there lies the dread of being alone in the world, forgotten by God, overlooked among the tremendous household of millions upon millions.”⁵¹² Kierkegaard thinks it a sin to numb oneself to pain: “one should not repress the words, any more than one should hide visible emotion when it is genuine...”⁵¹³ His goal is to soften that which has been made stoic by reason. Having feelings is not shameful:

I do not have the right to harden myself against the pains of life, for I *ought* to sorrow. So it is also with love. You have no right to harden yourself against this emotion, for you *ought* to love; You ought to preserve yourself to preserve the love.⁵¹⁴

Using the language of rights, Kierkegaard argues for opening the deep connections to feel sorrow and compassion for others. To those who insist on the ‘natural’ right of indulging

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 40.

⁵¹¹ Geoffrey Clive, *The Romantic Enlightenment: Ambiguity and Paradox in the Western Mind (1750-1920)* (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), 27.

⁵¹² JP 1847.

⁵¹³ WL 29.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 57.

in the pursuit of autonomy, he reminds his readers that caring for others is also a natural emotion that should not be frozen into cold contractual relations. It is better to express one's passion of sorrow, to give it expression than to pretend that one is coolly in control of one's emotions. How daring to suggest hardening of one's emotional valve as a violation of right. Kierkegaard will not justify why one should care, but insist that one cannot freely deny her emotional connection to others. Despair is there even in times of fortune; it is merely hidden and revealed in times of loss since loving with the eternal command is too dependent on the finite to be constant over the vicissitudes of the phenomenal world.

In asking the reader to perform the works of love, Kierkegaard still asks the reader to turn inward. Outward deeds do not necessarily match inward commitment for "one can perform works of love [charity] in an unloving, yes, even in a self-loving way."⁵¹⁵ As in his other works, Kierkegaard hopes that the reader will read his book not to judge others but to turn inward to investigate one's own life. He writes also for himself, not just to speak pedantically to the reader:

But the holy words of our text are not spoken to encourage us to get busy judging one another [it should turn inward]; they are rather spoken warningly to the individual, to you, my reader, and to me, to encourage each one not to let his love become unfruitful but to work so that it is capable of being recognised by its fruits, whether these are recognised by others or not.⁵¹⁶

One should turn inward not to find the hypocrite only in others but to turn the gaze to one's own deeds since one cannot judge as an outsider what internal motives move another. The secret will be for the individual to discover alone. Christian love is contrasted with preferential love in the sphere of the erotic. "Erotic love is not the eternal;

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 30.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 31.

it is the beautiful giddiness of infinity; its highest expression is the rashness of riddles.”⁵¹⁷
 It can cause one to be quickly intoxicated, but it will be prey to time.

For Kierkegaard this radical notion did not come from a man’s heart. He seems to be buying into the natural man theory of the social contract theorists to claim that the fact that love is commanded is out of this world, inhuman to first make this suggestion. This command would surprise those who have never heard of the teachings of Christianity but the fact that the notion goes against man’s instinctual desires. It is not an easy command that flows from the natural pleasure seeking individual. Man does not wake up and naturally want spirituality since this is necessarily taxing for someone who does not have the basic necessities.

Kierkegaard would rather have his readers be repulsed than indifferent to his reading of the Gospels since this is a consequence of willing to not believe rather than the apathy of not caring at all. Having passions in either way, at least one is related to faith. Kierkegaard can engage with those who feel, not those who stand unmoved: “If anyone thinks he has faith and yet is indifferent towards his possession, is neither cold or hot, he can be certain that he does not have faith.”⁵¹⁸ Cold atheism is better than lukewarm, noncommittal agnosticism, the constant state of deciding not to decide. While Kierkegaard wants the object of faith to rest between triumphalism and indifference, passion cannot be in between. Belief and apathy are mutually exclusive. One cannot be completely rational either as a Christian or an atheist since this eliminates the dialectical nature of faith. One cannot be a Christian sleepwalker to remove oneself from the pain of risk in being passionate.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 36.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 42.

