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Concluding Unscientific
Postscript

Edited by
Alastair Hannay

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KIERKEGAARD
Concluding Unscientific Postscript

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SØREN KIERKEGAARD

*Concluding Unscientific Postscript
to
the Philosophical Crumbs*

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY

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Introduction

What does the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* conclude?

Those with an acute ear for language will pause at the title *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Don't postscripts conclude anyway? Besides, strictly speaking, a postscript is not really a conclusion at all, but an addition, perhaps an afterthought, or a supplement, even an appended note commenting on what the reader has read previously.

Some clarification is needed to assure the reader that here as elsewhere Kierkegaard has chosen his language with care. Perhaps this 'postscript' was meant to be concluding in more ways than one, or even just in one way but not the one that first comes to mind. Also, and as one might guess from the work's very length, it is no mere afterthought, not just something the author forgot to include in the slim book to which this forms a gigantic sequel.

In his introduction to the *Postscript* Johannes Climacus, the pseudonymous author (of both books, naturally), describes it as the continuation of a project begun in that earlier work but left incomplete. The earlier work's Danish title is *Philosophiske Smuler*, which is traditionally translated 'Philosophical Fragments' but is rendered here more accurately as 'Philosophical Crumbs'. In the conclusion of that book Johannes Climacus had made mention of what a continuation might contain, though (in a style of studied nonchalance to be found in both books) not committing himself to producing any such thing ('if I ever write such a section'). He says there that the sequel to the abstractly conceived *Crumbs* would 'give

the matter its real name and clothe the problem in its historical costume'.¹ This, not so surprisingly to the reader of the *Crumbs*, turns out to be Christianity. But while the *Crumbs* had concerned itself with what one would have to *think* if, as it hypothesizes, the conditions for locating essential truth were not a human birthright, here, more directly, the task discussed is how to participate in that truth, or to clothe the task in its historical costume, a matter of what it means to become a Christian.

In writing the *Postscript* Kierkegaard was not merely bringing the earlier work's unfinished task to bear on this more practical task; he was also bringing a far larger project to its close. This was something that Kierkegaard had begun in Berlin, in 1841, with the drafting of material forming part of *Either/Or*, the first in a series of pseudonymous works the most recent of which, *Stages on Life's Way*, had appeared just eight months before publication of the *Postscript* early in 1846. The latter was to be 'concluding', therefore, in the sense of bringing four and a half years of a creative and exhausting pseudonymous authorship to its conclusion. It must be borne in mind that Kierkegaard had also published a series of discourses simultaneously in his own name, the most recent being *Three Discourses for Imagined Occasions*. This was published in April 1845. After revisiting Berlin briefly in May, Kierkegaard set to work on this 'sequel', delivering the manuscript to the printer in mid-December. The *Postscript* appeared two months later, on 17 February 1846.

But Kierkegaard did not stop there. In this connection two factors are to be noted. One was the beckoning of the Kierkegaard family's nemesis. In May 1846 Kierkegaard would be thirty-three years old, the age, he told a friend, at which he was firmly convinced that he was going to die.² It was at this age that two of his sisters had died, and Kierkegaard and his elder brother, Peter Christian, were now the sole survivors of a family of seven children, with both parents dead. One might be little surprised, then, to gain an impression from the text, especially towards the end, not least from the many footnotes that bear the mark of being inserted in reworkings of the manuscript, of an attempt to cram into one envelope as

¹ References to Kierkegaard's published writings in this introduction and in the translation are to the latest Danish edition, *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* (abbrev. *SKS*) (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag), 1997-. Here *SKS* 4, p. 305.

² See Bruce H. Kirmmse (ed.), *Encounters with Kierkegaard: A Life as Seen by His Contemporaries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 240 and 336.

many as possible of the ideas that had come to him in those four and a half years.

That metaphor might be extended, or adjusted slightly. Not only does the *Postscript* conclude those rich years by presenting the drift of the authorship between two covers, it also in a sense wraps them up. An appendix to one of the chapters has Climacus rehearse the products of the other pseudonyms, as well as his own, as well as commenting on the signed works. We perhaps begin to feel that Climacus occupies a position superior to that of his colleagues – at least one that affords him a certain detachment enabling him to provide a kind of itinerary into which the paths of the other pseudonyms are drawn in a single direction.

The other factor in Kierkegaard's continued activity is that it was during the last phases of preparing the *Postscript* for publication that the notorious *Corsair* affair broke out,³ in which that satiric journal's lampooning of Kierkegaard's person drove him into uncustomary seclusion. In his journal from that time and later, Kierkegaard admits to having contemplated retirement as a country pastor. He even took some tentative steps in that direction. He had, after all, the necessary qualifications; in February the previous year, perhaps with this 'conclusion' in mind, he had held the trial sermon required for ordination. However, his plans for self-rustication were in the event short lived. Finding himself still alive at thirty-four, and unwilling to be seen to have been forced into retirement against his will, Kierkegaard returned to his desk to produce several more discourses, several important pamphlets, and the two final pseudonymous works, *The Sickness unto Death* and *Practice in Christianity*.

These facts, however, do not in themselves disqualify the *Postscript's* title to be concluding. Although there may be some point to regarding the two later pseudonymous works (by Anti-Climacus) as forming a postscript to the earlier pseudonymous series (as a whole), there is no obvious way in which these can be seen to provide the latter with a more embracing wrapping, from an even more detached position. On the contrary, Anti-Climacus appears less detached. While Climacus speaks to us from outside and tells us what is needed if we should enter, Anti-Climacus is already halfway through the door and speaking to us, as it were, over his shoulder.

³ Perhaps reflected on pp. 350–1.

The *Postscript* as a new approach to the problem of the *Crumbs*

Philosophical Crumbs had taken up the question of how an eternal happiness could be based on something that was simply historical. The question was one that had been put by the German dramatist and critic Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, who had formulated it in terms borrowed from Leibniz. That Lessing is the source of the formulation is first mentioned in the *Postscript*. Not noted as a systematic thinker, and keeping his many cards close to his chest, Lessing had escaped classification by the encyclopaedists (Kierkegaard's use of the symbol '§' to denote "entry" or "paragraph" is retained in this translation), so that Climacus is able to present him as the exemplar he needs of the kind of subjective thinker whose requirements become the topic of the rest of the *Postscript*. With Lessing as reference, and providing the concept of subjective thinker with an appropriately elusive historical costume, the *Postscript* opens the way to a new way of thinking. It is an existential way that plucks traditional philosophical problems from their intellectual reserve and places them in daily life. In that context questions asked in a philosophical spirit come from a core experience of what it is, plainly and simply, to be a human being – but not only that: of what it is to be the particular human being that one is.

Philosophical Crumbs had in fact already mentioned Christianity briefly as 'the only historical phenomenon' to fit its hypothesis and its thought-experiment. Climacus now says in the introduction, a little disconcertingly, that in order to give the problem its historical costume all you need to do is utter the word 'Christianity'. Since he has already done that, one wonders why this postscript has to be so lengthy. The answer is something like this: if you are to approach truth on the assumption that it lies in Christianity, then certain conditions are to be met. These conditions work upon each other and form a tension that in the end only a hard and personal and purely individual decision can resolve. In other words they form a 'dialectic', and among his other capacities it is in his role as a seasoned dialectician that Climacus pilots the reader towards an understanding of what is required.

This suggests clearly enough that what we are presented with is not just an expansion of what had been presented so concisely in the *Crumbs* as its problem. Nor, it seems, is the *Postscript* in any literal sense a sequel.

Indeed Climacus says that any promise he had made of a sequel to the *Crumbs* is already fulfilled in the comparatively short Part One of the *Postscript*. That deals with those who assume that the correct approach to Christianity is to establish objectively some genuinely Christian state of affairs. Several such approaches are reviewed and dismissed, all of them familiar to Kierkegaard's Danish readers. One such approach is based on the assumption that the truth of Christianity is to be found in the living word of repeated Christian worship; another is that of those who rely on the ability of Hegelian philosophy to assimilate Christianity into a process of rational thought, faith thereby giving way to understanding (at least for those able to follow the reasoning).

It is with a radically different way of grasping Christian truth that the bulk of the *Postscript* is concerned. It could well be the case that what this required, together with its implications and the space needed to lay them bare, was not clear to Kierkegaard on completing the *Crumbs*. Although he says, here in the introduction, that his Part Two is 'a renewed attempt on the same lines' (as the *Crumbs*), he also says that it is a 'new approach to the problem'.

Outline of the 'argument' (Part Two)

The nature of the new approach to the problem of the *Crumbs* has already been hinted at. Roughly speaking, it is a matter of seeing what is needed to appreciate the problem itself. However, to the reader glancing at the list of contents for the first time the path to enlightenment on this matter will seem a tangled one. The serried layers of parts, chapters, sections, subsections and minor headings suggest a labyrinth in which it will be all too easy to lose one's way, or *the* way if only there is one. However, the visual density here is due in part to a convention (still prevalent in Scandinavia) that dispenses with indexes and gives as much information as possible at the start. The structure of Part Two of the *Postscript* (and that is where we must look for the new approach) is in fact fairly simple. It has two main sections, the first setting up the question of how to relate to Christianity once the task of doing so is conceived as a subjective one, and the second, vastly longer, devoted to an account of what must be true of 'subjectivity' for the task to be properly presented and addressed.

Part Two has five chapters. The first of these guides the reader in the direction of what it means, in ethical terms, to 'become subjective', and it

ends with some examples of questions raised in that direction. In the second chapter we find the famous assertion that truth is subjectivity, but with the clarification that this conception of truth is one that can be apprehended only by someone who has become subjective and can thus see what matters most from that point of view. It is to this chapter that Climacus adds the appendix, mentioned earlier, in which he incorporates the previous pseudonymous authorship seamlessly (after some critical editing) into his own current project. The third chapter comes closest to stating some sort of fundamental ontology. It does so, among other things, by making the inversions of the traditional Aristotelian terms 'possibility' and 'actuality' required once subjectivity is the preferred point of view. The chapter ends by giving a (comparatively) brief résumé of the form and style of a thinker who performs such inversions.

By far the longest, longer even than the *Philosophical Crumbs*, to which it is only a small part of a postscript, the fourth chapter is itself divided into two main sections. Again, one of these sets up a question before going to work on it, in this case in pursuit of what is required of subjectivity if it is to address the issue of an eternal happiness. In the first of the two main sections Climacus returns to the question of the *Crumbs*, explaining its point of departure and positioning it in relation to the Hegelian 'mediation' whereby Christianity is dissipated in thought and 'becoming' vanishes from view. There then follows, in the second main section, what may be identified as the essence of the new approach. It consists of illustrated accounts of the two vital dimensions which reciprocally motivate the seeking of an eternal happiness (pathos) and keep the search on track (dialectic). The subsection on pathos describes three progressively emphatic expressions of a person's relationship to the absolute. The subsection on dialectic is briefer but has an appendix that rehearses the three-stage (aesthetic/ethical/religious A and B) account of spiritual progression (developed in previous works by other pseudonyms) in the light of what has been said in the subsection on pathos.

There follows a relatively brief concluding fifth chapter, which marks a distinction between what, with regard to Christianity, matters for the simpler-minded person *vis-à-vis* what matters for the intellectual. Included here is some evidently autobiographical material on Kierkegaard's part relating to the damage that imposing a strict form of Christianity can cause a child. There follows an appendix to the book in which Climacus signs off and (it may seem surprisingly) takes his work with him. After

which, in pages left unnumbered in the original, Kierkegaard comes forward himself and assumes responsibility for all the pseudonyms, though stressing that he is not responsible for what they have written.

Humour in the *Postscript*

Except perhaps for this final talk of taking it all back, it all sounds sufficiently serious. Yet not only does our author not always wear his earnest on his sleeve, he makes a point of calling himself a humorist. What can that mean? A great deal of discussion has been generated on this score. Some commentators have exploited this self-description in order to draw the sting from some of the less palatable characterizations that Climacus applies to Christianity, especially his use of terms like ‘the absurd’ and ‘the paradox’, and not least the much disputed definition of truth as subjectivity. Louis Mackey famously suggested that in defining ‘truth as subjectivity’ Climacus was ‘writing a satire on definition’, adding that, if it is read as a philosophical treatise, the *Postscript* ‘is nonsense’.⁴ The ‘nonsense’ theme has been strengthened by being further adumbrated in the light of Wittgenstein’s description of the sentences of his own *Tractatus* ‘as nonsensical’ (*als unsinnig*). As Wittgenstein points out (while still in the *Tractatus*), these sentences fail to conform to the conditions of meaningfulness that the work itself states by means of these very sentences.⁵ Likewise, the 500 pages or so of Part Two of the *Postscript* may be seen in some way to infringe a rule of practical truth that their sentences tell us is what the truth that matters really is. Wittgenstein’s ‘ladder’ metaphor is also introduced as corroboration: a person who has seen the nonsense but gained insight thereby into what cannot be said ‘must throw away the ladder after he has climbed it’.⁶

There is some force to the suggestion. It is not out of the question that Wittgenstein, himself an admiring reader of the *Postscript*, actually borrowed the ladder metaphor from Climacus. The latter’s name, not entirely

⁴ Louis Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 192; cf. Henry E. Allison, ‘Christianity and Nonsense’, *The Review of Metaphysics*, 20/3 (1967), reprinted in Daniel W. Conway (ed.), *Kierkegaard: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers* (London and New York, Routledge, 2003).

⁵ See, e.g., James Conant, ‘Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Nonsense’, in Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer and Hilary Putnam (eds.), *Pursuits of Reason* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Technical University Press, 1993).

⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 6.54.

incidentally, is that of a certain seventh-century abbot who lived for many years as a hermit in a monastery in the neighbourhood of Mount Sinai. Known initially for his learning as Johannes Scholasticus, he taught the vanity of human wisdom and received the name Johannes Climacus from his work Κλίμαξ τοῦ παραδείσου (or in Latin *Scala paradisi*: the ladder to heaven, or heavenly ladder). The analogy gains further credibility from the fact already noted that towards the end of his almost 500 pages (of Part Two) Climacus revokes everything. Perhaps he is throwing away the ladder.

There is a tendency here to place Climacus in an ancillary role in relation to the main import of Kierkegaard's authorship seen as a whole. This might be interpreted in several ways. One such is to see Climacus, and indeed the whole pseudonymous authorship that he 'wraps up', as simply to be read and then forgotten, except as a warning about where not to go before getting down to the practical job of becoming a Christian. An alternative interpretation regards Climacus as supplementary reading to the 'edifying' and 'Christian' discourses published in parallel with the pseudonymous works and under Kierkegaard's own name. This in turn can be seen in either of two ways: either Climacus must be read as a preliminary to reading the discourses, in order to put us on course; or else he has to be read but then kept constantly in mind in order *keep* us on course through being constantly reminded of the dangers of slipping back into self-serving ways of grasping Christian truth.

Where commentators take us on this point is not always clear. Thus, as Mackey sees it, the 'sense' behind the nonsense is its being designed to 'force the reader back on his own resources and into the awful presence of the living God'. The *Postscript*, though a 'funny book', has the 'frighteningly sober purpose ... of [leading] its reader down a broad and prodigal path of merriment to the brink of the bottomless pit of freedom and to surprise him with the absolute responsibility he bears for his own life'.⁷ This, for Mackey, is part of the project of 'reconverting' philosophy into 'its ancient form'.⁸

It is not hard to imagine even a reader disinclined to accept a 'nonsense' reading finding something obviously right in this description of where the *Postscript* tries to lead its reader. Whether or not Climacus is at the same time trying to guide philosophy back into its ancient form, or perhaps even ushering it and us onward into a new one, the *Postscript* does give an

⁷ Mackey, *Kierkegaard*, p. 192. ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

impression of trying – yes, with among other things humour and satire – to wrench people out of their customary ways of thinking while at the same time confronting them with what they must face if they are to treat their assumed topic, essential truth and specifically the nature of Christian faith, in the way this topic demands once *it* is understood.

As for Mackey's suggestion that in defining 'truth as subjectivity' Climacus was 'writing a satire on definition', if by that he means that the definitions themselves lend themselves to ridicule, then Kierkegaard himself would strongly disagree. He himself thought Climacus had done a fairly good job in this department. On the publication, three years later than the *Postscript*, of Hans Lassen Martensen's *Dogmatics*, Kierkegaard wrote: 'Gentle God and Father! The most popular of my works is more rigorous in its conceptual definitions, and my pseudonym J. Climacus is seven times more rigorous in his.'⁹

The *Postscript* is far from consistently humorous. Indeed much of the detail shows no sign of humour at all. Long passages drive the same point home again and again. Nor do the points driven home arise haphazardly; they are, to all appearances, and if the reader does not just dip into this large tome, related quite systematically in a developing argument. Many a footnote totally lacks the sheen of light-heartedness (and ridicule or mockery) that sporadically pervades the text otherwise. They are as though reservoirs of urgent and cool thought in the midst of a work that in its playful tone and tendency to lapse into anecdote is often otherwise anything but scholarly. One example shows also the polemical thrust of these remarks added to the text. It talks of 'dialectic' as the 'infinite reflection, in which alone the subject's concern for his eternal happiness can realize itself', and says that it has 'just one distinguishing mark':

that the dialectical accompanies it everywhere. Be it a word, a proposition, a book, a man, a society or whatever, as soon as it is supposed to form a limit in a way in which the limit is not itself dialectical, it is superstition and narrow-mindedness. There is always in a human being some such concern, at once complacent and concerned, a wish to lay hold of something so really fixed that can exclude the dialectical; but this is cowardice and treason towards the divine ... As soon as I take away the dialectical I become superstitious and cheat God of each moment's strenuous reacquisition of

⁹ Kierkegaard's *Journals and Notebooks* (henceforth *KJN*) (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007–), *KJN* 6, NB 12:16.

what was once acquired. On the other hand, it is far more comfortable to be objective and superstitious, and bragging about it, and proclaiming thoughtlessness.¹⁰

Dialectic, along with pathos, is essential to Climacus's 'argument', the latter providing a living interest in the topic under discussion, the former holding the individual back from immature and premature satisfactions of the spirit. It would be incongruous to consider a passage such as the one above as humorous in a sense similar to that in which some commentators take the whole work to be amusing, even an entertainment. That, for instance, would mean that the reader is supposed to see something laughable in the very idea of an infinite reflection; which in turn would mean that dialectics, by which Kierkegaard means the thought process generated through conceiving one's life project ever more clearly in the light of an eternal goal, also becomes part of the comedy. Why, then, we may ask, is Climacus so insistent on this dialectic as to repeat the claim over and over again, or why should we not take his quite straightforward claim (in a footnote just prior to the one quoted) that 'there is no excluding dialectics' to be intended with absolute seriousness? No entertainer deserving the name would countenance such tedious insistence and repetition.

Humour in Climacus's 'system'

So what is the humour that we must presume pervades the work as a whole and justifies its author in calling himself a humorist? That is, over and above the fact that it does indeed include moments of ordinary comedy and satire, and also that irony seems to be a tool that comes so naturally to its author that he finds it hard to put down.

The *Postscript* itself contains the outlines of a 'theory' of humour (and irony), but part of the answer may be found in remarks made by Kierkegaard himself on irony and humour well before he began his pseudonymous production. In the latter we may be looking at remarks forming the germ of Kierkegaard's dissertation on irony of 1841. In observations jotted down a whole decade earlier than the *Postscript* we read of someone able 'to practice the absolutely isolated humour that subsists in the person alone'.¹¹ Irony differs from humour in calling for collective support. While irony can make fun of the world, humour makes fun, privately,

¹⁰ See p. 31. ¹¹ *KfN* 1, DD 36, p. 225.

of what will save it. Ten years on, the distinction between irony and humour is elaborated in the *Postscript*, and with the introduction of 'the comic' it is applied to the stages of existence. The comic is itself dignified by inclusion in the philosophical category of 'contradiction', something that also brings it within the scope of 'dialectical' reflection. The comedy that appears is to be seen in a contradiction made apparent from the point of view from which you live your life. Climacus, not being religious himself in the sense that he is investigating it (as shown by the very fact that he is *investigating* it), nevertheless grasps what is needed, and indeed what it means to be (properly) religious. He is able, therefore, to see the comedy of those who adopt an ethical life-view but have not risen to the level of religion. If he were the religious person himself, and seeing that there is no position above that of the religious from which the latter can appear comic, he would *not* be a humorist. Or, if in that case he did resort to humour, it would only be as an 'incognito', a cover with which he protects the 'hidden inwardness' of his religiousness. As it is, he 'remains in immanence', professionally so, one might say, and is therefore not prevented by any incapacitating elevation from laughing at religiousness proper when he finds its claims to be intellectually absurd and thus also amusing.

Climacus's own task, therefore, is to 'make legitimate use of the comic against presumptuous forms of the religious',¹² that is to say, those that fall short of the religiousness of what he calls 'hidden inwardness'. That includes all the targets of Part One, among them the 'speculating' philosophers. But then again, humour of this kind is legitimate only if the would-be humorist can safely assume that the object of the humour is someone who is potentially religious, and thus someone who 'surely knows the way out if only he is willing'. To laugh at a person when one believes that he or she has no idea of the way out is like laughing at lunacy, and that is not legitimate.

You might say, in other words, that Climacus's humour is an expression of his position near the top of the ladder. His virtue, for the reader, is that he sees the way to the top, while his value depends on his not having got there; for then he would have disappeared from view and would be practising that 'absolutely isolated humour that subsists in the person alone'. Given that the humorist (as opposed to the religious person using humour as a cover) is still with us, the reader's own ability to join him in his sense of the comedy of those who live below him thus also depends on

¹² See p. 437.

our assuming, with him, that the latter know the ‘way out if only they were willing’. As for whether those who manage to retract their religiousness into a hidden inwardness can, by the same token, throw away the ladder, or whether they still need it to remain elevated and hidden, Climacus’s own words, taken at their face value, seem to suggest the latter. He must take the ladder up with him as at least a reminder that, still being human, he may at any time need it again to regain altitude.

Climacus’s *curriculum vitae*

Some historical details relating to the genesis of the *Postscript* can be of help in the choice of one’s reading. Surely not irrelevant, for example, is the fact that it was only at the last minute, indeed as late as when preparing the fair copy, that Kierkegaard had decided to resort to a pseudonym, presenting himself only as publisher (*Udgiver*) of *Philosophical Crumbs*. That he nevertheless did so is open to several interpretations. It might mean that he found himself expressing attitudes or voicing opinions that he would not openly admit to having, or opinions that he did not actually hold. But the late decision also undermines any impression one may have of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymity as a pre-planned and strategic manipulating of marionette figures behind whose studied posturing the manipulator himself remains a secret. Kierkegaard’s own explanation can be found in a later remark to the effect that his own position was higher than Climacus’s but lower than that of Anti-Climacus.¹³

In resorting to the Climacus pseudonym, Kierkegaard was resuming an earlier connection with it. While *Either/Or* was still in press he had begun on a philosophical project that remained uncompleted. It bore the title ‘Johannes Climacus eller *De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*’ (Johannes Climacus or Everything Is to be Doubted). Subtitled ‘A Tale’ (*Fortælling*), it was the story of the young student Johannes Climacus, who aspired to an eternal consciousness and chose the way to it prescribed by philosophy or ‘speculation’. The outcome, so far as it went, was to undermine the ambitions of speculative philosophy itself, or, as some today might prefer, to deconstruct the very notion. Kierkegaard’s own closeness to Climacus is suggested by his describing this aborted effort as his own first ‘attempt at a little speculative exposition’,¹⁴ just as its drift indicates how this might give way to a polemic

¹³ *K7N* 6, NB 11:209. ¹⁴ *K7N* 2, JJ, p. 288.

directed *against* speculation. An observant reader of the *Postscript* will note a brief passage that brings the tale discreetly back to mind.¹⁵

In what sense is the *Postscript* ‘unscientific’?

Another interesting detail is the history of the *Postscript*’s title. Up until his preparation of the fair copy, the working title that Kierkegaard had used was *Concluding Simple-Minded (eenfoldig) Postscript*.¹⁶ What prompted the last-minute change to *Unscientific (uvidenskabelig) Postscript* is unclear, but reading the text supplies some clues. The simple-minded person is a figure that Climacus returns to several times, contrasting the simple soul with the wise man. He talks also of the simple-minded wise man, whose wise answers are to questions that occur to him *in his existence*. We are reminded of the Sermon on the Mount’s ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit [οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι], for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’¹⁷ Whether or not this is the reference, Climacus makes it clear that it should be no more difficult for the simple-minded to receive Christianity’s offer of eternal happiness than for the clever and wise. Far from it indeed. The difficulty is surely greater with the wise, for they have to disabuse themselves of so much worthless knowledge, to say nothing of their assumption that the truth that will save them is to be found down the path of scholarship and learning. In changing the title to *Unscientific Postscript* Kierkegaard may have been worried that the earlier title hinted that the book was written *for* the simple-minded by someone on their level, rather than by someone really quite learned but writing, on their behalf, to those who assumed that their learning gave them a head start rather than being, as it is, a serious obstacle.

Another thing that the last-minute change in the title strongly suggests is that in labelling his postscript ‘unscientific’ Kierkegaard is not specifically targeting Hegel, as has been widely assumed. Climacus never talks of Hegelian ‘science’, only of the ‘system’. (We would hardly have expected him to call his work ‘unsystematic’, for in spite of its inner disproportions, it all hangs quite nicely together.) As for ‘science’, we note that Climacus has no hesitation in describing Immanuel Kant as ‘at the peak of science’,¹⁸ the very same Kant in whose critical philosophy Hegel saw there lacked exactly

¹⁵ See p. 260. ¹⁶ See facsimile on *SKS K7*, p. 35. ¹⁷ Matthew 5:3.

¹⁸ Even described as ‘the top of human science (paa *Videnskabens Hoide*)’, p. 462.

what his own philosophy as *Wissenschaft* (science) was projected to provide. The domain of 'science' that is under question here is human science, and the first occurrence of the notion in the *Postscript*¹⁹ refers quite generally to any objective approach to truth essential to human being. As noted, it is this approach, illustrated by a selection of samples drawn from their local protagonists in Copenhagen, that Part One of the *Postscript* dismisses before going on to develop its 'argument' in favour of a subjective approach. The Hegelian case, what Climacus calls the 'speculative view' is just one example of the 'scientific' approach addressed in Part One, though one that in its local manifestation at the time in Copenhagen preoccupies him most and in that manifestation becomes a prime target in Part Two.

The term 'unscientific', through narrowing the focus of Climacus's polemic not least by implying that, once Hegel is discredited, its critical task has been accomplished, can therefore be seriously misleading. Today it can be misleading in yet another way. 'Science', with its sharp focus on method and procedure, now defines a more restricted type of investigation than it did in Kierkegaard's time, something that naturally tends to weaken the force of denying that what one says is 'scientific'. Equally, a term like 'unscholarly', an acceptable and perhaps less misleading rendering of the Danish, today fails fully to capture the sense in which, in Kierkegaard's time, scholarship as a whole, under the surviving influence of theology, was seen to focus on matters considered relevant to the human 'spirit', including of course nature itself. Scholarship was for that reason properly called 'science'.

That raises the heretical thought that, in a sense of the word rooted in its time, and in view of the *Postscript*'s fairly evident aim to point the reader in the direction of a faith that can in some sense be called 'knowledge' of the truth, the book has in fact even some claim, in an attenuated and incipiently ironical sense of the term, to be called 'scientific'.

It is as well to bear all this in mind when considering the way, or ways, in which the *Postscript* proclaims itself as an 'unscientific' and/or 'unscholarly' work. Even from our own point of view, its claims to be unscholarly are evident enough. It deliberately flouts the conventions of scholarship in both style (humour) and content (inclusion of anecdote), to say nothing of revocation (though now we do have Wittgenstein as an example).

The disregard of convention might of course be put down to humour. But we must again bear in mind where the humour comes from.

¹⁹ See p. 20.

Its source is not in the anecdotal asides and all else that contributes to the idiosyncrasy and sheer length. These things that deliberately disqualify the *Postscript* as a contribution to an ongoing scholarly discussion on its topic are a byproduct of the author's acquired sense of the comedy of the behaviour of those persons in whom contradiction is apparent. These byproducts are merely a way of showing that scholarliness is not the way to the goal at which these discussions claim to be aimed. The comedy that Climacus sees in those who do approach its topic by way of ongoing and 'approximating' discussion is something that, given the essential privacy of humour, he might have kept to himself. But Climacus hopes to share his sense of the comedy of people who aim at something that the means they have chosen never lets them reach. If you do not see it as he does, then the sheer humour becomes mere entertainment.

However, there is another side to the unscholarliness (humour, anecdote, etc.). It can be seen as a loosening up of the traditional category and genre distinctions that is not only allowed but is even mandatory once the matters under discussion are seen not to be the preserve of 'science' and 'scholarship' but to be approached positively by all literary and discursive and even rhetorical means.

Some commentators have claimed that the *Postscript* (and presumably they are referring to Part Two) is a deliberate parody of the Hegelian approach. It may be more revealing, as just noted, to follow Climacus himself and ascribe any comedy that is seen in that approach to its futility when seen from the perspective of someone able to place it in the category of contradiction. The fact that Climacus employs Hegelian concepts in his criticism of the Hegelian approach need not prevent him from using them himself. When he employs them we are not forced to attach a certain wryness of tone, a sort of verbal nudge and wink, to his utterance, something that signals to his audience that here there is something that will no doubt entertain them too. Climacus is a humorist, not a comedian, and he can enter into the business of dialectic quite seriously on behalf of his own vision of the comedies of 'approximation' and 'mediation'.

Hegel as background and target

The Hegelian philosophy nevertheless forms a main target of Climacus's polemic. What has just been said means that it is less than obvious that in attacking it Kierkegaard has Climacus discard the entire Hegelian

apparatus. Again some historical background can be useful. As a student, according to his philosophy teacher Professor Sibbern, Kierkegaard like many others of his colleagues underwent a Hegelian phase. Sibbern himself had developed an interest in Hegel, though from the start he was also critical. The firmer grip of Hegel on Kierkegaard did not last, but even when it loosened, Kierkegaard continued to show considerable respect for Hegel's thinking. Thus he seems to have both appreciated and absorbed Hegel's writing on aesthetics in particular. What we find at the receiving end of Climacus's humour are mainly notions from Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik* (Science of Logic). Its concepts of being, nothing, and coming into being, as well as essence and existence, finitude and infinity, ground, and repulsion, are all to be found in Climacus, as also that of the concept itself, or 'idea' (not here capitalized as often in translations of Hegel). Conversely, we find in Hegel such iconically Kierkegaardian notions as 'inwardness' and the 'leap'. It is hardly surprising, particularly in light of its account of the genesis of philosophy as thought about the world, that this particular work of Hegel was required reading then as later. This places Kierkegaard in the company of thinkers like Karl Marx, Lenin, Lukács and not least Jean-Paul Sartre.

Just as they did, Kierkegaard too gave the Hegelian terminology a new twist, and none more radically than he. In the light of the *Postscript's* inverted focus away from objectivity, some might claim that a terminology thus torn from its traditional philosophical roots in 'objectivity' becomes empty jargon. But there is little indication that Kierkegaard himself believed this to be so, or that if he did, he has Climacus also assume it. To all appearances these Hegelian terms are deployed by Climacus in their new clothing quite straightforwardly, as a means of conveying in the philosophical language of the time that the way in which philosophers were using it was a dereliction of their professed duties to the human spirit.

The Hegelian notion criticized most repeatedly in the *Postscript* is 'mediation'. Hegel's term is *Vermittlung* and it occurs mainly in the discussion of philosophy's *modus operandi*, in particular in connection with how it gets started.²⁰ It implies that the truth of one notion can be sought only through the 'mediation' of another. In the Hegelian dialectic one term first stands and then is opposed by its negation. The 'contradiction' thus unearthed speaks untruth but can be resolved through the

²⁰ As in *Wissenschaft der Logik, Werke*, v1 (Frankfurt a. M., 1979), pp. 125–9. See also *Hegel's Logic*, tr. William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), pp. 105ff.

mediation of a third term, the two original terms thus being reconciled, and in a sense preserved yet transcended in a grasp that is more true because more embracing. At that time in Denmark, however, ‘mediation’ was topical at what might be termed the other end of philosophy, in the question of the ability of Hegelian thought to assimilate Christianity. It is this aim that Climacus is out to discredit. In attempting this he was resuming a project that Kierkegaard had placed on the table long before in a programme-declaring journal entry beginning ‘Philosophy and Christianity can never be united’.²¹ There he writes that he ‘can conceive a philosophy after Christianity, or after a person has become a Christian’, but in that case it would be ‘a Christian philosophy’. The drift of the argument now being put into the hands of Johannes Climacus is that no such possibility can be conceived if the method of the philosophy is mediation. Other aspects of Hegelian philosophy are also targeted, for instance the idea that philosophy can begin with Nothing, or with Immediacy, that is, without any presuppositions, and also the idea that the ‘movement’ towards an opposition-free understanding which mediation is supposed to allow can be part of a philosophy based in logic.

Resources, supporters and opponents

Thinkers are said typically to build on the work of their predecessors. If Climacus may be said to follow that tradition, then there can be little doubt that Hegel is the most obvious thinker upon whose shoulders he raises himself, though Aristotle can be mentioned as a common source. But there is no doubt that Climacus also raises himself on the shoulders of Socrates. That complicates the picture, since the Socratic aspect, according to Kierkegaard’s inversion of Hegel’s project, is one in which the thinker sinks lower into ignorance, with inwardness increasing proportionally. Still, the two seem to be somehow combined in Climacus, the Socratic side correcting any impression that the Hegelian style here is doing what Hegelians take themselves to be doing with it, arriving at the truth, and not, as Climacus proposes, just as far as the point where truth must then be grasped in ignorance and faith.

The references to recent thinkers besides Hegel are few and carefully chosen. Climacus has good words for two anti-Enlightenment thinkers,

²¹ *KJN* 1, AA 13.

Johann Georg Hamann (1730–88) and Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819). Both of these assisted German philosophy in an anti-Enlightenment direction, Hamann in his typically ironic and allusive manner, the latter more incisively. Climacus's appreciation of Socrates is something he shared with Hamann. These German and religiously minded thinkers are both mentioned in the *Postscript*, but only as lost causes due to the ease with which the Hegelian system has been able to reduce them to passing phases in the development of thought. However, as mentioned earlier, in Lessing (1729–81) Kierkegaard found a figure more resistant to what he calls the 'overturning plough' of Hegelian philosophy, in fact an 'authority' of sorts for the elusive notion of a subjective thinker. Lessing (via Leibniz) provides the formulation of 'the problem of the *Crumbs*', to which the *Postscript* then proceeds to make its new approach.

Several of Kierkegaard's coevals in Copenhagen are directly or indirectly present in the text, among them two supporters and mentors. Poul Martin Møller (1794–1838) was a poet as well as a philosopher, well known in his time for his *Strotanker* (Aphorisms). In the late 1820s he had been responsible for introducing Hegel's thought to the comparatively new Royal Frederick University in Christiania (Oslo). From 1831 until his relatively early death Møller was professor at the University of Copenhagen and a close friend of Kierkegaard, to whom Møller's death came as a severe blow. He lost not only a close friend but also a living witness to the possibility of the kind of poetic approach to philosophy to which his own talents were most suited. A long footnote in Part One seeks to rectify the reputation as a pro-Hegelian that Møller had acquired since his death. Another mentor was Frederick Charles Sibbern (1785–1872), a serious-minded thinker and professor of philosophy at the university in the seven years or so of Kierkegaard's studies there, and until his retirement fifteen years after Kierkegaard's death. Sibbern had travelled in Germany, meeting Fichte, Schleiermacher and Schelling, but on returning to Copenhagen he had pursued an independent line, engaging in debates on aspects of Hegel's philosophy as this was being promoted and developed by the local Hegelians. Sibbern was instrumental in having Kierkegaard's dissertation accepted by a sceptical committee. Incidentally, the dissertation's title, 'Om Begrebet Ironi' (On the Concept of Irony), was identical with that of one of Møller's aphorisms.

The most prominent among the local Hegelians satirized by Climacus is Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791–1860). Heiberg combined the careers of

academic, playwright, theatre director and editor. Together with his wife Johanne Louise Heiberg (Pätges), Denmark's most celebrated actress, he hosted a salon to which the young and aspiring Søren Kierkegaard had sought and finally gained access. Kierkegaard's subsequent relations with Heiberg were strained, at least on Kierkegaard's part, and he later lost no opportunity to get back at what he considered Heiberg's superior attitude in what he saw as ill-conceived reviews of his works. That he sent Heiberg a personal copy of the *Postscript* on its publication speaks, however, of continued respect. A theme to which Kierkegaard constantly returns (in the *Postscript* too) is Heiberg's report of having received a vision of the truth of Hegel's philosophy when returning from attendance at Hegel's lectures in Berlin on aesthetics in the 1820s. Following his visit to Berlin, Heiberg subsequently wrote several excellently lucid introductory works on Hegel. Above all, he managed to publish a systematic account of Hegel's aesthetics even before the (posthumous) publication of Hegel's own lectures on the subject. A recurring expression in Kierkegaard's writings, including the *Postscript*, is 'the demands of the times'. This stems from Heiberg, consistently from a perspective in which the times determine their own demands, thus making them blind, in Climacus's view, to what they actually require or need. Climacus also alludes several times to Heiberg's keen interest in astronomy.

Two other names are the butt of Climacus's ironic tongue, the first in the form of unalloyed ridicule, the other with a touch of bitterness. Whenever Climacus makes fun of the 'awakened' or 'reborn', it is impossible not to suppose him to be referring to followers of Nicolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783–1872). These included Kierkegaard's own elder brother. Pastor Grundtvig was a theologian, politician, historian, philologist and hymnwriter who also became one of Scandinavia's greatest influences within education. With a strong poetic imagination based in the German Romantic writers, Grundtvig sought to revitalize Denmark's religion, replacing ritual observance based on texts duly deciphered by intellectuals with what he called the 'living word'. This could be established in a 'society of faith with a creed', something Grundtvig referred to as his 'matchless discovery'.²² The phrase is one that Climacus makes much of in Part One of the *Postscript*, in the section 'On the Church'.

²² See Bruce H. Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 212.

The other name here is that of Hans Lassen Martensen (1808–84). Once Kierkegaard's tutor, he topped off a brilliant academic and clerical career by succeeding to the primacy of the Danish Church just a year before the death of his former (and only five years younger) student. Martensen is not directly mentioned in the text either, but it was he who, on returning from a three-year study tour of Germany, reawakened interest in Hegel at a time when, Hegel himself having died in 1832, any original interest helped by Heiberg's advocacy was clearly on the wane. Kierkegaard had attended Martensen's inspiring lectures in the winter of 1838–9. He must have realized that they would change the face of local Hegelianism, and they no doubt inspired Kierkegaard too. Together with a sense of rivalry that never seems to have left him in his relations with Martensen, they gave him the thought that something must be put in Martensen's way. The *Postscript* gives every appearance of being just such a something. Martensen's ongoing project, after all, culminating in his *Christian Ethics* of the 1870s²³ (as a sequel and supplement to his *Christian Dogmatics*, on which Kierkegaard comments adversely in his journals), was the uniting of philosophy and Christianity.

Finally, there was the primate at that time of the Danish Church, Jakob Peter Mynster (1775–1854), a man of formidable intellect who took part freely in academic debate. In his younger days he had been picked out by Kierkegaard's father to be the family's pastor; it was he who officiated at Kierkegaard's confirmation. Much later Mynster had engaged in a discussion on *Either/Or*. He criticized a colleague who, also in writing on that work, had defended the view that religion could profit from some injection of the aesthetic as a way of motivating a personal appropriation of Christianity. As was natural for a cleric in his position, Mynster followed Kierkegaard's writings as their religious aspect became increasingly explicit. It seems that in general he shared Kierkegaard's anti-Hegelian sympathies. As time went on, however, and as Mynster began to see how a polemic on behalf of the 'single individual' would eventually endanger the very existence of the established church in his charge, relations between the primate and the polemicist became strained. Mynster had already been subjected to some scathing remarks at the very

²³ Hans Martensen, *Christian Ethics* (1871), tr. (from the Danish) C. Spence (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1873), and *Christian Ethics: Special Part: First Division: Individual Ethics* (1878), tr. (from the author's German) William Affleck (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1881).

end of the *Postscript*. Climacus implies that he has failed to find in ‘his reverence’ what he most urgently seeks, namely a teacher of ‘the ambiguous art of thinking about existing and existing’. It was nevertheless from Mynster that, very soon after, Kierkegaard sought advice when contemplating retirement to a country living now that the Climacus operation was accomplished. When, in his final year almost a decade later, Kierkegaard launched his notorious no-holds-barred attack on the church, he waited a full year following Mynster’s death before publishing an article that was shockingly critical of this widely revered man.

The *Postscript*’s continuation

Kierkegaard sold 119 copies of the *Postscript*. He also gave away several. The work’s subsequent history became largely that of Kierkegaard’s authorship in general. On the whole it was *Either/Or* and *Fear and Trembling* that caught the public’s imagination. Few people bothered to read the whole of Climacus’s huge and, at first glance, ramshackle ‘compilation’. When they did, parts of it, especially passages from the chapter on truth as subjectivity and the brief account given of ‘indirect communication’, were subsequently introduced into compendia as required reading for students taking courses in existentialism and its sources. Thus began a tradition of citing Kierkegaard out of context, typically also with indifference to any problems suggested by pseudonymity.

Ignoring the interpretational challenges of the pseudonymity has been the rule rather than the exception. Several significant thinkers have based their criticism of Kierkegaard on the evident ‘contradictions’ that come to light if one attempts to form their productions into one coherent life-view. This is true of Adorno,²⁴ and also of Levinas, whose view of ‘the leap of faith’ (an expression nowhere to be found in Kierkegaard’s work) as an act of violence is based on the figure of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling*.²⁵ But as Kierkegaard himself acknowledges, and as Climacus already indicates in his discussion of it in the *Postscript*, that work is a very misleading guide to what the latter means by the religious. Heidegger’s appreciative but thinly acknowledged appropriation of a wide range of Kierkegaardian

²⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, tr. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

²⁵ See Emmanuel Levinas, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Genealogy of Ethics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

concepts²⁶ places them outside the ‘private’ sphere of personal religious commitment, which is exactly where the *Postscript* begins, while Sartre’s category of the ‘singular universal’²⁷ converts the single individual into a philosophically acceptable category under which everyone potentially falls, rather than into a goal that we are urged one by one to become.

Among those whose attentions have been caught especially by the *Postscript*, Ludwig Wittgenstein has already been mentioned. Another, also of Austrian origin, is Paul Feyerabend, who acknowledges that work as a main inspiration behind his anarchistic *Against Method*.²⁸ Each of these philosophers applies what appealed to him in the *Postscript* to his own field of interest, respectively the logical analysis of language, and scientific procedure. In recent years philosophers of diverse background, in areas ranging from ethics through philosophy of language to cognitive science, have engaged themselves in Kierkegaard. This must be due partly to the availability of translations allowing a wider realization of the richness and challenge in his work; but accompanying the dissemination of his thought is a growing appreciation of Kierkegaard’s remarkable ability to combine philosophical insight with the skills of a writer. On reading Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein said he felt humbled by his profundity,²⁹ and more recently, thinking primarily of his powers of exposition, Jerry Fodor has described Kierkegaard as ‘a master and way out of the league that the rest of us play in’.³⁰ The interesting point, though, is that both Wittgenstein and Fodor take Kierkegaard to be ‘playing’ in *their* league.

All of which confirms that those who find inspiration and challenge in this particular work, whether reacting to it favourably or unfavourably, do so from diverse interests and points of view. Perhaps, in concluding his concluding postscript with a wish that the work be left as it is, Kierkegaard had a premonition that this, if it was read at all, would be the last thing to happen to it.

²⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

²⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, tr. J. Matthews, ‘Kierkegaard: The Singular Universal’ (1972), in *Between Existentialism and Marxism* (New York: New Left Books, 1974).

²⁸ Paul K. Feyerabend, *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (London: New Left Books, 1975).

²⁹ In private correspondence; see *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 28/1–3 (1976) (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Co.).

³⁰ *The London Review of Books*, 23 April 2006.

Concerning Climacus's 'defence' of Christianity, he says in one place that it is 'a hair's breadth' away from being an attack on it,³¹ not just on Christendom, which for Climacus is not Christian and which he also attacks, but on the Christianity for which Climacus himself is commissioned to be a protagonist. Readers taking sides here are standing on a fine edge, an either/or that is reflected in the secondary literature. One could even say that the range of interpretational attitudes invited by the work's style and pseudonymity vanishes into indeterminacy. What, for instance, is to stop a reader of a sceptical bent from seeing in the *Postscript* simply a direct attack on the real author's rivals and critics? Since the satire and wish to make fun of his contemporaries seem real enough, it is hard to believe that Kierkegaard is merely scripting someone else's jokes. So might not the 'theory' of humour outlined in the *Postscript* simply be a ruse to give an appearance of legitimacy to the satire? The legitimation would be of just the kind its chosen targets would be most easily taken in by.

Of course one doubts that anyone in a reasonably balanced state of mind could seriously countenance such a reading. But its possibility is there, among many others, and here we might guess at one more of many conceivable reasons why Climacus should want to revoke the work. His work is done as far as he is concerned. One might compare this satirically with the way in which he says the same about the Hegelian system. It too claims to have completed its task, or very nearly so, so that 'going further', as some Danish Hegelians claimed to do, was no way of honouring the system. Similarly with the Climacian 'dialectic' both discussed and deployed in the *Postscript*. Once you are through reading the *Postscript* and you happen to be a simple-minded person who is also wise, it should have done its job. If you are not as simple-minded as a wise person must be in order to get its message, then it is just possible that its humour and its dialectic may have helped you to become so. For those who are wise but treat it as further wisdom it will have been a waste of time. It is as though they had become, in their new wisdom, wiser even than the wise. Today's readers will no doubt include many who have no sympathy with its project anyway. They too may see the work as a source of greater wisdom, helping them to justify their lack of sympathy.

All the above are liable to do what Kierkegaard says that he would rather they did not, namely meddle dialectically with Climacus's *opus*.

³¹ *KJN* 6, NB 13:92a.

On the other hand, those who do have sympathy for the project, and also have understood the role of the dialectic, will more readily see that in this direction there is nowhere further to go. The book can be shelved, though that does not mean it should be forgotten. Another title that Kierkegaard played with before settling, first, on *Concluding Simple-Minded Postscript* and then *Concluding Unscientific [or Unscholarly] Postscript*, was *Comprehensive and yet Superfluous Postscriptum*.³² In the published text the assertion of the book's redundancy comes in an appendix at the end. Of course, commercially speaking, if he had described it in this way on the title page, people might have been discouraged from reading it at all, especially in view of its length (though perhaps today that might have succeeded wonderfully as a sales gimmick). But the intention was indeed that it should be read. In that appendix Climacus says that revoking a book having once written it is not same as not having written it. Better that there should be one reader than none.

Indeed, even if there were several readers, the idea seems to have been that each should read it as though he or she were that one reader. There comes a point where irony is capable of conveying deep truth to those on the right wavelength. So Kierkegaard may have been serious when he has Climacus say, with seeming irony, that he would be happy to find just one reader who saw the point. The truth here would be that he wants every single reader to be that one. However, readers selecting the *Postscript* as one in a series of Historical Texts may be forgiven for doing so collectively out of a certain curiosity, or just to pass an exam.

³² See the facsimile on *SKS* K7, p. 54.

Chronology

- 1813 Søren Kierkegaard is born in Copenhagen
- 1830 Enters the University of Copenhagen as a theology student
- 1838 Publishes his first book, *From the Papers of One Still Living*, a critique of Hans Christian Andersen as a novelist
- 1840 Becomes engaged to Regine Olsen but breaks the engagement the following year
- 1841 Successfully defends his doctoral thesis, 'The Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates', and goes to Berlin to hear Schelling lecture, returning the following year.
- 1843 Publishes the pseudonymous *Either/Or* in two volumes, the first book in what he will later call his 'authorship', and also begins to publish a series of *Upbuilding* (or *Edifying*) *Discourses* under his own name. *Either/Or* is followed by *Repetition* and *Fear and Trembling*
- 1844 Publishes *Philosophical Crumbs*, *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Prefaces*
- 1845 Publishes *Stages on Life's Way* pseudonymously and *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* under his own name
- 1846 Publishes *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, with the thought that he would complete his authorship and take a pastorate, and also *A Literary Review: Two Ages*. He also becomes embroiled in a controversy with a satirical magazine, *The Corsair*, and decides that he must remain at his literary 'post' rather than become a pastor. He also works on *The Book on Adler*, a work that reflects on the case of a Danish pastor

- deposed for claiming to have received a revelation from God, but Kierkegaard never publishes his work, though sections are later incorporated into *Two Ethical-Religious Essays*
- 1847 Publishes *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* and *Works of Love*
- 1848 Publishes *Christian Discourses* and *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*. He completes *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, but the work is only published posthumously
- 1849 Publishes *The Sickness unto Death*, *Two Ethical-Religious Essays*, and two books of religious discourses: *The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air* and *Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*
- 1850 Publishes *Practice in Christianity* and *An Upbuilding (or Edifying) Discourse*
- 1851 Publishes *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, *On My Work as an Author*, and *For Self-Examination*. *Judge for Yourself!* is written but not published until after his death
- 1854 Begins a public, polemical attack on the Danish Lutheran Church as a state Church, first waged in *The Fatherland*, and later, in a periodical Kierkegaard himself published, *The Moment*
- 1855 Publishes *What Christ Judges of Official Christianity* and *The Changelessness of God*. In the midst of his controversial attack on the Church, collapses on the street and dies in a hospital a few weeks later on November 11

Further reading

A reader approaching Kierkegaard for the first time through the *Postscript*, but without the benefit of a general introduction to his work, might be well advised to assimilate the background against which it was written by way of the history of ideas and also biography. A suitably focused example of the former is Bruce H. Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), while a more intimate picture of the figures who populated Kierkegaard's world is to be found in a work collated, translated and edited by the same author, *Encounters with Kierkegaard: A Life as Seen by His Contemporaries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). There are several biographies, each of quite different character. The earliest, by a retired pastor, is Walter Lowrie, *Kierkegaard* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1938). Its enthusiastic celebration of Kierkegaard as a courageous and radical religious thinker helped to lay the foundations of a generation of Kierkegaard scholarship in the United States. Josiah Thompson, *Kierkegaard* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973) was deflationary in form and literary in style but, as befits an author who later became a private investigator, provides a more probing look into the personal background. Two recent biographies also approach their subject in quite different ways. In his *Soren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, tr. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), Joakim Garff, a compatriot of Kierkegaard, aims to 'uncover the cracks in the granite of genius'. That there is next to no mention of the *Crumbs* or the *Postscript* is due to the author's focus on the details of the continuing engagement of

Kierkegaard's psyche-soma with its surroundings. An indirect advantage of this, in our context, is that the reader can savour in Garff's book something of the atmosphere of literary discussion among younger writers in Kierkegaard's own time, of which Garff's book is in some ways a prolongation. The second recent biography, *Kierkegaard: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), by Alastair Hannay, limits the background to what can afford an understanding of the works in the order in which they were written. Readers looking for a key that opens the door more directly into Kierkegaard's thought-world will find one in the currently appearing *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007–), already cited in the introduction to the present volume. An alternative (but incomplete) edition of Kierkegaard's surviving papers and journals is *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers* (6 volumes), ed. and tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1967–78), although by ordering entries by topic it loses touch with the development of Kierkegaard's thought. A sizeable and chronologically ordered selection is to be found in *Kierkegaard's Papers and Journals: A Selection*, tr. Alastair Hannay (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1996).