The understanding of love is based on faith and not on purely external signs for one can be in love with these signs of love rather than the uncertain inward type of love that cannot be made completely transparent. Human love will try to make sure that one's love is not in vain. The exhibitionist would be more in love with preaching love than practicing it: "for love to one's neighbour is not to be sung about—it is to be fulfilled in reality."⁵¹⁹

People who cannot move on from their first love think that genuine love can happen only one time and the following times are always second best. They might say that "To love a second time is not really to love" since the highest passionate erotic love is with one and only one person. But to love another as just as good as the first love is needed to overcome the comparison. One will never be satisfied if one is constantly comparing subsequent loves with the highest. Even eroticism needs to transform the best from the highest. Man is not inclined to love eternally. They are inclined by nature to love carnally.

To go in search of the one and only is to subject oneself to the winds of chance. In WL, Kierkegaard reduces the spatial distance between neighbors:

And when a man will go out into the world, he can go a long way—and go in vain—he can wander the world around—and in vain—all in order to find the beloved or the friend. But Christianity never suffers a man to go in vain, not even a single step, for when you open the door which you shut in order to pray to God, the first person you meet as you go out is your neighbour whom you *shall* love.⁵²⁰

The quixotic warrior in search of fool's gold will be subjected to the winds of fate to find his beloved. The difficulty of Christian love does not require a spatial journey.

The goals are not as lofty as saving all, but the one beyond one's door. From a leap to a

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 60.

⁵²⁰ Ibid., 64.

mere opening one's door, no impossible feats of physics are necessary to open one's door to love a neighbor. The seriousness of religion to "find God" is revoked to a simple deed. The tasks become closer to home than one thinks. Rather than be controlled by fate to find someone to love, the Christian imperative gives the lover more control. The other is not some abstracted entity that one can fantasize being ethical to but the first person outside the door. One can still have passionate preferences in friendships and erotic loves, but the danger is that this love excludes the love of one's neighbor: "Love and friendship are the very height of self-feeling, the I intoxicated in the other-I. The more securely the two I's come together to become one I, the more this united I selfishly cuts itself off from all others." Without a middle term of God, earthly love can be too intense. For those who fear that one will be stretched too thin as one gives to strangers, Kierkegaard writes that "[t]herefore love of neighbour cannot make me one with the neighbour in a united self. Love to one's neighbour is love between two individual beings, each eternally qualified as spirit."⁵²¹ To love one's neighbor or partner as a united unit is not to be individuals. Individual neighbors become spirits but never merged into one: "In love and friendship preference is the middle term; in love to one's neighbour God is the middle term."⁵²²

Although Kierkegaard does not call for the elimination of erotic or preferential love for friends, he reminds the reader to not forget about the neighbor since "Death can deprive you of a friend, because in loving a friend you really cling to your friend, but in loving your neighbour you cling to God: therefore death cannot deprive you of your neighbour."⁵²³ God is found in loving your neighbor. There is always enough neighbor to

⁵²¹ Ibid., 68.

⁵²² Ibid., 70.

⁵²³ Ibid., 76.

go around. However, loving one's neighbor will not mean that you will be loved in return for "it is very thankless to love one's neighbour."⁵²⁴

Christianity contains obscure passages but it seeks to "imprisoning everyone in the task."⁵²⁵ One can debate endlessly about the meaning of Bible passages, "[b]ut Christian love, which is the fulfilling of the law, is whole and collected in its every expression, and yet it is sheer action. Consequently it is just as far from inaction as it is from busyness."⁵²⁶ Busy-ness feels like a chore as if you wish you were doing something else. But acting to love one's neighbor is an act that fulfills one wholeheartedly. It is enjoying the act in the moment without thinking of being rewarded since the deed is endless.

Kierkegaard does not give justifications why someone should care. They just shall. To live a life in the service of others is not simply to extend your love from your parents, lovers, or friends but to transform your relationship to these preferences so one loves through God and hence loves one's neighbors. To spend a lifetime only in love with those closest to you is to live a life of expanded selfishness.⁵²⁷ God is also the sum of all the neighbors but more. If God is taken out of the picture, then one will too easily merge with the other. Love does not always feel rosy or comforting. There is more connection to Levinas who says that the ethical is in caring in the face of the Other, however, Kierkegaard stresses the dialectical love of self that sustains a tension to other regarding love. One must give up human conceived happiness in return for the eternal peace. If it is

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 80.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 103.

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 105.

⁵²⁷ Ibid., 123.

too intense, this love ends up consuming the two perfect lovers. The danger is that one hides out with their lover and never comes out to love others.

Kierkegaard is dealing with the inward level of a non-exchange value sense of friendship and erotic love that is sustained through God. Human love burns up quickly without a space in between:

Purely human love is always about to fly after or fly away with the beloved's perfections. We say that a seducer steals a girl's heart, but one must say of all merely human love, even when it is most beautiful, that there is something thievish about it, that it even steals the beloved's perfection...⁵²⁸

Pure erotic love is thievery because it can never last. The fire will die down if love is based on the interesting. All beauty will fade with time and habit. Beauty becomes old.

The problem of distinguishing between merely external and inward religiosity is that they are externally indistinguishable: "They (spiritual and sensuous-psychic individuals) both use the same language."⁵²⁹ People who talk much of having spirit do not have the "presence of spirit" which "is the quiet, whispering secret of transferred language."⁵³⁰ People who preach about how good they are to others are betraying the inner quietness of spirit. To emphasize that one is righteous is to confess that one cannot keep it a quiet commitment. It shows spirit's absence rather than presence. The problem with identifying the religious individual is that the spiritual is invisible.

Rather than assume the worst in people, Christian love presupposes the other as capable of infinite good despite having done bad: "for to be loving means precisely to assume, to presuppose, that other men are loving."⁵³¹ To love is to hold out the possibility

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 169.

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 199.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 200.

⁵³¹ Ibid., 211.

that one can never know how evil or good a person can be. Kierkegaard inverts what has been the cynical view of human nature:

If someone thinks that a man should not believe even the best person, for it is still possible that he is a deceiver, then the opposite also holds true, that you can expect the good from even the lowest fellow, for it is still possible that his baseness is an illusion.⁵³²

Even though the possibility of sin is always present, one believes in the good: “Love is the very opposite of mistrust, and yet it is initiated in the same knowledge.”⁵³³ To believe is not to be naive, but to know that one can be possibly deceived. It is to know everything that a mistrustful person knows but to still believe. Even when one was deceived through experience, the possibility is confirmed. The lover wills to not see the bad to assume the good despite evidence to the contrary.

This means that one cannot judge no matter how much external evidence one has as to the strength or weakness of another’s character:

If one could with unqualified truthfulness judge every human being according to an established universal criterion, the God-relationship would essentially be done away with; then everything would turn outward, fulfilling itself paganly in political and social life; then to live would become much too easy, but also exceedingly empty; then exertion or the deepening of the self would be neither possible nor required, and yet precisely in the most difficult collision of infinite misunderstanding the God-relationship in a man develops.⁵³⁴

Politics is not enough to fill the emptiness of despondency. Political theorists who claim that people should care more than themselves but do not develop a need for spiritual, inward growth are advocating an empty, outward life that only counts external activities

⁵³² Ibid., 216.

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 217.

as what matters to the political realm. Private spiritual development is relegated as nonpolitical or private.

To believe in the worse is also based on faith. One can be easily deceived by vision. From one's perspective, it may seem that another is operating on bad principles, but without complete knowledge of the other, this judgment cannot stand.

A true lover gives even though that love is not returned. The true lover is still in love with all even if deceived by the one. To reduce love to an exchange economy is to cheapen love to a lower form:

Therefore everyone who has only deception's lower concept of love takes good care that he does not become deceived; he learns from the financier or from those who trade in commodities what means of security are used against deceivers.⁵³⁵

To receive security, love is turned into an investment. If proper inwardness is maintained through the third term, one is not harmed because she did not love only this one person.

In feeling passionate for someone she still keeps a higher sense of love for all as neighbors. One can rise above the deception:

In a certain sense the lover is quite aware if someone deceives him, but by not being willing to believe it or by believing all things he preserves himself in love and in this way is not deceived—therefore one sees here an example of the foolishness, the irrationality, of the bustling which thinks that knowing is superior to believing, for it is precisely believing all things which secures the lover, who in a certain sense knows that he is deceived, against being deceived.⁵³⁶

What is considered as buffoonery saves the individual from insecurity. To believe in love is better than money because one can be cheated out of money but not out of true love. Those who give into the Christian love will be able to love everyone while the aesthetically bounded lover will only love the one: "The erotic lover regards it as a misfortune to continue loving the deceiver; the true lover regards it as a victory if he