General introductions to Kierkegaard's thought do not as a rule offer much help in the reading specifically of the *Postscript*. Very often they find a place for a selection of its more obvious 'theses' in a general account of Kierkegaard's 'philosophy', while much of the drift in Climacus's major *opus* tells against the advisability of any such project. After having come fairly well into the *Postscript*, or even having read it in its entirety, the reader may find it helpful to consult some recent monographs that cast light on a variety of the work's aspects in the language(s) of contemporary philosophy. Among the few that focus on Climacus or the *Postscript* in particular can be mentioned S. N. Dunning, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985); John W. Elrod, *Being and Existence in Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Works* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975); C. Stephen Evans, *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992); John Lippitt, *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); Steven Mulhall, *Faith and Reason* (London: Duckworth, 1994); and Merold Westphal's *Becoming a Self: A Reading of Kierkegaard's*

Concluding Unscientific Postscript (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1996).

Several collections include useful essays on the *Postscript* as well as some that can help to place this work in a wider context. There is the four-volume *Kierkegaard* edited by Daniel Conway (London and New York: Routledge, 2003) in the series 'Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers'. The first three volumes contain essays by several authors mentioned in the introduction to the present volume and include Henry E. Allison's classic 'Christianity and Nonsense'. A volume of *Kierkegaard Studies (Yearbook 2005)*, ed. Nils Jorgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), is devoted wholly to the *Postscript*, as is also volume XII of the *International Kierkegaard Commentary (IKC)*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997). Included in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), are C. Stephen Evans, 'Realism and Antirealism in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*', and Merold Westphal, 'Kierkegaard and Hegel'. Essays by Hubert Dreyfus and Edward Mooney on how to approach the *Postscript* can be found in *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard: Philosophical Engagements*, ed. Edward F. Mooney (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), with comments by Alastair Hannay.

The influence of Kierkegaard on several later thinkers, including Heidegger, Sartre, Wittgenstein and Levinas, is discussed in essays in two further collections, *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, ed. Martin J. Matustik and Merold Westphal (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), and *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, ed. Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998). Michael Weston, *Kierkegaard and Modern Continental Philosophy: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), and Steven Mulhall's monograph, *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), place Kierkegaard in the wider context of thinkers who established their own relationship to him.

Several monographs deal with Kierkegaard as philosopher. Alastair Hannay's *Kierkegaard, The Arguments of the Philosophers* (London and New York: Routledge, 1982, repr. 1999) provides each of Kierkegaard's works with what might be called its philosophical persona and includes a chapter on the *Postscript* ('The Dialectic of Faith'), while George Pattison,

Further reading

The Philosophy of Kierkegaard (Chesham: Acumen, 2005), presents Kierkegaard's thought in the round as containing a philosophy in the face of the challenge of concepts such as 'absurdity' and 'paradox'. The same challenge is met by Edward F. Mooney in his *On Soren Kierkegaard: Dialogue, Polemics, Lost Intimacy and Time* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007). Both books presuppose sufficient familiarity with Kierkegaard's work as a whole for their readers to be able to grasp the need to meet this challenge and also to appraise their authors' ways of doing so. Further essays specifically on Climacus are to be found in Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard and Philosophy: Selected Essays* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

Note on the translation

The present translation is based on the A. B. Drachmann, J. L. Heiberg and H. O. Lange edition, *Søren Kierkegaards Samlede Værker*, first published in 1901–6 and revised in 1962. Reference in the text (including Kierkegaard’s footnotes) and in the translator’s footnotes to Kierkegaard’s works is made to the new edition (*Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*) in fifty-five volumes (including commentary volumes) from the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre in Copenhagen (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 1997–).

Kierkegaard’s footnotes appear immediately beneath the main text, the translator’s footnotes below these. Translator’s notes to Kierkegaard’s notes are in square brackets within the latter.

Certain central terms in the Danish are rendered otherwise than in the two hitherto standard translations (Swenson and Lowrie’s of 1941 and Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong’s of 1992, both from Princeton University Press). Some particular considerations that have been taken in this respect are as follows:

First the title. The translation of ‘Smuler’ in *Philosophiske Smuler* as ‘Crumbs’ requires no complex justification. ‘Crumb’ just is a closer translation of ‘Smule’ than is ‘Fragment’, which in a literary context suggests a detached part of a composition or of a body of thought, only pieces of which have seen the light of day. ‘Leftovers’ might catch it, as in the Danish Bible’s rendering of the feeding of the five thousand (‘tiloversblevne Stykker’: leftover pieces) (John 6:12). If the source is indeed biblical, it could be the story of the beggar Lazarus wanting to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table (Luke 16:21). According to the English

Authorized Version, what fall are crumbs (Greek ψῆχιον: a crumb of bread), although the Danish Bible has only ‘what falls from the rich man’s table’.

Retaining ‘uvidenskabelig’ as ‘unscientific’ in the *Postscript*’s title is not ideal, as the Hongs recognize by translating ‘Videnskab’ as ‘science and scholarship’. To avoid the awkwardness of this, and for reasons given in the introduction to the present translation, the term ‘unscientific’ has been retained with the proviso that it is not to be understood exclusively, and perhaps not at all, as a riposte to Hegel’s ‘Science’.

In the text itself the distinction between ‘Existents’ and ‘Tilværelsen’ is consistently observed, at the cost of some slight circumlocution with regard to forms of the latter. The former, as often pointed out, has the etymological sense of ‘standing out’ (*ex-sistere*) and has the feel of a philosophical category, while ‘Tilværelse(n)’ gives the more immediate sense of ‘being here’, or ‘being there’ (in general), and acquires the sense of ‘life itself’, or ‘this existence of ours’. The verb forms ‘at være til’ (to be there), ‘blive til’ (come to be, come about), etc., are translated in ways that circumvent ‘exist’ and its cognates, while in order to keep track of the distinction in the original the Danish is given in the footnotes.

Previous translation has made liberal use of the now familiar adjective ‘existential’ to render the participial form ‘existing’ (*existerende*), no doubt to avoid having to use this latter in a rather clumsy appositional way. ‘Existential’ occurs in the subtitle and contents, but (along with ‘existentially’) only rarely in the text. Uses of ‘existential’ here mirror the Danish.

A central concept in the *Postscript* is that of ‘becoming’. It is customary to translate ‘i Vorden’ as ‘in the process of becoming’. ‘Process’ here is unfortunate, however, implying something more regulated than human becoming. Besides, ‘Proces’ is a term that Kierkegaard uses in contexts to which human becoming is explicitly opposed (‘the speculative process’ and ‘the scientific process’). Several alternatives are used as the context requires or allows, such as ‘coming to be’, ‘in the course of becoming’, and even ‘on the way to being’. The latter captures a basic thought in Kierkegaard’s theology, that the creation is still in progress (certainly not process!). The verb form ‘at vorde’ is rendered plainly as ‘to become’, which is synonymous here with ‘coming to be’.

‘Inwardness’ is by no means a perfect translation of ‘Inderlighed’. As with Hegel’s *Innerlichkeit*, the sense is not that of inward-directedness, which the term ‘Indvortshed’, also found in the *Postscript*, conveys.

'Inderlighed' refers to an inner warmth, sincerity, seriousness and wholeheartedness in one's concern for what matters, a 'heartfeltness' not applied to something but which comes *from* within. However, since 'inwardness' has become a standard translation for Kierkegaard's 'Inderlighed' and in this sense even finds a place in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it has been retained here.

A difficulty nevertheless remains with its cognate 'Inderliggjørelse', which, when the standard rendering is retained, reads 'making inward'. The Swenson and Lowrie translation has 'intensification of inwardness', which says rather more (which more enters into the notion of *Inderliggjørelsens Dialektik*), while the Hongs translate 'Inderliggjørelse' as 'inward deepening'. Since Kierkegaard also uses 'fordybning' (deepening) in the same context, and not least because he shows considerable care and consistency in his choice of terms, it seems best to preserve the distinction here, however close the two may be in meaning. 'Inderliggjørelse' is translated here as 'taking to heart' where the context makes it clear what that amounts to. Where the wording as well as context requires it, the alternative 'inner absorption' has been adopted.

In the much-discussed Kierkegaardian notion of 'indirect communication' the Danish for 'communication' is 'Meddelelse'. This notion is that of a one-way relation better rendered by 'imparting'. Kierkegaard does indeed use the Danish term 'Communication' in connection with his notion, but only when talking abstractly, and also otherwise where a two-way relation is clearly intended, as in the ability to impart things, such as mere information, to one another, and also sometimes in connection with the then recent development of telegraphic communication. Where possible I have used 'impart' and its cognates, so as to indicate the aspect mentioned.

The German 'Privatdocent' is sometimes translated 'assistant professor', but although *privat-docents* are untenured, they are also unsalaried and paid by attendance. The position is a German one not found as such in Denmark at the time. Here the term '*privat-docent*' is preserved.

Having noted in the introduction that 'speculation' is the word used for Hegelian philosophy ('speculative idealism'), I have retained that term in the text, along with 'speculative' and 'speculator'.

A difficult word in translation is the ubiquitous 'svigefuldt'. The verb form 'at svige' means centrally to 'betray' or 'let down', but to be 'svigefuldt' can also have the sense of being tricky or treacherous (also in the

sense in which an icy surface may be that), fraudulent, underhanded and deceptive (in the sense of deceiving). The choice among these is adapted to context.

The Greek ‘τέλος’ (*telos*: goal, aim) occurs so frequently that generally it is not translated in the text or a footnote.

‘Temptation’ generally occurs in the sense of ‘spiritual trial’ (*Anfægtelse*), where the temptation is to opt for a less painful path than true spirituality requires. Exceptions not obvious from the context are signalled in the notes.

As for Kierkegaard’s habit of peppering his prose with Latin, most of it has been retained in preference to defacing the text with clumsier alternatives. A case in point is the recurrent ‘eo ipso’, which might be rendered idiomatically as ‘by the same token’ or ‘by virtue of that fact’. Another is the ubiquitous ‘qua’ (as), preserved more for reasons of accuracy of style. Translations of the Latin are given in footnotes at the beginning of chapters or of long sections. Sometimes the Latin occurs in Kierkegaard’s text because the Danish has no idiomatic equivalent, as with ‘in mente’ (‘in mind’). In such a case the English is preferred to the Latin and the Latin given in a footnote.

I must here acknowledge my thanks to the editors of *Acta Kierkegaardiana*, vol. III, for permission to include in my introduction a passage from ‘Climacus for Our Time’.

I am much indebted to my copy-editor Jo Bramwell for detecting residual mistakes and not least for noting many a Bible reference I myself have been too little conversant to detect.

Concluding Unscientific Postscript
to
the Philosophical Crumbs

A Mimic, Pathetic, Dialectic Compilation
An Existential Contribution

By

Johannes Climacus

Responsible for Publication:
S. Kierkegaard

ἀλλά δὴ γ', ὦ Σώκρατες, τί οἶει ταῦτα εἶναι συνάπαντα; κνήσματα τοί ἐστι
καὶ περιμήματα τῶν λόγων, ὅπερ ἄρτι ἔλεγον, κατὰ βραχὺ διηρημένα:

But really, Socrates, what do you suppose all this amounts
to? As I said a little while ago, it is mere scrapings and
shavings of discourse, cut up into little bits ...

Hippias Major, § 304a

Preface

Fate may seldom have so favoured a literary undertaking in accordance with its author's wishes as my *Philosophical Crumbs*.¹ In doubt and unforthcoming as I am in all matters of personal opinion and self-appraisal, there is one truth I may confidently assert concerning the fate of that little piece: it has caused no sensation, none whatever. Undisturbed, and in accordance with his own motto ('Better well hanged than ill wed'),² the hanged, yes, well-hanged author has been left hanging. No one has asked him, not even playfully and in jest, exactly for whom he was hanging. But that was the wish: better well hanged, yes, better that than by an unfortunate marriage brought into systematic affinity with all the world. Relying on the manner of the piece's composition, my hope was that it would turn out like this. But in light of the agitated ferment of the times, in light of the constant warnings of prophets, visionaries and speculators, I feared I might see my wish confounded through some mistake. It is always awkward, even for the most insignificant traveller, to arrive at a town just when, in a state of the highest but most diverse expectation – some with cannons drawn up and fuses lit, with fireworks and illuminated placards in readiness, some with the town hall

¹ *Philosophiske Smuler eller en Smule Philosophi*, SKS 4 (traditionally translated as *Philosophical Fragments*), published on 13 June 1844 under the pseudonym 'Johannes Climacus', with Kierkegaard, as here, accepting responsibility for publication. The work is often referred to in the text as 'the *Crumbs*'.

² 'Bedre godt hængt end slet gift.' Danish rendering of the German translation of the clown's 'Many a good hanging prevents a bad marriage' in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Motto of *Philosophiske Smuler*.

ceremoniously decorated, reception committee booted, speakers prepared, some with urgent systematic pen dripping and notebook opened – everyone is awaiting the arrival incognito of the promised one. A mistake can always happen. Literary mistakes of this kind belong to the order of the day.

So, thank heaven it did not happen. With no fuss, no shedding of blood or ink, the piece has remained unnoticed, un-reviewed, unmentioned anywhere. No tinkling of literary bells in its connection has added to the ferment; no scholarly outcry has misled the expectant throng; no warning shout from the outpost has brought the citizenry of the reading world to its feet. Just as there was no hocus-pocus about the project itself, so too has fate exempted it from all false alarms. The author is thus also in the happy position of not, *qua* author, owing anyone anything, I mean critics, reviewers, intermediaries, consultants etc., who in the literary world are just like tailors in the civic world, who ‘make the man’: they style the author, position the reader correctly, through their assistance and art a book amounts to something. But the same is true of these benefactors as Baggesen³ says about the tailors: ‘They kill them again with bills for the creation.’ One comes to owe them everything, without even being able to pay off the debt by writing a new book, for that new book’s significance, if it has any, is again due once more to these benefactors’ art and assistance.

Encouraged by that favour of fortune I now mean to press ahead. With nothing in my way, or any pressing regard to the demands of the times,⁴ following solely my inner impulse, I continue as it were to knead the thoughts until to my notion the dough is a good one. Aristotle says somewhere⁵ that people now prescribe the absurd rule for narration that it should be rapid, and continues: ‘It is fitting to remember here the answer given to a man kneading dough who asked if he should make it hard or soft: “What, can’t you make it good?”’ The one thing I fear is a sensation, especially the appreciative kind. Although the age is broad-minded, liberal, and speculative; although the sacred claims of personal liberty have their cherished and applauded spokesmen, it nevertheless seems to me that the matter is not grasped dialectically enough. For otherwise one would not repay the strenuous exertions of the elect with noisy jubilation, hip-hip hurrahs at midnight, torchlight processions and other distracting encroachments on personal liberty. In lawful things

³ Jens Baggesen (1764–1826), Danish writer.

⁴ For the source of this expression see the translator’s introduction. ⁵ *Rhetoric*, 1416b29–32.

everyone should be allowed, it seems only fair, to do as he likes. The encroachment occurs only when what one person does puts another under an obligation. Thus any expression of disapproval is permissible since it imposes no obligation on the life of another. If the mob brings a *pereat*⁶ on a man, it does not interfere with his freedom; he is not urged to take any action, nothing is demanded of him, he can remain sitting undisturbed in his living room, smoke his cigar, occupy himself with his thoughts, joke with his sweetheart, relax in his morning-gown, sleep without a care – yes, he can even be out, since personal presence is in no way required.

Not so, however, with a torchlight procession. If the object of celebration is not at home he must return at once. If he has just lit a fragrant cigar he must instantly put it down. If he has gone to bed he must straight away get up, hardly has time to pull on his trousers and must go out under the open sky bareheaded to make a speech. What is true for the prominent with regard to those collective expressions of opinion holds also in more modest circumstances for us humble folk. A literary attack, for instance, constitutes no encroachment on the author's personal freedom, for why should anyone not be allowed to express his opinion, and the object of the attack is still free to go on with his work, fill his pipe, let the attack go unread, etc. An expression of approval is on the other hand far more questionable. A criticism that ushers you out of the literary realm is no encroachment, but a criticism assigning a place within it is worrisome. A passer-by who laughs at you puts you under no obligation at all; he becomes, on the contrary, your debtor for having given him something to laugh at. The parties remain free to pursue their own ways, unhampered by an intrusive or binding mutuality. A passer-by who stares at you defiantly, as much as to intimate that you are not worth taking his hat off to, puts you under no obligation at all; on the contrary, he relieves you of having to do something, from the inconvenience of tipping your hat. An admirer, on the other hand, cannot be so easily got rid of. His tender courtesies soon become so many liabilities laid on the unfortunate object of admiration, whose life, before he realizes it, labours under heavy taxes and duties, even were he the most independent of men. If one author borrows an idea from another without naming his source, and makes something absurd out of the borrowed idea, he makes no encroachment

⁶ Latin: let him die, death to ...

on the other's personal rights. If he mentions him by name, however, perhaps even with admiration as the one to whom he owes, yes, that wrong-headed notion, he creates a most embarrassing situation. Grasped dialectically the negative is therefore no encroachment, only the positive. How strange! Just as that freedom-loving nation, the North Americans, have invented the cruellest punishment, silence,⁷ so too has a liberal and broadminded age invented the most illiberal forms of pestering: torch-light processions in the evening, popular demonstrations three times a day, hip-hip hurrahs for the great, and similar lesser annoyances for humble folk. The principle of sociality is precisely illiberal.

The present offering is again a piece, *proprio Marte, proprio stipendio, propriis auspiciis*.⁸ The author is proprietor in so far as he is the private owner of the crumb he does own; but otherwise he is as far from having bonded tenants as from being one himself. His hope is that fortune will smile on this little project once again and, above all, avert the tragicomedy of some or other prophet in deep earnest, or a rogue as a joke, going off and making the age believe that it is something, and then running off, leaving the author stuck with it like 'the pawned farmer's lad'.⁹

J. C.

⁷ Part of a nineteenth-century penal system developed in Auburn, NY, in which inmates worked by day and were kept in solitary confinement at night with silence enforced at all times.

⁸ Latin: of my own accord, at my own expense, at my own risk. The expression occurs in rearranged form in the first line of the Preface to *Philosophical Crumbs*.

⁹ Reference to a comedy by the Dano-Norwegian dramatist and playwright Ludvig Holberg (1684–1745), its title usually translated as *The Pawned Farmer's Helper* (1726).

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Introduction

You may recall, dear reader, that there was a remark towards the end of the *Philosophical Crumbs*, an item that might be taken as the promise of a sequel. True, as a promise that remark ('in case I ever write a next part') was as casual as could be and as far as possible from a solemn vow. Nor, therefore, have I felt bound by that promise, even if it was my intention from the start to fulfil it and the requirement was already to hand. As far as that goes, the promise could just as well have been made with great solemnity, *in optima forma*;¹ but it would have been inconsistent to publish a piece that by its nature is incapable of creating a sensation, nor intended to, and then introduce a solemn promise which, if anything, is calculated to create a stir and would decidedly have created a huge one too. You no doubt know how it goes. An author publishes a very big book; hardly a week goes by before he falls into conversation with a reader who, out of polite solicitude, asks with eager concern whether he won't soon be writing a new book. The author is enchanted: having a reader who works his way so rapidly through a big book and in spite of the effort remains enthusiastic. Ah, the poor fool! In the course of the conversation, that benevolently interested reader, so anxiously awaiting the new book, admits that he has not read this one at all, and will probably never have time to do so, but he had heard talk at a social gathering of a new book from the same author, and he is extraordinarily occupied in being assured on this matter.

¹ Latin: in the best order, according to form.

An author publishes a work and fondly imagines: now I'll have a month's grace before the gentlemen reviewers have had time to read it. But what happens? Three days later a rushed notice raises an outcry and ends with the promise of a critical review. The outcry creates a tremendous sensation, the book itself is gradually forgotten and the critical review never appears. Two years later there is talk of the book in some coterie, where a well-informed person reminds the forgetful of it by identifying it as the book reviewed by F. F. This is the way a promise satisfies the demand of the times. First it creates a tremendous sensation and two years later the promise-maker still enjoys the honour of being thought to have fulfilled it. For it is the promise that interests; fulfilling it would only be to his own detriment, the fulfilment interests no one.

As for my own promise, the casual form was not accidental: in real terms it was not a promise, in so far as it was fulfilled by the piece itself. If one wants to divide a matter into two, an easier and a harder part, then the promise-making author should proceed as follows: begin with the easier part and promise the most difficult as a sequel. Such a promise is serious and in every way worth accepting. It is more irresponsible on the other hand to complete the hardest part and then promise a sequel, especially one that anyone who has read through the first part attentively, assuming he has the necessary education, could easily write himself should he find it worth the trouble.

So too with the philosophical crumbs. The sequel should merely, as it was put there, invest the problem in its historical costume.² The difficult part, if indeed there was any difficulty at all in connection with the matter, was the problem itself; the historical costume is easy enough. Without wishing to offend anyone, it is my belief that not just any theology graduate on reading the piece would be able to throw it aside and then state the problem himself with just that dialectical clarity with which it is elucidated in the piece. Regarding the sequel, on the other hand, I am convinced – and I don't quite know whether it flatters anyone for me to say so – that any theology graduate will be capable of writing it, provided, that is, that he is capable of reproducing the unflinching positions and movements of the dialectic.

Such being the nature of the promise of the sequel, it seems fitting that its fulfilment be made in a postscript, and very far from being the case that the author – should there otherwise be any importance in the whole

² See *SKS* 4, p. 305.

thing – can be accused of anything so womanly as saying what is most important in a postscript. Essentially, there is no sequel. In another sense, the sequel could become endless in proportion to the learning and erudition of the one who invested the problem with a historical costume. All honour to learning and knowledge, praise be to the person who masters the material with the surety of knowledge and the reliability of personal observation. It is nevertheless the dialectic that is the nerve in the problem. If the problem does not become clear dialectically, but on the contrary exceptional learning and great acumen are expended on the detail, the problem becomes only more and more difficult for someone dialectically interested. No one can deny that in terms of thorough erudition, critical acumen and skill in bringing order, much that is excellent concerning this problem has been achieved by those for whom the present author feels deep respect, and whose guidance he wished in his student days that he could have followed with more talent than he possesses, until with mixed feelings of admiration for the eminent and despondency in his own forsaken, doubting distress, he believed he had discovered that, in spite of these excellent efforts, the problem was not being advanced but pushed back.

Thus, if naked dialectical reflection shows there *is no approximation*, that *to want to quantify oneself into faith* along this path is a misunderstanding, a *delusion*, that wanting to concern oneself with such considerations is a *temptation*³ that *the believer* must resist with all his might, preserving himself in the passion of faith, for fear of succeeding (NB by giving in to a temptation, that is, by greatest ill-luck)⁴ in transforming faith into something else, into another form of certainty, substituting probability and guarantees, these being exactly what were scorned when, at the start, he made the qualitative transition of the leap from unbeliever to believer – if this is how it is, then anyone neither unfamiliar with learned scholarship nor bereft of a willingness to learn, and who has seen it in this way, he too will have felt hard pressed when admiration in the face of those distinguished by learning, acumen and well-merited renown led him to think meanly of himself and of his own insignificance, so that he kept on coming back to them time and again, seeking the fault in himself, and when, despondently, he had to admit that he was in the right.

³ 'Anfægtelse'. Here and henceforth in the sense of a spiritual trial as defined in the 'Note on the translation'.

⁴ The text at *SKS* 4, p. 21, plays on the Danish 'lykkes' (succeeds) and 'Ulykke' (misfortune).

Dialectical fearlessness is not so easily come by, and the sense of one's abandonment though believing one is in the right, admiration's taking leave of these trusty teachers, is its *discrimen*.⁵

The relation to the dialectical person arrived at here by way of introduction is analogous to the orator's. The orator craves permission to speak, to be allowed to develop his ideas in a coherent delivery; the other, hoping to learn from him, wants that too. But the orator has rare gifts, much understanding of human passion, the power of imaginative description and command over the resources of fear for use in the decisive moment. So he speaks, he carries the listener away, the listener loses himself in the portrayal, admiration for the distinguished speaker fills his soul with a feminine devotion, he feels his heart beating, his whole soul is stirred. Now the orator in his own figure combines earnest and pathos; he bids every objection keep silent, he brings the case before the Omniscient's throne; he asks if anyone dares in all sincerity to deny before God what only the most ignorant and erring wretch could bring himself to deny. In gentler mood he adds an admonition not to give in to such doubts; the terrible thing is just succumbing to the temptation. He comforts the anxious soul, plucks him out of his fear as a mother does her child, whom the tenderest of caresses reassures. And the poor dialectician goes home with a heavy heart. He notes that the problem was not even posed, much less solved; but as yet he lacks the strength to triumph over the power of eloquence. With admiration's in this case unhappy love he understands that there must be a tremendous legitimacy in eloquence too.

Once the dialectician has freed himself from the superior power of the orator, along comes the systematic philosopher and says with speculation's emphasis: 'It's only when the end has been reached that everything will become clear.' So it's a matter of waiting long and patiently before venturing to raise a dialectical doubt. True, the dialectician with amazement hears the same systematician say that the system is not yet completed. Ah, so everything will be clear at the end but the end is not yet there. The dialectician, however, has still not acquired that dialectical fearlessness. For this would soon teach him to smile in irony at such a proposal, where the conjuror has secured escape routes for himself on such a scale, for it is indeed ridiculous to treat everything as completed and then conclude by saying that the conclusion is lacking. If the conclusion is lacking at the conclusion, then it was also lacking at the start.

⁵ Latin: distinction, turning-point.

This should then have been said at the start. You may indeed complete a house even if it lacks a bell-pull, but in a scientific structure the lack of a conclusion has retroactive power to make the beginning doubtful and hypothetical, i.e. unsystematic. So much for dialectical fearlessness. But it is something our dialectician has still to acquire. Accordingly, in youthful modesty he refrains from drawing any conclusion respecting the absence of a conclusion – and he begins, putting hope in the work. So he reads, and he is amazed; he is riveted in admiration, he yields to the superior power, he reads and reads, he grasps something, but above all he puts his hope in the clarifying reflection that the conclusion will cast over the whole. And he finishes the book but without finding the problem presented. And yet the young dialectician has all the swooning enthusiasm of youth's trust in the person of renown. Yes, like a young girl who has but a single wish, to be loved by just one, so has he but one wish: to be a thinker. And alas!, it is in this renowned person's power to decide his fate; for if the youth does not understand him, he is rejected, he has been shipwrecked on his single wish. And just for that reason he dare not yet confide in anyone else and initiate him into his misfortune, his disgrace, the fact that he cannot understand the famous man. So he starts afresh. He translates all the more important passages into his mother tongue, to be sure that he understands them and is not overlooking anything and thus possibly something about the problem (because that it should simply not be there is something he cannot at all understand). He learns much of it by heart; he makes an outline of the argument, takes it with him everywhere, pondering it; he tears it in pieces and makes a new one. What will one not do for the sake of one's single wish! He comes to the end of the book a second time but no nearer the problem. So he buys a new copy of the same book, so as not to be put off by discouraging memories, travels to foreign parts in order to begin with renewed energy – and what then? He learns to give to Caesar what is Caesar's, to the renowned person his admiration, but also to keep hold of his problem in spite of all celebrities.

The scholarly introduction distracts through its erudition, and the impression is given that the problem presents itself just when the scholarly learning reaches its maximum, i.e., as if the learned and critical effort towards completion were the same as that of getting to the problem. The rhetorical lecture distracts by intimidating the dialectician. The systematic direction promises everything and holds on to nothing at all. Along these paths the problem thus fails to emerge, especially along the

systematic. For the system presupposes faith as something given (a system that has no presuppositions).⁶ It further supposes that it can interest faith in grasping itself in some other way than that of remaining in the passion of faith, which is a presupposition (a presupposition for a system that has no presuppositions) and one that insults faith, a presupposition that shows precisely that faith has never been something given. The system's presupposition that faith is given dissolves into a conceit into which the system has deluded itself, that it knew what faith is.

The problem posed in that piece, without pretending to have solved it, since it wanted simply to pose it, went like this: *can there be a historical point of departure for an eternal consciousness; how can such a thing be of more than historical interest; can one base an eternal consciousness on historical knowledge?* (Cf. the title page.) It was said in the piece itself: 'As is well known, Christianity is the only historical phenomenon which in spite of the historical, indeed precisely by means of the historical, has wanted to be the single individual's point of departure for his eternal consciousness, has wanted to interest him more than just historically, has wanted to base his happiness on his relation to something historical.'⁷ Thus what is asked about in the problem in its historical costume is Christianity. The problem is now relative to Christianity. Put less problematically in the form of a treatise, the problem would go as follows: On the apologetic presuppositions of faith, transitions and approaches to faith by approximation, the quantifying introduction to the decision of faith. What would then be treated are numerous considerations that are, are being, or have been discussed by theologians in the propaedeutic to exegesis,⁸ in the introduction to dogmatics, and in apologetics.

So as not to cause confusion, however, it must be immediately borne in mind that the problem is not about the truth of Christianity but about the individual's relation to Christianity, that is, not about the indifferent individual's systematic eagerness to arrange the truths of Christianity in §§,⁹ but about the infinitely interested individual's concern regarding his own relation to such a teaching. Putting it as plainly as possible (to make use of myself experimentally): 'I, Johannes Climacus, born in this city and now thirty years old, a quite ordinary human being just like anyone else, assume that for me, as much as for a serving maid and a professor, there awaits a highest good called an eternal happiness. I have heard that

⁶ See the translator's introduction. ⁷ *SKS* 4, p. 305. ⁸ So-called isagogic studies.

⁹ That is, paragraphs, or sections.

Christianity contracts to provide one with that good. And now I ask how do I enter into relation with this doctrine?' 'What unsurpassed effrontery', I hear some thinker say, 'what frightful vanity in this world-historically concerned age, this theocentric age, the speculatively significant nineteenth century, to dare lay such stress on one's own little self.' I shudder inwardly. If I had not steeled myself against sundry terrors I would no doubt slink away quietly with my tail between my legs. But my conscience is quite clear in this matter; it is not I who in myself have become so impudent, it is precisely Christianity that obliges me to be so. It places a quite different sort of weight on my own little 'I', and on every rather little 'I', since it wants to make him eternally happy if he is fortunate enough to enter into it. That is, without having understood Christianity, since I merely pose the question, I have nevertheless grasped this much, that it wants to make the single individual eternally happy, and that it presupposes precisely in the individual himself this infinite interest in his blessedness as *conditio sine qua non*,¹⁰ an interest by virtue of which he hates father and mother¹¹ and doubtless also cares less about speculative systems and world-historical outlines. Although an outsider, this much I have grasped, that the only unpardonable *lèse-majesté* against Christianity is for the individual to take his relationship to it for granted. However unassuming it may seem, being thrown in with everything in this way, it is exactly this that Christianity considers impudence. I must therefore most respectfully decline all theocentric helpers and the assistance of helpers' helpers in helping me into Christianity in that way. I would rather stay where I am, with my infinite interest, with the problem, with the possibility. For it is not entirely impossible that someone who is infinitely interested in his own eternal happiness may sometime become eternally happy. On the other hand, it is surely quite impossible for someone who has lost that sense (and it can hardly be anything but an *infinite* concern) to become eternally happy. Yes, once lost it is perhaps impossible to regain. Those five foolish maidens, they had lost expectation's infinite passion. So the lamp went out. Then the cry arose that the bridegroom was coming. They ran to the dealer and bought new oil, wanting to start afresh and let everything be forgotten. And everything was indeed forgotten. The door was shut and they were left outside, and when they knocked on the door the bridegroom said: 'I do not know you.'¹² This was

¹⁰ Latin: necessary condition. ¹¹ See Luke 14:26. ¹² Matthew 25:1-12.

no mere gibe on the bridegroom's part but a sober truth, because by losing the infinite passion they had in a spiritual sense made themselves strangers.

The objective problem will then be: about Christianity's truth. The subjective problem is: about the individual's relation to Christianity. Quite simply, how can I, Johannes Climacus, share in the happiness that Christianity promises? The problem concerns only me by myself; partly because if properly posed it will concern each in the same way; and partly because all the others have faith already as something given, as a trifle they do not even think very highly of, or as a trifle that only amounts to something when tricked out with some proofs. So the posing of the problem is not presumption on my part but only a kind of madness.

To make my problem clear I shall first pose the objective problem and show how this is dealt with. This will give the historical aspect its due. I shall then proceed to pose the subjective problem. It is really more than the promised sequel as the investing of the problem with its historical costume, since the historical costume is given merely by citing the one word: Christianity. The first part is the promised sequel, the second a renewed attempt on the same lines as the piece, a new approach to the problem of the *Crumbs*.

PART ONE

The objective problem of Christianity's truth

Viewed objectively Christianity is a *res in facto posita*¹ the truth of which, however, is inquired into in a purely objective way, since the modest subject is far too objective not to leave himself out or *ohne weiter*² include himself as the one who unreservedly has faith. Thus objectively understood truth can mean: (1) the historical truth, (2) the philosophical truth. Looked at historically, the truth must be made out through a critical consideration of the various reports etc., in short, in the way that historical truth is ordinarily brought to light. In the case of philosophical truth, the inquiry turns on the relation of a historically given and ratified doctrine to the eternal truth.

Thus the investigating, speculating, knowing subject does indeed ask about the truth, but not about the subjective truth, the truth of appropriation. Thus the investigating subject is of course interested but not infinitely, personally, passionately interested in his relation to this truth in respect of his eternal happiness. Far be it from the objective subject to be so immodest, so vain.

The investigating subject must be in one of two situations; he must either be in faith and convinced of the truth of Christianity and of his own relation to it, in which case the rest cannot possibly be of infinite interest, since faith is after all precisely the infinite interest in Christianity, any other interest apt to be a temptation; or the subject is not in faith but objective in his observation, and as such here too has no infinite interest in deciding the question.

So much at the outset just to call attention to the fact, as will be followed up in Part Two, that along this path the problem simply fails

¹ Latin: given fact. ² 'Without further ado'.

to come decisively into view, i.e. emerge, since the problem lies precisely in the decision. Let the scholarly investigator labour with tireless zeal, let him even shorten his life in the enthusiastic service of science; let the speculative thinker spare neither time nor diligence; they are still not infinitely, personally, impassionedly interested. On the contrary, they would even rather not be so. Their observations are to be objective, disinterested. As for the subject's relation to the truth, the assumption is that once the objective truth has been grasped, appropriation is a minor matter, thrown in automatically as an extra, and so *am Ende*³ it doesn't matter about the individual. In exactly this lie the lofty equanimity of the scholar and the comic mindlessness of the parrot.

³ 'In the end'.

Chapter I

The historical view

If Christianity is looked on as a historical document, the important thing is to obtain completely reliable reports of what the Christian doctrine really is. Here, if the investigating subject were infinitely interested in his relation to this truth, he would despair straight away, because nothing is easier to see than that with regard to history the greatest certainty is after all only an *approximation*, and an approximation is too little to base his happiness on, and incongruent to such a degree with an eternal happiness that no ready solution can emerge. Since, however, the inquiring subject is interested only historically (whether, as a believer, he is also infinitely interested in the truth of Christianity, in which case his whole effort is liable to embroil him in a fair number of contradictions, or whether, lacking any impassioned negative decision as an unbeliever, he stays outside), he sets to work on the enormous studies to which he himself makes new contributions right up until his seventieth year. Just two weeks before his death he is looking forward to a new publication that is said to shed light on one whole side of the debate. A state of mind as objective as that – if the contrast is not an epigram on *it* – is an epigram on the infinitely interested subject's state of unrest, insisting as he does on having a question like that, concerning the decision on his eternal happiness, answered and yet not daring in each case, and at any price, to give up his infinite interest until the very last moment.

In raising now the historical question of the truth of Christianity, or of what is and what is not Christian truth, Holy Scripture immediately presents itself as a crucial document. The historical point of view therefore focuses first on the Bible.

§ I

Holy Scripture

Here the important thing, for the investigator, is to ensure the greatest possible reliability. For myself, however, it is not a matter of exhibiting knowledge or of showing that I have none. For my deliberating it is more important that it be understood and kept in mind that, even with the most stupendous learning and perseverance, and with the heads of all critics placed on a single neck,¹ one never gets further than an approximation, and that there is an essential disproportion between that and a personal, infinite interest in one's own eternal happiness.^a

If Scripture is regarded as the secure resort for decisions about what is Christian and what is not, the important thing is to give Scripture a secure critical basis historically.^b

Here one deals with matters such as whether particular books belong in the canon, their authenticity and integrity, the author's trustworthiness, and a dogmatic guarantee is posited: inspiration.^c When one thinks of the labour spent by the English on the tunnel,² the enormous expenditure of

^a In highlighting this contradiction, that piece, *Philosophical Crumbs*, emphasized the problem, or posed it: Christianity is something historical (in relation to which the best knowledge is only an approximation, the most masterly historical treatment only the most masterly 'as good as' or 'all but'), and yet *qua* historical, and precisely by means of the historical, it wants to have decisive meaning for one's eternal happiness. It follows without saying that the humble achievement of the piece was always just to pose the problem, to extricate it from all prattling and speculative attempts at explanation, which indeed do explain why the explainer has no idea of what it is about.

^b There is no excluding dialectics. It may be that a generation, perhaps two, can live in the belief of having found a barricade that is the end of the world and of dialectics. That doesn't help. Thus, for a long time it was thought possible to exclude dialectics from faith by saying that it was on the strength of authority that faith found its conviction. Were one then to question the believer, that is, challenge him dialectically, he would with a certain free and easy frankness deflect the question by saying: I neither need to account for it nor can I, because I rest in my confidence in others, in the authority of the saints, etc. This is an illusion, because dialectics merely turns and asks, i.e., challenges him dialectically, about what authority is, and why he regards these as authorities. That is to say, it speaks dialectically with him not about the *faith* he has *from* his confidence in them, but about the *faith* he has in *them*.

^c The disproportion between inspiration and critical inquiry is like that between eternal happiness and deliberative critique, since inspiration is only an object of faith. Or is one so zealous critically because the books themselves are inspired? But then the believer who *believes* the books to be inspired does not *know* which books he believes to be inspired. Or does inspiration follow as a result of the inquiry, so that having done its job it has also demonstrated that the books are inspired? In that case, one will never come to embrace inspiration, since, at its *maximum*, work in textual criticism is only an approximation.

¹ A reference to the Roman Emperor (AD 37–41) Caligula's reported remark concerning the Roman people.

² The Rotherhithe to Wapping tunnel constructed by Marc Brunel and completed in 1843.

energy, and how a minor accident can interrupt the entire project for a long time – one has some idea of this whole critical enterprise. What time, what diligence, what splendid abilities, what exceptional knowledge have, from generation to generation, been requisitioned for the sake of this marvel! And yet a little dialectical doubt touching the presuppositions can here suddenly disrupt the entire project over a long period, interrupt the subterranean way to Christianity that one has wanted to construct objectively and scientifically, instead of letting the problem arise as it is: a subjective one. One sometimes hears uneducated or half-educated people, or pompous geniuses, scoff at this critical working with ancient writings. They foolishly belittle the learned scholar's concern with the least detail, which is precisely to his credit, that scientifically he considers nothing to be insignificant. No, philological scholarship is wholly in its rights, and the present author probably yields to none in his respect for what scholarship consecrates. But critical scholarship in theology, on the contrary, gives one no such clear impression. Its whole effort suffers from a certain conscious or unconscious duplicity. It always looks as if something should suddenly come out of this criticism for faith, something that has to do with it. That is where the fraud lies.

Thus, for example, if a philologist publishes an edition of one of Cicero's writings and it is done with great acumen, the scholarly apparatus in perfect compliance with the superior power of mind, his ingenuity, and a familiarity with antiquity hard won through years of tireless application coming to the aid of an inventive instinct for the removal of difficulties, preparing the way of thought in the confusion of readings, etc. – then one may safely yield in admiration, for when he is done, nothing follows from it except the admirable fact that, through his skill and competence, an ancient text has been made available in the most reliable form. By no means, however, am I supposed now to base my eternal happiness on this book, because in relation to my eternal happiness, yes, I confess it, his amazing acumen is too little for me. Yes, I confess it, my admiration for him would be despondent rather than cheerful if I thought he had anything like that in mind.³ But that is precisely what learned critical theology does: when finished – and until then it holds us *in suspenso*⁴ but with this prospect in view – it concludes: *ergo*, now you can base your eternal happiness on these writings.

Anyone who, as a believer, posits inspiration must consistently regard every critical appraisal, whether for or against, as something irregular, a

³ *In mente.* ⁴ Latin: in suspense.

kind of temptation. And anyone who, lacking faith, ventures upon critical appraisals cannot possibly pretend to want the inspiration to be their outcome. To whom, then, is it all really of interest?

Yet the contradiction goes unnoticed because the matter is treated purely objectively. Indeed, it is not there even when the scholar himself forgets what he holds up his sleeve, except when now and then urging himself lyrically to continue the work, or resorting to eloquence in lyrical polemics. Have an individual appear; have him want passionately, with infinite, personal interest, to attach his eternal happiness to the anticipated result, and he will easily see that there is no result and none to expect, and the contradiction will bring him to despair. Luther's rejection of the Letter of James⁵ is itself enough to bring him to despair. In relation to an eternal happiness and a passionate infinite interest in this (in which latter alone the former can exist), an iota is of importance, of infinite importance; or conversely: despair over the contradiction will teach him precisely that there is no forcing this path.

And yet that is how things have gone on. One generation after another has gone to the grave; new difficulties have arisen and been conquered, and new difficulties have arisen. Generation after generation inherits the illusion that the method is the correct one yet the learned scholars have still to succeed, etc. Everyone seems happy with that, all become more and more objective. The subject's personal, infinite, impassioned interest (which is the possibility of faith, then faith itself, the form of eternal happiness, and then eternal happiness itself) gradually vanishes because the decision is postponed, and is postponed as something that will straightforwardly result from the learned scholar's result. That is to say, the problem does not arise at all. One has become too objective to have an eternal happiness, because this happiness inheres precisely in the infinite, personal, impassioned interest, and just this is what one gives up in order to become objective, just this what one lets objectivity trick one out of. With the help of the clergy, who betray scholarship now and then, a hint of it reaches the congregation. The 'communion of believers' becomes in the end an honorific title, since the congregation becomes objective merely by looking at the clergy and then looking forward to a tremendous result. Then an enemy rushes out against Christianity. Dialectically he is just

⁵ As a part of the New Testament that could form the basis of Christian faith.

as informed as the scholarly investigators and the bungling congregation. He attacks a book in the Bible, a series of books. The learned emergency choir rushes instantly to the defence, etc., etc.

Wessel has said that he keeps away from crowds.⁶ Likewise, it is not fitting for a leaflet writer to jab his respectful petition at them concerning a few dialectical considerations. He would be just like a dog in a game of bowls. Neither, likewise, is it suitable for a stark-naked dialectician to enter into a scholarly dispute like this in which, despite all the talent and learning *pro et contra*, it is nevertheless dialectically undecided in the last resort what the dispute is about. If it is purely philological, then let the learning and talent be honoured with the admiration they deserve; but then it has nothing to do with faith. If they have something up their sleeves, let us have it brought into the open in order to think it through in dialectical peace and quiet. Anyone defending the Bible in the interests of faith must surely have made clear to himself whether, from all that effort and should it succeed according to all possible expectation, some result should ensue in that respect, so that he does not get stuck in the parenthesis of his labour and amid the scholarly difficulties forget the decisive dialectical *claudatur*.⁷ Anyone who attacks must likewise have reckoned whether, if the attack succeeded on the largest possible scale, it would result in anything other than the philological result, or at most in a victory by contending *e concessis*,⁸ where, be it noted, one can lose everything in another way if the mutual agreement is a phantom.

In order to allow the dialectical its due, and to let it just think the thoughts undisturbed, let us assume first the one thing and then the other.

I assume, accordingly, that there has been a successful demonstration of whatever in the Bible any learned theologian in his happiest moment could ever have wished to demonstrate about the Bible. These books, no others, belong to the canon, they are authentic, they are complete, their authors are trustworthy – it can well be said that it is as though every letter were inspired (more cannot be said, because inspiration is after all an object of faith, qualitatively dialectical, and not to be reached by quantitative means). Furthermore, there is no trace of contradiction in the sacred books. For let us be cautious in our hypothesis. If only as much as a single word is rumoured about such a thing, the parenthesis reappears

⁶ The Norwegian-born poet and playwright, J. H. Wessel (1742–85). The reference is to one of his works.

⁷ Latin: closing parenthesis. ⁸ Latin (*ex concessis*): on the basis of what is granted.

and the hectic business of philological criticism promptly leads one astray. Altogether, what is needed here to make the matter easy and plain is merely the dietary precaution, the renunciation of every learned intermediate clause which, one, two, three, could degenerate into a century-long parenthesis. This may not be so easy, and just as a person walks in danger wherever he goes, so too the dialectical development everywhere runs a risk, the risk of slipping into a parenthesis. The same is true in greater things as in smaller, and what generally makes debates boring listening for a third party is that, already in the second round, the debate has entered a parenthesis and now proceeds, with increasing heat, in the wrong direction, further and further away from the real topic. One exploits it for that reason as a fencing ruse to draw the opponent a little, to see whether we have here a dialectical trotter or a parenthesis hot-blood that goes giddy-up into a gallop as soon as it is a matter of the parenthetical. Think how many entire human lives have passed in this way, moving continually in parentheses from early youth on. But here I break off these moralizing observations aimed at the common good, an attempt at compensating for my own lack of a critical historical competence. So we assume everything is in order regarding the Holy Scriptures. What then? Has that person who was not a believer come a single step closer to faith? No, not one. Faith does not result from straightforward scholarly deliberation, nor does it come straightforwardly. On the contrary, in this objectivity one loses the infinite, personal, impassioned interestedness that is the condition of faith, the *ubique et nusquam*⁹ in which faith can come into being.

Has that person who did believe gained anything with regard to the power and strength of faith? No, not in the least; rather, in this profuse knowledge and in this certainty lying at the door of faith and coveting it, he is in such a precarious position that much effort, much fear and trembling, will be required if he is not to fall into temptation and confuse knowledge with faith. Whereas up to now faith has had in uncertainty a beneficial taskmaster, now in this certainty it would have its worst enemy. That is, if the passion is taken away, faith no longer exists and certainty and passion are not harnessed together. Let a parallel demonstrate this. For someone who believes that there is a God and a providence, things are made easier (in preserving the faith) in an imperfect world, where passion

⁹ Latin: everywhere and nowhere.

is kept alive, easier too in definitely gaining faith (as against an illusion) than in an absolutely perfect world. Indeed in such a world faith is unthinkable. Hence the teaching that faith is abolished in eternity.

How fortunate, then, that this wishful hypothesis, this finest desire of critical theology, is an impossibility, because even its most perfect fulfilment would still be an approximation. And how fortunate in turn for the scholars, that the fault is by no means theirs! If all the angels combined forces they could still only produce an approximation, because in historical knowledge an approximation is the only certainty – but also too little on which to base an eternal happiness.

So I assume now the opposite, that the enemies have succeeded in demonstrating what they wish regarding the Scriptures, with a certainty surpassing the most ardent desire of the rankest foe – what then? Has the enemy abolished Christianity? Not at all. Has he harmed the believer? Not at all, not in the least. Has he won the right to disown responsibility for not being a believer? Not at all. That is to say, just because these books are not by those authors, are not authentic, are not *integri*,¹⁰ are not inspired (though, being an object of faith, this cannot be disproved), it does not follow that these authors have not existed and, above all, that Christ has not existed. To that extent, the believer is still just as free to accept it, just as free. Let us heed this well. For if he accepted it on the strength of a demonstration he would already be on the point of abandoning faith. If it gets that far, the believer will always have some guilt, to the extent that he has himself made the first move, and has begun by playing into the hands of unbelief by himself wanting to prove. Here is the rub, and I am led back to the case of theological learning. For whose sake is the proof furnished? Faith has no need of it, indeed must even consider it its enemy. On the other hand, when faith begins to feel ashamed of itself, when like a sweetheart not content with love but slyly ashamed of the beloved, and so needs it to be recognized that there is something exceptional about him, that is to say, when faith begins to lose passion, that is to say, when faith begins to cease being faith, it is then that the proof becomes a necessity, in order to enjoy general esteem on the side of unbelief. As for the rhetorical idiocies on this point perpetrated, through their confusion of categories, by ecclesiastical speakers, ah, but let us not speak of that. The vanity of faith (a modern substitute – how can they believe who receive glory from

¹⁰ Latin: whole.

one another? John 5:44) will not, and naturally cannot, sustain faith's martyrdom, and a genuine address of faith is perhaps at this moment the address most rarely heard in all of Europe. Speculative thought has understood everything, everything, everything! The ecclesiastical speaker still exercises some restraint; he admits that so far he has not understood everything; he admits that he is striving (poor fellow, that is a confusion of categories!). 'If there is someone who has understood everything', he says, 'then I admit [alas, he is shamefaced and unaware that he should be using irony against the others] that I have not understood it, cannot prove everything, and we lesser ones [alas, he feels his lowliness at a very wrong place] must make do with faith' (poor, unappreciated, supreme passion: faith, that you must make do with such a defender; poor preacher fellow, that you have no idea what it is all about! Poor intellectual pauper Per Eriksen,¹¹ who cannot quite make the grade as a scholar but has faith, because that indeed he has, the faith that turned fishermen into apostles, that can move mountains – if one has it!).

When the matter is treated objectively the subject cannot relate in passion to the decision, least of all have a passionate interest that is infinite. It is a self-contradiction and therefore comic to have an infinite interest in respect of what, at its maximum, always remains only an approximation. If passion is posited none the less, zealotry ensues. For the infinitely interested passion every iota will be of infinite value.^d The fault lies not in the infinitely interested passion but in the fact that its object has become an approximation-object.

The objective view, however, persists from generation to generation precisely through the individuals (the observers) becoming more and more objective, with a less and less infinite passionate interest. Assuming that one sought proof along this way and tried to demonstrate the truth of Christianity, the curious consequence would finally emerge that, just as one was finished with the demonstration of its truth, it would have ceased to exist as something in the present; it would have become so much a historical matter as to be something past, whose truth, that is, whose historical truth, had now been authenticated. In this way the

^d The objective point of view is thereby also reduced *in absurdum* [Latin: to absurdity] and subjectivity posited. For were we to ask why the least iota is nevertheless of infinite value, the answer would have to be, because the subject is interested infinitely, but then it is the subject's infinite interest that is decisive.

¹¹ A common expression also known from Holberg's *Den Stundesløse* (*The Busy Trifler*) (1731).

anxious prophecy of Luke 18:8 might be fulfilled: Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?

The more objective the observer, the less he bases an eternal happiness, i.e., his own eternal happiness, on his relation to his observation, since this happiness can only be in question for the impassioned, infinitely interested subjectivity. The observer (whether investigating scholar or dabbling member of the congregation) now understands himself objectively in the following leave-taking speech at the borderline of life: When I was young, such and such books were in doubt, now their authenticity has been proved, but then sure enough doubt has once again recently been raised about some books never previously questioned. But there is bound to come a scholar, etc.

The modest objective subjectivity, to a hero's applause, holds itself aloof: it is at one's service, being willing to accept the truth as soon as it has been come by. Yet the goal to which it aspires is a distant one (undeniably so, since an approximation can go on as long as you please) – and while the grass grows the observer dies, peacefully, because he was objective. Ah! objectivity, not for nothing are you praised, capable of everything; not even the firmest believer has been so certain of his eternal happiness, and above all so sure of not losing it, as one who is objective! Could it be that this objectivity, and this modesty, were out of place, were un-Christian? Then it would indeed be a dubious matter, entering into the truth of Christianity in this way. Christianity is spirit; spirit is inwardness; inwardness is subjectivity, subjectivity in its essential passion, at its maximum an infinitely, personally interested passion for one's eternal happiness.

Once subjectivity is taken away, and passion from subjectivity, and infinite interest from passion, there is absolutely no decision at all, on this problem or any other. All decision, all essential decision, lies in subjectivity. At no point does an observer (and that is what objective subjectivity is) have any infinite need of a decision, and at no point sees it. This is objectivity's *falsum*¹² and what mediation means as a right of way in the constant process in which nothing remains standing nor anything is infinitely decided, because the movement turns back on itself and turns back again, and the movement itself is a chimera, and speculative thought

¹² Latin: falsehood.

is always wise afterwards.^c Objectively understood, there is result enough everywhere, but no decisive result anywhere, which is quite as it should be, just because decision lies in subjectivity, essentially in passion, and *maxime*¹³ in the infinitely interested, personal passion for one's eternal happiness.

^c The scepticism of Hegelian philosophy, so loudly acclaimed for its positivity, may also be understood in this way. According to Hegel, truth is the continued world-historical process. Each generation, each stage of this process, is legitimated, yet is only an element in the truth. Short of settling for some charlatanry, which helps by assuming that Prof. Hegel's own generation, or the one now succeeding him, is *imprimatur* [Latin: let it be printed], that the generation is the last and world history over, we are all implicated in scepticism. The passionate question of truth does not even arise because philosophy has first tricked the individuals into becoming objective. The positive Hegelian truth is as illusory as was happiness in paganism. Only afterwards does one get to know whether or not one has been happy; and similarly the next generation gets to know what truth was in the preceding generation. The great secret of the system (yet this remains *unter uns* [between us], just like the secret among the Hegelians) is close to Protagoras's sophism 'Everything is relative', except that here everything is relative in the continued progression. But this is no help to the living, and anyone living who happens to be familiar with an anecdote by Plutarch (in *Moralia*) about the Lacedaimonian Eudamidas is sure to be reminded of it. When Eudamidas saw the aged Xenocrates in the academy, together with his disciples, seeking the truth, he asked: 'Who is this old man?' And when the reply was given that he was a wise man, one of those seeking after virtue, he exclaimed, 'When, then, will he use it?' Presumably, it is also this continued progress that has given rise to the misunderstanding that one must be a devil of a fellow well up in speculative thought to free oneself from Hegelianism. Far from it; all it needs is sound common sense, pointed humour, a little Greek *ataraxia*. Apart from the *Logic*, and also partly in it, through an ambiguous light that Hegel has not kept out, Hegel and Hegelianism are an essay in the comic. By this time Hegel, now of blessed memory, has probably met his master in the late Socrates, who has undoubtedly got something to laugh at; that is, if Hegel has otherwise remained unchanged. Yes, there Socrates has found a man worth talking with, and especially asking in Socratic fashion (something Socrates meant to do with all the dead) whether or not he knows something. Socrates would have to have changed considerably were he to allow himself to be even remotely impressed were Hegel to begin to reel off §§ and promise that everything would become clear at the end. — Perhaps in this note I can find a fitting place for a complaint. In Poul Møller's biography there is just a single reference conveying an idea of how he viewed Hegel in later years. Presumably the respected editor has let himself be guided in this restraint by partiality and reverence for the deceased, and by an uneasy regard for what certain people would say, what a speculative and almost Hegelian public might judge. But perhaps in the very instant of thinking he acted out of partiality for the deceased, the editor harmed the impression given of him. More remarkable than many an aphorism included in the printed collection, and just as noteworthy as many a youthful trait preserved by the careful and tasteful biographer, in an attractive and noble presentation, was the fact that at the time when everything here at home was Hegelian, P. M. judged quite differently, that to begin with and for a time he spoke of Hegel almost with indignation, until his wholesome, humorous nature made him smile, especially at Hegelianism, or, to recall P. M. even more clearly, made him laugh right heartily at it. For who has been enamoured of P. M. and forgotten his humour; who has admired him and forgotten his wholesomeness; who has known him and forgotten his laughter, which did one good even when it was not entirely clear what he was laughing at, because his absentmindedness occasionally left one in confusion.

¹³ Latin: maximally.

§ 2

On the Church

The protection that the visible presence of the Pope provides the Catholic Church against the intrusion of dialectics we will omit from the discussion.^f But the Church has also been seized on within Protestantism, once it had abandoned the Bible as the secure recourse. Although attacks are still levelled against the Bible, and although learned theologians defend it linguistically and critically, this whole procedure is in part antiquated. And above all, precisely because people are becoming more and more objective, they no longer have the decisive conclusions up their sleeves. Letter-zealotry, which at least possessed passion, has vanished. That it had passion was its merit. In another sense it was comic, and just as the age of chivalry really comes to a close in Don Quixote (for the comic interpretation is always the concluding one), so might a poet, by comically immortalizing such an unhappy servant of the letter in his tragicomic romanticism, still make it plain that literal theology is a thing of the past. For wherever there is passion there is also romanticism, and anyone who has a bent and a sense for passion, and has not learned simply by heart to know what poetry is, will be able to see a beautiful infatuation in such a figure, just like when a girl in love embroiders the finely wrought frame for the Gospel in which she reads of her love's joy, just like when a girl in love counts the characters in the letter he has written to her. But then he would also see the comedy.

Such a figure would certainly be laughed at, but with what justification is another matter. That the whole age has become devoid of passion is no warrant for laughter. What was laughable about the zealot was that his infinite passion fell upon a wrong object (an approximation-object); the good in him was that he had passion.

^f The infinite reflection, in which alone the subject's concern for his eternal happiness can realize itself, has in all just one distinguishing mark: that the dialectical accompanies it everywhere. Be it a word, a proposition, a book, a man, a society or whatever, as soon as it is supposed to form a limit in a way in which the limit is not itself dialectical, it is superstition and narrow-mindedness. There is always in a human being some such concern, at once complacent and concerned, a wish to lay hold of something so really fixed that can exclude the dialectical; but this is cowardice and treason towards the divine. Even the most certain of all things, a revelation, *eo ipso* becomes dialectical when I am to appropriate it; even the most fixed of things, the infinite negative resolve that is the infinite form of God's presence in the individual, at once becomes dialectical. As soon as I take away the dialectical I become superstitious and cheat God of each moment's strenuous reacquisition of what was once acquired. On the other hand, it is far more comfortable to be objective and superstitious, and bragging about it, and proclaiming thoughtlessness.

This turn that the matter has taken, letting go of the Bible and laying hold of the Church, is even a Danish idea. However, I am unable to bring myself either to rejoice on my fellow countrymen's behalf over this 'matchless discovery'¹⁴ (as it is officially called among the geniuses in question: the inventor and Messrs admirers), or to consider it desirable for the authorities to commission a *Te Deum* from the whole nation in devout thanksgiving for the 'matchless discovery'. It is better, and at least for me indescribably easy, to let Grundtvig keep what is his: the matchless discovery. It was indeed whispered at one time, especially when a similar little movement began in Germany with Delbrück etc.,¹⁵ that Grundtvig really owed the idea to Lessing, without however owing him its matchlessness; so that Grundtvig's merit would consist in having transformed a small Socratic bone of contention, submitted with skill and judgment, with rare sceptical expertise and subtle dialectic as something to ponder, into an eternal, matchless, world-historical, absolute, glaring and crystal-clear truth. But even supposing there was some connection on Pastor Grundtvig's part, which I myself don't at all assume since, in its matchless absoluteness, the matchless discovery does bear the unmistakable stamp of Grundtvigian originality, it would still be unjust to call it a borrowing from Lessing, since in all that is Grundtvigian there is not the least thing that reminds one of Lessing, or anything which that grand master of understanding could lay claim to without matchless resignation. Had it only been intimated that the clever and dialectical Magister Lindberg,¹⁶ the matchless discovery's talented chief advocate and defender, might owe something to Lessing, that would have been worth listening to. The discovery in any case owes much to Lindberg's talent, in so far as it was by his efforts that it took on form, was pressed into a dialectical posture, became less afflicted with hiatus, less matchless – and more accessible to sound common sense.

What Grundtvig had rightly seen was that the Bible could not possibly hold out against the intrusive doubt. But he had failed to realize that the reason was that attack and defence are both part of an approximating which, in its incessantly continued striving, lacked the dialectic for an infinite decision on which one bases an eternal happiness. Since he lacked

¹⁴ The expression is due to N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872). See the translator's introduction.

¹⁵ Ferdinand Delbrück (1772–1848), a professor of philosophy in Bonn, commented on by Grundtvig.

¹⁶ Jacob Christian Lindberg (1797–1857). Danish theologian and pastor who defended Grundtvig in a number of treatises.

dialectical awareness of this, it must have been by a sheer stroke of luck that he actually found himself outside the presuppositions within which the Bible theory has its great merit, has its venerable scholarly significance. But a stroke of luck is unthinkable in relation to the dialectical. As for that, it was more likely that with his Church theory he would come to stay within the same presuppositions. Abusive language directed at the Bible, with which he at one time really offended the older Lutherans, abusive and dictatorial language instead of thoughts, can naturally only, and that to an extraordinary degree, satisfy devotees. Everyone else can easily see that when thought is lacking in the din of the discourse, it is thoughtlessness that is giving vent to itself in this loose way of talking.

Just as previously the Bible was to decide objectively what is Christian and what is not, so now the Church is supposed to serve as the safe objective recourse. More specifically, again, it is the living word in the Church, the confession of faith, and the word with the sacraments.

Now, for the first time, it is clear that the problem is to be dealt with objectively. The modest, immediate, wholly unreflective subjectivity remains naïvely convinced that if only the objective truth stands fast, the subject is all ready and primed to put it on. Here, straight away, we see the youthfulness (something on which the old Grundtvig so prides himself)¹⁷ that has no inkling of that subtle little Socratic secret: that the crux is exactly the relationship of the subject. If the truth is spirit, then the truth is a taking to heart,¹⁸ not an immediate and utterly unconcerned relationship of an immediate *Geist* to a sum of propositions, even if, to compound the confusion, the name given to the relationship is that of the most decisive expression of subjectivity: faith. Unreflectedness is always directed outwards, over towards something, over against it, in its striving towards the goal, the objective. The Socratic secret, which if Christianity is not to be an infinite step backwards can only be infinitized in the latter through a deeper inwardness, is that the movement is inwards, that the truth is the subject's transformation in himself. The prophetic genius who envisages so matchless a future for Greece¹⁹ just does not know the Greek spirit. A study of Greek scepticism is much to be recommended. There one learns excellently what will always require time and exercise and

¹⁷ By analogy with the Young Germans of the time, Kierkegaard had mocked Grundtvig as leader of the 'Young Danes'.

¹⁸ 'Inderliggjørelse'; see the 'Note on the translation'.

¹⁹ Grundtvig entertained high hopes for the newly (1832) established Greek monarchy.

discipline to understand (narrow paths for unshowy language!), that the certainty of sense perception, to say nothing of historical certainty, is uncertainty, is only an approximation; and that the positive and an immediate relation to it are the negative.

The first dialectical difficulty with the Bible is that it is a historical document; that as soon as it is made the recourse, an introductory approximation begins and the subject is distracted in a parenthesis whose conclusion one can await in eternity. The New Testament is something of the past and is thus historical in the stricter sense. Just that is the source of the befuddlement that prevents the problem becoming subjective and treats it objectively, so that it altogether fails to arise. The *Philosophical Crumbs* bear in on this difficulty in chapters 4 and 5 by cancelling the difference between the contemporary disciple and the latest disciple, who are presumed separated by 1,800 years. This is of importance, in case the problem (the contradiction that God has existed in human form) be confused with the history of the problem, i.e., with the *summa summarum*²⁰ of 1,800 years' opinions etc.

It was in this experimental manner that the *Crumbs* brought the problem into relief. The difficulty with the New Testament as something from the past appears now to be obviated in the case of the Church, which is indeed something in the present.

On this point Grundtvig's theory has merit. Lindberg in particular has developed, with competent juristic acumen, the thought that the Church cuts away all the proving and demonstrating needed in connection with the Bible, since that is something from the past, whereas the Church is there, something in the present. To demand that it prove it is there,²¹ says Lindberg quite correctly, is nonsense, just as it is to ask a living man to prove he is there.^g Here Lindberg is wholly in the right and deserves credit for the unwavering and clarifying assurance with which he is able to stick to something.

The Church, then, is there. And from the Church (as something in the present, as contemporary with the inquirer, so that the problem acquires the right of equality of contemporaneity) one may learn what is essentially Christian, since that is what the Church professes.

^g The reason for this, in terms of dialectical metaphysics, is that its being there is superior to any proof of its being so, and that it is therefore foolish to ask for proof; whereas, conversely, to infer from essence to being involves a leap.

²⁰ Latin: in summary, the long and short of it. ²¹ 'Er til'. See the 'Note on the translation'.

Quite right. But not even Lindberg has been able to keep the issue to this point (and I prefer having a dialectician before me, leaving the matchless to Grundtvig). After it has been asserted of the Church that it is there, and that one may learn from the Church what Christianity is, it is further asserted of this Church, the Church in the present, that it is the apostolic Church, the same Church that has persisted for eighteen centuries. The predicate 'Christian' is thus more than a predicate of the present: when predicated of the present it implies a past and thus a historicity in quite the same sense as the Bible. All the merit now comes to nothing. The only thing historical that is superior to the proof is the being contemporary;²² all determination of what is past requires proof. Thus if someone says to a man: prove that you are there, the latter will quite properly answer: that's nonsense. But if he says: I who am here now was there over 400 years ago, substantially the same person, the other rightly says: here we need proof. It is curious that so seasoned a dialectician as Lindberg, with his ability precisely to push a matter to its conclusion, has failed to notice this.

The instant we use the living word to lay stress on the continuity, the matter is brought back exactly to where it was in the Bible theory. Objections are like the pixie: a man moves house to escape it – the pixie moves with him. Sometimes an illusion momentarily prevails; by suddenly changing the operational plan and also being lucky enough to have no one attack the new defences, it is easy for a genius like Grundtvig to be blissful in the conviction that, with the help of his matchless discovery, all is now well. But let the Church theory bear the brunt, just as the Bible theory had to; let all objections conspire against its life. What then? Then here again we shall find, quite consistently (for any other procedure would destroy the Church theory itself and carry the problem over into the realm of subjectivity, where sure enough it belongs, but as the objective Grundtvig does not suppose), that a propaedeutic discipline becomes necessary, its task to prove the primitive character of the confession of faith, its identity of meaning everywhere and at every moment through eighteen centuries (where criticism will stumble on difficulties that the Bible theory never knew).^h

^h Here, in the interests of caution, I must repeat the dialectical point. It is not unthinkable that someone with the imagination to appreciate the scale of the difficulties involved might wish to say: 'No, it works better with the Bible.' But let us not in distraction forget again that this more or less, this better or not-better, lies within the essential incompleteness of an approximation, as being incommensurate with any decision about an eternal happiness.

²² 'Dem samtidige Tilværelsen'. See the 'Note on the translation'.

And then there will be a ferreting about in old books. The living word cannot help us, it goes without saying. Nor will it help to explain this to Grundtvig, which I do here accordingly with no great hopes, but rather in a lack-lustre mood of hopelessness. The living word proclaims that the Church is there. Quite right; Satan himself cannot take this from anyone. But the living word does not proclaim that the Church has been there for eighteen centuries, that it is essentially the same, has remained wholly unaltered, etc. So much even a dialectical adolescent can see. The living word corresponds to the immediate indemonstrable being of the contemporary present as a manifestation of it being there. But the living word can no more correspond to the past, the predicate itself indicating only immediate presence, than the past itself is not to be proved (i.e., is superior to proof). A Grundtvigian anathema upon those who might not understand the beatific or decisive power of the living word with regard to the category of historical pastness (a living word from the departed) proves neither that Grundtvig thinks nor that the opposite party does not think.

It is Magister Lindberg himself who, having too clear a head to be content with sounding the alarm year in and year out, has given the matter this turn. Once, when a dispute arose as to whether it was correct to say: 'I believe in a Christian Church' or 'I believe that there is a Christian Church', he himself resorted to old books to show when the incorrect variant crept in. Naturally, for there is nothing else to be done unless a new renunciation is added to the Christian creed, namely the renunciation of all true thinking in relation to the matchless discovery, and the abracadabra of the living word.¹

Along this path the approximation process begins anew; the parenthesis is posited, and when it will end no one can say; for this is and remains just an approximating and has the remarkable property of being able to continue as long as you please.

So the merit of the Church theory over the Bible theory was its getting rid of the subsequent history and making the historical into the present. But this merit vanishes again once the more specific provisions are brought into the picture.

Whatever else has occasionally been said on the advantages of the confession of faith over the Bible as a bulwark against attack is somewhat

¹ But no one whose imagination is not entirely paralysed, if he should happen to recall this polemic, will deny that Lindberg's behaviour brought quite vividly to mind the erudite exertions of a worried biblical exegete. However, I have never been able to find anything sophistical in Lindberg's behaviour, provided, as is only fair and just, one does not presume to judge infallibly the secrets of the heart, a kind of judgment that has always haunted Lindberg.

obscure. That the Bible is a big book and the articles of the confession only a few propositions is an illusory comfort and really only works for people who have not discovered that prolix thought does not always match prolix words. And the opponents need only shift the point of attack, i.e., level it on the articles of the confession, and then everything is in full swing. If, to support the denial of the personality of the Holy Spirit, the opponents can try their hand at New Testament exegesis, they can just as easily draw on the distinction that Lindberg himself has discussed exegetically: whether we should read ‘the holy spirit’ or ‘the Holy Spirit’. This but by way of an example, for it goes without saying that it is impossible with historical problems to reach an objective decision so certain that no doubt could find its way in. This too shows that the problem is to be put subjectively, and that it is nothing but a misunderstanding to seek an objective assurance, and in that way avoid the risk in which passion chooses and continues to reaffirm its choice. It would also be a huge injustice should any later generation be able safely, that is objectively, to enter Christianity and thus secure a share in what the first who did so had bought in subjectivity’s direst mortal danger and had acquired, subject to the same danger, through a long life.

Anyone who wants to say that the briefer statement is easier to keep a hold on and harder to attack is holding something back, namely how many thoughts are contained in the briefer declaration. As for that, someone else might then say, with equal justice, that the wordier statement (when as *in casu*²³ both derive from the same, here the Apostles) is clearer and thus easier to hold on to and more difficult to attack. But everything that is said in this direction, *pro et contra*, is again only the scepticism of approximation.

The Church theory has been sufficiently praised as objective, a word that in our age is a commendation with which thinkers and prophets believe they are saying something great to one another. A pity only that where one should be objective, in the strict scientific disciplines, one is seldom so. For a scholar equipped with a thorough first-hand acquaintance with his field is a great rarity. With regard to Christianity, on the other hand, objectivity is a most unfortunate category, and anyone who has an objective Christianity and none other is *eo ipso*²⁴ a pagan, for Christianity is precisely an affair of spirit, of subjectivity and inwardness. That the

²³ Latin: in this case. ²⁴ Latin: by that very fact, by the same token.

Church theory is objective I will not deny, but show on the contrary from the following. When I place the individual who is passionately and infinitely interested in his eternal happiness in relation to this theory, it being this that he would base his happiness upon, he becomes comic. That he does so is not because he is infinitely and passionately interested, this being precisely the good in him; he becomes comic because the objectivity is not congruent with his interest. If the historical aspect of the confession is to be decisive (that it derives from the Apostles, etc.), then every iota must be infinitely insisted upon; and this can only be attained *approximando*,²⁵ the individual then finding himself in the contradiction of attaching, i.e., trying to attach, his eternal happiness to it and yet not being able to do so because the approximation is never finished, from which it again follows that the individual will never in all eternity tie his eternal happiness to it but only a less passionate something. If people were able to agree on using the confession of faith instead of the Scriptures, phenomena quite analogous to the zealotry of the anxious biblical exegete would arise. The individual is tragic in his passion and comic in throwing it at an approximation.

If one wants to stress the sacrament of baptism, basing one's eternal happiness on the fact that one is baptized, one again becomes a comic figure. Not because the infinitely interested passion is comic; far from it, just this is honourable, but because the object is only an approximation-object. We all live with easy minds in the knowledge that we are baptized. But if baptism is to be decisive, infinitely so, for my eternal happiness, then I, and likewise anyone who has not become objectively blessed and put passion aside as a childish prank (and indeed such a person has no eternal happiness for which to find a basis, so he can just as well base it upon little), must ask for certainty. Alas, the trouble is that, with regard to a historical fact, all I can obtain is an approximation. My father has told me, the parish records say it, I have a certificate,^j etc. Oh, yes, my mind is easy. But let someone have passion enough to grasp the significance of his own eternal happiness, and then let him try to attach it to the fact that he is baptized. He will despair. Following this path, the Church theory, had it exercised any influence and everything had not become so objective, would have led directly to the Baptist movement, or also to repetition of the baptismal rite, as with Holy Communion, simply in order to make sure of its case.

^j God knows whether Pastor Grundtvig thinks there must also be a living word for proof that one is actually baptized.

²⁵ Latin: by approximation.

Precisely because, as a poet, Grundtvig is tossed to and fro and moved in immediate passion, which is what is so wonderful about him, he feels a need, and in an immediate sense feels it deeply, a need for something firm with which to hold the dialectical at bay. But such a need is only an urge for a superstitious fixed point, for as was said above, every boundary intended to exclude the dialectical is *eo ipso* superstition. Precisely because Grundtvig is moved in immediate passion, he is no stranger to temptations. In regard to these, one now finds a short cut through having something magical to hold on to; and one then has plenty of time to occupy oneself with world history. But it is just here the contradiction lies: to put trust, in respect of oneself, in something magical and then be busy about all of world history. When the temptation seizes one dialectically, when in addition the victory is always construed dialectically, one will always have enough to do with oneself. And then, it goes without saying, one is not going to beatify the whole of human kind in matchless visions.

Whether it is not un-Christian in other ways in the matter of one's eternal happiness to rest in the assurance of having been baptized, just as the Jews appealed to circumcision and to their being the children of Abraham as the decisive proof of the God-relationship, and so to find rest not in a free spiritual relationship to God (and then we are in the subjectivity theory, where the real religious categories belong, where everyone has simply to save himself, and finds enough in this because salvation becomes constantly more difficult, more intensive in inwardness the more significant the individuality, and where playing the role of world-historical genius and fraternizing world-historically as an *extraordinarius*²⁶ with God is much like foppery in the ethical life), but in some event, that is, keeping temptation away by means of this magical baptism,^k not interpenetrating it with faith – this is something I shall not undertake

^k When it is said that what it is in baptism that protects against all temptation is that God does something with us in this sacrament, naturally it is just an illusion that this aspect keeps dialectics away, for the dialectical promptly returns with the taking of this thought to heart, its assimilation. Every genius, the greatest who has ever lived, has to use all his energy exclusively on this, on taking to heart. But one wants to free oneself from temptation once and for all. In the moment of temptation, therefore, faith does not address God but is reduced to *faith in* really having been baptized. If there were not a considerable amount of sham lurking here, psychologically remarkable cases of concern about becoming certain that one is baptized would have emerged long ago. Only suppose 10,000 rix-dollars were at stake. The matter would hardly be left in a certainty of the kind that we all have that we are baptized.

²⁶ Latin: extraordinary in the sense of 'outside' the regular order, as with 'professor extraordinarius', used of those who are not incumbents of established chairs.

to decide. I have, everywhere, no opinion but merely seek to bring the problem experimentally to light.

As far as the Bible theory goes, the present author, even if he became ever more convinced of the dialectical distortion lurking within it, will never be able to remember its distinguished achievements within the presupposition other than with gratitude and admiration, remember the rare and thorough scholarship exhibited in its writings, remember a salutary impression made by the whole movement that is laid down in a literature with whose entire compass the present author is far from arrogating to himself anything more than an ordinary acquaintance. As for Grundtvig's theory, the author feels no exact pain in the moment of parting, nor exactly any special sense of abandonment at being in disagreement with this thinker. Having Grundtvig on one's side is something no one could wish who wants to know definitely where one is, and who does not wish to be where there is a hubbub, especially when the location of the hubbub is the only more specific determination of where one is. As for Magister Lindberg, he is a man of so many scholarly attainments, so experienced a dialectician that it must always be a great gain to have him on one's side, and as an opponent he can always make the fight difficult yet also satisfying, because he is a practised fencer who strikes home and does not kill so absolutely that the survivor can easily convince himself that it is not he who is slain but rather one or another huge absoluteness. It has always seemed to me unfair to Lindberg that, while Pastor Grundtvig enjoys a certain annual tribute of admiration and incidental income from the worshipping party membership, Magister Lindberg has had to stand in the shade. And yet it is truly something, and something that can truly be said of Lindberg, that he has a good head on his shoulders. On the other hand, it is extremely doubtful how much truth there is in all that is said about Grundtvig being seer, bard, skald, prophet, with a well-nigh matchless eye for world history and one eye for the profound.

§ 3

The centuries' proof of the truth of Christianity

The problem is posed objectively. The trustworthy subjectivity thinks as follows: 'Let the truth of Christianity only be made clear and certain, and

I'll be man enough to accept it, it goes without saying.' The difficulty is that due to its paradoxical form¹ the truth of Christianity has something in common with the nettle: when trying in this way without further ado to seize hold of it, the trusty subjectivity merely succeeds in stinging himself. Or rather (being a spiritual relationship, the stinging can only be understood metaphorically), he does not seize hold of it at all; he seizes hold of its objective truth so objectively that he himself remains outside.

This argument is not one which can be treated in a properly dialectical manner at all, for with its very first word it transforms itself into a hypothesis. And although a hypothesis may become more probable by being upheld for 3,000 years, it never on that account becomes some eternal truth decisive for one's eternal happiness. Has Mohammedanism not lasted for 1,200 years? The dependability of the eighteen centuries, the circumstance that Christianity has permeated all life relations, has reshaped the world, etc. – this dependability is no other than a deceit whereby the resolving and choosing subject is caught and enters the perdition of the parenthesis. In relation to an eternal truth that is to decide my eternal happiness, eighteen centuries have no greater demonstrative force than a single day. On the contrary, the eighteen centuries and all, yes all those countless things that can be told and said and repeated in that connection, have a power to divert which distracts excellently. Every human being is fitted by nature to become a thinker (all honour and praise to the God who created man in his image!). God cannot help it if habit and routine and want of passion, and affectation, and gossiping with neighbours next door and opposite little by little ruin most people so that they become thoughtless – and base their eternal happiness on one thing and then another and then something else – not noticing the secret that their talk about their eternal happiness is an affectation precisely because it is devoid of passion, which is why it can also be so excellently supported by matchstick arguments.

The argument can therefore be treated only rhetorically.^m True eloquence is no doubt rare these days, and true eloquence would probably scruple to use such an argument; perhaps this is why it is heard so often. The argument at its maximum refrains from dialectics (it is only

¹ Cf., on this point, the *Crumbs*.

^m Perhaps most fittingly with a humorous twist, as when Jean Paul [Johann Paul Friedrich Richter (1763–1825), German writer and aesthete] says that if all proofs of the truth of Christianity were disproved or abandoned, one argument would still remain intact, namely, that it has endured for eighteen centuries.

dilettantes who begin with the dialectical and then afterwards resort to rhetoric), it seeks merely to impress. The speaker isolates the meditating or doubting subject from all connection with others and he confronts the poor sinner with countless generations and millions upon millions, and then says to him: Dare you now make so bold as to deny the truth? Do you, do you really dare to imagine that you yourself possess the truth, and eighteen centuries, the innumerable generations and millions upon millions, have lived their lives in error? Do you, do you dare, you miserable solitary soul, do you dare as though to plunge all these millions upon millions, yes, all of humankind, into perdition? Just look, they rise from their graves; see, it's as though they pass over my thought in silence, generation after generation, all those believers who found repose in the truth of Christianity, and their look judges you, you insolent rebel, until the sorting out of judgment day prevents you seeing them because you were found wanting and were shut out in darkness, far from that eternal happiness, etc. Yet, sometimes, behind this huge array (of the millions upon millions), the cowardly speaker shivers when he uses the argument, because he has an uneasy feeling that there is in his whole approach a contradiction.

But he does the sinner no harm. A rhetorical shower-bath like that from a height of eighteen centuries is very invigorating. The speaker performs a service, if not just in the way intended. He does it by singling out the subject in the face of all other human beings – ah, this is a great service, for only very few are able to do that entirely on their own. And yet trying out this position is an absolute condition for entering Christianity. The eighteen centuries are supposed precisely to be horror. As proof *pro* in the moment of decision they amount to zero for the individual subject; but as a fear-inspiring *contra* they cannot be bettered. The question is only whether the orator succeeds in getting the poor sinner under the shower-bath. He is in fact doing him an injustice, since the sinner is far from either affirming or denying the truth of Christianity, but thinking solely of his relationship to it. Just as the Icelander in the story said to the king, 'That is too much, your honour',²⁷ so could the sinner say, 'That is too much, Your Reverence, what have all these millions on millions to do with it? One's head gets so confused that it is impossible to tell right from left.' As noted above, it is Christianity itself that puts an enormous emphasis on the individual subject. It wants only to get involved with

²⁷ The source is unidentified.

the individual, with him, yes him, him alone; and similarly with each individually. It is, as far as that goes, an un-Christian use of the eighteen centuries to either entice or threaten the individual into embracing Christianity: he still does not enter. And if he does, it will make no difference whether he has the eighteen centuries for him or against him.

What is hinted at here has been stressed often enough in the *Crumbs*, namely that there is no direct or immediate transition to Christianity, and that therefore all those who would in this way give a rhetorical push to get one into Christianity, or perhaps even help one in with a thrashing – no, they know not what they do.²⁸

²⁸ Luke 23:34.

Chapter 2

The speculative view

The speculative view grasps Christianity as a historical phenomenon. The question of its truth therefore means penetrating it with thought in such a way that, in the end, Christianity is itself the eternal thought.

The speculative view does of course have the virtue of being without presuppositions. It proceeds from nothing, assumes nothing as given, does not begin ‘bittweise’.¹ So here we can be sure not to encounter presuppositions like those we met in the preceding.

One thing though is assumed: Christianity as given. It is assumed that we are all Christians. Alas, alas! Speculative philosophy is far too civil. Yes, how curious the way of the world! Once it was at the risk of life that one dared to profess oneself a Christian; now doubting that one is so is something to worry about. Especially, that is, when this doubting does not involve rushing out to have Christianity abolished, for that would be something. No, if someone were to say plainly and innocently that he was worried for himself, that as far as he was concerned it might not be quite right for him to call himself a Christian, he would not exactly suffer persecution or be put to death. But angry glances would come his way and people would say: ‘How tiresome to make such a fuss about nothing; why can’t he behave like the rest of us who are all Christians? He’s just like F. F. who can’t wear a hat on his head but wants to be out of the ordinary.’ And should he happen to be married, his wife would say to him, ‘Dearest husband, how can you get such notions into

¹ German: by the provisional begging of certain questions. Cf., e.g., Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, tr. W. H. Johnston and L. G. Struthers, Book One (London: Allen & Unwin, 1961 [1929]), p. 84; ‘bittweise Vorausgesetztes’, tr. ‘temporarily accepted’.

your head? Aren't you a Christian? Aren't you a Dane, and doesn't the geography book tell us that the prevailing religion in Denmark is Lutheran Christianity? You aren't a Jew, or a Mohammedan; so what can you be? After all, a thousand years have gone since paganism was replaced, so I know you are no pagan. Don't you attend to your duties at the office as a good civil servant should; aren't you a good subject of a Christian nation, a Lutheran Christian state? Then you must be a Christian.' You see? We have become so objective that even a civil servant's wife argues to the single individual from the whole, from the state, from the idea of society, from geographical science. So much is it a matter of course that the individual is a Christian, a believer, etc., that it is foppery to make a fuss about it, or even a freak of fancy. Since it is always unpleasant to have to admit the lack of something everyone is assumed as a matter of course to possess, and which therefore rightly attracts attention only when someone is foolish enough to betray his lack of it, what wonder that no one admits it. In the case of something that matters, something calling for proficiency and the like, it is easier to make an admission. But the more insignificant the object – insignificant, that is, because everyone has it – the more embarrassing the admission. And this in fact is the modern category for concern about not being Christian: it is embarrassing. *Ergo*, it is a given fact that we are all Christians.

However, speculation may say: 'These are popular and naïve reflections of the kind that teacher-training students and popularizing philosophers can put about; but speculation has nothing to do with them.' How dreadful to be excluded from the superior wisdom of speculative philosophy! Yet it seems strange to me that people are always talking of speculative philosophy and speculation as though it were a man, or as though a man were speculative philosophy. It is speculative philosophy that does everything, doubts everything, etc. The speculative philosopher has become too objective on the other hand to talk about himself; he says not that he himself doubts everything, but that speculation does so, and that he affirms this of speculation. Further than this he refuses to commit himself – in case of a private lawsuit. But should we not agree to be human beings! Socrates familiarly says that when we assume flute-playing we must also assume a flautist;² similarly, if we assume speculative philosophy we must also assume a speculative philosopher, or several such. 'Therefore, dear person and most worthy Mr Speculator, you at least I may surely venture to approach

² Plato, *Apology*, 27b.

on a subjective basis: Dear man, what view do you yourself take of Christianity? That is, are you a Christian or are you not? The question is not whether you go further, but only whether that is what you are. Unless indeed, for a speculative philosopher an advance beyond Christianity means ceasing to be what he was, a feat truly in the Münchhausen³ vein, perhaps possible for speculative philosophy, for I do not comprehend that enormous power, but surely impossible for the speculator *qua* human being.⁷

The speculator (unless he is as objective as the wife of our civil servant) wants to look at Christianity. It is a matter of indifference to him whether anyone accepts it or not; such anxieties are left to pupils at seminaries and lay people – and also, after all, to those who really are Christians and by no means indifferent as to whether or not they are Christians. He looks at Christianity in order now to penetrate it with his speculative, yes indeed, his genuinely speculative thought. Suppose this whole proceeding were a chimera, suppose that it were sheerly impossible. Suppose Christianity is precisely subjectivity, taking to heart, and suppose that only two kinds of person can know anything about it: those who with an infinite passionate interest in their eternal happiness base this, their happiness, in faith, upon their believing relationship to Christianity, and those who with an opposite passion (but in passion) reject it – the happy and the unhappy lovers. Suppose, accordingly, that objective indifference can learn nothing at all. Only like is understood by like, and the old principle, *quicquid cognoscitur, per modum cognoscentis cognoscitur*,⁴ must be expanded to make room for a mode of knowing in which the knower fails to know anything at all, or has all his knowledge reduced to a conceit. With a kind of observation where the observer must be in a certain state, it naturally follows that if he is not in that state he will apprehend nothing. He may of course attempt to deceive one by saying that he is in this condition even if he is not; but in the fortunate case where he happens to say himself that he is not in this state, he is deceiving no one. Of course if Christianity is essentially something objective, then the observer too must be objective. But if Christianity is essentially subjectivity, it is a mistake if the observer is objective. For with all knowledge where the object of knowledge is the very inwardness of the subjectivity, it is also the case that the knower must be in this state. But the expression of subjectivity's utmost exertion is the infinitely passionate interest in its eternal

³ Baron von Münchhausen (1720–97), German officer famous for exaggerated stories of his own exploits.

⁴ Latin: whatever is known, is known in the mode of the knower.

happiness. Even in the case of earthly love it is a necessary requirement for the observer that he be in the inwardness of love. But there the interest is not so great, because all such love involves illusion and has, for that reason, a quasi-objective aspect that makes it still possible to speak of an experience at second hand. But when this love is interpenetrated with a God-relationship, the imperfection of illusion, that remaining semblance of objectivity, disappears; and then it holds true that for all his observing someone not in this state can gain nothing. In the infinite passionate interest for its eternal happiness, subjectivity is in its extreme exertion, at the extremity, not indeed where there is no object (the imperfect and undialectical distinction), but where God is negatively present in the subjectivity, which in this interest is the form of the eternal happiness.

The speculator views Christianity as a historical phenomenon. But suppose Christianity is nothing of the kind. 'How stupid,' I think I hear someone say, 'what matchless chasing after originality to say such a thing, especially now, that philosophy has grasped the necessity of the historical.' Yes, what is speculative philosophy not capable of grasping! For if a speculator were to assert that he had understood the necessity of a historical phenomenon, I would ask him to busy himself for a moment with the misgivings that the *Crumbs* presented, in all simplicity, in the 'Interlude' between chapters 4 and 5. It is to this part that I shall refer for the present; on it I shall always be happy to base any further dialectical elaborations whenever I have the good fortune to be dealing with a speculative philosopher, a human being, for speculative philosophy is something I dare not get involved with. And now this matchless chasing after originality! Let us consider an analogy. Take a married couple: you see how their marriage leaves its clear stamp on the outside world, forms a phenomenon in existence (though on a smaller scale, just as Christianity has left its stamp on life world historically); but their wedded love is no historical phenomenon, the phenomenal here is of no importance and the importance it receives for husband and wife is only through their love. But looked at in another way (i.e., objectively), the phenomenal is a deception. So too with Christianity. Is that so original? Compared to the Hegelian principle, that the external is the internal and the internal the external,⁵ it is indeed highly original. But it would be even more original not only were the Hegelian axiom admired by our age but also had it

⁵ Cf. *Hegel's Logic*, tr. W. Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), §§ 138–40, pp. 196–200.

retroactive power to abolish, in historical reverse, the distinction between the visible and the invisible Church. The invisible Church is no historical phenomenon; it cannot as such be observed objectively at all, because it *is* only in subjectivity. Alas, my originality does not seem to amount to very much after all, in spite of all the commotion, of which I am nevertheless unaware. I say only what every schoolchild knows without perhaps their being able to put it quite so clearly. And this is a trait which the schoolchild shares with great speculative philosophers, only that the schoolchild is still too green, the speculator too overripe.

That the speculative viewpoint is objective there is of course no denying. On the contrary, just to provide further indication, I shall repeat here once more the experiment of placing the subjectivity infinitely concerned for its eternal happiness in relation to it, from which the objectivity of the speculative viewpoint precisely becomes evident through making the subject comic. He is not comic because infinitely interested (on the contrary, anyone not infinitely and passionately interested, but who tries nevertheless to make people believe that he has an interest in his eternal happiness, is a comic figure). No, the comic lies in the objective's disparity.

If the speculative philosopher is at the same time a believer (as is also said), he must have perceived long ago that speculative philosophy can never acquire the same meaning for him as faith. It is precisely as a believer that he is infinitely interested in his eternal happiness, and it is in faith that he is assured of it (NB in the way that one can be in faith, i.e., not once and for all but daily acquiring the certain spirit of faith through the infinite personal passionate interest). And he bases no eternal happiness upon his philosophical speculations. Rather, he deals circumspectly with philosophy in case it tricks him out of the certainty of faith (which has in it, at every moment, the infinite dialectic of uncertainty) into the indifference of objective knowledge. This, from a plainly dialectical point of view, is how the matter stands. So if he says that he bases his eternal happiness on the speculation, he is comically contradicting himself, since speculative philosophy in its objectivity is wholly indifferent to his and my and your eternal happiness, whereas an eternal happiness inheres precisely in the subjective individual's diminishing self-conceit, acquired through his utmost exertion. Additionally, when making himself out to be a believer, he is lying.

Or the speculative philosopher is not a believer. Here the speculator is of course not comic, for he is not asking about his eternal happiness at all. The comical appears only when the subject tries with an infinite passionate

interest to attach his eternal happiness to philosophical speculation. The speculator, however, does not pose the problem of which we speak; for as a speculative philosopher he becomes exactly too objective to be concerned about his eternal happiness. Just a word here, however, in order to make it clear, should anyone misunderstand many of these remarks of mine, that it is they who wish to misunderstand me and not I who am at fault. All honour to speculative philosophy, praise be to everyone who genuinely devotes himself to it. To deny the value of speculation (though one might wish for the moneychangers in the temple court etc. to be chased off as desecraters) would to my mind be to prostitute oneself, and particularly foolish in one most of whose life has in its little way been consecrated to its service, especially foolish in one who admires the Greeks. For he must know that in discussing the nature of happiness Aristotle⁶ places the highest happiness in thinking, reminding us that thinking was the blessed pastime of the eternal gods. And furthermore he must have some conception of and respect for the fearless enthusiasm of the scholar, his perseverance in the service of the idea. But for the speculating philosopher the question of his personal eternal happiness just cannot arise, for the very reason that his task consists in getting more and more away from himself, and becoming objective, thus vanishing from himself and becoming speculation's contemplative power. All this sort of thing I myself am quite conversant with. But then look, the blessed gods, those great prototypes of the speculative philosopher, neither were they concerned for their eternal happiness; in paganism the problem just did not arise. But to deal with Christianity in the same way is simply to confuse things. Since the human being is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, the happiness to be had by the speculator will be an illusion, since he desires in time to be merely eternal. Herein lies the speculator's untruth. Therefore higher than this speculative happiness is the infinite passionate interest in a personal eternal happiness. It is higher just because it is truer, because it definitely expresses the synthesis.

Understood in this way (and there would, in a sense, be no need to point out that the infinite interest in one's eternal happiness is higher, since the main point is that it is the interest itself that is in question), the comical will readily become apparent in the contradiction. The subject has a passionate infinite interest in his eternal happiness and is now supposed to be helped by speculation, i.e., by himself philosophizing.

⁶ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177a12–1177b32.

But in order to philosophize speculatively he must proceed in precisely the opposite direction, giving himself up and losing himself in objectivity, vanishing from himself. The incongruity thus confronting him will prevent him from beginning at all and pass a comic judgment upon every assurance that he has gained anything in this way.

This, from the opposite side, is just the same as what was said previously about the observer's relationship to Christianity. Christianity does not lend itself to objective observation, precisely because it wants to intensify subjectivity to the utmost; when subjectivity is thus correctly positioned, it cannot attach its eternal happiness to speculative philosophy. The contradiction between the subject with a passionate infinite interest and philosophical speculation, when it is supposed to help him, is one that I shall try to illustrate in a metaphor drawn from the perceptual world. In sawing wood, it is important not to exert too much pressure on the saw; the lighter the hand of the sawyer, the better the saw operates. Were someone to press down on the saw with all his might, he would no longer be able to saw at all. Similarly, it is important for the speculating person to make himself objectively light, but the person with a passionate infinite interest in his own eternal happiness makes himself subjectively as heavy as possible. For this very reason he makes it impossible for him himself to speculate. If now Christianity requires this infinite interest in the individual subject (which is assumed, since this is the point on which the problem turns), it is easy to see that he cannot possibly find in speculation what he seeks.

This can also be expressed as follows: speculative philosophy simply prevents the problem from emerging, so its whole answer is only a mystification.

PART TWO

The subjective problem. The subject's relation
to the truth of Christianity, or what it is
to become a Christian

Section One

Something on Lessing

Chapter 1

An expression of gratitude to Lessing

If a wretched amateur thinker, a speculative crank who, like a poor lodger, occupied an attic at the top of a vast building, sat there in his little closet, absorbed in what seemed to him difficult thoughts; if he began to conceive a dim suspicion that somewhere or other there must be something wrong with the foundations, without finding out more specifically how; if, whenever he looked out of his garret window, he shuddered as he saw the redoubled and hurried efforts to beautify or expand the building, so that after having seen and shuddered he subsided, drained of energy, uncomfortable as a spider who in its narrow nook sustains a miserable existence since the last house-cleaning, all the while anxiously sensing a storm in the air; if, whenever he expressed his doubts to someone, he perceived that his speech, because of its departure from the usual manner of dressing up a thought, was regarded as the worn-out and bizarre costume of some unfortunate derelict – if, I say, such an amateur thinker and speculative crank were suddenly to make the acquaintance of a man whose celebrity did not directly ensure for him the validity of his thoughts (for the poor lodger was not quite so objective as to be able with no more ado to draw the conclusion backwards from renown to truth), but whose fame was for him, in his abandonment, nevertheless a smile of fortune, finding one or two of his difficult thoughts touched upon by the famous man: ah, what gladness, what festivity in the little garret chamber when that poor lodger took comfort in the glorious remembrance of the celebrity, while his occupation with thoughts took on confidence, the difficulties took on shape, and he the hope of understanding himself; i.e., the hope first of understanding the difficulty and then perhaps of being able to overcome it! For regarding the understanding of difficulties, it is indeed a matter

of what Peter Degn improperly wants incorporated into the order of ecclesiastical advancement – ‘First the parish clerk ...’¹ – it is first a matter of understanding the difficulty and then you can always go on to explain it – if you can.

Well then, in jest and in earnest, forgive, illustrious Lessing,² this expression of starry-eyed gratitude, forgive its jesting form! At this respectful distance it is, to be sure, quite unintrusive. Free from world-historical bluster and systematic compulsion, it is purely personal. If it is untrue, the reason is that it is all *too* starry-eyed, for which the jesting tone makes amends. And this jesting tone has also its deeper ground in the inverse relationship: that of someone who experimentally evokes doubts without explaining why he does so, and that of someone who experimentally seeks to present the religious as larger than life without explaining why he does so.

The expression does not concern what is ordinarily and also, I assume, rightly admired in Lessing. To admire in this manner I feel myself incompetent. It has nothing to do with Lessing as scholar, not with what appeals to me as a brilliant myth: that he was a librarian, not with what appeals to me as an epigram: that he was the soul in a library, that he had a well-nigh omnipresent first-hand acquaintance with a vast body of learning, a gigantic apparatus under the insight of thought, obedient to the spirit’s beckoning, and pledged to the service of the idea. It has nothing to do with Lessing as poet, not with his mastery in constructing the dramatic setting, not with his psychological command of poetic revelation, not with his no doubt hitherto unsurpassed dramaturgical lines, which, in their intertwining in the dialogue, move freely and unconstrained and with an easy conversational tone, even though burdened with thought. It has nothing to do with Lessing as aesthetician, not with that line of demarcation which, at his command and quite otherwise decisive than a pope’s, was drawn between poetry and art; not with that wealth of aesthetic observation which continues to suffice even in our own age. It has nothing to do with Lessing as sage; not with that ingenious wisdom that concealed itself modestly in the humble dress of the fable. No, it concerns something where the whole point is precisely that one

¹ An allusion to Ludwig Holberg’s comedy, *Erasmus Montanus*. Peter Degn (Peter Deacon) is the parish clerk or deacon.

² G. H. Lessing (1729–81), German nonconformist thinker, dramatist and critic. See the translator’s introduction.

cannot admire him directly, or enter through one's admiration into any immediate relationship with him, since the merit consists precisely in his having prevented it: that he shut himself up religiously within the isolation of his own subjectivity, that in religious respects he did not let himself be hoaxed into becoming world-historical and systematic but understood, and knew how to insist, that the religious concerned Lessing and Lessing alone, just as it concerns every other human being in the same manner; understood that he had infinitely to do with God and nothing, nothing directly to do with any human being. This, you see, is the object of my thanks, if only it were certain that this is how it really is with Lessing, if only! And if it were certain, Lessing could rightly say to me: Don't mention it. Would that it were certain! Yes, in vain would I burst in on him with the persuasion of my admiration; in vain would I beg, threaten, bluster. Lessing has seized upon just that very Archimedean point of the religious life which, though it may not enable you to move the whole world, needs the force of the whole world to be discovered, if you possess Lessing's presuppositions. Would it were so!

But now to his result! Has he accepted Christianity, has he rejected it, has he defended it, has he attacked it, so that I can adopt the same opinion too, relying on him who had poetic imagination enough to be at any given moment contemporary with that event that occurred now 1,812 years ago, and in so primitive a fashion as to exclude every historical illusion, every backwards-looking objective falsification? Yes, grab Lessing there! No, he had also sceptical ataraxy and religious sensibility enough to be aware of the category of the religious. If anyone denies this I demand that the question be put to a vote. Well, then, to his result! Wonderful Lessing, he has no result, none whatever; there is no trace of any result. Truly, no father confessor to whom a secret was entrusted, no girl who had sworn herself and her love to silence and became immortal through keeping her pledge, nor the person who took his enlightenment with him to the grave, no one could comport himself more circumspectly than Lessing in achieving the more difficult task: to speak as well. Nor can Satan himself, as a third party, say anything positively as third party. As for God, when he is present in the religious he can never be a third party; just this is the secret of the religious.

What the world has perhaps always suffered from is a dearth of what might be called real individualities, persons of decisive subjectivity, those with artistically imbued powers of reflection, those who think

for themselves, as distinct from the bawlers and lecturers. The more objective the world and the subjectivities become, the more difficult it is with the religious categories, just because they belong within subjectivity, which is why wanting to be world-historical, scientific, objective in relation to the religious is well-nigh an excess of irreligion. But I have not dragged out Lessing to have someone to appeal to; even just wanting to be subjective enough to appeal to another's subjectivity is an attempt at becoming objective, the first step towards obtaining a majority in one's favour, and towards transforming one's God-relationship into a speculation on the basis of probabilities and of partnership and other shareholders in the enterprise.

But with regard to becoming properly subjective, again it is a question of the presuppositions that the subject must penetrate with reflection, the weight of objectivity he has to jettison, and of how infinite a conception he has of what this turn means, its responsibility and its *discrimen*.³ Even if the requirements from this consideration reduce the eligible individualities to a very small number, and even if Lessing seemed to me the only one, it is not to appeal to him that I drag him forward here (ah, whoever dared it, whoever dared place himself in an immediate relation to him, yes, he'd be helped!). It also occurs to me that it would be dubious because a resort to such an appeal would mean that I had also contradicted myself and nullified the whole thing. If the subjective individual has not worked himself through and out of his objectivity any appeal to another individual will simply be a misunderstanding; and if he has done that, he will, as subjective, doubtless know what course he is on and the dialectical presuppositions in which, and in accordance with which, he has his religious existence. The course of the development of the religious subject has the remarkable trait that the way opens up before the individual and then closes behind him. And why should not the deity, too, know how to maintain his price! Wherever there is something extraordinary and something of value to be seen, there is sure to be a pressing throng, but the proprietor takes care to allow only one at a time to enter – the throng, the mass, the mob, the world-historical tumult is left outside. And the deity surely possesses what is most precious of all. But it also knows far better than any earthly caretaker how to protect it, knows far better how to prevent anyone from slipping in world

³ Latin: distinction, turning-point.

historically, objectively, scientifically, under cover of the crowd. And whoever understands may doubtless express the same in his conduct, although the same conduct can be impudence in one person and religious courage in another, there being no way of distinguishing between these objectively. Whether Lessing has done this great thing, whether he has humbled himself under the deity and with love of the human come to the deity's aid by expressing his God-relationship in his relation to others, so as not to incur the meaningless consequence of his having his God-relationship and anyone else having a God-relationship only through him – who can know that for certain? If I did know it for certain I could appeal to him; and if I could appeal to him and be justified in doing that, then certainly Lessing would not have done it.

Now of course Lessing has been left behind long ago, a vanishing little way-station on the systematic railroad of world history. To resort to him is to stand self-condemned, to confirm every contemporary in the objective judgment that one is unable to keep up with the times, where one now travels by railroad, so that the whole trick is to jump into the first and best wagon and leave it to world history. To call him to mind is an act of despair, for then it is indeed certain that it is all over with you, certain that if Lessing has already said some of what you want to say, then you have been left way, way behind – whether what Lessing said was true (in which case steering away from it with the speed of a train is a dubious course of action) or people have given themselves no time to understand Lessing, who always knew shrewdly how to hold himself and his dialectical knowledge, and his subjectivity within that knowledge, away from every busy transfer to bearer. But watch out! Having armed yourself against all this injury and vexation, the worst is still to come: suppose Lessing deceived you. No, that Lessing, he was an egoist after all! With religious matters he always kept something to himself, something which indeed he gave word to but in an artful way, not something that could be directly rattled off by teaching assistants; something which always stays the same while constantly changing its form; something not to be handed out on a printer's block for insertion in a systematic formulary but which the gymnastic dialectician comes up with and changes and comes up with again, the same and yet not the same. It was really a dirty trick of Lessing's always to be changing the lettering in this way in connection with the dialectical, just like a mathematician confusing the learner who fails to keep his eye on the proof but makes do with a cursory acquaintance that goes by the characters. It was

shameful of Lessing thus to bring upon all those who so infinitely wanted to swear *in verba magistri*⁴ the embarrassment of never being able to adopt towards him the only attitude natural to them, namely taking an oath, that he did not say outright 'I attack Christianity', so that the oath-takers could say 'We swear'; or that he did not say outright 'I defend Christianity', so that the oath-takers could say 'We swear.' It was an abuse of his dialectical skill that he necessarily had to bring them to swear falsely (since necessarily they had to swear), partly in swearing that what he said now was the same as what he had said before, because the form and dress were the same; partly in swearing that what he said now was not the same, because the form and dress differed, like the traveller who under oath recognized his robber in an innocent man and failed to recognize the robber himself because he only recognized his wig, and so should surely have confined himself to swearing that he recognized the wig.