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 224.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 225.

might only succeed in continuing to love the deceiver.”⁵³⁷ The notion of reciprocity is a “contamination.”⁵³⁸ If love is out of reciprocity, then one will be only in love for the benefits one receives. Deception can be beneficial at times. This is the alien logics of giving and sacrifice. Money does not have this advantage: “To deceive in this way—is it not like calling it stealing to slip money into a person’s pocket?” To play the fool one becomes stronger since she does not abide by conventional standards. But “since deception stretches unconditionally as far as the truth, one man can really not judge the other.”⁵³⁹ As the humorist plays the fool; Christianity provides possibility.

Kierkegaard as the teacher works behind the scenes so the beneficiary does not know how much someone vouches for the individual. Helping someone means not necessarily letting them know they have been helped. Direct communication creates a hierarchical relationship when the receiver is passively dependent on the giver for help. The midwife does not seek to make herself institutionalized. The helper must disappear in “disinterestedness” lest the person helped becomes too dependent on the midwife. Hence a person who seems to be detached from caring about the helped may help more than one who in exhibiting one’s care which ends up making the helped dependently attached:

Consequently the greatest benefaction cannot be accomplished in any way whereby the recipient gets to know that he is indebted. For if he gets to know this, it is excluded, precisely by this, from being the greatest benefaction. ...he has made him free, independent, unto himself, until his own, and simply by hiding his help helped him to stand alone.⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 228.

⁵³⁸ Ibid., 227.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 228.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 256.

To love one's enemies, for example, may be construed as absurd by the understanding: "It is a divine kind of madness (as in the ancient times) lovingly not to see the evil which takes place right in front of me." While the Enlightenment stressed clarity of vision, Kierkegaard will call for darkness. Whereas the deliberative age calls for more speech, he will preach silence: "Certainly it is desirable that men should again learn to be silent."⁵⁴¹ In silence, one cannot pass judgment on others: "Let the judges appointed by the state, let the detectives labour to discover guilt and crime; the rest of us are enjoined to be neither judges nor detectives—God has rather called us to love..."⁵⁴²

To stand in judgment is to think that one can have absolute knowledge of the other as either good or evil. There is so much more to lose if one expects the good. One can protect herself by expecting the worst in people but this will cause passionate relations to go slack.

The lover who loves the imperfect one just as much as the ideal will believe away the imperfections: To forgive is to see and then wish away. There is a neat inversion here. When everyone is concerned with believing in magical things as real without seeing, then Kierkegaard turns the tables and makes forgiveness into believing a thing that one can see exist as not seen, so that one does not judge an individual even if one sees and witnesses all the bad that she has done. It is a willful refusal to expect the worst even if one has ample reason.

Kierkegaard inverts the saying to forgive but not to forget. Kierkegaard says forgiveness is willful forgetting. Kierkegaard asks the reader to identify with the sinner as one who needs to be forgiven for her sins (as a deceiver): "Yet, if you yourself have ever

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 269.

⁵⁴² Ibid., 272.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., 274.

needed forgiveness, then you know what forgiveness accomplishes—why then do you speak so naïvely and so unlovingly about forgiveness?”⁵⁴⁴ If reason relies on vision to light the unknown, then Kierkegaard asks his readers to turn off one’s vision. He reminds the reader that vision cannot reveal all that comprises the individual in his infinite inwardness. To see is overrated since one cannot see to the very depths of an individual’s infinite capabilities. The disjunction is “that which is seen nevertheless by being forgiven is not seen.”⁵⁴⁵ One cannot forget what one was not aware of in the first place. It is a willful not seeing. Reason would protest that this is not true. Love is loving more than what is true.

Not seeing is not taking away knowledge. It is not believing that knowledge is all there is to a man:

knowledge places everything in the category of possibility.... at its utmost it means precisely to place contrasting possibilities in equilibrium....knowledge is not mistrust, for knowledge is infinitely detached....The mistrustful person and the lover have knowledge in common.⁵⁴⁶

Sin and forgiveness are necessary components of sacrifice, or non-violence because if one cannot forgive, then one will always try to seek punishment. Forgiveness of sin is crucial since sin comes out of sin. Continuing the lines of vengeance is not justice but a continuation of sin. It is to take the blow and forgive it through love. If one’s concept of justice is to make each pay for one’s sins, then the cycle of violence will never end. To love may not reap financial rewards, but it will be the well spring for meaningful action that does not depend on the money relation. Love counters the economic logic of capital that asks for what is given in return.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 274.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 218.