No indeed, Lessing was no serious man. His whole presentation lacks earnest and is without that true dependability that is all that others who think backwards and yet without reflection need. And then his style! This polemical tone, which has at any moment endless time for a witticism, even in a period of ferment, for according to an old newspaper I've found, those times, just as now, were times of ferment the like of which the world has never seen. This stylistic nonchalance which pursues a simile to the most minute detail, as if the literary expression itself had value, as if peace and safety reigned, regardless of whether the printer's devil and world history, yes all of humankind, were waiting for him to finish. This scholarly idleness that refuses to obey the paragraph norm. This mingling of jest and earnest, making it impossible for a third party to tell which is which – unless the third party knew it by himself. This artfulness, which perhaps even occasionally puts a false accent on the indifferent so that just in that way those in the know best grasp what is dialectically decisive, and the heretics get nothing to spread abroad. This form of his which is so entirely part of his individuality, vigorously and refreshingly clearing its own path, and not dying away in a mosaic of catchwords and authorized modes of expression and contemporary turns of phrase that reveal to one in quotation marks that the writer keeps up with the times; whereas Lessing on the contrary confides to the reader *sub rosa*⁵ that he is keeping up with the thought. This adroitness in teasingly using his own *I*, almost like Socrates, declining

⁴ Latin: to the master's words. ⁵ Latin: privately.

all partnership, or rather, insuring himself against it, regarding that truth where the main thing is precisely to be alone about it, without wishing to have others with him for the sake of the triumph, since here there is none to gain unless it is infinity's joke about becoming nothing before God; without wishing to have people about him when struggling in the deadly perils of solitary thought since exactly this is the way.

All this, is it earnest? Is it earnest to treat all in essentially the same way, if in varying form, not only to evade the stupid attempts of fanatics to enrol him in the service of positive social ends and elude their foolish arrogance when they would exclude him, but even to refuse to be impressed by the noble Jacobi's⁶ enthusiastic eloquence, and to remain unmoved by Lavater's amiable, simple-minded concern for his soul?⁷ Is it a serious man's way of departing this life that his last words should be as mysterious as all the rest,^a that the noble Jacobi even dare not vouch for the salvation of his soul, something that Jacobi was serious enough to be concerned about – almost as much as about his own? Is this earnest? Yes, let those decide the point who are too earnest even to be able to understand jest. They ought to be competent judges, unless it should be impossible to understand earnest when one does not understand jest; something which (according to Plutarch's *Moralia*) that earnest Roman Cato Uticensis⁸ is supposed already to have indicated by showing the dialectical reciprocity of jest and earnest. But if Lessing is no earnest man, what hope is there for someone who renounces so very much, the world-historical and contemporary systematics, in falling back on him?

^a Hegel's dying words are also supposed to have been that only one man had understood him and that one had misunderstood him; and if Hegel has done the same it might serve to reflect some credit on Lessing. But alas, there was a great difference. Hegel's statement has straight away the defect of a direct form and hence is quite inadequate as an expression of a misunderstanding of this kind, and it is enough to show that Hegel didn't exist artistically in the deceptive form of a double reflection. Then there's also the fact that Hegel uses a direct mode of communication in the entire series of seventeen volumes, so that if he has found no one who understands him, so much the worse for him. It would be another matter with, e.g., Socrates, who planned his entire form of communication artistically so as to be misunderstood. Regarded as a dramatic line by Hegel in the hour of death, this saying is best interpreted as delirium, as thoughtlessness on the part of a man who, now in death, wants to frequent paths he has never attempted in life. If Hegel as a thinker is one of a kind, then there is no one with whom he can be compared; and if he nevertheless should have some parallel somewhere, one thing is certain: he would have nothing in common with Socrates.

⁶ F. H. Jacobi (1743–1819), German philosopher of feeling and faith, critical of Immanuel Kant. See the translator's introduction.

⁷ J. C. Lavater (1741–1801), Swiss priest, physiognomist, poet and author acquainted with many prominent cultural figures especially in Germany.

⁸ M. Portius Cato (95–46 BC) studied oratory and philosophy. He died by his own hand in Utica (in Africa) rather than fall into the hands of Caesar, posthumously earning the surname Uticensis.

You see, that's how hard it is to approach Lessing in religious matters. If I were to present the individual ideas, ascribing them to him directly and in parrot fashion; if I were to enfold him politely, obligingly, in my admiring embrace, as the one to whom I owed everything; then he might smilingly disengage himself, leaving me in the lurch, an object of ridicule. If I were to keep his name quiet, come out bawling joyously over this matchless discovery of my own that no one before me had made, then that πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς,⁹ were I to imagine him there, would no doubt thump me on the shoulder and say with a look of ambivalent admiration: 'Darin haben Sie recht, wenn ich das gewußt hätte.'¹⁰ And then I, if no one else, would understand that he had the better of me.

⁹ Greek: resourceful (or ever-ready) Odysseus. ¹⁰ 'You are right in that, if only I had known.'

Chapter 2

Possible and actual theses of Lessing

So without daring to appeal to Lessing, without positively citing him as my source, without obliging anyone on account of Lessing's fame to feel bound to want to understand, or to protest that they do understand, what only brings them into a suspect association with my own obscurity, doubtless as off-putting as Lessing's fame is attractive, I am now about to present what I'll be damned if I won't attribute to him anyway, even if uncertain that he agrees; what I might, by throwing caution to the winds, easily be tempted to foist on him teasingly as something he had actually said, even if not directly; what in another mood I could wish in starry-eyed admiration to dare thank him for; what again with proud restraint and self-respect I ascribe to him simply out of generosity; and what, once more, I fear will offend or inconvenience him through my bringing his name into connection with these things.

Yes, one seldom finds an author who is such pleasant company as Lessing. And why is that? It is, I think, because he is so sure of himself. All this trivial and easy association between the eminent and the less eminent: that the one is genius, master, the other apprentice, messenger, hired servant, etc. is obviated here. If I strove with a devil's might and main to become Lessing's disciple, I could not, for he has prevented it. Just as he himself is free so, too, I imagine, he wants to make everyone else free in relation to him, begging to be excused the exhalations and *gaucheries* of the apprentice, afraid of becoming an object of ridicule in the hands of the teaching assistants: a parroting echo's routine rendition of what was said.

1. *The subjective existing thinker is aware of communication's dialectic.*

While objective thought is indifferent to the thinking subject and his existence, the subjective thinker is, as existing, essentially interested in his own thinking, is existing in it. Therefore, his thinking has a different kind of reflection, namely the reflection of inwardness, of possession, by virtue of which it belongs to the subject and to no other. While objective thought invests everything in result, and helps all mankind to cheat by copying and rattling off result and answer by rote, subjective thought invests everything in becoming and omits the result; partly just because this belongs to him, since he possesses the way, partly because as an existing individual he is constantly coming to be, which holds true of every human being who has not let himself be fooled into becoming objective, into inhumanly becoming speculation.

The reflection of inwardness is the subjective thinker's double reflection. In thinking, he thinks the universal, but as existing in this thinking, as assimilating this in his inwardness, he becomes more and more subjectively isolated.

The difference between subjective and objective thinking must express itself in the form of the communication,^a that is, the subjective thinker has to be aware from the start that artistically the form must have as much reflection as he himself has when existing in his thinking. In an artistic

^a Double reflection is implicit in the very idea of conveying something, that the subject existing in the isolation of his inwardness (who wants through this inwardness to express the life of eternity, in which sociality and all community are unthinkable because the existential category of movement cannot be thought here, and along with all essential communication, too, since everyone must be assumed essentially in possession of everything) nevertheless wishes to convey something personal, and hence wants to have his thinking in the inwardness of his subjective existence and at the same time convey it to others. This contradiction cannot possibly (except for thoughtlessness, for which all things are indeed possible) find expression in a direct form. – That the subject existing in this way might want to convey something personal is not so hard to understand. A lover, e.g., for whom his love is exactly his inwardness, may very well wish to convey this, but he will not do so directly, just because for him the main point is the inwardness of his love. Essentially occupied in constantly acquiring the inwardness of love, he has no result and is never finished, but for that reason may still want to tell of this, although he can never use a direct form because such a form presupposes result and finality. So, too, with a God-relationship: just because he is himself constantly coming to be inwardly, i.e., in inwardness, he can never impart this directly, since the movement here is exactly the opposite. To impart something directly presupposes certainty; but certainty is impossible for anyone in the course of becoming and is just what makes for the deception. If, to cite an erotic situation, a young girl were to long for the wedding day because of the safe assurance it gave her, if she wanted to give herself the comfort of legal security as spouse, if she wished to exchange maidenly yearning for marital yawning, her husband would be right to complain of her infidelity even though she loved no one else, because she would have lost the idea and in fact did not love him. And this, after all, is the essential infidelity in the erotic relationship, loving another being the accidental infidelity.

manner, please note; for the secret does not lie in a direct utterance of the double reflection, since a direct expression of it of that kind is precisely a contradiction.

Ordinary communication between one human being and another is wholly immediate, because ordinarily people exist immediately. When one person addresses something to someone and another acknowledges the same, word for word, it is taken for granted that they are in agreement and have understood one another. Precisely because the one addressing is unaware of the double nature of thought–existence, he is also incapable of noting the double reflection involved in the process of imparting something.¹ So he does not suspect that this kind of agreement may be the greatest possible misunderstanding, nor, naturally, that just as the subjective existing thinker has made himself free through this double nature, so the secret of all imparting consists precisely in emancipating the other, and just for that reason he must not impart what he has to say directly, indeed that it is even ungodly to do so. This latter holds true the more the subjective is essential and, accordingly, first and foremost in the religious sphere, that is, as long as it is not God who is imparting, or someone presuming to appeal to the miraculous authority of an apostle, but just a human being who is partial to having meaning in what he says and does. The subjective religious thinker, who to become such must have apprehended the double nature of existence, readily perceives that the direct mode of communication is to cheat God (possibly cheating him of another human being's true worship), to cheat himself (as if he had ceased to be an existing individual), an attempt to cheat another person (who possibly acquires a merely relative God-relationship), and a form of cheating that brings him into contradiction with his entire thought. To point this out directly would again be a contradiction, because the form would be direct in spite of all the double reflection in the content. Asking a thinker to contradict his entire thought and worldview in the form he gives to his message, consoling him by saying that it will be to his benefit, urging him that no one will bother their head about it, indeed, that in these objective times no one will even notice, since such extreme consequences are considered a foolishness that every systematic hired servant thinks nothing of, well that's good advice and not even expensive. Suppose it were the life-view of a religiously existing subject that one must not have a

¹ 'Impart' here as an alternative translation of 'meddelelse' (usually translated 'communicate'). See the 'Note on the translation'.

disciple, that this is treason to both God and men; suppose he were also a little foolish (for if it takes a little more than mere honesty to make one's way in the world, then stupidity is always necessary for real success and to have many properly understand you) and said this directly, with unction and pathos, what then? Well, yes, he would indeed be understood. Soon ten would apply, asking to be engaged just for a free shave once a week to preach this doctrine; i.e., and as further confirmation of the doctrine's truth, he would have had the extraordinary good luck to acquire disciples who accepted and spread this teaching about having no disciples.

Objective thinking is wholly indifferent to subjectivity, and by the same token to inwardness and appropriation. Its mode of communication is therefore direct. It goes without saying that it need not be easy on that account. But it is direct, it lacks the deviousness and art of double reflection; it does not have that god-fearing and humane solicitude in imparting something of itself that belongs to subjective thinking. It can be understood directly and rattled off by rote. Objective thinking therefore takes notice only of itself, and for that reason is really not a case of communicating at all,^b at least not artistic communicating in so far as it would require one to think of the receiver and pay attention to the message's form in relation to the receiver's misunderstanding. Objective thinking^c is, like most human beings, so basically amicable and communicative. It gives of itself without further ado and resorts at most to assurances of its truth, recommendations and promises about how some day everyone will come to accept this truth – so sure is it. Or perhaps rather so unsure, because the assurance, the recommendation and the promise, which are indeed for the sake of those others who are supposed to accept the truth, might also be for the sake of the teacher, who stands in need of the surety and dependability of a majority vote. If his contemporaries take it from him, he makes a draft on posterity – so sure is he. This kind of surety has something in common with the kind of

^b That is how it always is with the negative: wherever present unconsciously it transforms positivity into negativity. Here it transforms the communication into an illusion, because no thought is given to the negative in the communicating, it is conceived simply and solely as positive. In double reflection's deceit, thought is given to the negative element in the communicating, and therefore this type of communication, which compared with the other seems not to be such, is precisely communication.

^c It must always be kept in mind that I am speaking of the religious, in which sphere objective thinking, when taken as ranking highest, is exactly irreligiousness. But wherever objective thinking is in its place, its direct form of communication is also in order, just because it is not supposed to have anything to do with subjectivity.

independence which, independent of the world, needs the world as witness to its independence, to be certain that one is independent.

The communication's form is something other than its expression. When the thought has found its suitable expression in the word, which is achieved by means of the first reflection, there follows the second reflection which concerns the relation between the matter to be imparted and the imparter, and reflects the imparter's own relation to the idea. Once again let us cite a few examples; we have plenty of time, since what I am writing here is not the awaited final § that completes the system.

Suppose^d someone wanted to impart the following conviction: truth is inwardness, objectively there is no truth, but appropriation is the truth. Suppose him to be very eager and enthusiastic to have this said, since if people could only hear it they would be saved; suppose he said it on every occasion and succeeded in moving the hard-boiled as well as those who perspire easily: what then? No doubt there would be some workers standing idle in the marketplace and simply on hearing this summons would go forth to work in the vineyard² – proclaiming this doctrine for all. And then? He would then have contradicted himself still further, just as he had from the beginning; for the eagerness and enthusiasm to have it said and get it heard was already a misunderstanding. What of course was most important was that he should be understood, and the inwardness of the understanding would consist exactly in each individual coming to understand it by himself. Here he had even gone so far as to obtain town criers of inwardness, and a town crier of inwardness is a quite remarkable animal. In order actually to impart such a conviction, art and self-control would be needed; self-control enough to grasp in inwardness that the individual's God-relationship is the main thing, and the bustle of a third party a lack of inwardness and an excess of amiable stupidity; art enough to vary the doubly reflected form of the communication as inexhaustibly as the inwardness is itself inexhaustible. The greater the artistry, the greater the inwardness. Yes, if he had much art he might even be willing to say that he used it in the certainty of being able the next moment to ensure the inwardness of his communication, because he was infinitely

^d I say only 'suppose', and in this form I am allowed to present what is most certain and what most absurd, for even the most certain is not posited as such but only assumed in order to throw light on the matter; and even the most absurd is not posited essentially but only assumptively in order to illustrate the logical implication.

² An allusion to Matthew 20:1–16.

concerned to preserve his own inwardness; a concern that saves the concerned from all positive prattling.

Suppose someone wanted to impart the conviction that it is not truth that is the truth but that the way is the truth, i.e., that the truth is only in the becoming, in the process of appropriation, that hence there is no result. Suppose he were a philanthropist who must needs proclaim this to all and sundry; suppose he made the splendid short cut of imparting this in the direct form in *Adresseavisen*,³ thus gaining a mass of adherents, while the artistic way would, despite his utmost exertions, leave it unclear whether he had helped anyone: what then? Why then, his statement became precisely a result.

Suppose someone wished to impart that all receiving is a producing; suppose he repeated it so often that this thesis even came to be used in directions for calligraphy: then he would certainly have had his thesis confirmed.

Suppose someone wanted to impart the conviction that a person's God-relationship is a secret; suppose he were that very congenial kind of man who was so fond of others that he simply could not keep it to himself; suppose he nevertheless had wit enough to sense some of the contradiction involved in imparting it directly and accordingly told it to others but under a pledge of secrecy: what then? Well, then he must either assume that the disciple was wiser than the teacher, so that he could really keep the secret while the teacher could not (an excellent satire on being a teacher!), or he must become so beatified in gibberish as to fail altogether to note the contradiction. There is something curious about these good souls; it is so touching that they have to come out with it – and it is so vain to believe that some other person needs one's assistance in their God-relationship, as if God were unable sufficiently to help himself and the one concerned. But it is rather strenuous keeping hold of the thought, while existing, that one is nothing before God, that all one's own efforts are but a jest; rather chastening to honour every human being so as not to venture meddling directly with his God-relationship, partly because there is enough to do with one's own, and partly because God is no friend of impertinence.

Wherever the subjective is of importance in knowledge, and appropriation is thus the main thing, the process of communication is a work of art;

³ The everyday name of a newspaper whose full title in translation is *Information from Copenhagen's Only Royally Licensed Advertising Office*.

it is doubly reflected, and its first form is precisely the artful principle that the subjectivities must be kept devoutly apart from one another, and not allowed to run together and coagulate into objectivity. That is objectivity's farewell to subjectivity.

The ordinary communication, objective thinking, has no secrets; it is only with doubly reflected subjective thinking that secrets arise, i.e., all of its essential content is essentially secrecy because it cannot be imparted directly. This is the meaning of secrecy. The fact that the knowledge in question is not to be said directly, because the essential thing with the knowledge is the appropriation, makes it a secret for everyone who is not in the same way doubly reflected within himself. But the fact that this is the essential form of such truth makes it impossible to express it in any other way.^c So anyone wanting to impart it directly is dull-witted; and if another person asks him to do so, he too is dull-witted. In the face of such a devious and artistic imparting of truth, ordinary human dullness will always raise the cry of egoism. And when dullness at last prevails, and the imparting has become direct, dullness will have won so much that the one who imparts will have become just as dull.

One can distinguish between the essential and the contingent secret. What, for instance, has been said in a privy council is a contingent secret until it is made public, for when made official the statement itself can be understood directly. It is a contingent secret when no one knows what will happen a year from now; but when it has happened it can be understood directly. On the other hand, when Socrates with his daimon⁴ isolated himself from any external relationship and, for instance, took it as a *posito*⁵ that everyone must do the same, such a view of life would become essentially a secret or an essential secret, for it cannot be imparted directly. The most Socrates could do was, through his maieutic art, to help another negatively to the same view. Everything subjective, which due to its dialectical inwardness eludes a direct form of expression, is an essential secret.

^c If a subjectively developed person lived today, conscious of the art of communication, he would experience the most magnificent comedies and farces. He would have the door shut in his face for being incapable of objectivity until a kind-hearted objective chap, a systematic sort of a bloke, finally took pity on him and helped him halfway into the paragraphs. For, something that was once considered an impossibility, namely to paint Mars in the armour that made him invisible, would now succeed extremely well; in fact, stranger still, now it would halfway succeed.

⁴ The divine voice that Socrates followed. ⁵ Latin: posit, or premise.

Such a form of communication in its inexhaustible artistry corresponds to and reflects the existing subject's own relation to the idea. In order to throw light on this experimentally, without deciding whether or not any one actually existing has been aware of this, i.e., existed in this way, I will indicate the nature of the existence-relation.

2. The existing subjective thinker is, in his existence-relation to the truth, just as negative as positive, has just as much humour as essentially he has pathos, and is constantly coming to be, i.e., striving.

Since the existing subject is existing (and this is the lot of every human being, except those who are objective and have pure being to be in), he is indeed on the way to being. Then just as the form of his imparting must conform essentially with his own existence, so must his thought correspond to the form of existence. From Hegel everyone is now familiar with the dialectic of becoming. What in becoming is the alternation between being and non-being (a nevertheless somewhat obscure definition inasmuch as being itself is also the continuity in the alternation) is later the negative and the positive.

We hear talk often enough these days of the negative, and of negative thinkers, and in this connection we often enough hear the harangues of the positive ones, and the prayers they offer in thanks to God and Hegel that they are not as those negative ones but have become positive. The positive element in respect of thought can be referred to these categories: sense certainty, historical knowledge, speculative result. But this positive element is precisely untruth. Sense certainty (cf. the Greek sceptics and the whole account given in modern philosophy from which much may be learned) is deceptive; historical knowledge is an illusion (since it is knowledge by approximation); the speculative result is a phantom. That is, all this 'positive' fails to express the situation of the knowing subject in existence; it therefore concerns a fictitious objective subject, and to mistake oneself for such a subject is to be and remain the victim of a hoax. Every subject is an existing subject, and that fact must therefore express itself in all his knowing, and in preventing the knowing arriving at an illusory finality, whether in sense certainty, historical knowledge, or speculative result. In historical knowledge he gets to know a great deal about the world, nothing about himself, moving constantly in the sphere of approximation-knowledge while in his supposed positivity imagining himself to possess certainty, which can only be had in infinitude, where however, as existing, he cannot be but only

be constantly arriving. Nothing historical can become infinitely certain for me except this, that I exist (which in turn cannot become infinitely certain for any other individual, who in turn can only be infinitely certain of his own existence), and that is not something historical. The speculative result is an illusion in so far as the existing subject wants as thinker to abstract from the fact that he is existing, and to be *sub specie aeterni*.⁶

The negative thinkers therefore always have the advantage that there is something positive they possess, namely their awareness of the negative element; being deceived, the positive have absolutely nothing. Just because the negative element is present in life⁷ and present everywhere (for life, existence is constantly a coming to be), the only way of being saved from it is by being constantly aware of it. Being protected from it positively is precisely what it means to be deceived.

The negativity in life, or rather, the negativity of the subject (which his thinking should essentially reflect in a form adequate to it), has its ground in the subject's synthesis, in the fact that he is an existing infinite spirit. Infinitude and the eternal are the only certainty, but since they are in the subject and the latter is in life, its first expression is its betrayal⁸ and this tremendous contradiction, that the eternal becomes, that it comes into being.

The important thing, then, is that the existing subject's thinking have a form in which this can be rendered. If he says it in direct utterance, what he says is untrue; for the direct utterance leaves out the betrayal, so that the form of the communication gets in the way as when the tongue of an epileptic pronounces the wrong word, except that the person speaking may not notice the contradiction as clearly as does the epileptic. Let us take an example. The existing subject is eternal, but as existing temporal. Infinitude's treachery is now that the possibility of death is present at every moment. All positive reliability is thus rendered suspect. Unless I am aware of this at every moment my positive trust in life becomes childishness, regardless of its having become speculative, strutting on its systematic stilts,⁹ but if I do become aware of it, so infinite is infinitude's

⁶ Latin: under the aspect of eternity.

⁷ In the following, 'Tilværelse' is rendered as 'life' or 'life itself', in order to distinguish it from 'Existents' (existence). For this and other derivations of the verb form of 'at være til' see the 'Note on the translation'.

⁸ The sense of the Danish 'Svig' (and 'svigefuldt') is not caught in every context by any one English term. Betrayal, disappointment, deception, underhandedness, trickery and fraud are all possible. See the 'Note on the translation'.

⁹ Original text 'Cothurne'. Thick-soled boots worn by tragic actors in ancient Greece.

thought that it is as though it transformed my existence into a vanishing nothing. How then does the existing subject render this thought-existence of his? That this is how it is with existing is something everyone knows, but the positive know it positively, i.e., they do not know it at all – but then they are of course also busy with the whole of world history. Once a year, on a solemn occasion, this thought seizes them, and then they declare in the form of an assurance that it is so. But the fact that they note it just once in a while, on a solemn occasion, is enough to reveal that they are very positive; and the fact that they say it in the form of assurance shows that even while saying it they do not know what they say, which is also why they are capable the very next moment of forgetting it again.

That is, in connection with such negative thoughts a treacherous form of communication is the only adequate one; the direct form relies on the dependability of continuity, while life's betrayal, when I grasp it, isolates me. Anyone aware of this, anyone satisfied with being human, anyone with the strength and leisure not to want to be tricked into gaining the right to go on about¹⁰ the whole of world history, admired by the like-minded, mocked by life, will avoid direct utterance. As we know, Socrates was an idler who concerned himself with neither world history nor astronomy¹¹ (as Diogenes relates, he gave up the latter and when he later occasionally stood gazing into space I cannot just assume, although with no idea otherwise as to what he was actually up to, that he was engaged in stargazing), but he had the time and enough oddity to show concern for the plainly *human*, a concern that is curiously enough regarded as an oddity in *humans*, while on the contrary busying themselves with world history, astronomy, and the like, is not at all peculiar. From an excellent essay in *Fyenske Tidsskrift*¹² I gather that Socrates is supposed to have been somewhat ironic. It is really high time this was said, and I am now in a position to appeal to that essay's support in my assuming something of the same. Among other things, Socrates's irony, and just when he wants to bring the infinite into focus, takes the form of his speaking at first like a madman. Just as life itself is sly, so too is his speech, perhaps (for I am not as wise a man as the positive author in *Fyenske Tidsskrift*) in order to prevent having on his hands a moved and

¹⁰ Original text 'spreche', German (given Danish form): talk, here with the sense of talking loudly.

¹¹ A dig at J. L. Heiberg, whose recent interest in astronomy was current knowledge.

¹² A quarterly journal, *For Litteratur og Kritik*, published in Odense. H. F. Helveg (1816–1901) had mentioned Socrates in an article published in 1845.

believing listener who would proceed to appropriate positively the proposition about life's negativity. For Socrates, this initial insanity may also have meant that in what was said, when speaking with people, he was also conferring privately with the idea, something that no one able only to speak in a direct form will be able to understand, and something it will be useless to tell a person once and for all, since the secret is exactly that it must always be present everywhere in the thought and its rendition, just as it is present everywhere in life itself. As far as that goes, it is precisely proper that one not be understood, for then one is protected against misunderstanding. Thus Socrates really is talking like a madman when he says somewhere that it is odd behaviour on the part of the skipper, who has just transferred you safely from Greece to Italy, to walk calmly up and down the beach and collect his payment as though he had done them a good turn, even though he cannot know whether he has genuinely rendered his passengers a service, or whether it might not have been better for them to have lost their lives at sea.^f Perhaps someone present actually thought him insane (for according to Plato and Alcibiades, there was a general view that he was at least a little peculiar, *atopos*);¹³ someone else may perhaps have thought it a whimsical way of talking, perhaps. On the other hand perhaps Socrates was at the same time keeping a little tryst with his idea, with ignorance. If he did grasp infinitude in the form of ignorance, then this was indeed the form he had to have with him everywhere. Such things do not inconvenience the *privat-docent*;¹⁴ he does it once a year in § 14 with pathos, and does well not to do it elsewhere, if, that is, he has a wife and children and prospects of a good livelihood – but no understanding to lose.

The subjective existing thinker who has the infinite in his soul has it always, and his form is for this reason constantly negative. When such is the case, when in existing he actually reflects life's form in his own existence, he is, in existing, always just as negative as he is positive, for his positivity consists in the continued taking to heart¹⁵ in which he is cognizant of the negative. Among the so-called negative thinkers there

^f If a contemporary spoke in this way, everyone would no doubt see that he was mad. But the positive people know, and they know positively, that Socrates was a wise man, it's said to be quite certain: *ergo*.

¹³ Greek: out of place.

¹⁴ German untenured university teacher paid by student fees. Although Kierkegaard uses the term frequently, and dismissively, there were no *privat-docents* as such in Denmark.

¹⁵ 'Inderliggjørelse'.

are, however, some who having got a whiff of the negative, take to the positive and go out shouting into the world to advertise their beatifying negative wisdom, to press it on people and offer it for sale – and a result can be cried in the streets as surely as Holstein herring, etc. These criers are hardly much wiser than the positive thinkers, while it is inconsistent of the latter to be so furious with them since they are essentially positive. The criers are not existing thinkers; they may have been so once, until they found the result. From that moment they no longer exist as thinkers but as criers and auctioneers.

But the genuine subjective existing thinker, yes, he is constantly just as negative as positive, and vice versa; he is constantly that as long as he exists, not once and for all in a chimerical mediation. His communication conforms to this, on pain of senselessly succeeding, by being extraordinarily expansive, in transforming a learner's existence into something other than what a human existence at all is. He is cognizant of the negativity of the infinite in life, and he constantly keeps open that wound of the negative that is indeed at times the saving factor (the others let the wound heal and become positive – deceived); in communication he expresses the same. For that reason he is never a teacher but a learner; and since he is constantly just as negative as positive, he is constantly striving.

True enough, there is in this way something that a subjective thinker like this must go without; he derives none of that positive hearty joy from life. For most people, when they reach a certain point in their searching, life takes on a change. They marry, they acquire positions in life, in consequence of which they are honour bound to have something finished, to have results (for discomfiture in the face of others demands a result, while less thought is given to what might be dictated by modesty before the god), so they come to think of themselves as actually having finished, or feel obliged to think that they are so, out of deference to custom and practice; or else they sigh now and then and complain that there are so many things that get in the way of their striving (what an affront to the god if the sigh sought him; what an affront to the god, too, if the sigh is just out of custom and practice; what a contradiction to sigh over the fact that one cannot chase the higher because one grabs after the lower, instead of refraining from sighing and from grabbing at the lower!). So they engage now and then in a little striving, but the latter is only the spare marginal note to a text completed long ago. In this way, one is exempted from being executively aware of the strenuous difficulties implied by the plainest

proposition about what it is to exist *qua* human being, while, as positive thinker, one knows all about world history and our Lord's most private thoughts.

Someone existing is constantly in coming to be; the genuinely existing subjective thinker simulates this existence of his constantly in his thinking and invests all his thinking in becoming. It is the same as with style: the only writer who really has style is the one who never has anything finished, but 'troubles the waters of language'¹⁶ every time he begins, so that for him the most everyday expression comes into being with the pristine freshness of a new birth.

To be thus constantly coming to be is infinitude's deceptiveness in existence. It is enough to bring a sensate person to despair, for one feels a constant urge to have something finished, but this urge is of evil and must be renounced. The continual becoming is the uncertainty of earthly life, in which everything is uncertain. This is something every human being knows, and once in a while says, especially on a solemn occasion, and then, not without perspiration and tears, says it directly and moves both himself and others – and shows by his behaviour what was already evident in the form of his utterance, that he does not understand what he himself is saying.[§] Lucian¹⁷ has Charon in the underworld tell the following story. A man in the upper world stood talking with one of his friends, whom he then invited to dinner, promising him a rare dish. The friend thanked him for the invitation. The man then said: But be sure now to come. Definitely, replied the invited friend. So they parted and a roof tile fell down and killed the prospective guest – isn't that something to die laughing over?, adds Charon. Suppose now that the invited guest had been an orator, who perhaps just a moment previously had stirred himself and others by discoursing on the uncertainty of everything! For that is how people speak: one moment they know everything, in the same moment they do not. And that is why it is considered foolish and quirky

[§] What marks the thoroughly cultivated individuality is the degree to which his everyday thinking is dialectical. Having one's daily life in the decisive dialectic of the infinite and yet to go on living, that is the trick. Most people have complacent categories for everyday use and resort to the categories of the infinite only on solemn occasions; that is to say, they never really have them. But, naturally, to put the dialectic of the infinite to daily use, and to exist in it, is extremely strenuous. And extreme exertion is again needed to prevent the exercise, instead of providing training in existence, from treacherously tricking one out of it. It is a well-enough-known fact that a cannonade tends to deafen you; but it is also recognized that by bearing with it you are able to hear every word, just as when all is quiet. So, too, for someone with a spirit-existence intensified by reflection.

¹⁶ An allusion to John 5:4. ¹⁷ Lucianus. Greek second-century AD satirist and Sophist.

to bother one's head about it and think about the difficulties, for doesn't everyone know this? That is, what not everyone knows, knowledge that marks one person off from another, it's wonderful to be concerned about that, while as for what everyone knows, where the difference is merely the nonsense of how it is known, to be concerned about that is a waste of effort – nor can one possibly become important by knowing it. Suppose the invited guest had based his reply on the uncertainty, what then? His speech would not have been so very unlike that of a madman, even if this may have gone unnoticed by many, since it can be said so deceptively that only someone familiar with such thoughts will notice it. Nor will such a one think it madness, which it is not, for while the jesting phrase winds its way wittily into the rest of the conversation, the speaker in his private thoughts may be having a tryst with the god, who is present precisely once the uncertainty of all things is thought infinitely. Therefore someone who really has an eye for the god can see him everywhere, while someone who sees him only on extraordinary occasions sees him in fact not at all but is superstitiously deceived by a phantom vision.

That the subjective existing thinker is just as positive as negative can also be expressed by saying that he has just as much of the comic as of the pathetic. In the way people ordinarily live, comedy and pathos are portioned out so that one person has the one and another person the other, one person a little more of the one, another a little less. But for someone existing in double reflection the ratio is this: just as much pathos, just as much of the comic. The ratio gives a reciprocal insurance. The pathos which is not insured by the presence of the comic is illusion; the comic that is not insured by pathos is immaturity. Only he who himself produces this will understand it, otherwise not. What Socrates said about the sea-crossing sounds altogether like a joke, and yet it was the height of earnest. If it were meant merely in jest, many might go along with it; if regarded as sheer earnest, no doubt many who perspire easily would be stirred.

But suppose this is not at all how Socrates understood it. It would sound like a joke if a prospective guest were to say, on receiving the invitation, I'll definitely be there, believe me, barring a roof tile accidentally falling and killing me, for then I can't come. But it might also be the height of seriousness, and the speaker may, though joking with a human being, be in the presence of the god. Suppose there was a young girl awaiting the arrival of her beloved on the ship referred to by Socrates;

suppose she rushed down to the harbour, met Socrates there, and in all the passion of her love asked after the beloved. Suppose, instead of answering her, the old tease had said: Yes, sure enough the skipper is walking contentedly back and forth along the beach, rubbing the money in his pocket, although not knowing for certain that it might not have been better for the passengers to perish at sea. What then? If she were a smart young girl she would understand that Socrates had, in a way, told her that her beloved had arrived. And as soon as that was certain, what then? Why then, she would laugh at Socrates, for she was not so frantic as not to know definitely how wonderful it was that the beloved had arrived. But of course, a young girl like that was also only in the mood for her assignation, safe on the shore and with her beloved in erotic embrace, not having come far enough for a Socratic assignation with the god in the idea on the boundless ocean of uncertainty. But then suppose that the clever little girl had been through confirmation, what then? Why, then she would have had exactly the same knowledge as Socrates – the only difference was in how it was known. Yet presumably Socrates had shaped his entire life in accordance with this difference; in his seventieth year he was still not through with striving to rehearse more and more wholeheartedly what a sixteen-year-old girl already knows. For he was not like someone who knows Hebrew and is thus in a position to say to the girl: This is something you cannot do, and it takes a long time to learn it. He was not like the person who can carve in stone, something the young girl would readily understand that she could not do and understand that she had to admire. No, he knew no more than she. So no wonder that he was so indifferent to dying; the poor fellow had presumably come to realize that his life was wasted and it was now too late to begin again to learn what only the eminent know. What wonder, then, that he makes absolutely no fuss about his death, as though in him the state would lose something irreplaceable. Ah, well, he probably thought something like this: If only I'd been a professor of Hebrew, or a sculptor, or a solo dancer, to say nothing of a world-historical bliss-bestowing genius, then how could the state recover its loss of me, and how could its citizens ever come to know what I could tell them! But no question will ever be raised about me, for what I know everybody knows. What a quipster this fellow Socrates was, joking in this way about Hebrew, the art of the sculptor, ballet and world-historical beatification, and then again, caring so much about the god that, although practising without ceasing all his life (yes, as a solo dancer to the

honour of the god), he still looked forward with diffidence to the divine test. So what would that be?

The relative difference between the comic and the tragic within immediacy vanishes in double reflection, where the difference becomes infinite and their identity thereby posited. Religiously, the comic expression of worship is therefore just as god-fearing as its pathetic expression. At the root of both the comic and the tragic lies the disparity, the contradiction, between the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the becoming. A pathos which excludes the comical is therefore a misunderstanding; it is not pathos at all. The subjective existing thinker is therefore just as bifrontal¹⁸ as the situation of existing. The disparity grasped in view of the idea ahead is pathos; grasped with the idea behind, it is comedy. When the subjective existing thinker turns his face towards the idea, the grasping of the discrepancy is in pathos; when he turns his back to the idea and lets it cast its rays from behind into the same disparity, the grasping of it is in comedy. It is, in this way, the infinite pathos of religiousness to say Thou to God. It is infinitely comic when I turn my back on this, and see within finitude what falls into it from behind. Unless I have drained the comic to the last drop, I do not possess the pathos of the infinite. If I do possess the pathos of the infinite, then I straight away have the comic too. – To pray is thus the highest pathos of the infinite,^h and yet it is comicⁱ precisely

^h Socratic gazing is also an expression of the highest pathos and so also just as comic. Let us test it. Socrates stands gazing into empty space. Two passers-by appear, one of whom says to the other: 'What is that man doing?' The latter answers: 'Nothing.' Suppose one of them has a rather better conception of inwardness and gives a religious expression to Socrates's behaviour, saying: 'He is lost in the divine, he is praying.' Let us focus on this latter, he is praying. But does he not use words, perhaps even a fair number of them? No, Socrates had understood his God-relationship in such a way that he dared say nothing at all, from fear of indulging in foolish prattle, and from fear of having a mistaken wish fulfilled, examples of which are said to have occurred, as for instance when the oracle foretold a man that all his sons would become distinguished, and when the anxious father asked: 'And then I suppose they will all die a miserable death?', the oracle replied: 'This too will be granted you.' For the oracle is consistent enough to suppose that whoever consults it is a supplicant, hence the use of the word 'granted' – a sad irony for the one in question. Socrates, accordingly, does absolutely nothing. He does not even speak to God inwardly – and yet he is doing the highest thing of all. No doubt Socrates himself has realized this and knew how to bring it out teasingly. Magister Kierkegaard, on the other hand, to judge from his dissertation, has scarcely understood it. Citing the dialogue *Alcibiades secundus*, he mentions there this negative relation of Socrates towards prayer, but as might be expected from a positive candidate in theology in our time, he cannot help instructing Socrates (in a footnote) that this was true only to a certain degree.

ⁱ I am not speaking here of accidental comedy, as when a man begging held his hat before his eyes without noticing it had no crown, so that by accident one came to see him face to face.

¹⁸ From the Roman God Janus bifrons, able to see in both directions, whose name is given to January, and on earth was guardian of the gate.

because in its inwardness it is incommensurate with every external expression; especially when one conforms to the scriptural injunction to anoint the head and wash the face while fasting.¹⁹ The comic is present here in two ways. In its objectionable form it arises when, for example, a strapping man comes along praying, and to mark the inwardness of his prayer twists himself into forceful poses that are instructive, especially if he is bare-armed, for an artist studying the arm's musculature. The inwardness of prayer and its inexpressible sighs are not commensurate with the muscular. The true form of the comic is that the infinite may take place in a person and no one, no one at all, discover it in him. With regard to the incessant becoming of existence, the comic and the pathetic aspects of prayer are present simultaneously in prayer's repetition; its infinitude in inwardness seems precisely to make a repetition impossible, and hence the repetition itself is something both to smile at and to grieve over.

Just as this is how the subjective existing thinker himself exists, so too is it the way in which his presentation renders it; and it is therefore impossible without further ado for anyone to appropriate his pathos. Like the comic parts of the romantic drama, comedy winds its way through Lessing's presentation, perhaps sometimes in the wrong place, perhaps so, perhaps not, I cannot definitely say. Hauptpastor Götze²⁰ is a most *ergötzlich*²¹ figure whom Lessing has comically preserved for immortality by making him inseparable from the way he portrays him. It goes without saying that it is disturbing; one cannot abandon oneself to Lessing with the same confidence as one can to the presentations of those who, in genuine speculative seriousness, make all things of a piece and so have everything finished.

That the existing subjective thinker is constantly striving does not, however, mean that he has a goal in the finite sense, towards which he strives and reaching which would mean he was finished. No, he strives infinitely, is constantly coming to be, which is ensured by his being constantly just as negative as positive, and by his having as much essential comedy as essential pathos; which is again based in the fact that he is existing and renders this in his thinking. The becoming is the thinker's very existence, from which he can of course thoughtlessly abstract in order to become objective. How far or short a way the subjective thinker

¹⁹ The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:17).

²⁰ J. M. Goeze (1717–86) was Lessing's main opponent on the side of orthodoxy and reacted to the latter's anonymous publication in 1774 of a rationalist work by H. S. Reimarus.

²¹ 'Amusing'.

has come along this road makes no real difference (it is, after all, also just a finite, a relative comparison), as long as he is existing he is on the way to being.

Existence itself, existing, is a striving and is just as pathetic as comic: pathetic because the striving is infinite, i.e., directed towards the infinite, is an infinitizing, which is the highest pathos; comic because the striving involves a self-contradiction. From the point of view of pathos, a single second has infinite value; viewed comically, 10,000 years are but a foolish trick, just like yesterday, and yet the time in which the existing individual lives consists of just such parts. If 10,000 years are declared simply and directly a foolish trick, then many a fool would agree and find it wisdom, but he forgets that other thing, that a second has infinite value. When it is said that a second has infinite value, this or that person will be taken aback and find it easier to understand that 10,000 years have an infinite value. Yet the one is just as hard to understand as the other, if only one takes the time to understand what is to be understood, or is in another way seized so infinitely by the thought that there is no time to waste, not a second, that the second acquires infinite value.

This feature of existence calls to mind the Greek conception of Eros that we find in the *Symposium*, and which Plutarch correctly explains in his work on Isis and Osiris (§ 57). The parallel between Isis, Osiris and Typhon does not concern me, but when Plutarch reminds us that Hesiod took Chaos, Earth, Tartarus and Love to be cosmic principles, to recall Plato in this connection is very apt. For love here evidently means existence, or that by virtue of which life in its entirety is the life that synthesizes the infinite and the finite. According to Plato, Poverty and Wealth begot Eros, whose nature was made of both. But what is existence? Existence is that child born of the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal, and is therefore constantly striving. This was how Socrates saw it: that is why love is constantly striving, i.e., the thinking subject is existing. It is only the systematicians and the objective thinkers that have ceased to be human beings and have become speculative philosophy, which belongs to pure being. Naturally, the Socratic is not to be understood finitely as concerning a continued and endlessly continued striving towards a goal without reaching it. No, but however much the subject has the infinite within himself, he is, through existing, on the way to being. The thinker who, in all that he thinks, can forget to think it along with the fact that he exists, does not explain life; he makes an attempt at ceasing to

be a human being, to become a book or an objective something, which only a Münchhausen can be. That objective thought has its factual basis is not denied, but with all thinking where precisely it is subjectivity that has to be accentuated, it is a misunderstanding. If a man occupies himself throughout his whole life solely with logic, that does not make him into logic. He himself therefore exists in other categories. If he now finds that this is not worth thinking about, then so be it. It is hardly pleasant for him to learn that life mocks him, now that he is about to want to become purely objective.

3. The topics to be considered under this and the next item can be referred more definitely to Lessing in that the respective proposition can be cited directly, yet again with no straightforward certainty, since Lessing is not didactic but subjectively evasive, not wishing to pledge anyone to accept his view for his sake, or trying to help others establish a direct continuity with the source. Perhaps Lessing has himself understood that such things cannot be put across directly. At least his procedure can be explained in this way, and the explanation is possibly right, possibly.

Lessing has said (*S.W.* 5th vol. p. 80) that accidental historical truths could never become evidence of eternal truths of reason; and also (p. 83) that the transition whereby one will build an eternal truth on a historical account is a leap.

I shall now look at these two propositions rather more closely, and place them in the context of that problem of the *Crumbs*: Can one base an eternal happiness on historical knowledge? But here I would first like to make room for an observation that can help to show how deceptive people's thinking is, like the reading of the pupil who 'pretends to be reading and isn't reading all the same'.²² When two thoughts are inseparably related to each other, so that anyone able to think the one can *eo ipso*²³ think the other, it is not uncommon for an opinion to pass from mouth to mouth, from generation to generation, that makes it easy to think the one thought, while an opposite opinion makes it difficult to think the other, and even establishes the practice of being sceptical towards it. And yet the true dialectical situation is that anyone who can think the one thought can

²² Something pupils said to themselves half aloud when supposed to be repeating their lesson to the teacher.

²³ Latin: by that very fact, by the same token.

eo ipso think the other, indeed has *eo ipso* already thought the other – if he has thought the one. I have in mind here the quasi-dogma of eternal punishment.²⁴ The problem the *Crumbs* presented was: How can something historical be decisive for an eternal happiness? In saying ‘decisive’ we are *eo ipso* saying that once the happiness is decided, so too is the unhappiness, either as posited or as excluded. The first is assumed to be easy to understand; it is something every systematic philosopher has thought, every believer, and we are all indeed believers; it is a piece of cake acquiring a historical point of departure for one’s eternal happiness and having it thought. In the midst of all this safety and reliability the question comes up occasionally of an eternal unhappiness decided through a historical point of departure. Well now, look, that’s a difficult question; it is impossible to make up one’s mind what to assume, and one agrees to leave it be, as something to use once in a while in a popular address, but as undecided – alack and alas!, and then it has in fact been decided; nothing easier – so long as the first is decided. Amazing human thoughtfulness, who can gaze into your thoughtful eye without being quietly exalted! Here then the result of the continued thoughtfulness: the one thought is understood, the other left in abeyance, i.e., is not understood, and yet this one and that other are, yes, I am almost embarrassed to have to say it, they are one and the same.^j If time and a relation in time to a historical phenomenon can be decisive for an eternal happiness, then they are *eo ipso* that for the decision of an eternal unhappiness. Human thoughtfulness proceeds in another way. That is, an eternal happiness is an eternal presupposition from behind, within immanence, for every individual. As eternal, he is higher than time and therefore always has his eternal happiness at his back, that is to say, only an eternal happiness is thinkable, an eternal unhappiness is absolutely unthinkable. This is philosophically entirely in order. Christianity now comes along and posits the disjunction: either an eternal happiness or an eternal unhappiness, and decision in time. What then does human thoughtfulness do? It does not, like the *Crumbs*, notice that this is a hard saying and the invitation to think it the hardest proposal that can be made; so it does not do what it

^j As for that, the *Crumbs* might just as well have posed the opposite and let that be the problem: How can something historical become decisive for an eternal unhappiness? In that case human thoughtfulness would no doubt have found it something worth asking about, seeing it could not even be answered.

²⁴ A teaching that has almost acquired the status of dogma.

was first possible to do: it fails even to formulate the problem. No, it tells a little lie and things then go along fairly well. It takes the first half of the disjunction (either an eternal happiness) and understands by it the idea of immanence, which precisely excludes the disjunction, and with that it has thought the whole problem, until declaring bankruptcy when it comes to the second half of the disjunction, admitting that it cannot think it, which is to give itself the lie and denounce itself for having failed to think the first half. The paradoxical character of Christianity lies in its constant use of time and the historical in relation to the eternal; all thinking lies in immanence, and what then does human thoughtfulness do? It thinks immanence, pretends that this is the first half of the disjunction, and then it has thought Christianity.^k

Now to Lessing. The passage is found in a little essay, 'Über den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft; an den Herrn Director Schumann'.²⁵ L. opposes what I would call quantifying oneself into a qualitative decision. He contests the direct transition from historical trustworthiness to deciding an eternal happiness. He does not deny (for he is quick to make concessions in the interests of clarity in the categories) that what the Scriptures say of miracles and prophecies is just as reliable as other historical reports, yes, as reliable as historical reports can be at all: 'aber nun, wenn sie *nur* eben so zuverlässig sind, warum macht man sie bei dem Gebrauche auf einmal unendlich zuverlässiger?'²⁶ (p. 79) – it is because one wants to base the acceptance of a doctrine that stipulates an eternal happiness on them, that is, wants to base an eternal happiness on them. L. is willing, just like anyone else, to believe that there once lived an Alexander who conquered all Asia: 'aber wer wollte auf diesen Glauben hin irgend etwas von großem und dauerhaftem Belange, dessen Verlust nicht zu ersetzen wäre, wagen?'²⁷ (p. 81).

It is always the transition, the direct transition, from dependable history to an eternal decision that Lessing contests. The position he adopts is therefore one in which a distinction is drawn between reports

^k The proofs by which a devout orthodoxy has sought to secure the dogma of eternal punishment must be considered a misunderstanding. Still, its procedure is not at all like that of speculative philosophy, for since the latter really lies in the disjunction, all demonstration is superfluous.

²⁵ The title, 'On the demonstration of the Spirit and of power', cites 1 Corinthians 2:4.

²⁶ 'But now, seeing that they are *only* so trustworthy, why are they treated as though they were infinitely more trustworthy?'

²⁷ 'But who would risk, on the basis of this belief, anything of great and lasting significance, the loss of which would be irreparable?'

relating to miracles and prophecies, between these and being contemporary with such things. (This distinction is one that the *Crumbs* has noted in providing contemporaneity experimentally and thus eliminating what has been referred to as the subsequent history.) From the reports, i.e., from their admitted reliability, nothing follows, says Lessing, but, he adds, that if he had been contemporary with the miracles and the prophecies, that would have helped him.¹ Well informed as Lessing always is, he therefore protests against a partially misleading quotation from Origen²⁸ that has been cited with the aim of bringing this proof of the truth of Christianity into relief. He protests by adding the closing words of the quotation, which show that O. assumes that in his time miracles still occurred, and that he assigns a demonstrative power to these miracles, with which he is contemporary, just as those that he reads about.

Since Lessing has taken this position regarding a given account, there is no opportunity for him to underline the further dialectical problem of whether contemporaneity would be of any help, whether it could be more than *occasion*, which the historical report can also be. Lessing seems to assume the contrary. But perhaps this appearance is produced so as to give his fencing *e concessis*²⁹ a greater degree of dialectical clarity in the face of a definite particular man. The *Crumbs* sought to show that, on the contrary, contemporaneity helps not at all, because there is in all eternity no direct transition, which of course would also have been an immeasurable injustice against all who came after, an injustice and a distinction far worse than the one between Jews and Greeks, circumcised and uncircumcised, that Christianity has cancelled.

Lessing has himself compressed his problem into the following saying, which he has emphasized by spacing the letters:³⁰ *‘zufällige Geschichtswahrheiten können der Beweis von nothwendigen Vernunftswahrheiten nie warden.’*^{31,m} What grates here is the adjective *zufällige*.³² This is

¹ However, the reader will perhaps recall what was presented in the *Crumbs* about the impossibility of being contemporary (in the immediate sense) with a paradox; together with the vanishing nature of the distinction between the contemporary and later disciples.

^m Putting the matter in this way makes it clear that the *Crumbs* is really opposed to Lessing in so far as he has settled for an advantage on the part of contemporaneity, in the denial of which lies the real dialectical problem; and the solution of Lessing's problem comes in this way to have another meaning.

²⁸ An early Christian writer (b. 186) who based his position on miracles.

²⁹ Latin: conceding the opponent's view.

³⁰ A convention in Germanic languages. Here italicized.

³¹ 'Contingent truths of history can never become the demonstration of necessary truths of reason.'

³² Contingent, accidental.

misleading; it might seem to lead to the absolute distinction between essential and contingent historical truths, a distinction that, after all, is merely a subdivision. If, in spite of the identity of the higher predicate ('historical'), the distinction here is made absolute, it might seem to follow that regarding essential historical truths it is possible to make the direct transition. I might of course become heated and say: It is impossible that Lessing should be so inconsistent, *ergo* – and my temper would no doubt convince many. However, I shall confine myself to a polite 'perhaps', which assumes that in the adjective 'accidental' Lessing has hidden everything but only said something, so that 'accidental' makes no distinction within historical truths but applies to the genus itself: historical truths which are accidental as such. If not, we have here the whole misunderstanding that crops up again and again in modern philosophy: letting the eternal become historical as a matter of course, and being able to grasp the necessity of the historical.ⁿ Everything that becomes historical is contingent, for it is precisely through coming into being, becoming historical, that it has its moment of contingency, for contingency is precisely the one factor in all becoming. In this again lies the incommensurability between a historical truth and an eternal decision.

Understood in this way, the transition in which something historical and the relation to it become decisive for an eternal happiness is a μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλω γένος.³³ Lessing even says, 'If this is not what it is, then I do not understand what Aristotle has meant by it' (p. 82), a leap both for the contemporary and for the one who comes later. It is a leap, and this is the word that Lessing has used inside the narrow notion of contingency designated by an illusory distinction between the contemporary and the non-contemporary. The words are as follows: 'Das, das ist der garstige breite Graben, über den ich nicht kommen kann so oft und ernstlich ich auch den Sprung versucht habe' (p. 83).³⁴ Perhaps that word

ⁿ Concerning this preposterous piece of systematic legerdemain the reader will perhaps recall what was stressed in *Crumbs*, that nothing comes into being necessarily (because becoming and necessity contradict each another), and that still less, therefore, does anything become necessary by coming into being, since to be necessary is the one thing that it is impossible to become, because it always presupposes to be.

³³ Greek: shift to another genus. Cf. Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, Book 1, ch. 7, 75a 38: 'We cannot in demonstrating pass from one genus to another. We cannot, for instance, prove geometrical truths by arithmetic.'

³⁴ 'That, that's the ugly broad ditch that I cannot cross, however often and however earnestly I have attempted the leap.'

*Sprung*³⁵ is just a stylistic turn of phrase, and perhaps this is why the adjective *breit*³⁶ is added, to make the metaphor appeal to the imagination, as though even the least leap did not possess the property of making the ditch infinitely wide; as if it were not equally difficult for one who *cannot* leap *at all* whether the ditch is wide or narrow; as if it were not the passionate dialectical abhorrence of a leap that makes the ditch so infinitely wide, just as Lady Macbeth's passion makes the spot of blood so immensely huge that the ocean itself cannot wash it away. Possibly the use of the word *ernstlich*,³⁷ too, is a piece of cunning on Lessing's part, for with regard to what it is to leap, especially when the metaphor addresses the imagination, the earnest is sufficiently amusing, as it stands in no relation or in a comic relation to the leap, it not being the width of the ditch that prevents the leap, externally, but it being, internally, the dialectical passion that makes the ditch infinitely wide. To have been quite close to doing something has in itself a comic side, but to have been very close to making the leap is nothing at all, just because the leap is the category of decision. And now, to have wanted in the utmost earnest to make the leap – yes, he is a rascal, that Lessing, for it is surely with the utmost earnest that he has made the ditch wide – isn't that just like making fun of people! Yet, as we all know, regarding the leap it is possible to make fun of people also in another and more appealing way: you shut your eyes, take yourself by the scruff of the neck *à la* Münchhausen, and then – yes, then you are standing on the other side, on that other side of sound common sense in the systematic promised land.

This expression 'the leap' is linked with Lessing's name in still another way. Altogether rare as it is these days for any thinker to call the beautiful Greek way of philosophizing to mind by cleverly concentrating himself and his thought-existence on something in a single brief, felicitous statement, L. reminds us vividly of the Greeks. His knowledge is not a learned mishmash and a ditto *echt*-speculative³⁸ mediation of what every Tom, Dick and Harry, geniuses, and *privat-docents* have thought and written; his merit is not to have strung all these splendours together on the thread of the historicizing method; no, he has something brief and simple of his own. Just as with many Greek thinkers one cites their watchword instead of their names, so too has Lessing left a last word. In its time Lessing's 'last word' famously gave rise to some scribblings. It fell to the enthusiastic and noble Jacobi, who speaks often and with amiable

³⁵ 'Leap'. ³⁶ 'Broad'. ³⁷ 'Earnestly'.

³⁸ The German 'echt' is used in translation here to convey the irony.

sympathy of a need to be understood by other thinkers, and of how desirable it is to be in agreement with others, to be the father confessor that preserved L.'s last words. Now, it was of course no easy matter being father confessor to an ironist like L., and Jacobi has had enough to put up with, undeservedly in so far as he has been attacked unjustly, deservedly to the extent that L. had, after all, in no way sent for him in the capacity of father confessor, still less asked him to make the conversation public, and least of all asked him to put the accent of pathos in the wrong place.

There is something highly poetic in this whole situation: two such markedly developed individualities as L. and J. in conversation with each other. Enthusiasm's inexhaustible spokesman as observer and the wily Lessing as catechumen. So J. is to investigate how things really are with L. What happens? To his horror he discovers that, after all, Lessing is at bottom a Spinozist. The enthusiast ventures the utmost and proposes to him the only way out, a *salto mortale*.³⁹ Here I must pause a moment. It may look as though J. turns out to be the discoverer of the leap. But it must be noted, first, that J. is not clear about where the leap essentially belongs; compared to Spinoza's objectivity his *salto mortale* is more like a subjectivizing act than a transition from the eternal to the historical. Secondly, neither is he dialectically clear about the leap, that it cannot be taught or imparted directly, exactly because it is an act of isolation that, precisely regarding what cannot be thought, leaves it to the individual whether he will decide to accept it in faith and on the strength of the absurd. Jacobi wants by resorting to eloquence to help people to make the leap. But this is a contradiction, and all direct incitement is nothing but an obstacle to really making the leap, which is not to be confused with making assurances about having wanted to make it. Assume that Jacobi has made the leap; assume that with his eloquence he persuades a learner to want to make it. In that case the learner acquires a direct relation to J. and so does not make the leap himself. The direct relation between one human being and another is naturally much easier, satisfies one's sympathies and one's own need far more quickly and it seems more dependably. It is understood directly, and there is no need of that dialectic of the infinite to keep oneself infinitely resigned and infinitely enthusiastic in the sympathy of the infinite, whose secret is nothing but to give up the fanciful idea that in his God-relationship the one is not the equal of the other, which makes the supposed teacher into

³⁹ 'Somersault'.

a learner who looks to himself, and all instruction into a divine joke because essentially every human being is taught only by God.

Regarding Lessing, all Jacobi wants is company in making the leap; his eloquence is that of one smitten with Lessing, and that is why it is so important for him to have Lessing along. One notes straight away the dialectical irregularity here: the eloquent, forever convinced person feels himself strong and energetic enough to win others over to his conviction; i.e., he has uncertainty enough to need the assent of others in his enthusiastic conviction. The enthusiast unable to express his enthusiasm to any human being in a contrasting form is not in general the stronger but the weaker party, and has only the strength of a woman, which is in frailty. Jacobi did not know how to discipline himself artistically into being content to express the idea in his existing. The restraint of isolation, precisely posited in the leap, is unable to restrain Jacobi; he has to divulge something. He is always bubbling over in that eloquence of his which at times, in its pungency and substance and lyrical effervescence, ranks with Shakespeare, but which nevertheless wants to help others in a direct relation to the speaker, or as *in casu*⁴⁰ to give himself the comfort of having Lessing agree with him.

To proceed. So when Jacobi discovers to his *horreur* that Lessing is really a Spinozist, he speaks out of total conviction. He wants to sweep Lessing off his feet. Lessing replies: ‘Gut, sehr gut! Ich kann das alles auch gebrauchen; aber ich kann nicht dasselbe damit machen. Überhaupt gefällt Ihr *Salto mortale* mir nicht übel, und ich begreife wie ein Mann von Kopf auf diese Art Kopf-unten machen kann, um von der Stelle zu kommen; nehmen Sie mich mit, wenn es angeht.’^{41,°} Here Lessing’s irony comes out superbly, aware as he presumably is that when you are to leap you must surely do it alone, and also be alone in properly understanding that it is an impossibility. One has to admire his urbanity and his liking for Jacobi, and the conversational skill that so politely says: ‘nehmen Sie mich mit – wenn es angeht.’ Jacobi goes on: ‘Wenn sie nur auf die elastische Stelle treten wollen, die mich fortschwingt, so geht es von selbst.’⁴² This, by the way, is truly well said, but there is the inaccuracy

° Cf. F. H. Jacobi, *Sammlende Werke*, Bd. IV, 1st abh., p. 74.

⁴⁰ Latin: in this case.

⁴¹ ‘Good, very good! I can use all of that, but I cannot do the same with it. Altogether I quite like your *salto mortale*, and I see how a man with a good head can lower his head in a somersault in this way to get going; take me along, if at all possible.’

⁴² ‘Take me along if at all possible . . . If you will just step on the springy spot that catapults me, it will go by itself.’

of his wanting here to make the leap into something objective and the leaping itself into something analogous to, for example, finding the Archimedean point. The good thing about the reply is that he does not want a direct relationship, a direct companionship, in the leap. Then follow Lessing's *last words*: 'Auch dazu gehört schon ein Sprung, den ich meinen alten Beinen und meinem schweren Kopfe nicht mehr zumuthen darf.'⁴³ Here Lessing, with the dialectical's aid, is being ironical, while the last turn of phrase has an altogether Socratic colouring – speaking of meat and drink, doctors, pack asses and the like,⁴⁴ *item* of his old legs and his heavy head. In spite of the leap being, as we have frequently remarked, the decision, Jacobi wants as though to make a transition to it. He, the eloquent one, wants to entice Lessing: 'There's not much to it,' he says, 'it's not so difficult a matter, you just step on this springy spot – and the leap will go by itself.' This is a perfect example of the pious treachery of eloquence. It is as though one were to recommend being executed with the guillotine, saying: 'It's all very easy, you simply lay your head on a board, a string is pulled, the axe falls – and you have been executed.' But suppose now that being executed was what one did not want, and similarly with the leap. When one is disinclined to make the leap, so disinclined that this passion makes 'the ditch infinitely wide', then the most cunningly contrived jumping device will be of no help at all. Lessing sees very clearly that the leap, being decisive, is qualitatively dialectical and that it allows no approximating transition. His answer is therefore a joke. It is very far from being dogmatic; it is dialectically entirely correct, is personally evasive, and instead of inventing mediation in a hurry he makes use of his old legs and his heavy head. And of course, for anyone with young legs and a light head, they can safely leap.

The psychological contrast between Lessing and Jacobi can be put summarily as follows. Lessing rests in himself, feels no need of companionship. So he parries ironically and slips away from Jacobi on his old legs – which are not up to leaping. He makes no attempt to persuade Jacobi that there is no leap.^P Jacobi, on the other hand, despite all his enthusiasm for others, is self-seeking. And his need is precisely his

^P It was fortunate for Lessing that he did not live in our no less serious than *echt*-speculatively dogmatic nineteenth century. He might then have lived to see some extremely serious man with no sense of humour propose in all seriousness to have Lessing re-attend confirmation classes in order to learn seriousness.

⁴³ 'That also takes a leap, which I may no longer expect from my old legs and my heavy head.'

⁴⁴ An allusion to Plato's *Gorgias*.

wanting at all costs to persuade Lessing; the vehemence with which he urges himself *upon* him shows how urgent was his need *of* him – to play with prepositions, as Jacobi was so fond of doing.⁴⁵

From what passed between Jacobi and Mendelssohn,⁴⁶ through Emilie (Reimarus)⁴⁷ respecting Jacobi's relation to Lessing, one gets some idea of how inexhaustible L. has been in his joking dialectically and in Greek high spirits with the J. whom he otherwise esteemed so highly. Thus J. relates that L. once said 'mit halbem Lächeln: Er selbst wäre vielleicht das höchste Wesen, und gegenwärtig in dem Zustande der äussersten Contraction.'^{48, q} So no wonder that Lessing was declared a pantheist.⁴⁹ And yet the joke is so obvious (not that this means the remark need be no more than jest) and particularly excellent in a later reference to the same remark. When he and J. were dining at Gleim's,⁵⁰ and during the meal it started to rain, which Gleim regretted since they had planned to go down to the garden after dinner, L. said to J. (presumably again *mit halbem Lächeln*): 'Jacobi, Sie wissen, das thue ich vielleicht.'⁵¹

As for that, Mendelssohn, who also has had a say in these things, has quite correctly announced the lyrical culmination of thinking in the leap. In seeking to go beyond itself lyrically, thinking^f wills the discovery of the paradoxical. This presentiment is a synthesis of jest and earnest, and on this point are to be found all the Christian categories. Beyond this point, every dogmatic determination is a *philosophem*⁵² that has entered into the heart of man and is to be thought immanently. The last thing that human thinking can will to do is will to go beyond itself in the paradoxical. And

⁴⁵ Dialectically, this confusion is not so easily solved. In the *Crumbs* I have tried to show how it arises, calling to mind how the self-knowledge of Socrates foundered on the curious circumstance that he did not know for certain whether he was a human being or a more composite animal than Typhon.

^f It goes without saying that I speak merely of thinking as it is in the subjective existing thinker. I have never been able to understand how a man could become Speculation, Objective Speculation and Pure Being. One may indeed become many things in the world, as the German rhyme says: *Edelmann, Bettelmann, Doctor, Pastor, Schuster, Schneider* ... [nobleman, beggar, doctor, pastor, shoemaker, tailor]. Thus far I am able to understand the Germans. One may also become a thinker or a blockhead; but to become Speculation, that is the most inconceivable of all miracles.

⁴⁵ Hegel had criticized Jacobi for placing undue emphasis on prepositions ('outside', 'above', etc.).

⁴⁶ Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86), Jewish philosopher and friend of Lessing, and on whom the latter modelled the character of Nathan in his drama *Nathan der Weise* (Nathan the Wise).

⁴⁷ Properly Elise, daughter of H. S. Reimarus, whose work Lessing had published anonymously. See note 20 above.

⁴⁸ 'with half a smile: He himself was perhaps the highest being and currently in a state of extreme contraction.'

⁴⁹ And thereby an adherent of Spinoza. ⁵⁰ J. W. L. Gleim (1719–1803), a German poet.

⁵¹ 'with half a smile ... You know, Jacobi, I might just do that.' ⁵² Latin: philosophical dictum.

Christianity is precisely the paradoxical. Mendelssohn says: 'Zweifeln, ob es nicht etwas giebt, das nicht nur alle Begriffe übersteigt, sondern völlig außer dem Begriffe liegt, dieses nenne ich einen Sprung über sich selbst hinaus.'⁵³ Mendelssohn will of course have none of it and doesn't know how to make either jest or earnest out of it.⁵

This is about all that can be said on Lessing's relation to the leap. It is not much in itself, and it is not entirely clear dialectically what he wanted to make of it; indeed, it is not even clear whether the note of pathos in that passage from his own writings is a matter of style, and in the conversation with J. a Socratic joke, or whether these two opposites proceed from and are borne by one and the same categorial thought of the leap. The little that is to be found in Lessing has been important for me. I had read *Fear and Trembling* by Johannes *de silentio* before coming to read the volume by Lessing. In that work I learned how in the author's view it was precisely the leap, as the decision *κατ' ἐξοχην*,⁵⁴ that became decisive for what is Christian and for every dogmatic category, something that is beyond the reach both of the intellectual intuition of Schelling and of what Hegel, scorning Schelling's idea,⁵⁵ would put in its place, namely the method, because the leap is precisely the most decisive protest against the method's inverse course. All Christianity is rooted according to *Fear and Trembling* – yes, rooted in fear and trembling (exactly the desperate categories of Christianity and the leap) – in the paradox, whether one accepts this (i.e., is a believer) or rejects it (just because it is the paradox). Although subsequent reading of Lessing made the matter no clearer, since what L. says is so very little, to me it was nevertheless always encouraging to see that L. was aware of it. Just a pity that he did not care to pursue this thought. But then neither did he have 'mediation' on his hands, the divine and idolized mediation that works and has worked miracles and turned a human being into speculation – and cast a spell over Christianity. All honour to mediation! No doubt it can help one in another way too, as it presumably helped the author of *Fear and Trembling* to seek the desperate expedient of the leap, just as Christianity too was a

⁵ Cf. Jacobi, *Works*, 4th vol., 1st sec., p. 110.

⁵³ 'To doubt whether there may not be something that not only surpasses all concepts but also lies completely beyond the concept, that I call a leap beyond oneself.'

⁵⁴ Greek: in special, or eminent, degree.

⁵⁵ F. W. J. von Schelling (1775–1854), the principal philosopher of German Romanticism, whose 'philosophy of identity' maintained the absolute identity of nature and intelligence and knower and known.

desperate expedient when it entered the world and in all ages remains so for everyone who really accepts it. A fiery and spirited steed may very well come to lose its wind and proud bearing when held for hire and ridden by every dabbler – but in the world of the spirit, sloth is never victorious, it loses constantly and remains outside. As to whether Johannes *de silentio* learned of the leap by reading Lessing remains undecided.

4. Lessing has said: ‘Wenn Gott in seiner Rechten alle Wahrheit, und in seiner Linken den einzigen immer regen Trieb nach Wahrheit, obschon mit dem Zusatze mich immer und ewig zu irren, verschlossen helte, und spreche zu mir: wähle! Ich fiel ihm mit Demuth in seine Linke, und sagte: Vater, gieb! die reine Wahrheit ist ja doch nur für dich allein.’⁵⁶ (Cf. Lessing’s *S.W.*, 5ter B, p.100.)

Presumably, at the time Lessing said this, the system was not ready; alas, and now he is dead! If he were alive now, when the system is just about done, or is in hand and will be finished on Sunday, believe me, L. would have grabbed after it with both hands. He would have had neither the time nor the manners, nor the elation, thus in jest to as though play odds and evens with God and choose in earnest the left hand. But then the system has more to offer than God has in both hands; it has more even this very moment, to say nothing of next Sunday when it will quite certainly be finished.

The words are found in a little essay (‘Eine Duplik’, 1778) occasioned by a devout man’s defence of the story of the Resurrection against the attack made upon it in the fragments published by Lessing. It is no doubt common knowledge that people simply failed to see the point of L.’s publishing these fragments. Not even the good and widely read Hauptpastor Götze⁵⁷ could make up his mind what passage in the Apocalypse⁵⁸ applied to it and indeed was fulfilled in Lessing. People in their relation to him have been to that extent forced in a curious way to accept his principle. Although in those days too there were results and finalities to spare, it was quite impossible to have Lessing killed and world-historically butchered and salted in a §. He was and remained a

⁵⁶ ‘If God held the truth enclosed in his right hand, and in his left hand the one and only ever-striving drive for truth, even with the corollary of erring for ever and ever, and if he were to say to me: Choose! – I would humbly fall down to him at his left hand and say: Father, give! Pure truth is indeed only for you alone.’

⁵⁷ Properly ‘Goeze’. ⁵⁸ Following the Greek title of the book of Revelation.

riddle. If anyone should try calling him back now, he will get no further with him.

Here, first, an assurance regarding my own humble person. I am as willing as the next man to fall down in worship before the system, if only I can get a glimpse of it. Up to now I have not managed and although I have young legs I am practically worn out with running from Herod to Pilate.⁵⁹ Once or twice I have been on the brink of adoration, but lo and behold, with my handkerchief already spread on the ground to avoid dirtying my trousers from kneeling, and just as I had in all innocence made a final appeal to one of the initiates, 'Tell me honestly now, is it quite finished; because if so I will fling myself down, even at the risk of ruining a pair of trousers' (for due to the heavy traffic to and from the system, the road has become not a little muddy), I always got the answer, 'No, it is still not quite ready.' And so there was once more a postponement – of the system and the kneeling.

System and closure are pretty much one and the same, so that if the system is not completed there is no system. I have already pointed out in another place that a system which is not quite completed is a hypothesis, while a half-finished system is nonsense. Were someone now to say that this is just a dispute about words, and that the systematizers themselves say that the system is not finished, I would simply ask: Why then do they call it a system? Why at all do they speak with forked tongues? When they deliver their compendia, they say nothing about there being anything missing. Thus they lead the less knowledgeable to suppose that everything is complete, unless they are writing for those better informed than themselves, which would no doubt strike the systematizers as unthinkable. If, on the other hand, the building is tampered with, out comes the builder. He is an extremely pleasant man, courteous and friendly to the visitor. He says: 'Yes, we are still under construction, the system is still not quite finished.' But did he not know that beforehand? Did he not know it when he had his beatifying invitation sent out to all mankind? If he did know, why did he not say so himself, i.e., why did he not refrain from calling the fragment on offer a system? For here we have it again: a fragment of a system is nonsense. A continued striving for a system, on the other hand, is still a striving; and a striving, indeed a continued striving, is exactly what Lessing is talking about. And surely not a striving for nothing! On the contrary, Lessing speaks of a striving for truth, and he

⁵⁹ An allusion to Luke 23:1–25.

uses a remarkable phrase about this urge to truth: *den einzigen immer regen Trieb*.⁶⁰ This word ‘*einzig*’⁶¹ can hardly be understood otherwise than as equivalent to the infinite in the same sense as that having one thought, just one, is higher than having many. So these two, Lessing and the systematizer, both talk of a continued striving, except that Lessing is stupid or honest enough to call it a continued striving, while the systematizer is clever or dishonest enough to call it the system. How would this difference be judged in other contexts? When commission agent Behrend⁶² had lost a silk umbrella, he advertised for it as a cotton one, thinking, ‘If I say it is a silk umbrella, the finder will be more easily tempted to keep it.’ Perhaps the systematizer thinks as follows: ‘If on the title page and in the newspaper I call my offering a continued striving for the truth, alas, who will buy it or admire me; but if I call it the system, the absolute system, everyone will buy the system’ – if only there were not the remaining difficulty that what the systematizer sells is not the system.

So let us proceed, but let us not play games with each another. I, Johannes Climacus, am neither more nor less than a human being; and I assume that the person I have the honour of conversing with is also a human being. If he wants to be speculation, pure speculative thought, I must stop conversing with him; for at that moment he vanishes from my sight and from the feeble mortal eye of a human being.

Consequently: (a) *there can be a logical system*, (b) *but there can be no system for life itself*.⁶³

a

α. If, however, a logical system is to be constructed, special care must be taken not to include in it anything that is subject to life’s dialectic, anything that only ‘is’ by being there, or having been there, not something that is just by being. From this it follows quite simply that Hegel’s matchless and matchlessly applauded invention – having movement brought into logic (apart from the absence one notes in every other passage of any attempt on his part to make one believe that it is there)

⁶⁰ ‘The one and only ever-striving drive’. ⁶¹ ‘One and only’.

⁶² A well-known character in Copenhagen and subject of many such anecdotes.

⁶³ ‘Tilværelsens System’, sometimes translated ‘System of/for Existence’. See the ‘Note on the translation’.

does nothing but confuse logic.[†] And it is surely also strange to make movement the basis of a sphere where movement is unthinkable; and to let movement explain logic when logic cannot explain movement. On this point, however, I am fortunate enough to be able to refer to a man whose thinking is sound and who is happily schooled in Greek philosophy (rare traits in these times!), a man who has been able to liberate himself and his thought from every foot-dragging and cringing relation to Hegel, from whose reputation everyone wants to profit, if by nothing else than by going further, i.e., by having taken him on board; a man who has preferred to be content with Aristotle and with himself – I mean Trendelenburg (*Logische Untersuchungen*).⁶⁴ Among his merits is to have grasped movement as the inexplicable presupposition, the common factor, in which being and thinking are united, and as their continued reciprocity. I cannot attempt here to show how his view is related to the Greeks, to Aristotelian thought, or to something that, strangely enough if only in a popular way, bears much resemblance to his exposition: a small passage in Plutarch's work on Isis and Osiris.⁶⁵ I do not mean at all that the Hegelian philosophy has had no salutary influence on Trendelenburg, but the fortunate thing is that he has seen that there is no improving Hegel's construction, going further etc. (a dishonest approach by which today many a poor devil seeks to usurp Hegel's celebrity, fraternizing with him like a Neapolitan street loungeur), and on the other hand that Trendelenburg, sober-minded as a Greek thinker, without promising everything, without wanting to bestow blessedness upon all mankind,

[†] The off-hand way in which systematizers concede that Hegel may not have altogether succeeded in introducing movement into logic, much as the greengrocer thinks that a raisin or two more or less are nothing to worry about when the purchase is a large one – this farcical humouring of Hegel is of course an expression of contempt, one that not even his most vehement antagonist has allowed himself. There have of course been logical attempts prior to Hegel, but his method is supposed to be everything. For him and for everyone bright enough to grasp what it means to have willed something great, its absence at this or that point cannot be a matter of indifference, as it is when a greengrocer and his customer squabble over whether there is a little over or under weight. Hegel has himself staked his whole reputation on this matter of the method. But a method has the remarkable characteristic of being nothing in the abstract; it is precisely in the execution or application that it is the method. Where it is not put into practice it is not the method, and if there is no other method, then there is no method at all. Let admirers of Hegel reserve to themselves the right to make him into a bletherer; an antagonist will always know how to hold him in honour for having willed something great and not having attained it.

⁶⁴ *Logical Investigations*. F. A. Trendelenburg (1802–72) (in the Danish his name is consistently misspelled) was professor of philosophy in Berlin and a critic of Hegel.

⁶⁵ See Plutarch, *Moralia*, Loeb, v, pp. 142–5.

accomplishes a great deal and brings blessing to whoever would need his guidance in learning about the Greeks.

In a logical system, nothing must be taken on that has a relation to life itself, nothing that is not indifferent to existence. The infinite advantage over all other thinking held by the logical, by being objective, is limited in turn by the fact that, seen subjectively, it is a hypothesis just because it is indifferent to life in the sense of actuality. This double nature of the logical distinguishes it from the mathematical, which has no relation at all to life, one way or the other, but possesses only objectivity – not objectivity and the hypothetical together as the unity and the contradiction in which it relates negatively to existence.

The logical system must not be a mystification, a piece of ventriloquism in which the content of life emerges artfully and surreptitiously, where logical thought is taken aback and finds what the Herr Professor or the licentiate has had up his sleeve. A stricter judgment on this point would be possible if it could be determined in what sense the category constitutes an abridgement of life itself, whether logical thought is abstract after life itself⁶⁶ or abstract with no relation to life. This is a question I could wish to treat rather more fully in another place, and even if it has not been answered satisfactorily, just having raised it is at least something.

β. The dialectic of the beginning must be made clear. What is the almost amusing thing about it – that the beginning is and again is not, because it is the beginning – this true dialectical observation has for some time now been a kind of game played in good Hegelian society.

The system begins, so it is said, with the immediate; some people, delinquent in the dialectical, are even oratorical enough to speak of the most immediate of all, although the very notion of a comparison implied here could prove hazardous for the beginning.^u The system begins with the immediate and therefore without any presuppositions and therefore absolutely; i.e., the system's beginning is an absolute beginning. This is quite correct and has also been sufficiently admired. But why is it that before making a beginning with the system, the second, equally, yes precisely equally important question has not been raised, its implications

^u To show how would here take us too far. Often the trouble taken in such matters proves wasted; for after taking great pains to state an objection pointedly, one learns from a philosopher's rejoinder that the misunderstanding was not rooted in any inability to understand the idolized philosophy, but in having persuaded oneself to think that it really amounted to anything – and not loose thinking hiding behind expressions of the most presuming kind.

⁶⁶ 'Tilværelse'.

made clear and respected: *How does the system begin with the immediate? I.e., does it begin with it immediately?* To this the answer must be an unconditional No. If the system is assumed to be after life itself (giving rise to a confusion with a system for life), then the system does of course come afterwards and therefore does not begin immediately with the immediacy with which life itself began; even if in another sense it may be said that life itself did not begin with the immediate, since the immediate never is but is annulled as soon as it is. The beginning of the system that begins with the immediate *is then itself attained through a reflection.*

Here is the difficulty, for if one does not let go of this single thought, deceptively or unthinkingly, or in a breathless haste to get the system finished, it is in all its simplicity enough for deciding that no system for life is possible; and that the logical system must not boast of an absolute beginning, because such a beginning, like pure being, is a pure chimera.

That is to say, if it is impossible to begin immediately with the immediate (which would have to be thought of as an accident or a miracle, i.e., as not to think), yet the beginning must be arrived at through a reflection, then the question quite simply arises (ah! if only I won't now be put in the corner for my simple-mindedness, since everyone can understand my question – and must therefore be ashamed by the popular level of their questioner's learning): How do I put an end to the reflection which was set in motion to reach that beginning? Reflection has the notable property of being infinite. But its being infinite must in any case mean that it cannot stop by itself, because in stopping itself it uses itself, and so can only be stopped in the same way that a sickness is cured if allowed to prescribe its own medicine, i.e., by nourishing the sickness. Maybe this infinity of reflection is the bad infinity⁶⁷ – in that case we are soon finished, for the bad infinity is meant to be some despicable something or other that has to be given up the sooner the better.

Perhaps I may be permitted a question in this connection. How is it, indeed, that Hegel himself and all Hegelians, who are otherwise supposed to be dialecticians, become angry at this point? Yes, as angry as Germans. Or is it a dialectical attribute, this 'bad'? From where does such a predicate enter logic? How do scorn and contempt and means of intimidation find a place as acceptable means of locomotion in logic, so that the absolute beginning is accepted by the individual because he is afraid of what his

⁶⁷ In Hegel a bad infinity is one that cannot be accommodated to the dialectic of opposition in which oppositions are cancelled in the true infinity.

neighbours and those opposite will think of him if he does not? Is not 'bad' an ethical category?^v What do I mean by speaking of the bad infinity? I charge the individual in question with not wanting to halt the infinite reflective process. Am I then requiring something of him? But in an *echt*-speculative way I assume on the contrary that reflection brings itself to a halt. So why require anything of the thinker? And what do I require? I require a decision. And I do right in doing so, for that is the only way of halting the process of reflection. On the other hand, a philosopher never does right while playing games with people, at one moment letting the reflective process bring itself to a halt in the absolute beginning, and the next moment mocking someone whose only fault is that he is stupid enough to believe the first, mocking him in order to help him in this way to arrive at an absolute beginning, which then occurs in two ways. But to require a decision is to abandon the presuppositionlessness. It is only when reflection comes to a halt that a beginning can be made, and reflection can be halted only by something else, and this something else is something quite other than the logical, because it is a decision. And only when the beginning that brings the process of reflection to a halt is a breakthrough, so that the absolute beginning itself breaks through the infinitely continued reflection, only then is it that the beginning has no presuppositions. If, on the other hand, it is a break in which the process of reflection is interrupted, so that the beginning can emerge, then this beginning is not absolute, since it has come about through a *μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλω γένος*.⁶⁸

When beginning with the immediate is achieved by a reflection, the immediate must have a meaning other than the usual. This is something that Hegelian logicians have correctly seen, and they therefore define the immediate with which logic begins as follows: the most abstract remainder after an exhaustive abstraction.⁶⁹ There is nothing objectionable about this definition, but there certainly is in the failure to respect what this says; for indirectly this definition says that there is no absolute beginning.

^v And if not that, it is in any case an aesthetic category, as when Plutarch says that some have assumed a single world because they feared that they would otherwise have an infinite and troublesome infinity of worlds on their hands (εὐθύς ἀόριστος καί χαλεπῆς ἀπειρίας ὑπολαμβάνουσης [directly an unlimited and burdensome infinity [of worlds] overtook them], *De defectu oraculorum* [On the Obsolescence of Oracles], xxii).

⁶⁸ Greek: shift to another genus. See p. 83 n. 33.

⁶⁹ The sentence summarizes § 26 of the Danish philosopher J.L. Heiberg's 'Outline of the Philosophy of Philosophy or Speculative Logic' from 1832, in *Heiberg's Speculative Logic and Other Texts*, ed. and tr. Jon Stewart (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 2006), p. 55.

How so? I hear someone say. When one has abstracted from everything, is it not the case then that, etc.?

Yes, *when* one has abstracted from everything. Let us be human beings. This act of abstraction, just like that other act of reflection, is infinite. So how do I bring it to a halt? – and it is indeed first when ... that. Let us go to the length of risking a thought-experiment. Suppose the infinite act of abstraction is *in actu*.⁷⁰ The beginning is not the act of abstracting but comes afterwards. But with what then do I begin, now that I have abstracted from everything? Ah, here a Hegelian, deeply moved, might fall upon my breast and stammer blissfully: with nothing. And that is just what the system says, that it begins with nothing. But I must be allowed my second question: How do I begin with this nothing? For unless the infinite act of abstraction is one of those foolish pranks that are easy to play two at a time; if it is, on the contrary, the most strenuous deed that can be performed, what then? Why then of course, all my strength goes into keeping hold of it. If I let go of any part of my strength, I am no longer abstracting from everything. And if I make a beginning under these conditions, I do not begin with nothing, just because at the moment I began I did not abstract from everything. This means that if it is indeed possible for a human being to abstract from everything in his thinking, it is at any rate impossible for him to do more, since even if it does not altogether exceed human powers, it at least absolutely exhausts them. To grow tired of the act of abstracting and in that way arrive at a beginning is the kind of explanation you would expect only of greengrocers, who are not so particular about such irregularities. The very expression, beginning with nothing, and quite irrespective of its relation to the infinite act of abstraction, is also treacherous. For to begin with nothing is really neither more nor less than a new reformulation of the dialectic of the beginning. The beginning is, and again is not, precisely because it is the beginning. This can also be put as follows: the beginning begins with nothing. It is simply a new expression, not one single step further. In the one case I merely think the beginning *in abstracto*; in the other I think the relation which this same equally abstract beginning has to a something with which a beginning is made. And it appears, quite properly, that this something, indeed the only something which could correspond to such a beginning, is nothing. But this is only a tautological reformulation of the second proposition: the beginning

⁷⁰ Latin: actual.

is not. That the beginning is not and that the beginning begins with nothing are wholly identical propositions, and I have not budged.

What if instead of talking or dreaming of an absolute beginning, we talk about a leap? To be content with a 'just about as good as', a 'you could almost say that', an 'if you sleep on it until tomorrow, you may well say that', shows only that you are a relative of Trop,⁷¹ who came little by little to the point of assuming that almost having passed his bar examination was the same as having passed it. Everyone laughs at this, but when one argues similarly in the realm of truth, and in the shrine of scholarship, then it is good philosophy, *echt*-speculative philosophy. Lessing, being no speculative philosopher, assumed the opposite, that an infinitely small distance makes the ditch infinitely wide, because what makes the ditch so wide is the leap itself.

It is rather odd. Although in logic they know that reflection stops of itself, that doubting everything turns through itself into its opposite (a true sailor's yarn, i.e., truly a sailor's yarn), Hegelians in everyday life, when they are amiable people, when they are just like the rest of us except for being, as I am always willing and ready to allow, more learned and talented, etc., know that reflection can be halted only by a leap. Let us dwell on this a moment. If the individual does not stop the reflection, he will be infinitized in reflection, i.e., no decision emerges.^w Through getting lost in reflection in this way, the individual in fact becomes objective; he increasingly loses the decisiveness of subjectivity and its turning back into itself. And yet people want to assume that reflection can be halted objectively, even though the opposite is the truth and it cannot be stopped objectively; and when it is stopped subjectively, it does not stop of its own accord, it is the subject that stops it.

For example, once Rötischer⁷² (who, in his book on Aristophanes, does seem to understand the necessity with which world-historical transition occurs, and to have understood in logic how reflection works through itself to an absolute beginning) – once Rötischer puts himself to explaining Hamlet he knows that reflection is stopped only by a decision. He does not take it (am I to say rather oddly?), rather oddly, that Hamlet just by

^w The reader may recall that when the matter becomes objective, there is no question of an eternal happiness, because this lies precisely in subjectivity and decision.

⁷¹ An everlasting student in a comedy by J. L. Heiberg. In his sixties he was still on the point of taking his law examination.

⁷² H. T. Rötischer (1803–71), German professor of philosophy and critic in aesthetics. Discussed in connection with Aristophanes in Kierkegaard's dissertation on irony (see *SKS* 1, pp. 183, 193–4).

continuing to reflect came at last to an absolute beginning. But in logic he supposes (shall I say rather oddly?), rather oddly, yes, there he presumably supposes that the passage of reflection comes through itself to a stop at an absolute beginning. This is something I cannot understand, and it pains me not to be able to understand it, precisely because I admire Rötcher, for his talent, his classical culture, and his tasteful and yet primitive grasp of psychological phenomena.

What has been said here about the beginning in logic (that the same things show the impossibility of a system for life will be pursued in more detail in 'b') is very plain and simple. It almost embarrasses me to say it, or embarrasses me to have to say it, embarrasses me because of my situation, that a poor pamphleteer, who would rather kneel in worship before the system, is obliged to say such things. What has been said might have been put in another way so as to impress someone or other by the presentation calling to mind more specifically the philosophical controversies of a moment now past. The question would then turn on the significance of Hegel's *Phänomenologie*⁷³ for the system: whether it is an introduction, whether it remains outside the system, and if an introduction, whether it is incorporated in its turn within the system; further, whether Hegel may not even have to his astonishing credit the writing not only of the system but of two, yes, three systems, which always requires a matchless systematic mind, and yet which seems to be the case, seeing that the system has been completed more than once, etc. In fact all this has been said often enough, but often it is said in a confusing way. A large book has been written about it.⁷⁴ First everything is said that Hegel has said, and then this or that later material is taken into consideration, all of which merely diverts attention and casts a distracting prolixity over what can be said quite briefly.

γ. To shed light on logic it might be a good thing to place oneself psychologically in the state of mind of someone who thinks the logical: what kind of dying to oneself this needs, and how far the imagination plays a part. This, again, will be a poor and extremely simple comment, but for that reason quite possibly true and by no means redundant: a philosopher

⁷³ *Phänomenologie des Geistes* [*Phenomenology of Spirit*], described on its title page as the first part of a 'System of Science' but without what should have been its sequels forming a completion of any homogeneous project.

⁷⁴ Probably a reference to Carl Ludwig Michelet's *Geschichte der letzten Systeme der Philosophien in Deutschland von Kant bis Hegel* [*History of the latest philosophical systems in Germany from Kant to Hegel*], 1–11 (Berlin, 1837–8).

has, by and by, become such an incredible being that the most extravagant imagination has scarcely invented anything so far-fetched. How at all does the empirical *I* stand to the pure *I-I*?⁷⁵ Anyone who wants to be a philosopher will more than appreciate a little information on this, and above all want not to become a ludicrous creature by being transformed, *ein zwei drei kokolorum*⁷⁶ into speculation. If someone who is occupied with logical thought is at the same time human enough not to forget that, even if he has completed the system, he is still an existing human being, the fantasticality and the charlatanry will gradually disappear. And even if an eminent logical capacity is required to reconstruct Hegel's *Logic*, it takes only sound common sense in someone who once enthusiastically believed in the great thing Hegel claimed to be doing, and proved his enthusiasm by believing it, and proved his enthusiasm for Hegel by crediting it of him, yes, it takes only sound common sense to see that Hegel has in many places behaved indefensibly, not towards greengrocers, for they after all only believe half of what a man says, but towards enthusiastic young people who believed him. Even in the case of someone not particularly highly gifted, having had the enthusiasm to believe the highest none the less, as this is attributed to Hegel, and having had the enthusiasm to despair over himself in the moment of difficulty rather than give up Hegel – when a young person like that comes again to himself, he has a right to demand this nemesis, that laughter consume in Hegel what is laughter's rightful due. And a youth like that has after all upheld Hegel, quite otherwise than many a follower who in deceptive asides makes Hegel at one time everything, at another a triviality.

b

There can be no system for life itself. So is there no such thing? Not at all, nor does what was said imply that. Life itself is a system – for God, but cannot be that for any existing spirit. System and finality correspond to each other, but life is just the opposite. From an abstract point of view, system and existing cannot be thought together; because systematic thought in order to think life must think of it as annulled and hence not as life. Existence is the spacing that holds things apart; the systematic is the finality that joins them together.

⁷⁵ A formula associated with J. G. Fichte, who in continuation of Kant's philosophy made self-consciousness philosophy's foundation.

⁷⁶ 'One, two, three, hocus pocus'.

In actual life a deception now enters, an illusion, as also the *Crumbs* tried to point out, and to which I must refer, namely the question of whether the past is more necessary than the future. When a life is a thing of the past, it is indeed finished, it is indeed finalized, and to that extent falls into the systematic grasp. Quite right – but for whom? Someone himself existing cannot gain the finality outside life that corresponds to the eternity into which the past has entered. If it should please a thinker to forget distractedly that he himself is existing, absent-mindedness and speculation are still not quite the same. On the contrary, the fact that he himself is existing hints at the claim that existing makes upon him, and that his – yes, if he is a great man – that this life of his in the present can again, once a thing of the past, have a finality's validity for the systematic thinker. But who then is this systematic thinker? Yes, it is someone who is outside life and yet inside it, who in his eternity is forever finalized and yet envelops life within himself – it is God.

Why the deception? The fact that the world has been standing now for 6,000 years is no reason for denying that life does not make just the same claim upon the one who exists as it always has, which is that he is to be, not a contemplating spirit in a piece of make-believe, but an existing spirit in actuality. All understanding comes afterwards. While the individual existing now undoubtedly comes after in relation to the 6,000 years that went before, if we were to assume that he came to understand these systematically, the strange ironical consequence would be that he would not come to understand himself as existing, because he acquires no existence himself, having nothing that should be understood afterwards. It would follow from this that such a thinker would either have to be the good Lord or else a fantastic *quodlibet*.⁷⁷ The immorality in this is surely clear to anyone, as also the propriety of what another author has said regarding the Hegelian system, that with Hegel we got a system, the absolute system – without having an ethics.⁷⁸ Let us smile if we will at the ethico-religious extravaganzas of the Middle Ages in asceticism and the like; but let us above all not forget that the speculative low-comedy extravaganza of becoming *I-I*, yet often *qua* human being such a philistine that no person of enthusiasm would bother to lead such a life – is just as ridiculous.

⁷⁷ Latin: anything.

⁷⁸ A reference to *Stages on Life's Way*. See *SKS* 6, p. 216. The 'author' here is Frater Taciturnus.

Regarding the impossibility of a system for life, let us then ask in a quite simple-minded way, as a Greek youth would ask his teacher (and if lofty wisdom can explain everything else but not answer a simple-minded question, the world is indeed out of joint): Who is to write or complete such a system? A human being surely; unless we are to start talking again in that curious way that has a human being become speculation, become the subject-object;⁷⁹ accordingly a human being – and surely a living, i.e., an existing human being. Or, if the speculation which produces the system, if it is the joint effort of the various thinkers, in what final conclusion does this fellowship join forces?⁸⁰ How does the conclusion come to light? Surely through some human being? Again, how are the individual participants related to this enterprise, what are the conceptual means that mediate here between what is individual and what world-historical, and again what nature of being is this, the one who strings them all on the systematic thread? Is he a human being or is he speculation? But if he is a human being, then he is indeed existing. Altogether there are two paths for one who exists: *either* he can do his best to forget that he is existing, thereby managing to become a figure of fun (the comedy in the contradiction of wanting to be what one is not, for instance, a human wanting to be a bird, is no greater than that in the contradiction of not wanting to be what one is, *in casu*⁸¹ existing; just as in the use of language we find it comic that a man forgets his name, which means forgetting not so much his name as the distinctive nature of his being), since existence has the notable trait that someone existing exists whether he wants to or not, *or else* he can turn all his attention on this circumstance that he is an existing being. It is from this side that the objection must first be made to modern speculation, not that it has a mistaken presupposition, but that it has a comic presupposition, due to its having forgotten in a sort of world-historical distraction what it is to be a human being. Not indeed, what it means to be a human being at all, for this is the sort of thing even a speculative philosopher might be induced to go into, but what it means that you and I and he, we, are human beings, each individually.

Someone existing who turns all his attention on the circumstance that *he* is existing, he too will smile approvingly as a beautiful saying at those

⁷⁹ Cf. Hegel's *Logic*, § 214, where 'subject-object' is among the ways mentioned of describing 'the Idea'. See *Hegel's Logic*, tr. W. Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 277.

⁸⁰ The original plays on 'Slutning' (conclusion) and 'slutte sig sammen' (join forces).

⁸¹ Latin: in this case.

words of Lessing about a continued striving, not indeed winning for its author immortal fame, for they are so very simple, but as something any attentive person must confirm. Someone existing who forgets that he is existing will become more and more distraught, and as people sometimes deposit the fruits of their *otium*⁸² in books, so we may venture to expect as the fruit of his distraction the expected system for life itself – well, maybe not all of us, only those who are almost as distraught as he. While, then, the Hegelian philosophy distractedly goes ahead and becomes a system for life, and what is more, is finished – without having an ethics (exactly where life belongs), that more simple-minded philosophy, propounded by someone existing for the existing, will especially bring the ethical to light.

Once it is remembered that philosophizing is not a matter of talking fantastically to fantastic beings, but that it is those existing who are addressed, that it is not to be decided fantastically *in abstracto*⁸³ whether a continued striving is something poorer than the finality of the system, but the question is what existing beings must be content with in so far as they are existing, then continued striving will be alone in harbouring no illusion. Even if someone has reached the top, the repetition in which he must still fill out his life, if he is not to go backwards (or become a fantastic being), will again be a continued striving, because here again finality is put aside and postponed. In this it is just like the Platonic conception of love; it is a want, and a person feeling a want can just as much be one who desires the continued possession of what he has as one who desires the possession of what he does not have. Within the fantasies of speculation and aesthetics we have a positive finality in the system, and in the fifth act of the drama. But this sort of finality is only for fantasy beings.

The continued striving expresses the existing subject's ethical life-view. So the continued striving must not be understood in a metaphysical sense. But then neither has any individual existed metaphysically. By way of misunderstanding, an opposition might be drawn in this way between finality and the continued striving for truth. One might then be able, and perhaps has even tried, to call in mind the Greek idea of wanting always to be a learner.⁸⁴ But that is only a misunderstanding within this sphere. In the ethical sense, the continued striving is, on the contrary, the consciousness of being one who is existing, and the continued striving

⁸² Latin: leisure. ⁸³ Latin: in the abstract.

⁸⁴ A possible allusion to Solon, to whom Plutarch attributes the saying: 'But I grow old ever learning many things.'

is the expression of the perpetual realization that at no moment is it done with, as long as the subject is existing, something the subject is precisely conscious of and by which he is hence not deceived. But Greek philosophy always had a relation to ethics. So wanting always to be a learner was not considered a great discovery, or an inspired enterprise of an exceptional individual; for it was neither more nor less than the understanding that one is existing, which it is no merit to be conscious of but thoughtless to forget.

So-called pantheistic systems are often called to mind and attacked for abrogating freedom and the distinction between good and evil. This might be put just as peremptorily by saying that every such system fantastically dissipates the concept of existence. But it is not only of pantheistic systems we should say this; more to the point would be to show that every system must be pantheistic just because of its finality. Existing must be annulled in the eternal before the system can bring itself to a close; there must be no existing remainder, not even such a tiny little dangling appendage as the existing Herr Professor who writes the system. But this is not how the matter is presented to us. No, pantheistic systems are contested partly in riotous aphorisms that repeatedly promise a new system, and partly by way of putting together some writings supposed to be a system, and where there is a special paragraph from which one learns that special stress has been put on the concept of existence and actuality. That such a paragraph is a mockery of the entire system, that rather than being a paragraph in a system it is an absolute protest against the system, is nothing to the point for restless systematizers. If one is really to stress the concept of existence, this cannot be said directly in a paragraph in a system, and all oaths and 'bloody wells' serve only to make the magisterial topsy-turviness of the paragraph increasingly ridiculous. Actual emphasis on existence must be expressed in an essential form, and this in view of the treachery of existence is an indirect form: that there is no system. But this in turn must not become a reassuring official blank, for the indirect expression will be constantly renewed in that form. It may be perfectly all right with recommendations by committees to include a dissenting opinion; but an existential system which includes the dissenting opinion as one of its paragraphs is a curious monstrosity. No wonder the system endures. It proudly ignores objections, and if some particular objection is met with that appears to attract people's attention, the systematic

entrepreneurs have a copyist duplicate the objection, which is then recorded in the system, and with the binding the system is then done.

The systematic idea is the subject-object, the unity of thinking and being; existence is, on the contrary, precisely their separation. It by no means follows that existence is thoughtless; but it has made space and put space between subject and object, thought and being. Objectively understood, thinking is pure thinking, which corresponds in just such an abstractly objective way to its object, which object is therefore itself, and the truth the correspondence of thought with itself. This objective thinking has no relation to the existing subjectivity, and while the difficult question always remains of how the existing subject gains admission to this objectivity, where subjectivity is pure abstract subjectivity (which again is an objective qualification and signifies no existing human being), what is certain is that the existing subjectivity tends more and more to vanish into thin air; and finally, if it is possible for a human being to become anything of the sort, and the whole thing is not something he can become aware of in imagination at most, he becomes pure abstract consciousness privy to knowledge of this pure relation between thinking and being, this pure identity, yes, this tautology, because here being does not mean that the thinker is, but really only that he is thinking.

The existing subject is, on the contrary, existing, as indeed is every human being. Let us therefore not do the objective tendency the injustice of calling it an ungodly, pantheistic self-worship, but view it rather as an essay in the comical, because the idea that from now and to the end of the world nothing may be said that is not a proposal for further improvement in the almost completed system is a systematic consequence that only systematizers have to draw.

By starting straight away with ethical categories in the criticism of the objective tendency one does it an injustice and misses the target, since there is nothing that one has in common with those under attack. However, by staying inside the metaphysics one can employ the comical – which is also within metaphysics – to catch up with a glorified professor of the kind. If a dancer were able to jump very high we would admire him. But if he could jump even higher than any dancer before him, were he to give the impression of being able to fly, let laughter alone catch up with him. To jump is basically to belong to the earth and to respect the law of gravity; so that the leap is only momentary. But to fly means to be freed from telluric conditions, a privilege reserved only for winged creatures,

maybe also inhabitants of the moon, maybe – and that may be where the system finds at last its true readers.

Being a human being has been abolished, and every speculative philosopher mistakes himself for humankind, which makes him something infinitely great and also nothing at all. In distraction he mistakes himself for humankind just as the opposition press uses ‘we’ and sailors say ‘bloody well’. But when you have cursed over a longer period you go back in the end to straight talking, since all swearing is self-nugatory, and on discovering that every street urchin can say ‘we’, one finds out that it does after all mean a little more to be just one. And when you see that every basement bar proprietor can play at being humankind, you see at last that being a plain human being, pure and simple, means more than playing party games. And one more thing: when a basement bar proprietor plays this game, everyone thinks it ridiculous. Yet it is just as ridiculous for the greatest man in the world to do it, and one may very well laugh at him in this regard, and for the same reason, as is just and proper, have respect for his abilities, learning, etc.

Section Two

The subjective problem, or how subjectivity must be for the problem to appear to it

Chapter 1

Becoming subjective

What would there be for ethics to judge if becoming subjective were not the highest task set for a human being; what must be put aside on a closer understanding of this; examples of thinking directed towards becoming subjective.

Objectively, one always speaks only to the matter at issue; subjectively one speaks of the subject and subjectivity – and then, what do you know, subjectivity is the matter at issue! It has constantly to be stressed that the subjective problem is nothing about the matter at issue, it is the subjectivity itself. For since the problem is the decision and all decision lies, as was shown above, in subjectivity, the important thing is that objectively there be absolutely no remaining trace of a matter at issue, for at that very moment subjectivity wants to sneak its way out of some of the pain and crisis of decision, i.e., make the problem a little objective. If the introductory science is waiting for one more work to appear before taking the matter up for judgment; if the system still lacks a paragraph; if the speaker has still another argument up his sleeve, the decision is postponed. Hence, what is raised here is not the question of the truth of Christianity, in the sense that if this was decided, subjectivity would be ready and willing to accept it. No, it is a question of the subject's acceptance. And here it must be considered damnation's illusion (which has remained ignorant of the fact that the decision lies in subjectivity), or as treachery's subterfuge (which pushes the decision aside through an objective approach in which there can be no decision in all eternity), to assume that this transition from something objective to subjective acceptance is direct and comes

as a matter of course, when it is precisely the decisive factor, and an objective acceptance of Christianity is (*sit venio verbo*)¹ paganism or thoughtlessness.