Charity will not need to be forced out of people if giving is not a chore to be done drudgingly. When one's mercy is boundless, giving will follow at its heels. When one has softened her heart to feeling compassion for others, giving will not have to be stressed. When one lets go of the need to guard against the pain of betrayal, one frees herself from distrust. Good works will come forth when one has transvalued justice to be mercy. Mercy does not look down on the one who is forgiven for mercy allows the sinner to stand on her own again without having owed the forgiver his forgiveness. One can be seduced into believing in the significance of our lives. It *will* come is prophetic calling. Being merciful is better than giving money: "*To be able to be merciful is a far greater perfection than to have money and consequently to be able to give.*"⁵⁴⁷ The cash relation that reduces all to abstract numerical value has no place in the world of mercy where giving is its own reward. The politics of mercy may seem weak since retaliation is neutralized in forgiveness. It requires one to see the bad as just as good as the good. It offends natural instincts of self preservation to protect against the probability of pain.

Echoing Glaucon in Plato's *Republic*, Kierkegaard writes that ethics can be done in an egoistical way if one's aim is to be better than everyone else. Charity should not be reduced to a cash relation. Preaching should be about forgiveness—mercy. Grace should not only be given to the deserving since one does not know for sure that one is worthy of desert or not. The material world puts faith in anything that is guaranteed to pay. All efforts are reduced to what will procure the most material gains. To be earnest in making money will mean that the infinite worth of the individual no longer holds.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 294.

⁵⁴⁹ Weil, *Waiting for God*

One must soften one's heart to allow forgiveness to take over. It may be considered a sign of weakness but in turning the tables on fate, one can be in control of how one handles tragedy. Rather than be pulled by the forces of vengeance, one can rise above the fray in loving one's enemy, in finding strength in what is considered as weak.

Conclusion

According to Kierkegaard, if one lets the dreadfully secular world of the serious determine what is significant in life, then man would have given up on exercising the full potential of his radical freedom. To challenge the logic of seriousness, Kierkegaard's method is more than conceptually antifoundationalist. I argue that antifoundationalism is effective when it is felt as a thorn on the sides of the intellect. Through exaggerated seriousness, Kierkegaard makes Christianity unfamiliarly unpleasant so the pleasure seeking age cannot appropriate pain as pleasure to dull the senses. To be comfortable with antifoundationalism is to allow foundationalism to take revenge on thought. The new superstition is the unconditional reliance on logic. To know what antifoundationalism *is* is to remain within the logic of foundationalism which seeks to *know* with absolute clarity. Paradoxically, to be certain about one's grasp of what antifoundationalism is is to violate an antifoundationalist sensibility. To use reasonable language to explain the limits of reason is still propping up rationality as highest. How does one speak of the outside of language while using language? The language of a contingent sensibility cannot simply define itself against its opposite. A call to be open to radical contingency necessitates a particular style of writing that dislodges the tendency to settle meaning into essentialist terms. Kierkegaard is useful in that he seeks ways to trick reason in its own game. Kierkegaard makes reason confront the absurdity of anything that goes beyond its limits, to exhaust its attempts to generalize or make into common sense, to give up its surety of itself. Reviving the comic roots of ethics allows one to suspend ontology to act. Kierkegaard provides a way of overcoming paralysis of reflection by consistently being inconsistent.

To say that one is not antifoundationalist enough is to take the category too seriously. One can espouse foundational statements with an antifoundationalist sensibility. It is the term antifoundationalist that straightjackets one from stating anything that is not explicitly anti foundational. Yet, anti does not have to be understood as against just as Anti-Climacus does not have to be understood as against Climacus. One scholar writes that Anti-Climacus is written as a contrast but interconnected relationship with Climacus. The former is a professor speculating about the disease; the latter is the doctor diagnosing a disease. Antifoundationalism does not have to be always against foundationalism, it can use foundationalism for antifoundationalism's sake. Just as Climacus as humorist can be used for the seriousness of Anti-Climacus as spiritual doctor.