Christianity would bestow upon the individual an eternal happiness, a good which is distributed not in large consignments but only to one at a time. Even if Christianity assumes that subjectivity, as the possibility of appropriation, is the possibility of receiving this good, it does not assume that subjectivity stands there pat, with no further ado, even simply that it has, with no further ado, a real grasp of the meaning of such a good. The development, or remaking, of this subjectivity, its infinite concentration in itself, in view of the conception of the highest good of the infinite, an eternal happiness, is the developed possibility of subjectivity's first possibility. Thus Christianity protests against all objectivity; it wants the subject to be infinitely concerned with itself. What it asks about is the subjectivity; the truth of Christianity, if it is anywhere, is only in this; objectively it is not at all. If it is in a single subject alone, then it is in him alone; and there is greater Christian joy in heaven over this one² than over world history and the system, which as objective powers are incommensurate with what is Christian.

People commonly assume that as far as being subjective goes there's nothing to it. Now, of course, every human being is in a way also somewhat of a subject. To become what one in any case is, yes, who would want to waste time on that, surely the most unrewarding of all life's tasks? Quite so, but just for that reason it is extremely hard, the hardest task of all, simply because every human being has a strong natural bent and urge to become something else and more. That is how it is with such apparently trivial tasks. It is exactly their seeming triviality that makes them infinitely hard, since the task itself does not beckon directly, in a way that promises support to the aspirant, and because the task works against him, so that it needs an infinite effort just to discover the task, i.e., that this is indeed the task, pains that one is spared in other respects. To think about simple things, things the simple soul also knows in this way, is extremely forbidding; for to the sensate person the difference itself, even with the utmost effort, becomes by no means obvious. No, grandiloquence is something quite different and glorious.

¹ Latin: pardon the expression. ² Luke 15:1–10.

When one ignores this Socratically jesting, and from a Christian viewpoint infinitely concerned, little distinction between being a so-called subject of sorts and being a subject, or becoming one, or being what one is through having become that – then the admired wisdom is this, that it is the task of the subject increasingly to divest himself of his subjectivity in order to become more and more objective. From this it is easy to see what this instruction understands by being a so-called subject of sorts: that by this it quite rightly understands the accidental, the tactless, the selfish, the cranky, etc., all of which every human being can have enough of. Nor does Christianity deny that such things should be cast off; it has never been a friend of adolescent antics. But the difference is simply this, that speculative science wants to teach that the way to do this is to become objective, while Christianity teaches that the way to do it is to become subjective, i.e., truly to become subject. In case this should seem to be merely a verbal dispute, let it be said that Christianity wants precisely to intensify passion to its highest pitch, but passion is subjectivity and objectively it does not exist at all.

It is often impressed upon us, in a curiously indirect and satirical way, and even if the lesson goes unheeded, that the guidance of science in this matter misguides. While we are all so-called subjects of a sort and work at becoming objective, which many succeed in brutishly enough, poetry goes about anxiously looking for *its* object. In spite of our all being subjects, poetry has to make do with a very scanty selection of subjects; yet it is precisely subjectivities that poetry must have. Why then does it not just take any first-comer from our honoured midst? Alas, no, he will not do, and if all he wants is to become objective, he will never do. This seems really to suggest that being subject is something special. Why have only a few become immortal as enthusiastic lovers, a few as noble heroes, etc., if everyone in every generation was so by being in this way without further ado a subject? And yet, being a lover, a hero, etc., is precisely a prerogative of subjectivity, for one does not become that objectively.

And now the clergy! Why is it to the honoured memory of a certain collection of devout men and women that the religious address always returns? Why does the clergyman not just take the first comer from our honoured midst and make him our model? Are we not all what are called subjects? And yet, it is in subjectivity that devoutness lies and one does not become devout objectively.

Well, just look. Amorous love is a qualification of subjectivity and yet lovers are very rare. Yes, we do say (in roughly the same way as when

speaking of being a subject of sorts): there went a couple of lovers, there goes another couple, last Sunday the banns were read for sixteen couples, in Stormgade³ there lives a couple that cannot make up – but when love is transfigured by poetry's celebratory conception the name that is honoured takes us at times back several centuries, while everyday life puts us in about as good a humour as, in general, funeral speeches do – since of course every instant sees the burial of a hero. Is this just chicanery on the part of poetry, which is otherwise a friendly power, a lady comforter, by uplifting our spirits in the contemplation of the excellent? And what excellence? Why, of subjectivity. So there is something excellent after all about being subjectivity.

Just look. Faith is indeed the highest passion of subjectivity, but simply note what the clergy say about its being so scarce in the community of believers (for this 'the community of believers' is meant in roughly the same way as when speaking of being a subject of sorts). Hush, now, do not be so ironic as to ask further how rare faith may be among the clergy! But is this a cunning contrivance on the part of the clergy, who have devoted their lives to the care of our souls by carrying us away in devotions, while the soul's longing covets the transfigured ones – what transfigured ones? Why, those who had faith. But faith lies in subjectivity. So there is something excellent after all about being subjectivity.

The objective tendency (which wants to make everyone into an observer and, at best, into so objective an observer as, almost like a ghost, hardly to be distinguished from that immense spirit of time past) naturally wants to know or hear nothing except what stands in relation to itself. If one is lucky enough, under this assumption, to be of service by contributing some or other piece of information about a perhaps previously unknown tribe, which with the help of a banner is to join the paragraph parade; if one is competent, under the assumption, to assign China another place than the one it has hitherto occupied in the systematic procession, then one is made welcome. All else is incompetent prattle, for it is assumed as settled that the objective tendency towards becoming an observer is, in modern usage, the *ethical* answer (becoming an observer is the ethical!, to be that is the *ethical* answer – otherwise one must assume that there is simply no question of the ethical and, as far as that goes, no answer either) to the question of what I am to do ethically,

³ A street in the centre of Copenhagen.

and world history the task assigned to the observational nineteenth century – the objective tendency is the way and the truth. Let us, however, render a simple account to ourselves of a small bone of contention on subjectivity's part regarding the objective tendency. Just as the *Crumbs* called attention to a little prefatory consideration before one goes on to demonstrate the world-historical process of the idea *in concreto*, namely what it means for the idea to become historical, so too I propose now to dwell on a little prefatory consideration in respect of the objective tendency: *what would there be for ethics to judge if becoming subjective were not the highest task set for every human being?* What would there be for it to judge? Yes, naturally, it would have to despair. But what does the system care about that? It is, after all, sufficiently consistent not to allow it into the system.

The world-historical idea concentrates everything more and more systematically. What a Sophist once said, that he could carry the whole world in a nutshell, now appears to be being realized in the modern overview of world history: it becomes more and more compendious. It is not my intention to point to the comedy in this, but rather to try to make it clear via different thoughts leading towards the same goal, what objection ethics and the ethical have to this whole order of things. For it is not, in our age, a matter merely of an individual scholar or thinker busying themselves with world history; world history is something the whole age clamours for. But as the essential resort for all individual existence, ethics and the ethical have nevertheless an incontestable claim upon everyone who is existing; so incontestable that no matter what a person achieves in the world, be it the most astonishing, it is of doubtful worth all the same if that person was not ethically clear in making the choice and has not made the choice ethically clear to himself. The ethical quality is jealous of itself and looks down on the most astounding quantity.

Ethics therefore looks with a distrustful eye on all world-historical knowledge, since it easily becomes a snare, a demoralizing aesthetic diversion for the knowing subject, in so far as the distinction between what does and does not become world historical follows a quantitative dialectic. For which reason too, within world history, the absolute ethical distinction between good and evil becomes aesthetically neutralized in the metaphysically aesthetic categories of the great and the important, to which the bad and the good have equal access. Another kind of factor, not ethically dialectical, plays an essential role in the world-historical:

accidents, circumstances, the play of forces into which the historical totality incorporates the individual's deed by reshaping it so as to transform it into something else not directly belonging to him. Neither by willing the good to the utmost of his ability, nor by willing evil with diabolical heartlessness, is a human being assured of becoming world historical; even in the case of misfortune, becoming world historical is a matter of good luck. How then does an individual become world historical? Ethically, he becomes so by accident. But ethics also regards as unethical the transition whereby an individual lets go of the ethical quality in order to try its hand longingly, wishingly, etc., at the quantifying other.

An age or a person may be immoral in various ways, but it is also a form of immorality, or at any rate a temptation,⁴ to be too involved with the world-historical, a temptation that, when the time comes for oneself to act, may easily lead one into wanting to be world-historical as well. Constant occupation in the contemplation of the accidental, of that *accessorium*⁵ by which world-historical figures become world-historical, easily beguiles one into confusing this extra with the ethical, into developing an unhealthy, frivolous and cowardly concern for the accidental rather than concerning oneself infinitely with the ethical, as someone who himself exists. Perhaps the reason for the discontent in our age, when it comes to action, is that it has been spoiled by contemplation; yes, perhaps that explains the many fruitless attempts to become more than one is, by joining forces socially in the hope of impressing the spirit of history by numbers. Pampered by assiduous association with world history, people no longer have the will for anything but the consequential; they concern themselves with the accidental alone, the world-historical outcome, instead of with the essential, the innermost, with freedom, the ethical.

The fact is that this continual commerce with the world-historical renders one unfit for action. True ethical enthusiasm lies in willing to the utmost of one's ability but, at the same time, exalted in divine jest, never giving a thought to whether or not one achieves anything. Once the will begins to have half an eye for the outcome, the individual begins being immoral – the will's energy slackens, or is developed abnormally into an unwholesome, unethical, mercenary hankering that, however great its accomplishment, does not accomplish the ethical: the individual insists on something other than the ethical itself. A truly great ethical

⁴ 'Anfægtelse.' See p. 13 n. 3. ⁵ Latin: addition.

individuality would consummate his life as follows: he would develop himself to his utmost ability, possibly having a great effect on the external world in doing so, but without this seriously engaging him, for he would know that the external is not in his power, and therefore means nothing to him, either *pro* or *contra*. He would remain in ignorance of what he had done so as not to have the external delay him in his striving, or fall into its temptation. For what a syllogist fears most of all, a wrong inference, a μεταβάσις εἰς ἄλλω γένος,⁶ the ethicist fears just as much, namely an inference drawn, or made, from the ethical to something other than the ethical. By a resolution of the will he would therefore keep himself ignorant of his accomplishment and even in death *would not wish* to know that his life had any other moment than that of having ethically prepared the development of his soul. If the power governing all things should then want to adapt things to his becoming a world-historical figure: yes, that is something he would first ask about in eternity, jokingly; for only there is there time for the light-hearted questions of the unconcerned.

If, that is, someone cannot become a world-historical figure by himself, in freedom, by willing the good – and this is impossible because it is only possible, i.e., perhaps possible, i.e., it depends on something else – then it is unethical to be concerned with it. And when someone, instead of giving up this concern and snatching himself out of its temptation, dolls it up in the sanctimonious guise of helping others, he is immoral and tries slyly to slip into his account with God the thought that God does, after all, need him just a little. But this is stupidity, for God needs no man. Besides, being Creator would be highly embarrassing if it turned out that God was in need of the creature. On the contrary, God can demand everything of everyone, everything and for nothing. For every human being is a worthless slave, and the ethically inspired person differs from others only in knowing this, and in hating and abominating every form of deception.

When a headstrong temperament battles with his times, putting up with everything but at the same time shouts: Posterity, history will show that I spoke the truth, people then believe him to be inspired. Alas, no, he is just a little cleverer than the altogether stupid; instead of choosing money and the prettiest girl or the like, he chooses world-historical importance; yes, no doubt he knows well enough what he chooses. But

⁶ Greek: shift to another kind. See p. 83 n. 33.

in relation to God and the ethical he is a cheating lover; he is also one of those for whom Judas became guide (Acts 1:16): he too sells his God-relationship if not for money. And although with his zeal and his teaching he may reform an entire generation, he confounds life itself *pro virili*⁷ because his own existence-form is not adequate to his teaching, because, by exempting himself, he establishes a teleology that makes life itself meaningless. A king or a philosopher may be well served in a finite sense by some shrewd and gifted mind who protects the king's power and upholds the philosopher's teaching, and binds everyone in obedience to the king or to the philosopher, even if he himself is neither a good subject nor a true follower. But in relation to God this is pretty stupid. The cheating lover, who wants not to be true as a lover but only as a world-historical entrepreneur, does not want to be true to the last. He refuses to understand that there is nothing between him and God except the ethical; he refuses to understand that God, without doing any injustice or denying his own nature, which is love, could create someone equipped with unparalleled powers, set him down in a remote place and say to him: 'Now, go and live the human experience with unequalled exertion; labour, so that half as much would suffice to transform an age; but you and I, we are to be alone in this; all your efforts are to mean nothing at all to any other human being; and even so you are to, do you understand?, you are to will the ethical, and you are to be, you understand?, enthusiastic in your striving because it is this that is the highest.' This the cheating lover does not understand, and much less is he capable of understanding what comes next, when a genuinely enthusiastic ethical individuality, trembling in the earnest of it, lifts himself up in the holy jest of the divine madness,⁸ saying: 'Let me be as though created for a whim, this is the jest; and yet I would will the ethical to the utmost of my ability, this is the earnest; and I want nothing else, absolutely nothing. Oh, insignificant significance, Oh, sportive earnest, Oh, blessed fear and trembling! How blessed to be able to fulfil God's demands, smiling at those of the age; how blessed to despair at being unable to do so, as long as one does not let go of God!' Only an individuality of this kind is ethical; but he has also realized that the world-historical is a composition that is not directly dialectical for the ethical.

⁷ Latin: to the extent of his powers. ⁸ See Plato, *Phaedrus*, 244a-d, 256a-b.

The longer life goes on and the more the activities of the one existing involve him in the web of life, the more difficult it is to separate the ethical from the external; and the easier the metaphysical principle seems to be confirmed that the outer is the inner, the inner the outer, the one wholly commensurable with the other. Exactly this is the temptation, and for this reason the ethical becomes day by day more difficult, consisting as it does in that true hypertension of the infinite which is the beginning, and where it is therefore most clearly apparent. Let us imagine an individual at the beginning of life. He now resolves, for instance, to devote his whole life to a pursuit of the truth and to the perfection of the known. In the moment of decision he accordingly refuses everything, absolutely everything, including world-historical importance. But now, what if little by little such importance comes to him as the fruit of his labour? Yes, if it comes as the fruit of his labour – but this it never does. If it comes, it is Guidance that augments the ethical striving with it in itself, and so it is not the fruit of his labour. It is a *pro* that must be considered a temptation just as much as any *contra*. It is the most dangerous of all temptations, and many a glorious beginning made with the hypertension of the infinite is prostrated in what, for one who falls, became an enervated effeminate embrace. But back to the beginning. With the true ethical hypertension of the infinite, he refuses everything. In fables and fairytales there is a lantern called magic. When it is rubbed, a jinn appears. Joke! But freedom, that is the magic lantern. When man rubs it with ethical passion God appears before him. And lo and behold, the jinn of the lamp is a servant (so wish for it, you whose jinn is a wish), but whoever rubs the magic lamp of freedom becomes himself a servant – the jinn is the Lord. This is the beginning. Let us now see if it will do to add something else to the ethical. The resolving person accordingly says: I will – but also I want world-historical importance – *aber*.⁹ So there is an *aber* – and the jinn vanishes again, because the lamp of freedom has not been rubbed properly and the beginning does not occur. But if it has occurred, or has been done properly, then every *aber* must again be given up in the sequel, even if life itself did everything in the most ingratiating and alluring way to force it upon one. Or the resolving person says: I will, but also I want my efforts to benefit others, because between you and me, if it came to that, I'm the sort of good person who would like to do good to the whole of humankind.

⁹ 'But'.

Even if the jinn did appear with the rubbing done in this way, I think it would nevertheless rise up in wrath and say: ‘Stupid man! Do I not exist, I, the Almighty? And even if the human beings I have created, all of them, and have counted, all of them, I who have counted the hairs on your head,¹⁰ could I not help each one just as I help you? Presumptuous man! Have you anything to demand? Yet I have everything to demand. Do you own anything that you might give me some part of it? Or in doing your utmost, do you not give me back what is my own, and perhaps in rather poor condition?’

So here stands the beginner, the least trace of an *aber* and the beginning has gone awry. But if that is how it is with the beginning, the continuation must follow suit to the letter. If that beginner began well, if in addition he has achieved something astounding, if a whole generation owed him much and thanked him for it, then he must know in jest what jest is. The earnest is his own inner life; the jest is that it pleases God to attach this significance to his striving, he who is only an unworthy slave. When a mirage picks up a man and through its power of total transformation shows him to the wondering observer in preternatural proportions, does any merit attach to the man? Likewise, when Guidance so arranges things that the inner striving in a human being is reflected in the shadow play of world history, does any merit attach to him? I should think that the true ethicist, if this were to befall him, would, when talking about it, remind us impishly of a Don Quixote. He would say that just as that knight, and perhaps as repayment for having wanted world-historical importance, was persecuted by a hobgoblin who ruined everything for him, so he too must have a hobgoblin who played tricks with him in reverse – for only stupid schoolmasters and equally stupid geniuses make the mistake of believing it is due to themselves, and of forgetting themselves over their great importance in world history.

Anyone unable to see this is stupid, and should anyone dare object I shall ridicule him with the power of comedy I happen at the moment to possess. More I do not say, for it might please Guidance this very day to take this power from me and give it to another just to test me. It might please Guidance to let me do the work but so order things as to bestow the gratitude of my contemporaries upon a barber’s apprentice as though he had done it. This is something I cannot know; I know only that I must

¹⁰ Matthew 10:30.

stick to the ethical, making no demands, absolutely none, but be inspired only in my ethical relation to God, which may very well endure, indeed become even more fervent if he took such a gift away from me. It might therefore be wiser to have said nothing beforehand, in case people mock me all the more should I fail. But the ethical never raises questions of worldly wisdom; it merely demands understanding enough to discover the danger – in order then to go boldly into it, which indeed seems very stupid. Oh, strange power that is in the ethical! If a king were to say to his enemies: Do as I command; if not, tremble before my sceptre whose sway shall be terrible over you – unless it should please Guidance to take my throne away from me this very day and make a swineherd my successor! Why do we hear this ‘if’ so seldom, this ‘unless’, this latter part of the speech, which is the ethical truth? For truth it is – and the trick simply to be enthusiastic, as another author has said:¹¹ to be joyful out on the 70,000 fathoms deep. And whoever, himself existing, has understood life in this way, will not be deceived by the world-historical, which in the misty vision of speculation only runs together into something quite different, which the speculator profoundly makes sense of afterwards.

True, it is said that *die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht*,¹² and the word ‘judgment’ seems to want to claim an ethical view of life in the saying. Perhaps that is so for God, because being eternally privy to our thoughts he possesses the medium that is exactly the commensurability of the outer and inner. But the human spirit cannot see the world-historical in that way, even if one disregards difficulties and objections which I do not wish to dwell on in detail here, so as not to distract attention from the ethical, but merely point out and touch on in as concessionary a spirit as possible, in order not to place the interest in them.

α. *We must set aside the consideration that*, as has already been touched upon, *admission to becoming world-historical is quantitatively dialectical, so that whatever has become world-historical has undergone this dialectic*. That such a distinction does not exist for the omniscient God affords no comfort to the finite spirit, since, well, I hardly dare say it aloud, for that will not do in the world-historical nineteenth century, though I may whisper it in the systematist’s ear: there is a difference between King Solomon and Jørgen Hattemager¹³ – I breathe not a word of this to anyone

¹¹ Frater Taciturnus, in *Stages on Life’s Way*, SKS 4, pp. 411f., 433f.

¹² ‘World history is world judgment’, from the last but one line of Schiller’s poem ‘Resignation’.

¹³ An established saying. ‘Hattemager’ – hatter.

else. For God, the grasp of the historical is infused by and with his being privy to the innermost secrets of conscience of the greatest and humblest alike. If a human being adopts this standpoint he is a fool, but if he does not want to do that, he must be content with the survey that seeks out the salient points, and it is precisely this that makes quantity the clinching factor. That the ethical is in world history, as it is everywhere where God is, is not on that account denied, but only that the finite spirit can truly see it there, and to try to see it there is a piece of presumptuous risk-taking that can easily end with the observer losing the ethical in himself.

In order to study the ethical, every human being is assigned to himself. He is, in this regard, more than enough. Indeed, he is the only location where *he* can study it with assurance. Even another person with whom he lives can only become clear about him through what is external, and to that extent the understanding is already attended with risk. But the more complicated the externality in which ethical inwardness reflects itself, the more difficult becomes the problem of observation, until finally it goes astray in something quite different, the aesthetic. The grasp of world history easily becomes a semi-poetic, contemplative astonishment instead of ethical circumspection. The more significant the parties, the more difficult it becomes to keep track of the matter, even for a judge. And yet it is not for the judge to pass an ethical judgment but merely a civil one, where guilt and merit are subject to a dialectic that has a quantitative regard for the greater or lesser circumstance and a regard for the outcome that is contingent. In a world-historical perspective there is much wider scope for this confusion, where it often seems as if good and evil obey a quantitative dialectic, and as if there is a certain magnitude of crime and cunning in relation to millions of individuals and entire peoples, where the ethical becomes as shy as a sparrow in a dance of cranes.

But to attend again and again to this everlasting quantifying is damaging to the observer, who easily loses that chaste purity of the ethical which, being holy, infinitely scorns the quantifying, though to the sensate man it is his eye's delight and to the sophisticated man his fig-leaf.

The ethical as the absolute is infinitely valid in itself and needs no décor to help it make a better showing. But the world-historical is just such a dubious accessory (when the eye for seeing through it is that not of an omniscient but of a human being), and in world history the ethical, just like nature, in the words of the poet, 'serves *knechtisch dem Gesetz der*

*Schwere*¹⁴ since the quantitative differential is also a law of gravity. The more simplified the ethical, the better one sees it. It is therefore not the case, as people would cheatingly imagine, that the ethical is more clearly evident in human history, where everything concerns millions, than in one's own poor life. Quite to the contrary, one sees it more clearly in one's own life precisely because here one's eyes are not taken in by matter and mass. The ethical is inwardness, and therefore the smaller that in which one sees it, provided it is seen in its infinitude, the better one sees it; while anyone who thinks he must have the world-historical accessories the better to see it demonstrates his ethical immaturity precisely by so doing.

Whoever does not grasp the eternal validity of the ethical, even if it concerned him alone in all the world, does not really grasp the ethical; for the fact that it concerns all human beings is in a sense no concern of his except as a shadow accompanying the ethical clarity in which he himself lives. Grasping the ethical is like doing arithmetic: one learns best how to calculate by calculating in abstract numbers; if one begins with denominate magnitudes, interest easily comes to revolve around something else. In world history one calculates with denominate magnitudes, and with tremendously huge magnitudes that with their multiplicity multiply stir the multiplicity in the observer. But this quantifying is something to which the sensate man is extremely partial, and hence, recalling the simile and the dissimilarity, the beginner is far from being one who calculates in abstract numbers, since on the contrary it is a sign of true ethical maturity to give up what one early, and perhaps also naturally, hankers for: calculating with world-historical magnitudes. Just as a noble Greek (Empedocles – Plutarch) has said that one should fast in respect of evil (*νηστεύειν κακῆτος*),¹⁵ so also with a truly ethical grasp of the ethical, it is a matter of fasting and being sober, a matter of not longing to go world-historically to the banquet and getting drunk in amazement. But this abstinence is again, ethically grasped, the most divine of enjoyments and eternity's refreshing cordial. World-historically, on the other hand, it is easy for a person to be tempted to assume that if he is insignificant, his erring has no infinite significance, and that if he is a great man, the size can turn the mistake into something good.

¹⁴ 'The law of gravity slavishly'.

¹⁵ Greek: fast from evil; Plutarch, 'De cohibenda ira' ('On the Control of Anger'), an essay in his *Moralia*.

But even should the observing individual not be demoralized in this way, as long as the ethical is still being conflated with the world-historical, so that having to do with millions essentially differs from having to do with one, then another confusion easily arises: that the ethical first finds its concrete embodiment in the world-historical, and that this is the form in which it first becomes a task for the living. In this way the ethical does not become what is original, the most original, in each person, but an abstraction from world-historical experience. One observes world history and, lo and behold, each age has its own moral substance. One becomes objectively superior and, though existing, will not be satisfied with the so-called subjective ethical; no, the present generation, already in its own lifetime, wants to discover its world-historical moral idea and to act on its basis.

Alas, what won't the German do for money – and what won't the Dane do afterwards once the German has done it! In respect of the past, the illusion is easily come by that forgets to distinguish, and partly cannot know, what belongs to the individual and what to the objective order of things that is the spirit of world history. But in respect of the present generation, and of every particular individual, letting the ethical become something you need a prophet with a world-historical outlook upon world history to discover, that is an unusually clever comic invention. Fortunate nineteenth century; if no such prophet appears, we can all down tools and go on the town, for in that case nobody knows what the ethical is. Already odd enough that the ethical be so poorly thought of that instruction is left preferably to teacher-training students and parish clerks; already ridiculous enough if someone said that the ethical was not yet found and still to be discovered – though not a wholly insane notion if what he meant was that it was to be discovered by the individual becoming deepened in himself and his God-relationship. But that it should take a prophet, not a judge, no, but a seer, a world-historical bruiser, with the help of one deep and one blue eye,¹⁶ familiarity with world history, and perhaps also coffee grounds and the laying out of cards, to discover the ethical; i.e., to discover (for this is the modern slogan of the demoralizing ethic) what it is that the age demands – this is to create needless confusion in two ways, for which the laughter-lover must always be beholden to the wise

¹⁶ An allusion to N. F. S. Grundtvig. See the translator's introduction.

men. Ridiculous that anything like that should be the ethical, and that a seer should discover it by looking at world history, where it is so hard to see; and ridiculous, finally, that constant commerce with world history should have given birth to this conclusion. What the most stupid person, confirmed in a house of correction,¹⁷ is able to understand is upgraded by cathedral wisdom into that genuine speculative profundity. Alas!, while the speculating worshipful Herr Professor is explaining all of life, he has in distraction forgotten what he is called, namely a human being, a human being pure and simple, not a fantastical $\frac{3}{8}$ of a §. He concludes the system; he announces in a concluding paragraph that he will discover the ethical which this generation, including himself and me too, will realize – since it is not yet discovered! What? The ethical, or the demand of the times? Alas, the ethical is an ancient discovery. I can well believe, on the other hand, that what the times demand has not yet been discovered, despite the many satisfying and highly respectable yet still always promissory essays in gibberish.

If someone now says that this is a slanderous exaggeration, that those concerned with world history are happy to let teacher-training students and parish clerks lecture on popular ethics, and neither have they anything against the lower classes in particular seeking to live accordingly, but the world-historical interest hints at something higher, the far greater tasks – then this answer suffices to show that it was no slanderous exaggeration; for if the other is something higher then let us begin, and the sooner the better; but the trouble is that more than likely it is not yet discovered. And as for the far greater tasks, let us speak of them quite simply, as neighbour speaks to neighbour in the evening twilight. The general statement about the task being far greater is still not enough. It would be an encouragement to a reasonable person only if it were also made clear that the dividend for the individual participant would be greater. Thus, when out in the country, where peace reigns in the shade of the canopy of leaves, when the little family, according to the beloved king's devout wish, places a chicken on the table and there is plenty for the few: is this meal not abundant compared with that great feast where, although sure enough an ox was served, the partakers were so many that

¹⁷ A royal resolution from 1812 enjoined compulsory teaching and confirmation in houses of correction.

there was barely a taste for each? Or when some person, daily fond of silence, secretly finds the mysterious path to the solitariness of a forsaken person, and here finds the time and place to say the brief word that nevertheless comforts indescribably – does not such a speaker produce just as great, or rather, an infinitely greater effect than the celebrity who is rewarded with three times three cheers – and why?, because he uses the slogan the crowd likes to hear. Not, that is, because he spoke wisely, for the noise was too much for people to hear clearly, but because he put in a word that any numskull can say; because, that is, he was not a speaker but a bellows-squeezer.

The speculative distraction may be explained psychologically, as being due only to the constant commerce with world history, with the past. Instead of being properly aware of oneself as the person living in the present and with the future before him, so as to become psychologically able to reproduce the individual element that in the world-historical is only one factor among others, one muddles everything and wants to anticipate one's own pastness – in order to come to the point of acting, despite it seeming fairly easy to grasp that, once you have become past, you have acted.

It is only by attending closely to myself that I am able to become familiar with the conduct of a historical individuality at the time he lived; and I understand him only when I keep him alive in my understanding and do not, as children do, knock the clock to pieces in order to understand the life in it; and do not, as speculation does, change him into something quite different in order to understand him. But I cannot learn from him, any more than from the dead and gone, what it is to live. That is something I must experience through myself, and that is why I must understand myself, not the other way around, that is, having misunderstood him world-historically, going on to let the misunderstanding help me to misunderstand myself, as if I too were dead and gone. When alive, the world-historical individuality probably got along with the subjective ethics, and then Guidance added the world-historical importance if any.^a A certain class of people has perceived this quite correctly, although they are otherwise far from coming across the truth, since they go to the opposite extreme. These are the mockers and the unbelievers, who hold

^a Surely one of the most remarkable and significant world-historical figures is Socrates. So how are things with him? Well, let the system grasp his necessity after the event, the necessity of his coming

that all world history hinges upon pure trivialities, on 'a glass of water'.¹⁸ The other extreme is formed by speculation, which would turn the de-animated historical individuality into a metaphysical qualification, a kind of categorial designation for the relation between cause and effect conceived immanently. Both are in error; the mocker does human being an injustice, the speculative philosopher does God an injustice. World-historically the individual subject is no doubt a trifle, but there is after all the world-historical addendum. Ethically, the individual subject is infinitely important. Take any human passion at all and let it relate to the ethical in the individual; this will have great ethical significance but perhaps none at all world-historically, though perhaps a great deal, for the world-historical comes into being ethically by way of a 'perhaps'. Now, whereas this relation between passion and the ethical occupies the existing individual to the utmost (this is what the mocker calls nothing and speculation, with the help of immanence, speculatively overlooks), perhaps the power that guides world history forms an environment reflecting this individual, and by means of which the latter acquires extensive world-historical importance. He does not have this importance, but Guidance gives him this augmentation. The mocker laughs and says: Look, it was all a matter of

into existence, and of his mother being a midwife; the necessity of his father having been told by an oracle to leave the child to his own devices and never subject him to restraint (curious life when seen as a task for a necessary method); the necessity of his being married, and specifically to Xanthippe; the necessity of his being condemned to death by a majority of three – for here everything is necessary, and it is just as well that the system has only to do with the dead, since to be understood in this way must be intolerable for anyone living. But now let us also see, less systematically and more simply, how he conducted himself while alive, when he went about in the marketplace and taunted the Sophists, when he was a human being and even, in the most ridiculous situation preserved for posterity (cf. *Antoninus philosophus – ad se ipsum*, XI, 28), where, because Xanthippe had put on his clothes and left the house, he had to throw a hide around himself and appeared thus clad in the marketplace, to the great amusement of his friends, yet remained a human being in this situation and much less ridiculous in his hide than he became in the system, where he appears fantastically draped in the rich systematic drapery of a §. Did Socrates speak of what the times demanded, did he grasp the ethical as something to be discovered, or should he be discovered by a prophet with a world-historical gaze, or as something to be decided by the ballot box? No, Socrates was concerned only with himself, and when it came to counting votes he could not even count to five (see Xenophon), was unfit to join in any mission involving several others, to say nothing of one requiring a world-historical mob. He looked to his own – and then Guidance comes along and augments his ironical self-satisfaction with world-historical significance. It is too bad that we have heard nothing from him at all for the last 2,000 years. God alone knows what he thinks of the system.

¹⁸ A reference to A. E. Scribe's comedy *Le Verre d'eau* (*The Glass of Water*) (1842), played in Copenhagen (in Heiberg's translation) in 1845. In it, the Duke of Marlborough's fall is accounted for by his wife spilling water on Queen Anne's dress. Heiberg adapted many of Scribe's comedies for the Danish theatre.

wounded pride, i.e., nothing. But this is untrue, since in its relation to the ethical, wounded pride is not a matter of indifference, a nothing; and the world-historical is something quite different that does not follow directly from that relation. For speculation, everything runs together. It has overcome mockery and unbelief, not by rescuing the ethical from the world-historical but by having it all brought together *durcheinander*,¹⁹ bag and baggage, in a declamatory immanence theory. But mockery has its revenge; far from it being excluded, one would sooner believe speculation had shut itself in with it – so ridiculous has it become. Distraction has its revenge when, in ethics, speculation wants a now living individual to act on the basis of an immanence theory, i.e., act in virtue of refraining to act, because immanence is confined to the observer's point of view, essentially and in truth only for God, a make-believe for worshipful professors and their families and friends.

But if getting involved with world-historical observation is such a risky business, perhaps the objection stems from pusillanimity and apathy, which are always on hand to detain the enthusiasts, in this case the high flight of the world-historicals who know the risks they are taking but for that reason also dare to take them. Not at all, if there is anything in the world that can teach a human being to take risks, it is ethics which teaches risking everything for nothing, risking everything, including renouncing world-historical flattery, in order to become nothing. No, the objection is high-minded precisely because it is ethical; it says that the ethical is absolutely and in all eternity the highest, and that not every bold venture is half won, for there is also a bold venture in which much is lost. Further, a bold venture is not a high-flown phrase, not an exclamatory outburst, but painstaking labour. However daring, a bold venture is not a violent call to action but a quiet dedication that receives nothing in advance, yet stakes everything. So, then, dare, says the ethical, dare to give up everything, including that highly exclusive yet delusive commerce with world-historical observation; dare to become nothing at all, to become a single individual of whom God ethically asks everything, though without daring for all that to cease being enthusiastic – see, that is the venture! But then your gain is that God can never in all eternity be rid of you, for your eternal consciousness is only in the ethical – see, that is the reward! World-historically, being a single individual is nothing at all,

¹⁹ 'In confusion', 'higgledy piggledy'.

infinitely nothing – and yet for a human being it is the only true and its highest meaning, and higher accordingly than any other meaning, which is illusion, not so much in itself, but always when it is supposed to be the highest.

β. *We must set aside the consideration that the world-historical view as an act of cognition is an approximation,^b subject to the same dialectic as every dispute between idea and experience, which every moment obstructs the beginning and, when a beginning has been made, threatens a revolt against the beginning.* The material of world history is endless and the limit must accordingly in one way or another be arbitrary. Although the world-historical is something past, nevertheless as material for cognitive consideration it is incomplete; it is constantly coming into being through ever new observation and research, which makes ever more new or corrective discoveries. Just as the number of discoveries in the natural sciences increases through refining the instruments, so too is it with critically refined observation in the world-historical.

Ah, if only I could display learning at this point! If only I could show how the authorized and yet *valore intrinseco*²⁰ rather dubious Hegelian ordering of the world-historical process is due to arbitrariness and leaps, how China ought to be assigned to another place^c and a new § inserted for a recently discovered tribe in Monomotapa. If only I could show how the Hegelian method seems close to clowning when applied to a minor detail – then I might satisfy one or another reader. The essential thing would be the interest in ordering the world-historical, but what I had to say about

^b Even if one had to concede everything to Hegel, there is still one introductory question he has not answered. What does it at all mean to say that the world-historical view is an approximation? True, he disdained Schelling's intellectual intuition (Schelling's expression for the beginning); he has said himself, and it is said often enough, that his merit is the method, but he has never said how the method relates to intellectual intuition, whether or not a *leap* is needed here. As for the method and its beginning, all one constantly hears is that one must begin both at and with it. But if such a beginning is not just a fanciful idea, a reflection must have occurred beforehand, and in this reflection lies precisely the introductory question.

^c It has not yet become world-historically clear, that is, where China's place is in that world-historical process in which every *privat-docent* from the day before yesterday clearly and distinctly finds plenty of room. For all *privat-docents* are included and once the method reaches our time it goes like a house on fire and we all find a place. The method admits only one Chinese, but not a single German *privat-docent* is excluded, especially not a Prussian, since whoever has the cross blesses himself first. But then the system is not yet quite finished; perhaps it expects systematically to be able, one, two, three to turn the hard work of a true scholar to its account by having a few Chinese placed at its disposal. Then it will be all right. Just now, right enough, it looks a little embarrassing just to have one Chinese when there are so many Germans.

²⁰ Latin: in its intrinsic worth.

Monomotapa would make a strong impression, just as Jeronimus was impressed by what the schoolmaster in *Julestuen* says about the phoenix bird that resides out in Arabia.²¹ But to want to regard all of this world-historical interest – except when it seeks lovingly and in true philological scholarship to grasp some world-historical detail, disinterestedly and solely for the sake of science and knowledge, rather than helping speculatively to conflate the ethical task for the particular individual with the world-historical task of the human race, and still more when this interest aims at becoming everyone's business – to want to regard this interest as an immoral and neurotic curiosity, that would be, would it not, an abhorrent piece of ethical small-mindedness.

Only a very slow-witted person, or someone cleverly wanting to protect himself from feeling that he was a case in point, could take me here to be a vandal who would have the public security of the sacred pastures of science violated and the cattle let loose; or to be a street loungeur who wants to lead newspaper-readers and vote-casting vagrants in a popular uprising, so as to rob the peaceful scholar of what is his and earned lawfully through his happy gifts and in self-effacing toil. Truly, there are many, yes, many who possess more than I in the world of the mind; but no one believes with more pride and greater gratitude to God than I that what is owned in the world of the mind is eternally secured, that the casual labourers do in fact stay outside. Yet when a generation *en masse* wants to dabble in world history; when, demoralized by doing so, just as by playing the lottery, it rejects the highest; when a speculation is no longer disinterested but creates a double confusion, first by jumping over the ethical and then producing something world-historical as the ethical task for individuals; then scholarship itself is concerned that a word be put in about this. No, praise be to science, and praise be to just anyone who drives the cattle away from its sacred precincts. The ethical is and remains the highest task set for every human being. It may also be required of the devotee of science that he have acquired an ethical understanding of himself before dedicating himself to his discipline, and that he continue to understand himself ethically while absorbed in his labours; because the ethical is the breath of the eternal and, in the midst of solitude, the

²¹ A reference to the play *Julestuen* (*The Christmas Living Room*) (1724) by Holberg, in which the long-lived phoenix is said to set fire to itself as soon as it produces its offspring, because it will not live with its kind, while human beings, to show their lack of affinity with such beasts, are encouraged to get together and enjoy themselves.

reconciling fellowship with every human being. But then not a word more, except admiration for those who excel and enthusiastic cheers for the striving. The quiet scholar does not bring confusion into life; he is erotically lost in his glorious occupation. If, however, a noisy scholar wants to force his way into the existence-spheres and confuse what is there the life principle of the whole, the ethical, then, as a scholar and scientist he is no faithful lover and science delivers him over to comic treatment.²²

Only a dull-witted person could mean that the objection that reminds us that the world-historical view is an approximation stems from a pusillanimity and an apathy that shrink from the impossible task. If the direction towards this goal is the highest and all that makes us fearful is the enormous effort, then the objection is not worthy of consideration. But the objection is an ethical one; it is therefore high-minded and for that reason in all its humility it does not fall short of its goal and aim which is the highest. The objection says: the ethical is the only thing certain, to focus oneself upon it the only knowledge that does not at the last moment change into a hypothesis, to exist in it the only secure knowledge where the knowledge is secured by something else. Having to do ethically with the world-historical is an ethical misunderstanding of which true scholarship is never guilty. But while the ethical is everywhere made so light of, what does life teach us? Just as the lovers were few, just as the believers were few, so too no doubt are the true ethical individualities few. Falstaff says somewhere that he once had an honest face, but the year and date have been erased.²³ This 'once', there are countless different ways of saying it, all depending on the manner of the obliteration; yet this 'once' is a crucial word. Perhaps the poet wants to teach us how rare it is for there to exist an individuality in whom the deity's stamp of the eternal, which leaves its impress in the ethical, stays as pure and clear and distinct as it once did; an individuality for whom time does not lay itself like an eternity between him and that remembered eternal impression, but for whom the longest life is but a yesterday compared with this mighty eternal presence; an individuality (for let us not speak aesthetically, as if the ethical were a

²² Here and in the following 'science' and 'scholarship' are used interchangeably. See the translator's introduction.

²³ Shakespeare, *1 Henry IV*, Act II, scene 4: Prince Henry: 'Now, my masters, for a true face and a good conscience.' Falstaff: 'Both which I have had: but their date is out ...'

lucky stroke of genius) who from one day to the next strives to reinstate that primitivity that was his eternal origin! How rare, perhaps, is an individuality for whom the ethical preserves that holy chasteness, infinitely inaccessible to every, even the most remote, alien quality, an individuality who preserves it – but no (let us speak ethically), who gains it, who in life gains this virginal purity of ethical passion, compared with which the purity of the child is but an endearing pleasantry! For aesthetically, a person possesses a primitivity, a wealth which he may even lose a little of in life; but ethically speaking he *has* possessed it: if he gains nothing, all is lost!

If someone says that this is just a recital, that the only means I possess are a little irony, a little pathos, a little dialectics, my reply would be: What else should someone wanting to present the ethical have? Should he perhaps try to get it objectively into a §, and *geläufigt*²⁴ by rote, in order to contradict himself through the form? I think that irony, pathos, and dialectics are *quod desideratur* when the ethical is *quod erat demonstrandum*.²⁵ Yet I do not at all think that I have exhausted the ethical with my scribblings, for it is infinite. But all the more remarkable, then, that the ethical is looked on as something of so little importance that we give away the certain for the uncertain, give away the most certain thing of all in exchange for the various beckoning tasks of approximation. Let world history be a mirror, let the observer sit and see himself in the mirror; but let us not forget the dog that also looked at itself in the mirror – and lost what it had.²⁶ The ethical is also a mirror, and anyone looking at himself in it no doubt does lose something, and the more he sees himself in it, the more he loses – everything that is uncertain, that is, in order to gain the certain. Only in the ethical is there immortality and an eternal life; looked at in another way, world history is perhaps a play, a show that may keep on going – but the spectator dies and the spectating may have been a most meaningful way of – well, passing the time.

γ. Having put this aside then, and allowing that it is not because association with it is risky that we are to give up the world-historical, or because we pusillanimously fear the toil and trouble of the approximation, let us now look at world history – though not *in concreto*, in case we

²⁴ ‘Glibly’. ²⁵ Latin: what is to be desired ... what was to be demonstrated.

²⁶ Aesop’s tale of the dog that saw itself reflected in the water and let go of the meat in its mouth to grab what it took to be a bigger piece.

become too expansive, as can happen even to someone who knows only Kofod's History,²⁷ but let us *in abstracto* reflect upon *what there is to see in the world-historical*.

If the world-historical is to be something and not a highly vague category in which, despite of all one learns of China and Monomotapa, it remains ultimately undecided what the borderline is between the individual and the world-historical, while the confusion is repeatedly given rise to that a king is included because he is a king and a hermit since in his isolation he is a significant individuality, undecided whether there is any boundary at all (or a speculative merger that includes everyone, and world history is simply the history of individuals), whether the boundary is accidental (relative to what happens to be known at the time), or whether perhaps the boundary is dialectically arbitrary, depending only on what the worshipful arranging Herr Professor has most recently read, or must take along in view of his literary connections – so that if the world-historical is to amount to anything, it must be as the history of the human race. Here we have a problem that in my opinion is one of the most difficult of all: in what way and how far is the human race the outcome of the individuals, and what relation has the individual to the race? I will not try to answer it; the attempt might fail anyway; rather I will amuse myself by reflecting on how the survey of world history is now just about complete, or at least going along nicely without having had this difficulty removed.

If world history is the history of the human race, it goes without saying that I do not get to see the ethical in it. What I do get to see must correspond to the abstraction which is the race, and is therefore something equally abstract; whereas the ethical is meant on the contrary for individuality, and so much so that it is only in himself that each individual genuinely and essentially grasps the ethical, because it is his co-consciousness with God. While in one sense the ethical is infinitely abstract, in another it is infinitely concrete and the most concrete thing of all, because it is dialectical for each human being precisely as this particular human being.

It is in terms of purely metaphysical categories, then, that the observer sees world history, and he sees it speculatively as the immanence of cause

²⁷ A history primer first published in 1808 and in many enlarged editions subsequently.

and effect, ground and consequent. Whether he can glimpse a τέλος²⁸ for the whole human race I leave open; but this is not the ethical τέλος, which is for the individual; it is a metaphysical τέλος. To the extent that through their deeds individuals take part in the history of the race, the observer does not trace these deeds back to the individuals, within the ethical, but follows them away from the individuals into the totality. What makes the deed ethically the property of the individual is the intention, but this is precisely what is not included in the world-historical, for here what counts is the world-historical intention. World-historically, I see the effect: ethically, I see the intention. But when I see the intention ethically and understand the ethical, I also see that every effect is infinitely indifferent, that it is indifferent what the effect was; but then of course I do not see the world-historical.

The extent to which an image of guilt and punishment sometimes rubs off on the categories of cause and effect is simply due to the spectator being unable to sustain a purely world-historical attitude, to divest himself altogether of the ethical which is within him. But no merit redounds to the world-historical on that account, and on becoming aware of this the observer ought to bring his observing to a halt, precisely in order to become clear in his own mind about it being the ethical in himself that he ought first and last to develop, to its maximum, instead of helping out world history with a little. World-historically, one does not perceive the individual's guilt, existing as it does only in the intention, but perceives the external deed consumed in the totality and drawing upon itself the consequence of the deed within that. What he sees, therefore, is something wholly confusing and nonsensical: the well-intended deed drawing upon itself the same consequence as the ill-intentioned, the same disaster brought about by the best of kings and a tyrant. Or rather, he sees not even this, for this is an ethical reminiscence. No, he sees what is offensive to ethics, namely, that world-historically he has, in the final instance, to ignore the true distinction between good and evil, since this exists only in the individual, and really only in each individual in his God-relationship.

Looked at world-historically, one ethically true principle, and the vital force in the ethical, becomes untrue: the relationship of possibility that everyone has towards God. World-historically, none concern themselves

²⁸ Greek: aim, end, goal.

with this because everything is understood afterwards so that one forgets that the dead were also once alive. Thus, in the world-historical process as human beings see it, God does not play the role of the Lord. Just as the ethical fails to appear in that process, so too one does not see God there, for unless one sees him in the role of the Lord one does not see him. In the ethical, it is in that possibility relationship that he plays the role, and the ethical is for those existing, for the living, and God is the God of the living. In the world-historical process the dead are not called to life, but only to an imaginary objective life and God in a fantastic sense the soul in a process. In the world-historical process God is tight-laced into a half-metaphysical, half-aesthetic-dramatic bodice of propriety, which is immanence, the devil of a way to be God. A drama critic urges the playwright to kindly use the characters he has listed on the playbill and bring out everything in them. If, e.g. they are young women, they must be married before the play is over or else it misfires. In relation to the past, it seems quite in order that God has used such and such individualities, but when they were living how many weren't rejected at the time? And those who were used, how often did they not have to recognize in ethical humiliation that before God there is no privilege in immanence and that God is not bothered by theatrical propriety? They had to understand what our inspired ethicist, whose words were introduced earlier,²⁹ said, finding his inspiration in understanding that God does not need them. We are not saying that God should contradict himself, create and then not want to use. No, ethically there will be enough for everyone to do, and that relationship of possibility which is the inspiration of the ethical, in joy over God, is God's freedom which will if properly understood never in all eternity, neither before nor afterwards, become immanence.

World-historical immanence is always confusing for the ethical, and yet immanence is just where the world-historical belongs. If an individual sees something ethical it is the ethical in himself, and a reflection of this misleads him into seeing what he does not see. Through this, on the other hand, he has been led to make himself clear to himself ethically. For it would be incorrect to conclude that the more ethically developed a person is, the more he will see this in world history; no, quite the opposite: the

²⁹ See p. 114.

more ethically developed he is, the less he will be concerned about the world-historical.

Let me now, by way of an illustration, call to mind more graphically the difference between the ethical relation of the individual to God and the relation of the world-historical to God. A king no doubt has a royal theatre just for himself, but the distinction here that excludes his subjects is contingent. Not so when we speak of God and the royal theatre that he has for himself. For the individual's ethical development, it is the little private theatre where God is indeed the spectator but also on occasion the individual, even if he is essentially supposed to be the actor, nevertheless one who does not deceive but reveals, just as all ethical development consists in being revealed before God. But world history, that is the royal stage for God where he is not contingently but essentially the only spectator, because he is the only one who *can* be that. To this theatre there is no admission for any existing spirit. If any such fancies himself a spectator there, he simply forgets that he is supposed to be an actor in that little theatre, leaving it to the royal spectator and playwright how the latter would use him in the royal drama, *Drama Dramatum*.³⁰

This applies to the living, and it is only they who can be told how they ought to live; and only by understanding this for oneself can one be led, if it must be done, to reconstruct the life of someone who is dead, if there is time for that. But it is in any case back to front; instead of learning from one's own life while living it, this having the dead live over again, and then to want to learn how to live from the dead, looking back on them as though they had never lived – yes, incredible, that's how back to front it is – if one were already dead.

δ. If it were not true of becoming subjective that it was the task, the highest task set for every human being, a task that can also be enough for the longest life, since it has the curious trait of being over only when life itself is over – if this were not true of becoming subjective, then a difficulty would remain, which it seems to me ought to descend like a dead weight on every human being's troubled conscience, making him wish himself dead today rather than tomorrow. This objection is not mentioned in our objective and yet liberal age, which busies itself far too much with the system and with forms to trouble itself with human life.

³⁰ Latin: drama of dramas.

The objection is this: *if one decides only on the development of the generation or the race, or at least decides on it as the highest, how is one then to explain the divine extravagance that employs the endless host of individuals in one generation after the other in order to get the world-historical development going?* The world-historical drama proceeds infinitely slowly. If that is all he wants, why does God not get a move on? What undramatic tedium, or, rather, what a prosaic and boringly protracted performance! And if that is all he wants, how terrible in this tyrannical fashion to waste myriads of human lives! But what does the observer care about that? The observer catches a world-historical glimpse of that generational play of colours, just like the herring shoal in the ocean: the individual herrings are not worth much. The observer stares numbly into the huge forest of the generation and, just as someone who cannot see the forest for the trees, he sees nothing but forest, not one single tree. Systematically he hangs up curtains, using peoples and nations for that purpose; individual human beings mean nothing to him; eternity itself is draped with systematic synopses and ethical meaninglessness. Poetry squanders poetically and, being itself far from fasting, neither does it dare to assume that divine frugality which ethico-psychologically calls not for many human beings, but all the more idea. What wonder that we even admire the observer when he is so exalted and heroic, or perhaps sooner *distract*, as to forget that he too is a human being, an existing individual human being! He stares himself into that world-historical drama, he dies and disappears, nothing is left of him; or rather, he remains like a ticket in the hands of the usher indicating that the spectator has now gone.

On the other hand, if the task of becoming subjective is the highest set for a human being, everything turns out beautifully. It follows first that world history is no concern of his, but leaves everything in this connection to the poet laureate; and secondly, there is no waste, for even if the individuals are as countless as the sands of the sea, the task of becoming subjective is given to each; and finally, in this there is no denying the fact of world-historical development which, reserved for God and eternity, has both a time and a place of its own.