Kierkegaard exaggerates the foundations to the extreme. Christian ethics is humorous in that it goes against instinct. The notion that God will save us is so farfetched that to insist on its literality is humorous. His humor is the straight man, to take something ridiculous to the utmost seriousness. He takes foundationalism, the horror, as seriously absurd. Antifoundationalism may be more difficult to put into words since it involves a willingness to let go of an absolute interpretation of a concept which tends to be frozen in language. Antifoundationalism is not a new theory but a recovering what has been covered over by the illusion of absolutes.

There is no way to get around essentialist grounding as an inherent feature of language and mental mapping, the longing for purity, the longing to end the anxiety of uncertainty. There is no newer, better theory that would eliminate the longing for fixity. Antifoundationalism cannot be easily communicated since it entails deconstructing the

very roots of language and commonsensical conceptual mapping that tends to still the flux rather than keep it in play.

However, letting go is too threatening since it implies that one drops the term all together. I find Kierkegaard's suspension method a more effective technique that does not generate as much resistance. Suspending a term is not the same as letting it go completely since its suspension keeps the term in check against deification. The degree of reification is the degree to which the term cannot be suspended. Radical theology has a tradition of letting go of God to prevent a blind superstitious merger with the divine. Any central category unwilling to be suspended risks foundationalizing itself.

No matter whether one puts anti- or post- in front of a term, one cannot get around the reflexive tendency to reify. Stating the needs for an antifoundationalist postmodern ethic can easily be foundationalized as Zwart argues that postmodernism may be more rigid, hence foundational, than its name at first implies. Among the ways that theology has dealt with letting go of its central category: apophatic mysticism and humor.

Kierkegaard is usually seen as a religious thinker, someone who makes one leap into religiousness. Yet I argue that all his efforts are to distract the intellect long enough for ethical action to come forth. He presents the unknown as a set up so his readers will be frustrated enough to bounce back into the world of the ethical. He mocks the teleological progression from one stage to another only to shock his readers back to performing the ethical tasks closer to one's capacity. From the perspective of theology, he makes one believe in the possibility of god. From the perspective of politics, he makes one refreshed enough to join the fray of working to alleviate the suffering of oneself and fellow man. The two do not have to be antagonistic. One works in tension with the other,

literally, entertaining the space for the divine, given the inadequacies of a spatial metaphor for the infinite is what can spring the individual to recoil her energy resources to act ethically in the world. One does not need religion if one chooses the easy road, one can follow one's instincts to live in comfort. By definition, living in comfort is not the religiousness that Kierkegaard advocates. Kierkegaard collapses the spatial metaphor, the distance metaphor in preparing to take a journey, when he writes that one merely needs to pray and open the door to find one's neighbor, or find that god was not to be found, but waiting for her all along. The leap is not a physical leaping into another space, but a self transformation that requires no physical traveling. Spiritual awakening does not require leaving a position or stage of existence. The use of spatial metaphors in speaking about the divine draws one nearer to the text, as one reads slower and slower to literally achieve greater closure with the text, but this spatiality is revoked in the end as Kierkegaard writes that one should not be too imprisoned with her work. He revokes the distance or the need to travel by having the reader return to herself. After identifying with pseudonyms and veronyms, one should return to find herself changed through the mock journey.

The secular must entertain the spiritual. However, to give room for the divine does not mean that one must take reason up unconditionally. Rather, one must rise to the challenge to maintain a space that is wholly groundless and uncertain by revoking everything one thinks one can know about the unknown without creating a false unity with a new metaphysics. Weil is useful here when she says that "Religion in so far as it is a source of consolation is a hindrance to true faith: in this sense atheism is purification. I have to be atheistic with the part of myself which is not made for God."⁵⁴⁹ The part which

is not made for God is the secularized world of politics. Religiosity and atheism compliment one another. For Weil, atheism can purify false conceptions of God. *Fear and Trembling* purifies complacent religiosity. To take in the possibility of the divine is also to take in the possibility of its nonexistence. Just as to actively live in the world is to take up the responsibility that one's actions may be both good and evil simultaneously depending on the differential effects one has on others. EO is not a text about choosing between good or evil, but "good *and* evil/or excludes them....For the aesthetical is not the evil but neutrality."⁵⁵⁰ In the world of action, one cannot know for sure beforehand that his actions will lead to good.