ε. So, first the ethical, becoming subjective, and then the world-historical. Surely even the most objective person secretly agrees with what has been presented here, that it is incumbent on the wise man first to understand the same as the simple soul, and feel bound by the same

considerations that bind the simple soul – and only then pass over into the world-historical. First then, simple-mindedness. But this, of course, is so easy for the wise man to understand (why else call him wise?) that understanding it takes but a matter of a moment, and that same moment he is in full swing with the world-historical. And so too, no doubt, with my simple-minded remarks – he has understood them instantly, and in the same instant he is far beyond them. If only, just for an instant, I could engage the wise man in conversation; I would gladly be the simple soul who stops him with the following simple-minded observation: *whether what is the most difficult thing of all for the wise man to understand isn't the simple-minded?* The simple soul understands what is simple-minded directly, but when the wise man is to understand it, it becomes infinitely difficult. Is this an insult to the wise man, to put such stress on the simplest thing being the most difficult, just because he is the one who is supposed to deal with it? Not at all, when a maidservant marries a manservant everything passes off quietly, but when a king marries a princess it becomes an event. Is it to think poorly of the king to say this? When the child chatters away, the chatter may be simple-minded enough, and when the wise man says the same, it may have become the most brilliant profundity. That is how it is with the wise man's relation to what is simple. When he honours this enthusiastically as the highest, it honours him in turn, for it is as though, through him, it became something else even though it remains the same. The more the wise man thinks about what is simple (and the fact that there can be talk of a lengthy occupation with it already shows that it is still not that easy), the more difficult it is for him. And yet he feels gripped by a profound sense of humanity that reconciles him with the whole of life: that the difference between the wise man and the simplest of human beings is just this vanishing little distinction: that *the simple soul knows what is essential* while the wise man little by little *comes to know* that he knows it, or *comes to know* that he does not know it. But what they know is the same. Little by little – and then also the wise man's life comes to an end: so when was there time for an interest in world history?

But the ethical is not just a knowing; it is also a doing that is related to a knowing, and a doing such that the repetition can at times, and in more ways than one, be more difficult than the first doing. Still new delay – if we must perforce proceed to the world-historical. Here, however, I owe it to everyone who wants to go to the world-historical to make a confession

concerning myself, something distressing that may explain why I glimpse enough tasks for a whole lifetime while others may be able to complete them before this sentence ends.

Look here, most people are by nature such nice people; first, they are nice children, then nice young people, and then nice husbands and wives. This latter is of course something quite different. Once one has come so far that not only one's wife but also all one's sisters-in-law say *en masse*: God knows, he's an extraordinarily nice man – yes, one may then find time to attend to world history. This, regrettably, is not the case with me. It is, alas, only too well known to my few familiars and, I must admit, also to myself that I am a depraved and pernicious individual. All too true: while all the nice people stand pat, ready to attend to the future of world history, many a time I have to sit at home and grieve over myself. Although my father is dead and I no longer attend school, although I have not been turned over by the civil authorities to a public institution for correction, I have nevertheless seen the need to do a little something for myself, in spite of the fact that I would undeniably very much rather walk in Frederiksberg and be about world history. But of course, I have no wife to tell me God knows what a nice man I am; I have to knock about with myself, entirely on my own. My only comfort is Socrates. He found in himself, so it is said, the disposition to everything evil; it may even have been this discovery that prompted him to give up the study of astronomy, which the age now demands.³¹ I willingly admit how little I otherwise resemble Socrates. In his case it was presumably his ethical insight that helped him to make this discovery. With me it is another matter; in strong passions and the like I have sufficient material and therefore a hard enough time forming anything good out of it with reason.^d

So let us, so as not to be disturbed by thoughts of myself, stick to Socrates, with whom the *Crumbs* also threw in its lot. With his ethical insight he found that he had a disposition to all evil. There you see, arriving at the world-historical is now no longer just a matter of one, two, three. On the contrary, the ethical path becomes exceedingly long, since it begins with first making this discovery. The more profoundly it is made, the more one will have to do; the more profoundly one makes it, the more ethical one becomes; the more ethical one becomes, the less time there is for the world-historical.

^d I would call to mind, with the following words, Plutarch's admirable definition of virtue: 'Ethical virtue has the passions for its material, and reason as its form.' See his little book on ethical virtues.

³¹ A reference to Heiberg. See the translator's introduction.

It is strange with what is simple-minded just how protracted it can be. Take an example from the religious sphere (which lying so close to the ethical puts them in constant communication with each another). Praying is of course an extremely simple matter; one might think it was as easy as buttoning one's trousers; and if nothing else stood in the way, one should soon be able to start on the world-historical. And yet how difficult! Intellectually, I must have an entirely clear conception of God, of myself, of my relation to him, and of the dialectic of the relationship which is that of prayer, in case I confuse God with something else, so that it is not God that I pray to; in case I confuse myself with something else, so that it is not I who prays, and in the relationship of prayer preserve the difference and the relationship. Look, sensible-minded married couples admit that it takes months and years of daily cohabitation to become properly acquainted with each other. But getting to know God is far harder. God is not something external like a wife whom I can ask whether she's now satisfied with me. Whenever it seems to me in my God-relationship that what I do is good and am not on the alert for the infinite's mistrust of me, then it seems to me as if God too were satisfied with me, because God is not something external but the infinite itself, not something external that scolds me when I do wrong, but the infinite itself which has no need of scolding words but whose vengeance is terrible – God not being there for me at all, even if I pray. And praying is also an action. Ah, Luther was after all a man tested in this respect, yet he is said to have remarked that never once in his life had he prayed so fervently that he had not had one or another disturbing thought while doing so. So you might almost think that praying was just as hard as playing the role of Hamlet, of which one of the greatest of actors is said to have remarked that he had just once come close to playing it well, yet he intended to devote all his powers and his entire life to the continued study of this role. Might prayer be almost as important and meaningful?

But then becoming subjective is indeed a very praiseworthy task, a *quantum satis*³² for a life-time. Even if, like Lot's wife,³³ I am in grievous need of having to hurry, there will be more than enough even for the best to do. If I should be able in any way to help an individual among my contemporaries in this respect, my services would include a reference to the parable of the trees who wanted the cedar as king so that they could rest in its shade.³⁴ Our age likewise wants to have a systematic Christmas tree raised so that it can rest and take time off. But the trees had to be

³² Latin: sufficient amount. ³³ Genesis 19:15–26. ³⁴ Judges 9:8–15.

content with a brier. If in the capacity, not of king, but of lowly servant I compared myself with this bush, I would say: I am as barren as it, there is not much shade, and the thorns are sharp.

So the task of becoming subjective is supposed to be the highest set for every person, just as, correspondingly, the highest reward, an eternal happiness, exists only for the subjective; or rather, comes to be only for the person who becomes subjective. Furthermore, the task of becoming subjective should give a person plenty to do for as long as he lives, so that it is not the eager person but only the restless fidget who manages to have done with life before life has had done with him. And the fidget should not be entitled to speak slightly of life, but rather be obliged to understand that he has probably failed to get a proper grasp of life's task; for otherwise it would go without saying that this task lasts as long as life itself, this life's task, that of living. Accordingly, when the individual grasped it as his highest task to become subjective, problems should emerge while he was carrying out that task that could again suffice for the thinking person, just as much as for the objective problem facing the objective thinker, he who goes further, and further, and scorning repetition's deepening in the one thought, never repeats himself but astonishes the age first by being systematician, then world-historian, then astronomer, veterinarian, waterworks inspector, geographer, etc.

Amazing! But why should it not suffice, when one learns from the Socratic wisdom that discovers one's own propensity to all evil before one begins by being finished as a nice man, to make a similar discovery: that to be finished too quickly is the most dangerous thing of all. This is a very edifying observation with an extraordinary capacity to stretch the task, so that additionally there will be more than enough to do. Let us consider the curious fact that where something that is otherwise praised and admired, namely speed, haste, there is a case in which the praise is related inversely to the speed. Generally we praise quickness, while in some situations it is of no consequence. But in this case it is even objectionable. When young people in a written examination are given four hours to complete an essay, whether the individual happens to finish before the time is up or uses the entire period is neither here nor there. In this case, then, the task is one thing, the time another. But when time itself is the task, it will be a mistake to finish before time. Suppose someone were given the task of amusing himself the whole day and that he was through with the amusement already by noon – his speed would then have no merit. Likewise where

life is the task: for you to be finished with life before life is finished with you is precisely not to have finished the task.

That is how it is. Believe me, for I too am in a position of power, though I say it myself, while the common view of me is perhaps that I belong in a class with teacher-training students and parish clerks. I am in a position of power, but my power is not that of a ruler or a conqueror, for the only power I possess is the power of restraint. Nor is my power far-reaching, for I have power only over myself, and not even that unless I exercise restraint at every moment. Directly holding my contemporaries in check is something I have no time for, and besides, I think that trying to hold the times in check is like a passenger in a coach taking hold of the seat in front of him in order to stop the coach: he identifies himself as in direct continuity with the times yet wants to restrain them. No, the only thing to do is to get out of the coach and restrain oneself.

So, if one steps out of the coach (and it is especially true of our own times that being in continuity with them is to be constantly *auf der Eisenbahn*)³⁵ and never forgets that the task is to restrain oneself, since the temptation is to be finished too quickly, then nothing is more certain than that the task is enough for a lifetime. The fault cannot lie in the task, since the task is precisely that it be task enough. Being considered a teacher-training student and a laggard is a good sign, since teacher-training students and laggards are considered *slow-witted*.³⁶

Here follow some examples that show, in all brevity, how the simplest problem is transformed through restraint into the most difficult, so that there is no reason for hastily choosing astronomy, the veterinary sciences and the like if one has not understood the simple. Here the brevity cannot be an obstacle, since the problems are not finished.

For example, *to die*. I know what people ordinarily know about this: that I shall die if I take a dose of sulphuric acid, and also if I jump into the water, sleep in an atmosphere of coal gas, etc. I know that Napoleon always had poison on hand, and that Shakespeare's Juliet took poison, that the Stoics regarded suicide as a courageous act and others consider it cowardly. I know that one can die from a trifle so ridiculous that even the most serious-minded person cannot help laughing at death, that it is possible to escape certain death, etc. I know that the tragic hero dies in the fifth act, and that here death acquires in pathos an infinite reality that

³⁵ 'On the railway'. ³⁶ Emphasis added.

it lacks when a bar-tender dies. I know that the poet's variations of mood in interpretations of death can verge on the comic; I pledge myself to producing in prose the same diversity of effects in mood. I also know what the clergy customarily say; I am familiar with the usual themes dealt with at funerals. If nothing else stands in the way of my passing over into world history, I am ready. I need only buy some black cloth for a clerical gown and I shall preach funeral sermons as well as any ordinary clergyman, for although I gladly admit that those with a velvet front do it more elegantly, this difference is no more essential than that between five and ten rix-dollars for the hearse.

But, there you have it, even with this almost extraordinary knowledge or knowledgeable proficiency, I can in no way consider death something that I have understood. So, before I pass over into world history – concerning which I still always have to say, God knows whether that's really your concern – it seems to me that I had better think about this, in case life mocks me should I become so erudite as to have forgotten to understand what will happen to me sometime, and happens sometime to every human being – sometime, but what am I saying? Suppose death were so devious as to come tomorrow! Just this uncertainty, when it is to be understood and held fast by an existing individual, and hence enter into every thought, precisely because, as uncertainty, it enters into everything, and therefore also even into my starting on world history, so that I make it clear to myself whether, if death does come tomorrow, I am beginning upon something that is worth starting on – merely this one uncertainty generates incredible difficulties, difficulties of which not even the speaker is always aware, to the extent that he believes that he thinks the uncertainty of death yet forgets to think the uncertainty into what he says about it, when with feeling he speaks harrowingly of the uncertainty of death and ends by encouraging his hearers to form a good intention for the whole of life, and thus ends by really having forgotten death's uncertainty, for otherwise the enthusiastic intention for the whole of life should be placed in a dialectical relation with the uncertainty. To think this uncertainty once and for all, or once a year at matins on New Year's morning, is nonsense and is not to think it at all. If someone thinking it in this way also explains world history, then what he says about world history may well be glorious, but what he says about death is stupid. If death is always uncertain, if I am mortal, then this uncertainty cannot be understood in general terms, unless I too am a sort of human being in

general. But this, after all, is not what I am, and it is something only distracted people like Bookseller Soldin are.³⁷ And even if I am that to begin with, it is after all life's task to become subjective, and as much as I become that, correspondingly the uncertainty interpenetrates my subjectivity dialectically more and more. It thus becomes increasingly important for me to think it into every moment of my life, for since its uncertainty is there at every moment, it can only be overcome by my overcoming it at every moment. If, on the other hand, the uncertainty of death is just a something in general, then my own dying is itself only a something in general. Perhaps dying is also a something in general for systematicians, for distracted people. For the late Bookseller Soldin dying is said to have been such a something in general: 'When he was about to get up in the morning he was not aware that he was dead.' But for me, *my* dying is not at all a something in general; maybe for others my dying is a something in general. Neither, for myself, am *I* such a something in general; maybe for others I'm a something in general. But if the task is to become subjective, then every subject will for *himself* become the very opposite of such a something in general.

Also, I think it embarrassing to be so important for world history and then at home, in one's own company, to be just a something in general. It is already embarrassing enough for a husband who is so extraordinarily important a figure in the people's assembly, to come home to his wife and then to be, for her, only such a something in general; or to be a world-historical Diedrich Menschenschreck and then at home to be – yes, I say no more.³⁸ But then it is even more embarrassing that things go so badly with oneself, and most embarrassing of all to remain unaware of the fact. An answer to the question of what it is to die is something the high-and-mighty devotee of world history can hardly refuse to give me, and the moment he gives his answer the dialectic begins. No matter what reason he gives for not wanting to dwell further on such thoughts, that won't help, because to see what this reason really amounts to, it must again be made dialectical. I would then have to ask whether it was possible, at all, to have any idea of death, whether it can be anticipated and experienced *anticipando*³⁹ in an idea, or whether it is only when it

³⁷ A bookseller known for his absent-mindedness, an anecdote about whom is recounted in *Begrebet Angest (The Concept of Anxiety)*, SKS 4, p. 356.

³⁸ An allusion to a play by Holberg in which a swaggering, boastful officer is beaten by his wife.

³⁹ Latin: by being anticipated.

actually occurs. And since its actual being is a non-being, whether it follows that it *is*⁴⁰ only when it is not, in other words whether being able to have an idea of death means that it can be overcome ideally, or whether materiality conquers in death, so that a human being dies like a dog, while death can only be annulled in the dying person's idea of it in the moment of death. This difficulty can also be put by asking whether someone living can approach death at all, since there is no way in which he can come close enough experimentally without becoming comically a victim of his own experiment, while in the experience itself he cannot hold back but then learns nothing from the experience, being unable to extract himself from it and profit from it later, staying stuck in the experience.

If the rejoinder to this is that death cannot be admitted to the realm of ideas, that by no means settles the matter. A negative answer, a no, needs just as comprehensive a dialectical account as a positive answer, and only a child and the simple-minded are satisfied with a *das weiss man nicht*.⁴¹ The thinking person wants to know more, though not indeed positively about what by prior assumption can be answered only negatively; he wants to have it made dialectically clear that the answer *has* to be no, and this dialectical clarification puts this negative answer in relation to all other existence-problems, so that there will be difficulties enough. If the answer is yes, the question arises about what death is, and what it is for the living individual, how the idea of it must alter a person's whole life, if to think its uncertainty he has to think it every moment in order to prepare himself for it; about what it means to prepare for it, since here again one distinguishes between its actual coming and the idea of it (a distinction that seems to bring all my preparation to nought if what actually comes is not what I prepared myself for; and if it is that, then my preparation, if consummate, is death itself), and because it may come the very moment I start my preparation. There is a question about an ethical expression of its meaning, about a religious expression for the overcoming of it. A freeing word is needed that explains its mystery, and a binding word with which the living person protects himself against the incessant idea; for we hardly dare so openly recommend thoughtlessness and forgetfulness as life's wisdom. And further, for the subject it is an action to think his own death. That a human being in general, that a distracted person

⁴⁰ Emphasis added. ⁴¹ 'No one knows that'.

like Soldin and a systematician, think death in general, is certainly not an action; it is only a something in general, and what such a something is it is really hard to say. But if the task is to become subjective, then thinking death is not at all a something in general, but indeed an action, for the development of the subjectivity consists precisely in his actively implicating himself in his thought about his own existence, that he actually thinks the thought by making it actual, that he does not just think for one moment, now you must take care every moment, but takes care every moment.

Here everything now becomes more and more subjective, as is natural when it comes to developing subjectivity. Up to a point, man-to-man communication seems given up to lies and deception if anyone so wishes; for a person has only to say, I've done it, and we can come no further. Well, then, what of it? What if he had nevertheless not done it? Yes, what's that to me, so much the worse for him. In the case of something objective we can exercise better control. If, for example, someone says that Frederick VI is Emperor of China, we call it a lie. But if someone speaks of death, of how he has thought it and of, for instance, its uncertainty, it does not follow that he has actually done that. Quite so, yet there is a more subtle way of finding out whether he is lying. You just let him talk. If he is a deceiver he will contradict himself precisely when offering the most solemn assurances. The contradiction is not direct; no, it is in the failure of the statement to contain in itself an awareness of what the statement directly asserts. The statement itself, objectively understood, can be direct, but the man has just one fault: he is reciting by heart.^f That he also perspires and pounds the table is no proof at all that he is not just reciting, only that he is either very stupid or else also secretly aware that this is all that he is doing. For it is very stupid to think that reciting by heart can make one agitated, for agitation is internal while reciting is external, like urinating. And it is but a very indifferent deception to want to hide one's lack of inwardness by pounding the table.

^f The reduplicated presence of the thought in every word, in every intermediate clause, in the digression, in the unguarded moment of simile and comparison: this is what anyone must be on the lookout for who wishes to take the trouble to find out whether someone is lying – provided one first watches out closely for oneself. For it is by restraining oneself that one gains the ability to watch out in this way, so that you get it quite free of charge and in general are not inclined to make all that much use of it.

You see? When dying is to be put in relation to the subject's whole life in this way, even if my life were at stake, I am very far from having grasped death, and even less have I fulfilled my task as one existing. And yet I have thought again and again, sought guidance in books – and found none.⁴²

For example, *being immortal*. I know what people ordinarily know about this. I know that some accept immortality, that others say they do not. Whether they really do not, I do not know; and therefore it does not occur to me to want to take issue with them, for such a proceeding is of such dialectical difficulty that it could take an age before it was dialectically clear to me whether there was any basis for such a contention; whether communication's dialectic,⁴² if understood, would sanction such a proceeding or transform it into a mere beating of the air;⁴³ whether consciousness of immortality is an object of instruction that can be taught, and how the instruction must be adapted dialectically to the learner's qualifications; whether these qualifications are not so essential that the instruction becomes a deception unless one is straight away aware of this, in which latter case the instruction is transformed into non-instruction. Furthermore, I know that some have found immortality in Hegel, others have not. I know that I have not found it in the system, where it is indeed also unreasonable to look for it; for in a fantastical sense all systematic thinking is *sub specie aeterni*,⁴⁴ and to that extent immortality is there in the sense of eternity. But this immortality is not at all the one inquired about, because that is a matter of the immortality of a mortal, and is not answered by showing that the eternal is immortal, because the eternal is after all not the mortal, and the eternal's immortality is a tautology and a misuse of words. I have read Professor Heiberg's *Sjæl efter Døden*, indeed I have read it

⁴² Although it is said often, I wish to repeat it here again: what is developed in these pages is of absolutely no concern to those of simpler minds, who, sensing the burdens of life in another way, God wishes to preserve in their lovable simplicity, which feels no further need of another kind of understanding. Or, in so far as such need is indeed felt, it tends to become merely a sigh over the misery of life, the sigh humbly finding solace in the thought that life's blessing does not consist in being the one who knows. On the other hand, it does concern those who think they have the talent and opportunity for a deeper inquiry. And it concerns them in such a way as to stop them thoughtlessly turning their hands to world history before first bearing in mind that being an existing human being is such a strenuous and yet so natural a task for everyone, that one naturally first chooses it and most likely finds in it enough for a lifetime.

⁴² *Meddelelsens Dialektik*. See page 62 and the 'Note on the translation'.

⁴³ See 1 Corinthians 9:26. ⁴⁴ Latin: under the aspect of eternity.

with Dean Tryde's commentary.⁴⁵ If only I had not done so, for one takes an aesthetic delight in a poetic work and does not demand that last detail of dialectical precision appropriate in the case of a learner who wants to adjust his life in accordance with such guidance. If a commentator compels me to look for something of that kind in the poem, he has done no service to the poem. I might perhaps learn from the commentator what I have not learnt from the commentary, if only Dean Tryde with his catechetical instruction were to take pity on me and show how one constructs just one life-view upon the profundities he has achieved in his paraphrases. For praise be to Dean Tryde – just from that little article of his you could surely construct a number of different life-views – but one I cannot make out – and that, alas, is just the misfortune, for it is the one I need, not more, since I am not erudite. I know, moreover, that it was only later in life that the late Professor Poul Møller, who was certainly familiar with the newest philosophy, really became aware of the infinite difficulty of the immortality question when made simple, when it is not a new proof one is asking about, and the opinions of Tom, Dick and Harry strung upon a thread, or how best to string them. I also know that he tried in a treatise to explain himself, and that this treatise clearly bears the mark of his aversion to modern speculation.⁴⁶ The difficulty in the question is exactly when it is made simple, not in the way a well-drilled *privat-docent*⁴⁷ inquires about the immortality of the human being, of this abstractly understood human being quite generally and of this human understood fantastically as the race, and thus about the immortality of the human race.

A well-drilled *privat-docent* of this kind raises the question and answers it in a way in which well-drilled readers assume it should be answered. In such deliberation a poor un-drilled reader is only made to look a fool, like someone listening in on an examination where the questions and answers have been agreed upon beforehand, or like someone entering a family circle which has its own language, using words of the mother tongue but understanding something different by them. It usually follows from this that the answer is very easy, the question having first been changed, for which reason one cannot deny that they give it an answer but can justly

⁴⁵ E. C. Tryde, dean of the diocese at the Church of Our Lady, reviewed 'Soul after Death', subtitled 'An Apocalyptic Comedy', shortly after its publication in 1841. The title of Heiberg's comedy may have prompted that of Kierkegaard's 'The Sickness unto Death' (1849).

⁴⁶ In 1837, the year before his death, Poul M. Møller (see the translator's introduction) had written an essay on the possibility of proving human immortality.

⁴⁷ See p. 71 n. 14.

claim that the question is not the one it seems to be. When a teacher examining in Danish history realizes that the pupil can make nothing of it and promptly turns the questioning in another direction, for instance asking about the relation of some other country to Denmark and then about the history of that other land – can one say that there has been an examination on the history of Denmark? When schoolchildren write something in their books with a reference ‘see p. 101’, and on page 101 ‘see p. 216’, and on page 216 ‘see p. 314’, and then finally, ‘April Fool’ – can one rightly say that one profits from these directions – to be made a fool of? A book brings up the question of the immortality of the soul; the content of the book is of course the answer. But the contents of the book, as the reader by perusing it is convinced, are the opinions of the wisest and best men, strung on a thread, on the subject of immortality. Thus, immortality is all the wisest and best men’s opinions on immortality.

Oh, you great Chinese god!⁴⁸ Is this immortality? Is then the question of immortality a learned question? Praise be to learning! Praise be to him who can treat in a learned way the learned question of immortality! But the question of immortality is essentially not a learned question; rather it is a question of inwardness, which the subject by becoming subjective must put to himself. Objectively, the question cannot be answered at all, for it is not one that can be put objectively, since immortality is precisely the intensification and highest development of the developed subjectivity. Only by one really willing to become subjective can the question properly emerge, so how then should it be possible to answer it objectively? Socially, the question cannot be answered at all, for in social terms it cannot be presented, since only the subject who wills to become subjective can grasp the question and rightly ask: Will *I* become, or am *I*, immortal? Just think, people can get together in many things. Several families can share a box at the theatre, and three single gentlemen can join forces for a saddle horse so that each rides every third day. But this is not how it is with immortality; the consciousness of my immortality belongs to me alone; the very moment I am conscious of my immortality I am absolutely subjective, and I cannot become immortal in partnership with two other single gentlemen in rotation. Collectors of subscriptions who produce a numerous subscription of men and women with a felt need to become immortal in general receive no reward for their pains, for

⁴⁸ The exclamation is from a comedy by Heiberg.

immortality is not a possession that can be extorted by a long list of subscribers. Nor can immortality be proved systematically. The fault lies not in the proofs but in the fact that people will not understand that from a systematic point of view the whole question is nonsense, so that instead of seeking further proofs one should rather seek to become a little subjective. Immortality is subjectivity's most passionate interest; the proof lies precisely in the interest. When, with perfect consistency from the systematic point of view, one abstracts systematically from the interest, what that makes of immortality, God only knows, or even what the sense is in wishing to prove it, or what kind of a fixed idea it is to bother oneself about further. If one were able systematically to hang immortality on the wall like Gessler's hat,⁴⁹ before which we would all doff our own in passing, that is not being immortal or being conscious of one's immortality. The incredible pains the system takes to prove immortality are wasted effort and a ludicrous contradiction: wanting to answer systematically a question that has the notable trait of not being able to be raised systematically. This is like wanting to paint Mars in the armour that made him invisible. The point is in the invisibility, and in the case of immortality the point is in the subjectivity and the subjective development of the subjectivity.

What the existing subject asks about then, in all simplicity, is not immortality in general, for such a phantom does not exist, but his own immortality. He asks about *his* immortality, what it means to become immortal, whether there is something he can do to become it, or becomes it in some way as a matter of course; or whether he is it but can become it. In the first case, he asks what it might if anything mean that he has let some time go by unused, whether there might be a greater and a lesser immortality. In the second case, he asks what it might mean for his whole human existence that the highest thing in life becomes like a prank, so that the passion of freedom within him is assigned only to lower tasks but has nothing to do with the highest, not even negatively, since acting negatively with regard to the highest thing would in turn certainly be the most strenuous acting, that is to say, to have been willing enthusiastically to do all one could, only to learn that the highest thing is to maintain at every moment a merely receptive attitude

⁴⁹ In Schiller's play, *William Tell* (1805), the governor (Gessler) has his hat raised on a pole before which everyone must raise theirs.

towards what, in order to acquire it, one would so very infinitely like to *do* something. The question arises how he should conduct himself in speaking of his immortality, how he can speak from the standpoints of infinity and of finiteness simultaneously, and think these two together in one single instant, so that he does not at one time say the one and at another time the other; as to how language and all communication relate to this, when everything depends upon being consistent in every word, in case the casual little adjective, the chatty subordinate phrase, intervenes and makes a mockery of the whole thing; about where, so to speak, the place is for talking about immortality, since no doubt he already knows how many pulpits there are in Copenhagen and that there are two chairs of philosophy, but where it is that he can speak of the unity of infinity and finiteness, where he who is at one and the same time infinite and finite can talk in one breath of his infinity and his finiteness, whether this so dialectically difficult a place, which is nevertheless so necessary, can possibly be found. The question arises as to how he is able, while he exists, to hold on to his consciousness of immortality, in case the metaphysical conception of immortality goes on to confuse the ethical to the point of illusion; for ethically everything culminates in immortality, without which the ethical is nothing but use and wont, and metaphysically immortality swallows up existence, yes, the seventy years of existence as if they were nothing, and yet ethically this nothing is supposed to be infinitely important. The question arises how immortality refashions his life for him, in what sense the consciousness of it must be ever-present to him, or whether perhaps it is enough to think this thought once and for all, and whether if that were the answer, it would not rather show that the problem has simply not been presented, since such a once-and-for-all consciousness of immortality would be of a piece with being a subject of sorts at all and in general, whereby the question of immortality is made ludicrous in a fantasy, just as the opposite is ludicrous, when people who have half-toyed with everything in fantasy, and been everything possible, ask the clergyman one day with concern whether they will actually stay the same in the beyond – never having been able in this life to be the same for a fortnight, and having gone through every transformation as a consequence. Immortality would be an extraordinary metamorphosis indeed if it could transform such an inhuman centipede into the eternal identity with itself, which is what ‘being the same’ means.

He asks whether it is now definite that he is immortal, about what this definiteness of immortality amounts to; whether, if he lets it stand as something decided once and for all (using his life to attend his fields, take a wife, arrange world history), this isn't precisely for it not to be decided, so that, for all the definiteness, he has come no further, since the problem is not even grasped, but since not having used his life to become subjective his subjectivity has become a sort of indefinite something in general, and that abstract definiteness for that very reason indefiniteness. He asks whether the definiteness, if he uses his life to become subjective, having to be present to him every moment, doesn't become so difficult for him dialectically, through this constant self-relating to the alternation that is existence, that it becomes indefiniteness; whether, if this is the most he can hope for, that is, that the definiteness becomes indefiniteness, it would not be better to give up the whole thing, or whether he should stake all his passion on the indefiniteness and with infinite passion relate to the indefiniteness of the definite, this being the only way he can know of his immortality, so long as he is existing, because as an existing being he is strangely compounded, so the definiteness of immortality can be possessed in certainty only by the eternal but by one who exists only in uncertainty.

And to ask about his immortality is at the same time an action of the existing subject who raises the question – as sure enough for distracted people it is not, those who ask once in a while, and in a quite general way, what it means to be immortal, as if immortality were something that one can once in a while be, and the questioner a something of a sort in general. So he asks how to conduct himself in this existing in such a way as to express his immortality, whether he actually expresses it, and he is for the time being content with this task, which must surely be enough for a lifetime, seeing it is supposed to last for an eternity. And then? Yes, well, yes, when he is finished it is then the turn of world history. Nowadays indeed it is the other way around: today one attends to world history first and then we have the amusing result pointed out by another author,⁵⁰ that while people go on and on proving immortality quite generally, belief in immortality is more and more in decline.

For example, *what does it mean that I am to thank God for the good he gives me?* This, says the priest, I am to do; we all know that and, if only we take

⁵⁰ Vigilius Haufniensis, pseudonymous author of *Begrebet Angest (The Concept of Anxiety)*; see *SKS* 4, pp. 439f.

care to do it, those not having to be satisfied with the humble deeds of the simple-minded will find time to attend to world history. To make everything as easy as possible, I will not even object that after all it does take some time. No, to humour the priest I even assume that I am infinitely willing to do it, so that I do not even have to reckon the time taken between being disinclined, as the priest assumes, and through his admonition being inclined. I am therefore assuming that I am infinitely eager to thank God; I say no more than this, I do not say that it is actually the case, that I definitely know it, because in the face of God I always speak indefinitely about myself, it being only he who has knowledge of my relation to him. This caution in expressing oneself about one's God-relationship already involves a multiplicity of dialectical qualifications, and without it one could well end up like so many of those writers of world history who, in speaking of what is simple, contradict themselves on every third line. So I am to thank God, says the priest. And for what? For the good that he gives me. Excellent, but what good? Surely the good that I perceive is a good. Stop! If I thank God for the good that I can perceive is a good, I am making a fool of God, because, instead of my relation to God signifying that I am reformed into his likeness, I am reforming God into my own likeness. I thank him for that good which I know is a good, but my knowledge is of the finite, and so I go on to thank God for the fact that he has followed my fancy. Yet I am supposed to learn that in my relation to God I know nothing definitely, and so neither whether this is a good – and yet I am to thank him for the good which I know is a good but which I must not know. Then what? Am I to refrain from thanking God when what befalls me is something my poor finite understanding tells me is a good, something I may have wished for very much, and by which, now that I have received it, I feel so overwhelmed that I just simply must thank God?

Not exactly, but I am to bear in mind that my having wished for it so much is no merit, nor does it become so through my wish being granted. So I have to accompany my thanksgiving with an apology, to make sure that it is God I have the honour of addressing and not my friend and boon companion Councillor Andersen. I must admit, shamefacedly, that it seems to me so good that I have to pray for forgiveness for giving thanks for it because I can't help doing so. That is, I have to pray to be forgiven for giving thanks. That is not what the priest said. So either the priest wants to make a fool of me or he does not know what he is saying – so long as this priest is not worried also about world history.

I must learn in my God-relationship precisely to give up my finite understanding and with it the power of discrimination that is natural to me, so that I may be able with divine madness to give thanks always. Always to give thanks – is that something in general, a once-and-for-all sort of thing? Does this ‘always to thank God’ mean that I bear in mind once a year on the second Sunday in Lent, at Evensong, that I ought always to thank God? And perhaps not even that, for if I happen on that Sunday to be particularly out of sorts, then I may not understand it even on that day.

So this thanking God, this simple matter, suddenly presents me with one of the most strenuous of tasks, enough for my whole lifetime. It may take some time, then, before I achieve this, and if I did achieve it, what then would be that higher thing that I should aim at to let go of this? So while his friend, while his beloved looks at him with concern, and says near to despair, ‘Unhappy man, what you must be suffering!’, the God-fearing man will have the courage to say, and with his actions speaking for him: ‘Dear man, you are mistaken; what befalls me is the good; I feel disposed to thank God if only my thanksgiving might please him.’ And until I reach that point I shall, when giving thanks for the good of which the priest speaks, do so shamefacedly. The difficulty which here and likewise at every point in the God-relationship (and hence at countless points) proves to be the right of way to the true infinitizing in God, the difficulty of always giving thanks, whereas the priest’s speech was specious show – this difficulty I might express didactically as follows: what the simple-minded religious person does directly, the simple-minded religiously aware person does only through humour (on closer scrutiny the humour here would consist in my even having to apologize for doing what the lower court commands and commends as the highest), but not through this man’s religiousness being humour; rather, humour is the boundary from which he defines his religiousness if he is going to declare it, the boundary that distinguishes him from the immediate. It is a place of passage⁵¹ that is already hard enough to reach, though this is something the true religious infinitization has again forgotten. However, it is not my intention to lecture, in case I get accustomed to reciting by heart or prompt anyone else to do likewise.

For example, *what is it to marry?* I know what people ordinarily know about this. I have access to the garden from which the love-poet brings

⁵¹ ‘Gjennemgangspunkt’.

the bouquet, my own shall be as fragrant as those of most, where the storeroom is from which the priests fetch their discourses. If there is no other obstacle to my becoming world-historical, well then let us begin. But – and, yes, nevertheless, ‘but’ – but what is the mid-point expressed in marriage between the spiritual and the psychosomatic? How is that not an obstacle? How is it that spiritually it is a blessing (for what it is erotically answers only one part of the question)? How does it become ethically a task *in concreto* at the same time as the erotic everywhere sets an example of the marvellous? How is it that marriage, as the perfection of existence, is not precisely all that perfect, that it gives a satisfaction (apart from the degree to which it is disturbed by financial worries and the like, which must be left out of the account here) that suggests, worryingly, that the spirit within me is obscured and does not clearly grasp the contradiction, as indeed it is, that an immortal spirit has become an existing being? What if, accordingly, marital bliss is precisely an irregularity, while an unhappy marriage is hardly to be recommended and its suffering is in no way identical with that of the spirit, which in existence is the sure sign that I am existing *qua* spirit? What if paganism still haunts marriage, and the theological §§ on the subject, along with the clergymen’s reverend embellishments (whether priced at 100 or 200 rix-dollars), are an assorted confusion of knowledge that at one moment fails to notice the difficulty involved in the erotic and at another dares not say it, at one moment does not notice the difficulty in the religious sphere and at another dares not say it?

Ah, yes, if a maidservant gets married to a manservant, if she so wished I will gladly pay the musicians at the wedding, if I can afford it and have the time. I will gladly dance with her on the wedding day, rejoicing with those who rejoice⁵² – she most likely feels no need of a deeper understanding. That I should be her better because I feel this need is nonsense, and very far from the toilsome train of my thought. Even if I were to find what I was looking for I might not be half as good. But I feel this need to know what I am doing, the need which, at the height of its triumph, is rewarded with that absurd little difference between the simple soul’s and the wise man’s knowledge of the simple thing, namely, that the simple-minded person knows it and the wise man knows that he knows it or knows that he does not know it. Yes, everyone who can say simply and honestly that he feels no need of such an understanding, yes, he is

⁵² Romans 12:15.

blameless; woe to the one who disturbs him and will not leave to the god what he demands of each one severally. Yes, he who, humble and joyful in his good fortune, believes with honest modesty that the human race indeed does not begin with him, that he follows trustingly the *impressa vestigia*⁵³ of the race because love prompts him, that ‘humble before God, obedient to the royal majesty of love’,⁵⁴ he does not expect to have understood what in his modest contentment is his earthly bliss – yes, he is worthy of honour; woe to the one who risks wanting to bring down the dangers and terrors of intellectual warfare upon his blessed security within the pen of marriage. But when people everywhere employ great words, when world-historically and systematically people want to make a fool of God, when the priests themselves in a trice turn the linings of their clerical robes inside out so that they might almost be taken for professors’ gowns,⁵⁵ when people announce everywhere that the immediate is annulled, then it is no provocation of the god to ask these men of exalted wisdom what they know concerning this simple matter. I have read what the Assessor has written on marriage in *Either/Or* and in the *Stages on Life’s Way*;⁵⁶ I have read it carefully. It has been no surprise for me to learn that many who are well on the way with world history and the future of humankind have taken exception to a rejoinder that first makes the matter as difficult as it is before attempting an explanation. I cannot blame the Assessor for this, nor for his eager enthusiasm for marriage; but I do think that the Assessor, if only I can get hold of him, will, if I whisper a little secret in his ear, admit that difficulties remain.

Let these, then, be a few examples. I certainly have no lack of them; I can go on as long as need be, they will no doubt suffice for my life. So I have no need to proceed to astronomy or veterinary science. The examples are even on the easier side. Things become far more difficult when one asks about the religious in the strictest sense, where the explanation cannot consist in bringing about infinitization immanently but in becoming aware of the paradox and holding on to the paradox at every moment, most of all fearing exactly an explanation that took away the paradox; for the paradox is not a transitory form of the relation of the religious in its stricter sense to the one who exists, it is essentially conditioned by the fact

⁵³ Latin: footprints. An expression found in Cicero, *Orators*, III, 12.

⁵⁴ Quoted from *Stages on Life’s Way*, SKS 6, p. 101.

⁵⁵ Professors’ gowns were of silk while the clergy’s gowns were only lined with silk.

⁵⁶ See SKS 3, pp. 13–51, and SKS 6, pp. 85–171.

that he is existing, so that the explanation that removes the paradox also transforms someone existing, fantastically, into a fantastic something belonging neither to time nor to eternity. But such a something is not a human being. So let these be our few examples. What follows? Nothing, absolutely nothing. It is I, after all, who keeps on saying that there is only this silly little difference between the simple soul's and the wise man's knowledge of the simple, that the simple soul knows it, the wise man knows that he knows it or knows that he does not know it. Yet, on the other hand, something does follow. Might it not be best to exercise a little restraint in the matter of world history if this is how it is with one's knowledge of what is simple? I say no more. Perhaps those of exalted wisdom know of all this well enough; they are no doubt even finished once and for all with the tasks whose point is precisely that they should suffice for a lifetime. Ah, if only these precious thinkers who do so much for world history would also bear us common folk in mind, we who are not altogether simple-minded, seeing that we feel a need to understand, yet limited enough to feel especially the need to understand what is simple.

This is how I have tried to understand myself. Though the understanding be slight and the yield poor, I have resolved by way of compensation to act, with all my passion, on the basis of what I have understood. Perhaps, when all is said and done, it is a healthier diet to understand little but possess this little with the endless reliability of passion within the framework of the infinite, than it is to know much and possess nothing because I myself have fantastically become a fantastic subjective-objective something. I have thought it unbecoming were I to be more ashamed before human beings and their judgment than before the god and his judgment; cowardly and contemptible to ask about what I might be tempted to do through shame before human beings more than about what I might be bidden to do through shame before the god. And who anyway are these people I am to fear? A few geniuses perhaps, some reviewers, and whatever one finds in highways and byways. Or have there been no human beings living before 1845? Or what are those people compared with the god; what refreshment is there in all their noisy bustling compared with the deliciousness of that lonely wellspring that exists in every human being, that wellspring in which the god dwells, that wellspring in the profound stillness when all is silent! And what but a brief instant is the hour and a half I have to live with human beings compared with eternity? Are they perhaps to pursue me in all eternities? The priest

indeed says that we shall meet again, but does that apply to every acquaintance one makes on the street?

I think not. Suppose there were a dividing wall.⁵⁷ Suppose I had been in the wrong. Then I would no doubt have to be kept from their company. Suppose I had been in the right. Then no doubt I would come in another class. Suppose eternity was so spacious that I was unable even to catch sight of His Reverence, who so kindly vouched for our reunion! But woe unto me if the god judged me in my innermost being for wanting mendaciously to be systematic and world-historical and forget what it is to be a human being, and thereby forget what it means that he is the god. Woe unto me. Woe unto me in time, and still more dreadfully once he got hold of me in eternity! His is the final judgment, the only one; from his collective knowledge none can flee, since it is woven into, and weaves its way through, the feeblest movement of my consciousness, its most secret association with itself, his presence an eternal contemporaneity⁵⁸ – and I should have dared to feel shame in him!

This sounds almost like earnest. If only I dared now to appeal to visions and revelations, and to my being red in the face. Many, for want of putting that down to congestion, would take it for seriousness. For just as, at the time Socrates lived, it was the demand of the age that he should snivel and wail before the tribunal, pleading for mercy (in which case he would have been acquitted), so is it the demand of our own age that one must bawl systematically and crow world-historically, proclaiming oneself to be the one awaited. But I have no miracle to appeal to. Ah! Such was the happy lot of Dr Hjortespring.⁵⁹ It was, according to his own singularly well-written account, in Hamburg at Hotel Streit⁶⁰ that by a miracle (though none of the waiters noticed anything), on Easter morning, that he became an adherent of the Hegelian philosophy – of the philosophy that assumes there are no miracles. Marvellous sign of the times! If this man is not the long-awaited philosopher, then who else knows the demands of the times as he does! Marvellous sign of the times, far more glorious and significant

⁵⁷ Ephesians 2:14: 'In his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall.'

⁵⁸ Following a correction Kierkegaard made in a copy of *Postscript*, 'Samvittighed' (conscience, most likely in the earlier meaning of co-consciousness (*Medviden*) with God) is altered to 'Samtidighed' (contemporaneity).

⁵⁹ 'Hjortespring' (Deer Leap). Kierkegaard had originally written 'Prof. Heiberg'. It is Heiberg's account of his conversion to Hegel's philosophy (while stopping off in Hamburg *en route* to Copenhagen) that is satirized here. The dating to Easter and 1 April is also fictitious.

⁶⁰ Strife's Hotel. The actual location was an inn, 'Der König von England' (The King of England).

than the conversion of Paul. For the fact that Paul was converted by a miracle to the doctrine that proclaims that it is itself a miracle is more straightforward. But to be converted by a miracle to a doctrine that assumes there is no miracle is rather preposterous. The miracle occurred on Easter morning. The year and the day of the month are matters of absolutely no importance with such a poetical hero and such a poetical Easter morning; it might well have been the same Easter morning we read of in Goethe's *Faust*, even though the two contemporaries, Dr Hjortespring and Faust in Goethe arrived at different results! Who dares venture an explanation of that miracle? The whole thing remains infinitely puzzling, even if one assumed that Easter came very early that year, i.e., on the first of April, so that on top of becoming a Hegelian, the doctor became an April fool, an appropriate poetic compensation for wanting romantically to prettify the transition to the Hegelian philosophy, whose value lies precisely in the method and thus speaks against romanticism.

You see, then, that I cannot help you out with a miracle, or with anything of infinite importance. No, really I cannot. I must implore every sensitive fellow being, near or far, in or out of town, to rest assured that I would be more than willing to satisfy the demands of the times in this way; but for me truth is what is most cherished; and the truth here is anything but a miracle, so the tale ought not to be a miraculous and *wunderbar*⁶¹ story of an exceedingly insignificant event, nor therefore one occurring in that far-off unknown town in the west, the Hanseatic city of Hamburg, which a traveller only seldom reaches.

It is now about four years since I got the notion of wanting to try my hand as an author. I remember it quite clearly. It was on a Sunday, yes, that's right, it was a Sunday afternoon. I was sitting as usual outside at the café in Frederiksberg Garden, that wonderful park which for the child was the enchanted land where the king lived with the queen, that lovely garden which for the youth was a happy diversion in the people's joyful merriment, that friendly garden which for the adult has such a sense of home in its wistful elevation above the world and what is of the world, that garden where, out there, even the envied glory of royalty is what indeed it is, a queen's remembrance of her deceased lord.⁶² There I sat as usual and

⁶¹ 'Wonderful'.

⁶² The park, west of central Copenhagen, contains a palace in which Frederik VI (1768–1839) and Marie Sophie Frederikke (1767–1852) often resided, and where the queen continued to spend the summers after the king's death. The gardens were open to the public and contained a popular café (Josty's).

smoked my cigar. Regrettably, the only similarity I have been able to come up with between the beginning of my crumb of philosophic endeavour and the miraculous beginning of that poetic hero⁶³ is this, that it was in a public place. Otherwise there is absolutely no similarity, and I, although the author of the *Crumbs*, am so insignificant that I stand outside literature. I have not even added to the subscription-plan literature⁶⁴ or can be truthfully said to occupy a significant place within it.

I had been a student for a half-score of years. Although never lazy, all my activity was nevertheless only a sort of brilliant inactivity, a kind of occupation for which I still have a great partiality, and in respect of which I perhaps even have a little genius. I read much, spent the remainder of the day loafing and thinking, or thinking and loafing, but that was it; the creative germ in me went in everyday use and was consumed in its first greening. An inexplicable persuasive power held me constantly in check, as strong as it was subtle. This power was my indolence. It is not like the impetuous craving of love, or the intense incitement of enthusiasm; rather it is like a wedded wife who keeps one in check and with whom one gets on very well, in this case so well that it never occurs to one to want to marry. And this much at least is certain, that although I am not otherwise unacquainted with the comforts and conveniences of life, indolence is of all conveniences the most comfortable.

So I sat there and smoked my cigar until I fell into a reverie. Among others I recall these thoughts. You are getting on, I said to myself, and are becoming an old man without being anything, and without really taking on anything. Wherever you look about you on the other hand, in literature or in life, you see the names and figures of the celebrities, the prized and acclaimed making their appearances or being talked about, the many benefactors of the age who know how to do favours to mankind by making life more and more easy, some with railways, others with omnibuses and steamships, others with the telegraph, others through easily grasped surveys and brief reports on everything worth knowing, and finally the true benefactors of the age, who by virtue of thought make spiritual existence systematically easier and yet more and more important. And what are you doing? Here my soliloquy was interrupted, for my cigar was finished and a new one had to be lit. So I smoked again, and then suddenly this thought flashed through my mind: You must do something, but since

⁶³ Corrected in manuscript from 'the acclaimed systematic hero celebrant, Professor Heiberg'.

⁶⁴ A scheme announced by Heiberg in connection with the pre-purchasing of, e.g., journals.

with your limited abilities it will be impossible to make anything easier than it has become, you must, with the same humanitarian enthusiasm as the others, take it upon yourself to make something more difficult. This notion pleased me immensely, and at the same time it flattered me to think that I would be loved and esteemed for this effort by the whole community, as well as any. For when all join together in making everything easier in every way, there remains only one possible danger, namely, that the ease becomes so great that it becomes altogether too easy; then there will be only one lack remaining, if not yet felt, when people come to miss the difficulty. Out of love for humankind, and from despair over my embarrassing situation, having accomplished nothing, and being unable to make anything easier than it had already been made, and out of a genuine interest in those who make everything easy, I conceived it as my task everywhere to create difficulties. I was also especially struck by the curious reflection as to whether it was not really my indolence I had to thank for the fact that this task became mine. For far from having found it like an Aladdin, by a stroke of luck, I must rather suppose that by preventing me from intervening in good time to make things easy, my indolence has thrust on me the only thing that was left.

So then I, too, am striving towards the exalted goal of being greeted with acclaim – unless I am ridiculed, or maybe crucified; for it is quite likely that everyone who shouts *bravo* shouts also *pereat, item*⁶⁵ ‘crucify’, and does so even without becoming untrue to his character, since on the contrary he remains true to himself – *qua* shouter. But even if my effort should fail to be appreciated, I am still clear in my mind that it is just as noble as theirs. When at a banquet, where the guests have already over-eaten, someone is intent on having more courses brought on, another on having an emetic on hand, it is surely true that only the former has correctly grasped what it is the guests demand. But I wonder if the latter might not also claim to have reflected on what their demand could be?

From that moment I have found my life-support in this work. I mean, this work has supported me, the work of preparation and self-development; for until now all that I have accomplished is the *Crumbs*’ tiny crumb, and my life has found no support in that since I paid for it myself. Still, I can hardly expect people to pay for having something made difficult; that would be compounding the difficulty, and the extra one

⁶⁵ Latin: let him die, likewise.

more usually gets when taking medicine is a *douceur*.⁶⁶ This is something I am so far from failing to understand that if only I were objectively convinced (which as a *subjective* author I am not) of the efficacy of my medicine, and believed that this did not depend simply and solely on the way it is used, so that the way is really the medicine, then I would be the first to promise every one of my readers a reasonable *douceur*, or to open to my readers, one and all, men and women, the prospect of taking part in a lottery of tasteful gifts, in order thus to instil into them the strength and courage to read my pieces. Then if ever those who make everything easy were to realize that they might truly profit by my crumb of difficulty, in case the easiness should become a dead calm; if moved and touched at having thus understood my effort, perhaps mediated into their own, they were to decide to support me on the sly with cash contributions, these will be gladly accepted, and I promise inviolable secrecy in case humankind, from whom we jointly derive gain and profit, should discover the real state of affairs.

What has been presented here will presumably be found quite appropriate with a subjective author. It is more striking when a systematician entertains us with having become an adherent of the system through a miracle, which seems to indicate what his systematic life and career do not have in common with the system: beginning with nothing.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ 'Sweetener'. ⁶⁷ Another dig at Heiberg.

Chapter 2

The subjective truth, inwardness; truth is subjectivity

Whether you incline to an empirical definition of truth as the agreement of thought with being, or to an idealist definition as the agreement of being with thought, in each case great care must be taken over what is meant by 'being', and care must also be taken that the knowing human spirit is not tricked into losing itself in the indeterminate, becoming fancifully what no *existing* human being ever has been or can be, a phantom with which the individual occupies himself as best he can but without ever making clear to himself, through dialectical middle terms, how he has fallen in with this fantasy, what it means for him to be there, and whether all that effort in it doesn't dissolve into a tautology within a foolhardy venture of the imagination.

If, in the two definitions offered, being is understood as empirical being, then truth itself is transformed into a *desideratur*¹ and everything then posed in terms of becoming, since the empirical object is unfinished and the existing cognizing spirit itself is on the way to being.² The truth thus becomes an approximating whose beginning cannot be posited absolutely, just because there is no conclusion to have retroactive force; whereas any beginning (if it is not arbitrary because not aware of itself as such), when *made*, does not occur on the strength of immanent thinking but is *made* on the strength of a decision, essentially on the strength of faith. That the cognizing spirit is one that exists, and that every human being is one such who exists for himself is something I cannot repeat often

¹ Latin: it is needed, to be wished. Usually 'desideratum'.

² 'I Vorden'. See the 'Note on the translation'.

enough, since the fanciful neglect of this is responsible for much confusion. Let no one misunderstand me. I am a poor existing spirit just like all other human beings, but if I might, in any lawful and honest way, get assistance in becoming something extraordinary, the pure *I-I*,³ then I am always willing to say thanks for the gift and the good deed. But if it can only be done in the way discussed earlier, by saying *ein, zwei, drei, kokolorum*,⁴ or by tying a ribbon around the little finger and at full moon throwing it away in some remote spot, then I'd rather remain what I am, a poor existing individual human being.

The term 'being' in these definitions must therefore be understood much more abstractly, as the abstract rendering, or the abstract prototype, of what being is *in concreto* as empirical being. When it is so understood, there is no obstacle to our abstractly defining the truth abstractly as finished; for when viewed abstractly the agreement between thought and being is always finished, since becoming has its beginning precisely in the concretion from which abstract thought abstracts.

But if being is understood in this way, the formula is a tautology; that is, thought and being mean one and the same, and the agreement in question is merely an abstract self-identity. So neither formula says more than that truth is, with the accent here on the copula: truth *is*, i.e., truth is twofold. Truth is the first, but truth's second, that it *is*, is the same as the first; this latter, its being, is truth's abstract form. This is a way of saying that truth is not something simple but in an entirely abstract sense a duplication which, however, is in the same instant cancelled.

Abstraction can go on paraphrasing this as long as it likes, it never gets further. Once the being of truth becomes empirically concrete, truth itself is coming to be, and then indeed once more, in anticipation, agreement between thought and being, in the case of God actually, but not for any existing spirit, seeing that in existing the latter is on the way to being.