Religion is needed to keep the secular secular. Rather than fusing politics with religion, Kierkegaard wants to maintain their distance so that superstition will be kept at bay from both politics and religion. Giving space to the divine is pertinent for politics in an age when Order, Security, Race, and/or Nation become deified. It is also pertinent for moral philosophy so that the Other does not become deified by sacrificing oneself unlovingly. He resists any mergers that take away the space of inwardness to be preserved in any relationship whether personal, political, secular, or divine. Merging with any entity would lead to the loss of self that requires maintenance of an infinite distance between the one and the other.

It is also pertinent for politics that needs the divine to prevent the deification of any ground or concept. When the divine is stated, one needs to be careful not to take it too seriously, but seriously enough so the secular does not become deified. Political concepts will be deified if superstition is banished since it would not be kept in check.

⁵⁵⁰ EO II: Equilibrium Between the Aesthetical and the Ethical in the Composition of Personality, Søren Kierkegaard, *A Kierkegaard Anthology* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1946), 107 .

Hence, the form in which the divine is represented has direct political ramifications. In a more impassioned reiteration of Kant's opening lines in the 2nd *Critique*, Weil notes that the divine will take revenge on all of thought if space is not given to the superstitious. Even if Justice is to stand in place for the ideal, there is the tendency of the term to be reified given the tendency of language to reify its subject. Therefore, even if the divine is not named, other terms become reified e.g. Justice, Reason, or Ethics. The effort to avoid metaphysics comes back to haunt in the guise of an abstract language.

There is a tendency to think that the discussion of theology in political philosophy is something auxiliary to give support to social movements. Yet I argue that mysticism has already made its revenge on thought since the Enlightenment. Challenging a superstitious politics means that a skeptical theology is needed to keep the two separate but responsible to each other. Entertaining the possibility of superstitions may be a necessary fiction as long as one remains between the subjunctive and indicative moods. The disenchanting age still needs myths.⁵⁵¹ Without a space of the divine, the State will be deified. Kierkegaard writes that the present age needs a gadfly:

he may well be the 'gadfly' which the Establishment needed in order not to fall asleep, or to fall into self-deification, which is worse. Every person must live in fear and trembling, and therefore no Established Order may be free of fear and trembling....And fear and trembling means that there is a God, which no individual and no Established Order dare forget for an instant.⁵⁵²

To close the distance between God and man is to dissolve the distance between finitude and infinitude that deifies Man into arrogance. Those who do not give proper distance of self to the divine will succumb to self righteousness. The lack of humility before the

⁵⁵¹ See Karl Jaspers.

⁵⁵² PJ ed. P.A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr, and E. Torsting, XII, 84. Quoted in Bruce Kirmmse, "Call Me Ishmael- Call Everybody Ishmael: Kierkegaard on the Coming-of-Age Crisis of Modern Times," in *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community : Religion, Ethics, and Politics in Kierkegaard*, ed. George B. Connell and C. Stephen Evans (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1992), 178.

Unknown is a false belief in one's perfectibility. If man tends to deify, better to control this tendency in the proper sphere of a fear inducing unknown, reminding the individual to be careful of when this tendency seeps into institutions. God, as unknown serves as a reminder to be consciously vigilant of the vengeance of superstition.

The proper device to look at the self critically and achieve a proper distant vis-à-vis the divine is humor. According to Climacus, humor prevents one from feeling too self-righteous that she can close the gap between man and God. It allows one to accept one as faulty without despair. Kierkegaard takes this further. If Climacus allows despair to pass too quickly, Anti-Climacus magnifies the despair to the highest pitch. Kierkegaard gained inspiration from non-verbal arts such as music and dance.

Allowing faith to enter is bracketing limits to the power of the state. If one is bound to absolutize, better it be an unknown God that humbles, than the State or Movement which inflates self sufficiency to divinized status. One cannot get rid of absolutes all together. Foundationalism is a form of absolutism. Critical distance in faith is necessary to anti-foundationalize the political. Rather than a meditative complacency about radical otherness, the experience of reading Kierkegaard is not merely for shock value either. It stumps reason against the force of the divine. A skeptical theology can keep one from deifying political terms like Justice, Democracy, Order, and Security. It satisfies that part that needs myths and superstitions so one does not reify the political or the divine.

While Kierkegaard is considered a religious author, I argue that his writings offer political theory a way to deal with the lack of enthusiasm in the political sphere. Through his comic spirituality, he ignites enthusiasm in ethical commitments that translates into

responsible citizenship in the public realm and meaningful relationships in the private. In an age of the twin perils of thick and thin associations of fundamental devotion and cynical apathy, Kierkegaard's integration of the comic and tragic, religious and secular, humor and seriousness can allow for connections among people across faith and non-faith, identity and non-identity based forms of political participation in pluralistic societies. By opening his brand of Christianity to deep negative wounding to skeptical concerns, Kierkegaard can help to maintain a distance but still maintain a relation between religion and politics. Through divine humor, a serious consideration of how to behave and organize among others of different ontological commitments can take place without needing absolute consensus. This humor is not the comfortable, flippant humor of cynical souls, but the comic-tragic resonance that maintains the dialectical tension of faith. Kierkegaard shows a way to act with others while maintaining an inwardness that sustains disagreement with oneself, what Caputo calls shifting in moments of religiousness and atheism. Kierkegaard will not give his readers certainty that one stands on the side of right for even Kierkegaard is not sure of his efforts: "I am not at all so positive that my suffering is involved in an eternal salvation."⁵⁵³ For Kierkegaard, to be a humorous Christian is to speak with this grammar of weak ambivalence of ifs and maybes that causes one to act based somewhere between the subjunctive and the indicative, between true and false. One must think in between but live decisively.

To be humorous is to remain an enigma to the world. To come out of hiding may be more a vain gesture that cancels one's intentions to be earnest for earnestness' sake. The way to present the ethical is somewhere between pure earnestness and jest. Kierkegaard's humor is between silliness and seriousness when the reader is never

⁵⁵³ JP 3868 X¹ A 583 *n.d.* 1854.

absolutely sure that the author means what he says he means to say. Too much levity detaches the individual from duty while too much heavy-handedness makes one stuck in the ethical dilemma. Neither awakens the individual to act for the two extremes give reason for the individual to flee from duty or avoid being the sacrificial hero. In an age of reflection, the senses are dulled to the extent that conventional techniques in theater or writing do not hold one to examine or change her life. While Strawser writes that “[i]t is exceedingly difficult to live in uncertainty and without coming to any closure as a human being,”⁵⁵⁴ Taciturnus would warn that this age has anesthetized itself to be all too comfortable with indecision. One takes fence sitting as an activity in itself. One becomes subject to the winds of fate rather than one’s will. Living under the rule of accidents takes agency away. One can passionately decide to end the vicissitudes of the winds of change or passively let the circumstances dictate the end. The passionless age is too comfortable with letting fate decide one’s course in life.

To stress the social and political dimensions of Kierkegaard’s thought means also to keep superstition apart from politics *and* religion. Kierkegaard would argue that sternness would have made Abraham not hear God’s second call; rigidity cuts the lines of communication with the divine and makes one an irresponsive Christian. The more iron-proof or sure one is of his or her plan of action as the will of God without doubt, the more likely he or she stands to err in God’s name. The more one grapples with the source of divine inspiration, the more doubt, the more pause, the more willingness to point the finger of culpability to himself or herself, the more one demands one’s own sacrifice rather than impose it on others, the closer he or she is to Abraham by example. The less

⁵⁵⁴ Michael Strawser, *Both/And: Reading Kierkegaard from Irony to Edification* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 124.

one sleeps, the more chances he or she will be open to hearing God's will more than once or twice.

This begs the question: Where does one draw the line between blind superstition and mature belief? Kierkegaard answers that *somehow* the individual in inward singularity will find a way to come up with an answer. This somehow cannot be theorized but must be practiced. Somehow cannot be theorized or mandated from above or through texts; the reader must turn inward to forever maintain a distance from external authorities. The horror is that from the outside this individual is indistinguishable from the madman. No words can give comfort to this realization. With Caputo, I hope the reader would come in from the cold once in a while to be edified through healing words of redemption.

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