For the existing spirit *qua* existing spirit, the question of truth is still there. For the abstract answer is only for the *abstractum* which the existing spirit becomes by abstracting from himself *qua* existing, which is only possible momentarily, while even in these moments he is paying his debt to existence through nevertheless existing. It is therefore an existing spirit who now asks about truth, presumably because he wants to exist in it, but the questioner is conscious in any case of being an existing individual

³ See p. 100 n. 75. ⁴ 'One, two three, hocus pocus'.

human being. I believe every Greek as well as every rational human being will understand what I am saying here. If a German philosopher wants to follow his inclination to put on airs and first turns himself into a super-rational something⁵ – just as alchemists and sorcerers dress themselves up in fantastic ways – in order then to answer the question of truth in an extremely satisfactory way, that is no concern of mine; any more than is his extremely satisfactory answer, which is no doubt very satisfactory indeed when one has dressed oneself up fantastically. On the other hand, whether a German philosopher is doing this or not is something anyone can easily ascertain who concentrates his soul on letting himself be guided by such a sage, using his guidance, obediently and without criticism, wanting to fashion his existence accordingly. It is exactly in adopting the relation of enthusiastic learner to such a German professor that one exemplifies the most superb epigram upon him. A speculator of this sort is anything but served by a learner's honest and enthusiastic eagerness to express and realize this wisdom, to appropriate it in existing; for it is something that the Herr Professor has thought up and has written books about but has never attempted himself. Indeed, it has not even occurred to him that he should. Like the customs clerk who, in the belief that his only job was to write, wrote what he himself could not read,⁶ there are speculators who merely write, and write what, if it is, if I may so put it, to be read with the support of action, proves to be nonsense, unless it should happen to be intended only for fantastical beings.

When the question of truth is raised by an existing spirit *qua* existing, that abstract duplication⁷ recurs. But existence itself, existence in the questioner, who does indeed exist, holds the two factors apart, and reflection marks out two relations. For objective reflection the truth becomes something objective, an object, and the thing is to disregard the subject. For subjective reflection the truth becomes appropriation, inwardness, subjectivity, and the thing is precisely, in existing, to deepen oneself in subjectivity.

But then what? Are we to remain in this disjunction, or does mediation not offer its kind assistance so that truth becomes subject-object? Why not? But is mediation then able also to help someone existing, and so long as he exists, to become mediation, which is, after all, *sub specie aeterni*,⁸ whereas

⁵ In the Danish a play on 'skabe sig' (make oneself out to be) and 'skabe sig om' (turn oneself into).

⁶ I.e., the attached information on incoming and outgoing goods.

⁷ 'Reduplikasjon', as the occurrence of a thought abstractly held in its relation to a particular actualization of it in practice.

⁸ Latin: under the aspect of eternity.

the poor existing individual is existing? It can hardly be of any help to make a fool of a person, to entice him with subject-object, when he is prevented from entering the state in which he can relate to this identity, prevented through existing by his coming to be. What help is it to explain how the eternal truth is to be understood eternally when the supposed user of the explanation is prevented through existing from understanding it in this way, and is merely a fantasist if he imagines himself to be *sub specie aeterni*? That is, just when he must avail himself of the explanation of how the eternal truth is to be understood in the category of time by one who, through existing, is himself in time, as the worshipful professor himself admits, if only when drawing his salary every three months.

Mediation's subject-object merely takes us back to abstraction, for the definition of truth as subject-object is just the same as saying that the truth *is*, i.e., that truth is twofold. Thus sublime wisdom has again merely been *distract* enough to forget that it was an existing spirit that asked about truth. Or perhaps the existing spirit is itself subject-object? In that case I must ask, Where is there such an existing human being when he is at the same time also subject-object? Or shall we perhaps here again first transmute the existing spirit into something in general, and so explain everything except the question being asked, namely, how an existing subject *in concreto* relates to truth, or what then has to be asked, namely, how the individual subject relates to this something that seems to have not a little in common with a paper kite, or with the lump of sugar which the Dutch used to hang from the ceiling and all could lick.

So we return to the two paths of reflection, and have not forgotten that it is an existing spirit that poses the question, quite simply a human being. Nor can we forget that his existing is just what will stop him going both ways at once, while his anxious question will prevent him from frivolously and fantastically becoming subject-object. Which of these two paths, then, is the path of truth for an existing spirit? For only the fantastic *I-I* is finished with both paths all at once, or proceeds methodically down both paths simultaneously, a gait so inhuman for an existing human that I do not risk recommending it.

Since his being one who exists is what the questioner stresses, the path to recommend would seem to be the one that especially accentuates what it is to exist.

The path of objective reflection makes the subject accidental, and existence thereby into something indifferent, vanishing. Away from the subject,

the path of reflection leads to the objective truth, and while the subject and his subjectivity become indifferent, the truth becomes that too, and just this is its objective validity;⁹ because interest, just like decision, is rooted in subjectivity. The path of objective reflection now leads to abstract thinking, to mathematics, to historical knowledge of various kinds, and always leads away from the subject, whose existence or non-existence becomes, and from the objective point of view quite rightly, infinitely indifferent – yes, quite rightly, for as Hamlet says, existence and non-existence have only subjective significance. This path will lead maximally to a contradiction, and in so far as the subject fails to become wholly indifferent to himself, this only shows that his objective striving is not sufficiently objective. At its maximum this path will lead to the contradiction that only the objective has come about and that the subjective has been extinguished, that is to say, the existing subjectivity that has made an attempt to become what in the abstract sense is called subjectivity, the mere abstract form of the abstract objectivity. And yet, the objectivity which has thus come into being is at most, from the subjective point of view, either a hypothesis or an approximation, because all eternal decision lies in subjectivity.

However, the objective path thinks it has a security which the subjective path lacks (and, of course, existence, or what it is to exist, and objective security cannot be thought in combination); it thinks it avoids a danger that awaits the subjective path, and this danger at its maximum is insanity. With the solely subjective definition of truth, madness and truth become ultimately indistinguishable, since they could both have inwardness.^a But by becoming objective one does not become mad. Here I might make a small observation that in an objective age is not entirely beside the point. Absence of inwardness is also madness. Objective truth as such is by no means enough to determine that whoever utters it is sane; on the contrary, it can even betray the fact that he is mad although what he says be entirely true and in particular objectively true.

Let me recount an incident that, without any kind of adaptation from my side, comes straight from an insane asylum. A patient in such an institution wants to run away, and he actually succeeds in his plan by

^a But even this is not true. Madness never has the inwardness of infinity. Its fixed idea is a kind of objective something, and the contradiction of madness lies in wanting to embrace it with passion. What is crucial to madness, then, is not the subjective but the little finitude that becomes fixed, something the infinite never becomes.

⁹ The Danish plays on 'ligeegyldig' (indifferent) and 'Gyldighed' (validity).

leaping through the window. Now finding himself in the institution's garden, he is about to take to the road of freedom when the thought strikes him (should I say that he was sane or insane enough to hit on this idea?): 'When you come to the town you will be recognized and presumably brought straight back, so what you need to do is completely convince everyone, through the objective truth of what you say, that the matter of your sanity is quite in order.' As he walks along thinking about this, he sees a skittle bowl lying on the ground, picks it up and places it in his coat tail. Every step he takes, the bowl bangs his (to put it politely) 'a –', and every time it bumps, he says, 'Bang, the earth is round!' He comes to the town and immediately calls on one of his friends. He wants to convince him that he is not crazy, and so he walks back and forth, saying repeatedly: 'Bang, the earth is round!' And indeed is not the earth round? Does the asylum crave yet another sacrifice for this opinion as when everyone believed it to be as flat as a pancake? Or is that man insane who hopes to prove that he is sane by uttering a universally accepted and respected objective truth? Yet, to the physician it was precisely this that made it clear that the patient was not yet cured, even though the cure would not be a matter of getting him to accept that the earth was flat. But not everyone is a physician, and what the times demand has considerable influence in the question of madness. Yes, at times one might almost be tempted to suppose that having modernized Christianity, the modern age has also modernized Pilate's question,¹⁰ and that its longing to find something to repose in proclaims itself in the question: What is madness? If every time his gown reminds him that he has to say something, a *privat-docent* says *de omnibus dubitandum est*¹¹ and writes briskly away on a system in which, on every other point, there is internal evidence enough that this man has never doubted anything – he is not considered mad.

Don Quixote is the prototype of the subjective madness in which the passion of inwardness embraces a single finite fixed idea. But, when inwardness is absent, we have the madness that rattles away and is just as comic, and which one could wish some experimental psychologist were to portray by taking a handful of philosophers of the kind and bringing them together. When the madness is a raving inwardness, what is tragic and comic is that this something, which is of such infinite concern to the unfortunate, is some fixated particular that is of no concern to anyone.

¹⁰ 'What is truth?', John 18:38. ¹¹ Latin: everything is to be doubted.

But when the madness is absence of inwardness, what is comic is that, although the something which the blissful individual knows is indeed the truth, the truth that concerns the entire human race, it does not concern the much-respected rattler in the least. This is a more inhuman kind of madness than the other. One shrinks from looking the former in the eye, lest one plumb the depths of his ferocity; but one dare not look at the other at all, for fear of discovering that his eyes are not real but of glass and his hair made from a carpet-mat, in short, that he is an artificial product. Should one chance to meet someone with his mind so deranged, and where the derangement consists in his not having a mind, one listens in cold horror to what he says, hardly knowing whether to believe it is a human being speaking and not perhaps a 'walking-stick', one of Døbler's artificial contrivances¹² that has a barrel organ concealed inside it. It is always unpleasant for a proud man to find out that one has been drinking a toast of brotherhood with the public hangman; but to become engaged in rational and philosophical conversation with a walking-stick, that is just about enough to drive one crazy.

Subjective reflection turns in towards subjectivity, wanting in this inner absorption¹³ to be truth's reflection, and in such a way that, as in the above, where objectivity was brought forward and subjectivity disappeared, so here subjectivity itself is what is left and objectivity what vanishes. It is not for a single moment forgotten here that the subject is existing and that existing is a becoming, and that the notion of truth as the identity of thought and being is a chimera of abstraction, and truly only a longing on the part of creation,¹⁴ not because truth is not so, but because the knower is one who exists and thus, as long as he exists, truth cannot be so for him. If this is not held on to we will end up, with the help of speculation, in the fantastic *I-I* which recent speculation has indeed used but without explaining how the particular individual relates to it, and, good heavens, no human being is ever more than a particular individual.

If someone existing were really able to come outside himself, the truth for him would be something concluded; but where is that point? The *I-I* is a mathematical point that doesn't exist at all; so anyone may happily adopt this standpoint and no one will be in their way. It is only for a

¹² Ludvig Døbler, a well-known Austrian conjurer who exploited the latest technical innovations.

¹³ 'Inderliggjørelse'. See the 'Note on the translation'.

¹⁴ 'Creation' in the sense of 'the created'. Romans 8:19: 'For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God.'

moment that the particular individual, in existing, can be in a unity of infinite and finite that transcends existing. This moment is the instant of passion. Modern speculation has used every expedient in attempting to get the individual to transcend himself objectively, but it just cannot be done. Existence constrains, and if philosophers nowadays were not pen-pushers in the service of an endless trifling with fantastical thinking, it would have seen long ago that the only, in any way, practical interpretation of its efforts was suicide. But modern pen-pushing speculation looks down on passion; yet, for the one who exists, passion is the very height of existence – and we are after all existing. In passion, the existing subject is infinitized in the eternity of imagination, and yet is also most definitely himself. The fantastic *I-I* is not infinity and finitude in identity, for neither the one nor the other is actual; it is a fantastic accord in the cloud,¹⁵ an unfruitful embrace, and the relation of the individual *I* to this mirage is never stated.

All essential knowing concerns existence, or only such knowing as has an essential relation to existence is essential, is essential knowing. Knowing that does not concern existence, inwardly in the reflection of inwardness, is from an essential point of view accidental knowing, its degree and scope from an essential point of view indifferent. That essential knowing essentially relates to existence does not, however, signify that abstract identity mentioned above, between thought and being; nor, objectively, does it mean that the knowledge corresponds to something that is there as its object. It means that the knowledge relates to the knower, who is essentially someone existing, and that for this reason all essential knowledge essentially relates to existence and to existing. Therefore only ethical and ethico-religious knowing is essential knowing. But all ethical and ethico-religious knowing is essentially a relating to the fact that the knower is existing.

Mediation is a mirage, like the *I-I*. From the abstract point view, everything *is* and nothing becomes. So mediation cannot possibly have its place in abstraction, since it has *movement* as its presupposition. Objective knowledge may certainly have what is there¹⁶ for its object, but since the knowing subject is existing, and is through existing on the way to being, speculation must first explain how a particular existing

¹⁵ When Ixion tried to win the love of Hera, Zeus created a phantom, or cloud, resembling her, and Ixion thereby became the father of a centaur.

¹⁶ 'Det Tilværende'. See the 'Note on the translation'.

subject is supposed to relate to knowledge of mediation, what he is at the moment, whether, for instance, he is at the moment not rather *distract*; where he is, whether he is not on the moon.¹⁷ People talk all the time of mediation. Is mediation then a someone, just as Per Degen believes that *Imprimatur* is some person?¹⁸ What must a human do to become such a thing? Does one study one's way to this dignity, this great *philosophicum*?¹⁹ Or does the magistrate give it away as he does the offices of sexton and grave-digger? One tries merely to engage these and other such well-meaning questions from a decently behaved person who would gladly become mediation if only he could do so in a lawful and honest manner, and not either by saying *eins, zwei, drei, kokolorum* or by forgetting that he himself is an existing human being for whom existence is accordingly something essential, and for whom an ethico-religious existence is a suitable *quantum satis*.²⁰ To a speculative philosopher it may seem *abgeschmackt*²¹ to ask such questions, but it is particularly important not to polemicize in the wrong place and hence not to begin, in a fantastic objective manner, on a *pro* and *contra* debate on whether there is mediation or not, but to keep hold of what it is to be a human being.

Now, in order to clarify the difference between the paths of subjective and objective reflection, I shall demonstrate subjective reflection's seeking back inwardly in inwardness. Inwardness at its highest in an existing subject is passion; to passion there corresponds truth as a paradox; and the fact that truth becomes the paradox is grounded precisely in its relation to an existing subject. This is how the one corresponds to the other. Through forgetting that one is an existing subject, passion dies out and the truth in return no longer becomes something paradoxical, but the knowing subject, from being a human being, becomes a fantastic something, and truth a fantastic object for its knowing.

When truth is asked about objectively, reflection is directed objectively at truth as an object to which the knower relates. Reflection is not on the relation but on it being the truth, the true that he is relating to. If only this, to which he relates, is the truth, the true, then the subject is in the truth. If the truth is asked about subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively on the individual's

¹⁷ Martensen and Heiberg both participated in a discussion on whether the moon was inhabited.

¹⁸ Latin: let it be printed. The official Roman Catholic licence to print, and a reference here to Holberg's comedy, *Erasmus Montanus* (1731).

¹⁹ *Examen Philosophicum*, a test in a wide range of subjects that students took after matriculating at the university.

²⁰ Latin: sufficiency, sufficient amount. ²¹ 'Bad taste'.

relation; if only the *how* of this relation is in truth, then the individual is in truth, even if he related in this way to untruth.^b

Let us take knowledge of God as an example. Objectively, reflection is on it being the true God, subjectively on the individual relating to something *in such a way* that his relation is truly a God-relationship. On which side now is truth to be found? Alas, are we not forced at this point to resort to mediation and say: it is on neither side, it is in the mediation? Excellently put, if only someone could explain how an existing individual sets about being in mediation, because to be in mediation is to be finished, to exist is to become. Nor can an existing individual be in two places at once, be subject-object. When closest to being in two places at once he is in passion; but passion is only momentary and passion, precisely, is subjectivity at its highest.

The person existing who chooses to pursue the objective path now enters upon that whole approximating deliberation that aims at bringing God to light objectively, which is in all eternity impossible since God is subject and therefore for subjectivity in inwardness. Someone existing who chooses the subjective path grasps instantly the entire dialectical difficulty in using some time, perhaps a long time, to find God objectively; he feels this dialectical difficulty in all its pain, because he is to use God that very instant, and every moment in which he does not have God is wasted.^c That very instant he has God by virtue not of any objective deliberation but of the infinite passion of inwardness. The objective person, on the other hand, is not hampered by such dialectical difficulties as what it means to devote a whole period of research to finding God – it being possible that the researcher dies tomorrow, and if he were to go on living he could hardly think of God as something to take along just if he can afford it, since precisely God is something one takes along *à tout prix*,²² which in passion's understanding is exactly the true relation of inwardness to God.

^b The reader must be mindful of the fact that here it is matter of essential truth, or of the truth which essentially relates to existence, and that it is precisely in order to clarify it as inwardness or as subjectivity that the contrast is pointed out.

^c Certainly, God does become in this way a postulate, but not in the loose manner usually adopted. It becomes clear, rather, that the only way in which an existing person comes in relation to God is when the dialectical contradiction brings his passion to despair, and helps him to embrace God with the 'category of despair' (faith) in such a way that far from being arbitrary, the postulate is precisely a *self*-defence, so that God is not a postulate but the existing person's postulating God – a necessity [a play on 'Nødværge', lit. defence in need, and 'Nødvendighed', necessity].

²² 'At any price'.

It is at this dialectically so difficult point that the path branches off for the person who knows what it means to think dialectically, and to do so existing, which is something other than sitting as a fantastic being at a desk writing what one has never done oneself, is something other than writing *de omnibus dubitandum*^d and then, as someone existing, being as credulous as the most sensate human being. Here is where the path branches off, and the change is this, that while objective knowledge makes its leisurely way down the long path of approximation not itself urged on by passion, in the case of subjective knowledge every delay means mortal danger, and the decision is so infinitely important as to be so instantly urgent as to make the opportunity appear already to have gone by ungrasped.

In calculating now on which side there is more truth (and to be on both sides equally at once is, as we said, not granted to one who is existing, only to a beatifying delusion for a deluded *I-I*), whether on that of one seeking the true God and the approximating truth of the God-idea only objectively, or on that of one who is infinitely concerned that he relates truly to God with the infinite passion of necessity – then for anyone not totally bemused by science the answer can be in no doubt. If someone living in the midst of Christianity enters the house of God, the house of the true God, knowing the true conception of God, and now prays but prays untruly, and if someone lives in an idolatrous land but prays with all the passion of the infinite, although his eyes rest upon the image of an idol – where then is there more truth? The one prays truly to God though he worships an idol; the other prays untruly to the true God, and therefore truly worships an idol.

If someone searches objectively for immortality and another invests the passion of the infinite in the uncertainty – where then is there more truth and who has the greater certainty? The one has entered once and for all upon an approximating that never ends, for the certainty of immortality lies exactly in subjectivity; the other is immortal and fights by precisely struggling against the uncertainty. Let us consider Socrates. Nowadays everyone dabbles in a few proofs; one person has several, another not so many. But Socrates! He submits the question in what is objectively a problematic way: *if* there is an immortality. Does that mean that compared with one of the modern thinkers with three proofs he was a doubter? Not at all, he invests his entire life in this ‘if there is’. He dares to die, and with the passion of the infinite he has so ordered his entire life

^d Latin: everything is to be doubted.

as to make it likely that it must be so – *if* there is an immortality. Is there any better proof of the immortality of the soul? But those with three proofs do not at all order their lives accordingly. If there is an immortality it must be disgusted with the way they live; is there any better refutation of the three proofs? The ‘crumb’ of uncertainty helped Socrates, because he himself contributed the passion of the infinite. The three proofs are of absolutely no help to the others, because these are and remain drones, and if nothing else their three proofs prove just that. Similarly, a young girl may, in the faint hope of being loved by the beloved, have possessed all the sweetness of love, because she herself staked everything on this faint hope; on the other hand, many a married mistress, who has succumbed more than once to the strongest expressions of love, has no doubt had proofs, but curiously enough not possessed that *quod erat demonstrandum*.²³ Socratic ignorance was thus the expression, maintained with all the passion of inwardness, of the fact that the eternal truth relates to an existing individual and must therefore be, so long as he exists, a paradox for him; and yet it is possible that there was more truth in Socratic ignorance than in the objective truth of the entire system that flirts with the demands of the time and accommodates itself to *privat-docents*.

The objective accent falls on what is said, the subjective on how it is said. This distinction holds even aesthetically and is succinctly put by saying that in the mouth of such and such a person what is true may become untrue. The distinction is particularly worth noting these days, for if we were to express in a single sentence the difference between ancient times and our own, we should most likely have to say that in ancient times only a few knew the truth, while now everyone knows it, but that inwardness stands in the inverse relation.^c Aesthetically, the contradiction which occurs in truth becoming untruth in this or that person’s mouth is best construed comically. Ethico-religiously, the accent again is on the ‘how’, but not in the sense of manner, tone of voice, style of delivery etc. Rather, it should be understood as the existing individual’s relation, in his own existence, to what is said. Objectively the question is merely about categories of thought, subjectively about inwardness. This ‘how’ at its maximum is the passion of the infinite, and the passion of the infinite is

^c Cf. *Stages on Life’s Way*, note on p. 366 [SKS 6, pp. 434f.].

²³ Latin: which was to be demonstrated.

itself the truth. But the passion of the infinite is precisely subjectivity, and in this way subjectivity is truth. From the objective view there is no infinite decision, and so it is objectively correct that the distinction between good and evil be suspended along with the law of contradiction, and thereby also the infinite distinction between truth and falsehood. Only in subjectivity is there decision, while wishing to become objective is untruth. It is the passion of the infinite and not its content that is decisive; for its content is just what it is itself. This is the way in which the subjective 'how' and subjectivity are truth.

But the 'how' that is subjectively accentuated is also, and precisely because the subject is an existing individual, dialectical with regard to time. In the moment of passion's decision where the path branches off from objective knowledge, it seems as if the infinite decision had been made. But in that same instant the one existing belongs to the temporal order and the subjective 'how' is transformed into a striving that, propelled and repeatedly renewed by the decisive passion of the infinite, is nevertheless a striving.

When subjectivity is truth, the definition of truth must include an expression of the antithesis to objectivity, a memory of that fork on the road, and this expression will at the same time serve as an indication of the tension of inwardness. Here is such a definition of truth: *the objective uncertainty maintained through appropriation in the most passionate inwardness is truth*, the highest truth there is for someone *existing*. At the point where the path branches off (and where that is cannot be said objectively, just because it is subjectivity) objective knowledge is placed in abeyance. All he has objectively is uncertainty, but it is just this that tightens the infinite passion of inwardness, and truth is precisely this venture of choosing an objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite. I observe nature in order to find God, and indeed I also see omnipotence and wisdom, but I see much else too that troubles and disturbs. The *summa summarum*²⁴ of this is the objective uncertainty, but the inwardness becomes so great just because it embraces the objective uncertainty with all the passion of the infinite. In the case of, for example, a mathematical proposition, the objectivity is given, but that is why its truth is also an indifferent truth.

But the above definition of truth is another way of saying faith. Without risk, no faith. Faith is just this, the contradiction between the infinite

²⁴ Latin: sum total, result, the long and short of it.

passion of inwardness and objective uncertainty. If I can grasp God objectively, then I do not have faith, but just because I cannot do this, I must have faith. If I wish to stay in my faith, I must take constant care to keep hold of the objective uncertainty, to be 'on the 70,000 fathoms deep' but still have faith.

Contained in the principle that subjectivity, inwardness, is truth, is that Socratic wisdom whose undying merit is to have heeded the essential significance of existing, of the fact that the knower is one who exists, for which reason Socrates, in his ignorance, was in the truth in the highest sense within paganism. To be able to grasp that the misfortune of speculative philosophy is to have forgotten, again and again, that the one who knows is one who exists, can itself be difficult enough in our objective age. 'But to go beyond Socrates without even having grasped the Socratic – that at least is not Socratic.' Cf. the 'Moral' in the *Crumbs*.²⁵

From here let us try, just as in the *Crumbs*, a category of thought that really does go further. Whether it is true or not is not my concern, since I am merely experimenting. But this much must be asked: that it be clear that the Socratic is taken as understood, so that at least I do not end up once more behind Socrates.

When subjectivity, inwardness, is truth, then objectively truth is the paradox; and the fact that truth is objectively the paradox is just what proves subjectivity to be truth, since the objective situation proves repellent, and this resistance on the part of objectivity, or its expression, is the resilience of inwardness and the gauge of its strength.²⁶ The paradox is the objective uncertainty that is the expression for the passion of inwardness, which is just what truth is. So much for the Socratic. Eternal, essential truth, i.e., truth that relates essentially to someone existing through essentially concerning what it is to exist (all other knowledge being from the Socratic point of view accidental, its scope and degree a matter of indifference), is the paradox. Yet the eternal, essential truth is by no means itself the paradox; it is so by relating to someone existing. Socratic ignorance is the expression of the objective uncertainty, the inwardness of the one who exists is truth. Just to anticipate here, note the following: Socratic ignorance is an analogue to the category of the absurd, except that in the repellency of the absurd there is even less

²⁵ See *SKS* 4, p. 306.

²⁶ *Kraftmaaler*, lit. measurer of strength, perhaps in the sense of devices commonly found in fairgrounds rather than the laboratory (dynamometer).

objective certainty, since there is only the certainty that it is absurd. And just for that reason is the resilience of the inwardness even greater. Socratic inwardness in existing is an analogue of faith, except that the inwardness of faith, corresponding as it does to the resistance not of ignorance but of the absurd, is infinitely more profound.

Socratically, the eternal essential truth is by no means in itself paradoxical; it is so only by relating to someone existing. This is expressed in another Socratic proposition, namely, that all knowing is recollecting. That proposition foreshadows the beginning of speculative thought, which is also the reason why Socrates did not pursue it. Essentially it became Platonic. Here is where the path branches off and Socrates essentially accentuates existing, while Plato, forgetting the latter, loses himself in speculation. The infinite merit of Socrates is precisely to be an *existing* thinker, not a speculator who forgets what it is to exist. For Socrates, therefore, the proposition that all knowing is recollecting has, at the moment of his leave-taking and as the suspended possibility of speculating, a two-fold significance: (1) that the knower is essentially *integer*²⁷ and that there is no other anomaly concerning knowledge confronting him than that he exists, which anomaly, however, is so essential and decisive for him that it means that existing, the inward absorption²⁸ in and through existing, is truth; (2) that existence in temporality has no decisive importance, since the possibility of taking oneself back into eternity through recollection is always there, even though this possibility is constantly cancelled by the time taken in inner absorption in existing.^f

^f This may be the proper place to illuminate an anomaly regarding the set-up of the *Crumbs*, an anomaly due to my not wanting straight away to make the matter as difficult dialectically as it is, since terminologies and the like nowadays are so muddled that it is almost impossible to protect oneself against confusion. To try if possible to throw a proper light on the difference between the Socratic (which was supposed to be the philosophical, the pagan-philosophical position) and the experimental category that really goes beyond the Socratic, I reduced the Socratic to the principle that all knowing is recollecting. This is how people generally see it, and only someone with a quite special interest in the Socratic, and going back constantly to the sources, will see the importance of distinguishing between Socrates and Plato on this score. The proposition does indeed belong to both; it is just that Socrates is constantly taking leave of it in order to exist. Holding Socrates to the proposition that all knowing is recollecting makes him into a speculating philosopher, instead of what he was, an existing thinker who understood the essential thing to be existing. The proposition that all knowing is recollecting belongs to speculation and recollection is immanence, and from the point of view of speculation and eternity there is no paradox. The difficulty is that no human being is speculation but the speculator is someone who exists and is subject to the claims of existence. There is no merit in forgetting this but great merit indeed in abiding by it, which is just what Socrates did. Accentuating existence, which contains the category of inwardness, is what is Socratic, whereas the Platonic is to pursue recollection and immanence. This basically puts

²⁷ Latin: whole, uncorrupted. ²⁸ 'Inderliggjørelse'. See the 'Note on the translation'.

The unending merit of the Socratic was precisely to accentuate the fact that the knower is someone existing and that existing is what is essential. Going further through failing to understand this is but a mediocre merit. The Socratic is therefore something we must bear in mind²⁹ and then see whether the formula might not be altered so as to make a real advance on the Socratic.

Subjectivity, inwardness, accordingly, is truth. Is there now a *more inward* expression of this? Yes, indeed; when talk of 'subjectivity, inwardness, is truth' begins as follows: 'Subjectivity is untruth.' But let us not be in a hurry. Speculation also says that subjectivity is untruth, but says this in exactly the opposite direction; namely, that objectivity is truth. Speculation defines subjectivity negatively in the direction of objectivity. This other definition, on the contrary, gets in its own way from the start, which is just what makes the inwardness so much more inward. Socratically, subjectivity is untruth if it refuses to grasp that subjectivity is truth but, for example, wants to become objective. Here, however, in setting about becoming truth by becoming subjective, subjectivity is in the difficult position of being untruth. The work thus goes backwards, that is, back into inwardness. Far from the path leading in the direction of the objective, the beginning itself lies only even deeper in subjectivity.

But the subject cannot be untruth eternally, or be presupposed eternally to have been so; he must have become that in time, or becomes that in time. The Socratic paradox lay in the eternal truth relating to someone existing. But now existence has put its mark a second time on the one who exists. A change so essential has occurred in him that now he cannot possibly take himself back into the eternal through Socratic recollection.

Socrates ahead of all speculation, not having a fantastical beginning where the speculative philosopher shifts his clothes and then goes on and on speculating, forgetting the most important thing, to exist. But for the very reason that Socrates is in this way ahead, if correctly portrayed he acquires a certain analogical similarity to what in the experiment is described as 'truly' going beyond the Socratic: truth as paradox becomes analogous to the paradox *sensu eminentiori* [in a more emphatic sense]; the passion of inwardness in existing becomes analogous to faith *sensu eminentiori*. That the difference is infinite none the less, that the definition in the *Crumbs* of what truly goes beyond the Socratic remains unchanged, is something I can easily demonstrate; but I was afraid of causing confusion by using straight away what looked like the same definitions, or at any rate the same terms, about two different things. Now, however, I believe there can be no objection to speaking of the paradox in connection with Socrates and faith, since once properly understood it is quite correct. Besides, the old Greeks also use the word πίστις [faith, confidence], though not at all in the experiment's sense, and use it in such a way, especially in connection with its occurrence in a work of Aristotle's [see *Rhetoric*, book I, ch. 1, 1355a 5] as to give rise to some very enlightening considerations bearing on its difference from faith *sensu eminentiori*.

²⁹ 'In mente'.

To do that is to speculate; the Socratic is to be able to do it but to cancel the possibility by grasping the inward absorption in existence. But *now* the difficulty is this, that what followed Socrates as a cancelled possibility has become an impossibility. If, in relation to Socrates, speculating was already a dubious merit, now it is only confusion.

The paradox emerges when the eternal truth and existence are put together; but every time existence is marked out, the paradox becomes ever clearer. Socratically, the knower was someone who existed, but now someone who exists has been marked in such a way that existence has undertaken an essential change in him.

Let us now call the individual's untruth *sin*. Viewed eternally, he cannot be in sin, or be presupposed eternally to have been in it. Accordingly, it is by coming to be³⁰ (since the beginning was that subjectivity is untruth) that he becomes a sinner. He is not born a sinner in the sense that his being a sinner is presupposed before he is born, but he is born in sin and as a sinner. We might call this *original sin*. But if existence has got him in its power in this way, he is prevented from taking himself back into eternity by way of recollection. If it was already paradoxical that the eternal truth related to one who exists, it is now absolutely paradoxical that it relates to such a one who exists. But the more difficult it is made for him to take himself out of existence in recollecting, the more inward his existing can become in existence; and when it is made impossible for him, when he is so placed in existence that the back door of recollection is closed for ever, then inwardness will be at its most profound. But let us never forget that the Socratic merit was precisely to signal the fact that the knower is existing, for the more difficult the matter becomes, the more tempted one is to hurry down the easy path of speculation, away from terrors and decisions, to renown, honour, a life of ease, etc. If Socrates himself understood the impropriety of taking himself speculating out of existence and back into eternity, even when there was nothing objectionable after all for the one who existed apart from his existing, plus the fact that existing was the essential thing, now it is impossible. He must go forward; going back is impossible.

Subjectivity is truth. It was by eternal truth's relating to the one who exists that the paradox came about. Let us now go further; let us assume that the eternal, essential truth is itself the paradox. How does the paradox come about? By putting the eternal, essential truth together with existing.

³⁰ 'Ved at blive til'.

So, if we put them together in the truth itself, the truth becomes a paradox. The eternal truth has come about in time. This is the paradox. If the subject just mentioned was prevented by sin from taking himself back into eternity, this is now no concern of his, because eternal, essential truth is now not behind him but in front of him, by itself existing or having existed; so if the individual does not come by the truth in his existing, he will never come by it.

Existence can never be more sharply accentuated than here. The fraud of speculation in wanting to recollect itself out of existence is made impossible. It is simply a matter of grasping this, and every speculation that insists on being speculation shows *eo ipso*³¹ that it does not grasp it. The individual may push all this aside and resort to speculation; but accepting it and then wanting to revoke it through speculation is impossible, for it is designed directly to prevent speculation.

When the eternal truth relates to someone existing, it becomes the paradox. The paradox, in the objective uncertainty and ignorance, repels in the inwardness of the one who exists. But since the paradox is not in itself the paradox, the repulsion is not sufficiently inward, for without risk, no faith; the more risk, the more faith; the more objective dependability, the less inwardness (since inwardness is precisely subjectivity); the less objective dependability, the deeper the possible inwardness. When the paradox itself is paradoxical, it pushes off on the strength of the absurd, and the corresponding passion of inwardness is faith.

But subjectivity, inwardness, is truth, for otherwise we have forgotten the Socratic merit. Yet, when the retreat out of existence into the eternal by way of recollection is impossible, there is no stronger expression of inwardness than with truth before one as a paradox, in the anxiety of sin and with this pain, with the tremendous risk of objectivity, to have faith. But without risk, no faith, not even the Socratic faith, much less the kind we are talking about here.

In his belief that God was there, Socrates held fast to the objective uncertainty with all the passion of inwardness, and faith lies exactly in this contradiction, in this risk. Now it is otherwise. Instead of objective uncertainty, we have here the certainty that objectively it is the absurd; and this absurdity, when held fast in the passion of inwardness, is faith. Compared with the earnest of the absurd, Socratic ignorance is like a witty

³¹ Latin: by that very fact, by the same token.

jest; and the Socratic existing inwardness, compared with the exertion of faith, like a Greek insouciance.

So what is the absurd? The absurd is that the eternal truth has come about in time, that God has come about, has been born, has grown up, etc., has come about just as the single human being, indistinguishable from any other, since all immediate recognizability is pre-Socratic paganism and from the Jewish point of view idolatry. And it is essential to everything that determines a real advance on the Socratic that it bear a mark of being in relation to this, that God has come about; for faith *sensu strictissimo*,³² as explained in the *Crumbs*, refers to coming about.³³ Socrates, in believing that God is there, no doubt saw that where the road branches off, there is a path of objective approximation, for instance, the observation of nature, world history, etc. His merit was precisely to shun that path where the quantitative siren song spellbinds and fools the one who exists. In respect of the absurd *this* objective approximating is like that comedy *Misunderstanding upon Misunderstanding*,³⁴ a comedy usually performed by *privat-docents* and speculative thinkers.

It is precisely through the objective repulsion that the absurd is the gauge of faith's strength in inwardness. So, we have a man who wants to have faith; so let the comedy begin. He wants faith but also a safeguard by way of objective deliberation and approximating. What happens? With the assistance of approximating, the absurd becomes something else; it becomes probable; it becomes more probable; perhaps it becomes extremely and exceedingly probable. He is now all set to believe it, and he will go so far as to say of himself that his belief is not like that of cobblers and tailors and of simple folk but only after long deliberation. Now he is all set to believe it, but then what! It is just that now it is impossible to believe. The all-but-probable, the probable, the extremely and exceedingly probable, this is something he can all but know, or as good as know, or know extremely and exceedingly, but to *have faith* in it, that he cannot do, for it is the absurd that is the object of faith and the only thing that permits of faith.

Or there is a man who says he has faith, but now wants to be clear about his faith; he wants to understand himself in his faith. The comedy begins once more. The object of faith becomes just about probable, it becomes as good as probable, it becomes probable, it becomes extremely and

³² Latin: in the strictest sense. ³³ 'Tilblivelse'.

³⁴ The title of a one-act comedy (1828) by T. Overskou, performed as recently as May 1844.

exceedingly probable. He has finished, and he will go so far as to say of himself that his belief is not like that of shoemakers and tailors or of other simple folk; for he has also understood what it is to believe. Remarkable understanding; he has on the contrary come to understand something other than he believed about his belief; he has found out that he no longer has it, since he all but knows, or as good as knows, extremely and exceedingly just about knows.

Inasmuch as the absurd contains the element of coming about,³⁵ the path of approximation will also be that which conflates that absurd fact of coming about which is the object of faith with a plain historical fact, and hence seeks historical certainty for something that is absurd, for the very reason that it contains the contradiction that something that only against all human understanding can become historical has indeed become historical. It is just this contradiction that is the absurd in which alone one can have faith. If any historical certainty is reached, all that means is that what is proved is not what was in question. A witness can testify that he has believed it, and then testify that far from being a historical certainty, it goes directly counter to his reason. But a witness like that repels in just the same way as the absurd. A witness who does not repel in this way is *eo ipso* a deceiver, or else a man talking about something quite different, and such a witness can be of no assistance except in obtaining certainty about something quite different. One hundred thousand individual witnesses, who by the special nature of their testimony (that they have believed the absurd) remain individual witnesses, do not become *en masse* something else, thus making the absurd less absurd. Why? Is it because 100,000 human beings have each for themselves believed that it was absurd? Quite the contrary, these 100,000 witnesses repel in just the same way as the absurd.

Still, I need go no further into this here. In the *Crumbs* (especially where the distinction is cancelled between the disciple at first hand and at second hand) and in Part One of this book, I have expounded painstakingly enough the thesis that all approximation is of no avail, since the point is, on the contrary, to be rid of introductory reflections, reliable support, proofs from effects, and the whole mob of public moneylenders and solvent guarantors, in order to make the absurd clear, so that one can then believe if one wants to. I say only that it must be utterly strenuous.

³⁵ 'Tilblivelsens Moment'.

If speculation wants to engage in this and say, as always: from the eternal point of view, theocentrically, there is no paradox, then I am not the one to decide whether the speculative thinker is right, for I am only a poor existing human being unable to contemplate the eternal, either eternally or divinely, or theocentrically, and have to be satisfied with existing. But this much is certain, that with speculation everything goes back, back beyond the Socratic, which did after all grasp that the essential thing for one who exists is existing, to say nothing of speculation's not having given itself the time to grasp what it means to be *situated* in existence, as the existing person in what was experimented.

The difference between the Socratic and what goes beyond is clear enough, and essentially the same as in the *Crumbs*, for nothing is changed in the latter and the matter made only somewhat more difficult in the former, though not more difficult than it is; just as it has been made a little more difficult by the fact that while in the *Crumbs* I brought out the conceptual features of the paradox merely experimentally, here in addition and as a sequel I have tried latently to have the necessity of the paradox become clear, which even if the attempt is a little weak is always something other than annulling the paradox speculatively.

Christianity has proclaimed itself as the eternal, essential truth that has come about in time; it has proclaimed itself as *the paradox* and has demanded the inwardness of faith in respect of what is a stumbling-block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks,³⁶ and to the understanding the absurd. There is no stronger way of saying that subjectivity is truth and that objectivity only repels, yes also by virtue of the absurd, and it seems strange that Christianity should have come into the world in order to be explained, as if alas it were itself in some perplexity about what it was and therefore came into the world to go to the wise man, the speculator, who can assist with the explanation. There is no more inward way of saying that subjectivity is truth than when subjectivity first of all is untruth and yet subjectivity truth.

Suppose that Christianity was and wants to be a secret and to some purpose, not a theatrical secret to be uncovered in the fifth act while the clever member of the audience fathoms it in the exposition. Suppose that a revelation *sensu strictissimo* has to be the secret, and be identifiable exactly in virtue purely and simply of its being the secret, whereas a revelation *sensu laxiori*,³⁷ recollection's withdrawal into the eternal, was a

³⁶ 1 Corinthians 1:23. The New Testament Greek text has ἔθνεσιν (Gentiles rather than Greeks).

³⁷ Latin: in a less strict sense.

revelation in the direct sense. Suppose that what distinguishes intellectual giftedness is the ability to present ever more clearly that it is and remains a secret for those who exist. Suppose what distinguished intellectual giftedness in respect of misunderstanding were the individual's ability more and more deceptively to present the appearance of having understood the secret. Suppose that it were nevertheless a blessing, situated at the extremity of existence, to relate to this secret without understanding it, only having faith. Suppose that Christianity had no wish at all to be understood. Suppose that, so as to express this and to prevent anyone being misguided into taking the road of objectivity, it has proclaimed itself to be the paradox. Suppose it wanted to be only for those existing, and essentially for those existing in inwardness, in the inwardness of faith, which cannot be expressed more definitely than by saying that it is the absurd held fast in the passion of the infinite. Suppose that it did not want to be understood, and that any talk of understanding amounted at most to understanding that it cannot be understood. Suppose that for that reason it accentuated existence so decisively that the individual became a sinner, Christianity the paradox, existence the time of decision. Suppose that speculation were a temptation, the most critical of all. Suppose that the speculator were not the prodigal son,³⁸ for that is what the anxious divinity would only call the offended one whom he nevertheless continues to love, but instead the naughty child who refuses to remain where existing human beings belong, namely, in existence's nursery and educational sitting-room, where one becomes a grown-up only through inwardness in existing, and wants instead to enter God's council, constantly screaming that when viewed eternally, divinely, theocentrically, there is no paradox. Suppose that the speculator were the restless occupier who, although it was obvious that he is a tenant, would in view of the abstract truth that from the standpoint of the eternal and the divine all property is in common, nevertheless be the owner, then there is nothing to be done but send for an officer, who would no doubt say to him what the policemen said to Gert Westphaler: 'It pains us to come on this errand.'³⁹

Does being human differ now from what it was in the old days? Is the condition not the same, being a particular *existing* being? And is not existing the essential thing for as long as one is the existence? 'But people know so much more now.' 'Quite right, but if Christianity is not a matter

³⁸ Luke 15:11–32. ³⁹ From Holberg's comedy *Mester Gert Westphaler*.

of knowledge, then much knowledge is of no help except in making it easier to fall into the confusion of regarding Christianity as a matter of knowledge.' And if people indeed have more knowledge now, and we are not talking of the knowledge of railroads, machines, and kaleidoscopes, but knowing more about the religious, how have they acquired it? Surely through Christianity. So this is how they reward Christianity. They learn something from Christianity, this they misunderstand and, in a new misunderstanding, use it against Christianity. If in the old days the horror was that one might be offended, now the horror is that there is no horror, that one, two, three, and even before looking round, one becomes a speculator who speculates about faith. About what faith? Is it about the faith that he has, and especially about whether he has it or not? Alas no, that is too little for an objective speculator. So it is about objective faith. What does that mean, objective faith? It means a sum of axioms. But suppose Christianity were nothing of the kind; suppose, on the contrary, that it were inwardness, and for that reason the paradox, so as to thrust objectively away, so as to be for the person who exists in the inwardness of his existing, by placing him, as decisively as no judge can place an accused, between time and eternity in time, between heaven and hell in the time of salvation. Objective faith, it is as if Christianity had been proclaimed also as a little system, though indeed not as good as the Hegelian; it is as if Christ – yes, and don't blame me for saying it – had been a professor and the Apostles had formed a little society of science and letters. Truly, if at one time it was difficult to become a Christian, now I think it becomes more and more difficult year by year, because to become one is now so easy that the only bit of competition left over is to become a speculator. And yet the speculator is perhaps at the furthest remove from Christianity, and it is perhaps far to be preferred that one be a person offended who nevertheless constantly relates to Christianity while the speculator has understood it. To that extent you might say there was still hope of a similarity between a Christian now and a Christian in the first days, and wanting to be a Christian will once again be regarded as folly. In those early days a Christian was a fool in the eyes of the world, and to the pagans and the Jews it was foolishness to want to be one. One is now a Christian as a matter of course; anyone wanting to be one with infinite passion is a fool, just as it is always foolish to want to exert oneself with infinite passion to be what as a matter of course one already is, just like someone giving away his whole fortune to buy a gem that he already

owned. Before, a Christian was a fool in the eyes of the world; now that everyone is a Christian he becomes a fool all the same, in the eyes of Christians.

Suppose that this is how it was; I say only 'suppose,' not more. But since people now are surely growing tired of speculators sounding each other out in print in the rigmarole of the system, it is always a nice change to go through the whole question in another way.

'But from an eternal, divine, and especially from a theocentric point of view, there is no paradox; therefore true speculative philosophy does not stop at the paradox, it goes further and explains it.' 'May I beg peace and thank him not to start all over again; I have already said that I cannot involve myself with the supernatural and the subterranean.' 'The beginning and end of the explanation are with me, and it is for this explanation that the eternal truth has been waiting. For yes, it did indeed appear in time, but the first edition was only an imperfect attempt. The eternal truth entered the world because it was in need of an explanation and looked forward to finding this by giving rise to a discussion. In the same way a professor publishes just the outlines of a system, reckoning that, by being reviewed and discussed, the work will in due course come out in a new and wholly revised form. Only this second edition, after it has had the benefit of the advice and criticism of competent authorities, is the truth, and in this way speculation is the true and only satisfactory edition of the provisional truth of Christianity.'

So let us proceed with a few examples, to show how speculation, exactly by refusing to grasp that subjectivity is truth, has done by Christianity, which is once and for all the paradox, and at every point paradoxical, whereas by remaining in the sphere of the immanent, where recollection takes itself out of existence, speculation at every point brings about an attenuation, which by dint of the *tour de force*⁴⁰ of not thinking anything decisive about the most decisive (which, through the decision, is designed precisely to obstruct immanence), but exploiting the decisive terminology as mere phraseology, becomes a pagan reminiscence, to which there is no objection if it breaks straightforwardly with Christianity, but to which there is much to object when it is supposed to be Christianity.

The proposition that God has come into being in human form, was born, grew up, etc., is surely the paradox *sensu strictissimo*, the absolute

⁴⁰ 'Major feat'.

paradox. But as the absolute paradox it cannot relate to a relative difference. A relative paradox relates to the relative difference between more or less clever minds; but the absolute paradox, just because it is absolute, can relate only to the absolute difference that distinguishes man from God, not to relative man-to-man squabbling about one being smarter than another. But the absolute difference between God and the human being consists precisely in this, that the human is a particular existing being (which holds as much for the cleverest as for the most stupid), whose essential task therefore cannot be to think *sub specie aeterni*,⁴¹ since as long as he exists he is, though eternal, essentially someone existing for whom the essential thing, therefore, has to be inwardness in existence, while God is the infinite, who is eternal. As soon as I make the understanding of the paradox commensurate with the difference between greater or less intellectual endowment (a difference, after all, that never gets us past being human, unless someone were to become so gifted that he became not just a human but also God), my words about understanding show *eo ipso* that what I have understood is not the absolute paradox but one that is relative, for in connection with the absolute paradox the only understanding possible is that it cannot be understood. 'But then speculation cannot come to grasp it at all.' 'Quite right, that is just what the paradox says; it pushes you away in the direction of inwardness in existence.' Perhaps the reason for this is that objectively there is no truth for existing beings, but only approximations; while subjectively truth for them is in inwardness, because the decision of truth is in subjectivity.

The modern mythical allegorizing trend declares the whole of Christianity a myth without further ado. This at least is open dealing, and everyone can easily make up his mind about it. Speculation's friendship is of another kind. To be on the safe side, speculation opposes the ungodly mythical allegorizing trend and goes on to say: 'Speculation, on the contrary, does indeed accept the paradox but does not stick with it.' 'No need to anyway, since if someone persists in his belief, deepening himself in the inwardness of faith through existing, he does not stand still either.' Speculation does not stand still, what does this mean? Does it mean that Messrs Speculators cease being human beings, particular existing human beings, and *en famille* become all manner of things? Otherwise, it will surely be necessary to stick with the paradox, when

⁴¹ Latin: under the aspect of eternity.

this precisely has its ground in, and expresses the fact that, the eternal essential truth relates to those existing, calling upon them to go further and further in the inwardness of faith.

What at all does it mean to *explain* something? Is explaining something a question of showing that the unclear matter in question is not this but something else? That would be a curious explanation. You would think it was the function of an explanation to render it evident that the something in question was that definite thing, so that the explanation removed not the thing but the unclarity. Else the explanation is something other than an explanation; it is a rectification. An explanation of the paradox makes clear what the paradox is, removing the unclarity; a rectification takes the paradox away and makes it clear that there is no paradox. Yet the latter is hardly an explanation of the paradox; rather it is an explanation that there is no paradox. But if the paradox emerges from putting together the eternal and an existing particular human being, does the explanation, in taking the paradox away, not also take existing away from the one who exists? And when, on his own, or with someone else's help, the one who exists has arrived at or all but been brought to the point of it seeming that he did not exist, what is he then? Distracted. So the explanation of the absolute paradox that says that there is no paradox except to a certain degree, which means that there are only relative paradoxes, is an explanation not for existing individuals but for the *distract*. Yes, then everything is as it should be. The explanation is that the paradox is the paradox only to a certain degree, and it is quite in order that it, the explanation, is for someone existing who exists only to a certain degree, since he forgets it at every other moment, and an existing person of that kind is precisely someone who is distracted. And when someone speaks of the absolute paradox, which is an offence to the Jews, foolishness to the Greeks, and to the understanding the absurd, and addresses himself to speculation, the latter is not so impolite as to tell him to his face that he is a fool, but rather offers him an explanation which contains a rectification, thus indirectly giving him to understand that he is in error. This is how a humane and superior mind always behaves towards those of weaker intelligence. The procedure is altogether Socratic; the only thing un-Socratic here would be if the speaker, after all, were closer to the truth than the speculative explanation, for then the difference would be that while Socrates politely and indirectly took the untruth away from the learner and gave him the truth, speculation politely and indirectly takes the truth away from the

learner and gives him untruth. But politeness remains the common factor. And when Christianity announces that it is the paradox, the speculative explanation is no explanation but a rectification, a polite and indirect rectification, as befits a superior intelligence in relation to the more limited.

Explaining the paradox: is that to make the term ‘paradox’ a *rhetorical* expression, into something the worshipful speculator thinks does indeed have its validity – but then does not have it? In that case the *summa summarum*⁴² is that indeed there is no paradox. All honour to the Herr Professor! I say this not to deprive him of his honour, as if I too could suspend the paradox, not at all. But if the professor has suspended it, I daresay it is indeed neutralized – unless the suspending concerns the professor more than the paradox, so that the professor instead of neutralizing the paradox himself became an alarming fantastical protuberance.⁴³ In other cases it is assumed that explaining something is to make its meaning clear, that it is this and not something else. Explaining the paradox would then be to grasp ever more deeply what the paradox is and that it is the paradox. Thus God is a supreme conception not to be explained through something else but only by deepening oneself in the very conception. The highest principles of all thought can be demonstrated only indirectly (negatively). Supposing the paradox to be the limit for the relation of someone *existing* to an eternal, essential truth, then neither can the paradox be explained by something else if the explanation is for someone existing. But when understood speculatively even the absolute paradox (since speculation is not afraid to use decisive language, fearing only to say something decisive with it) expresses only a relative difference between more or less gifted and educated people. In this way, the shape of the world will gradually change. When Christianity entered the world there just weren’t any professors and *privat-docents*; it was then a paradox for everyone. In the present generation we can assume that one out of every ten is a *privat-docent*; accordingly it is a paradox for only nine out of ten. And when, finally, and in the fullness of time,⁴⁴ that matchless future when an entire generation of male and female *privat-docents* peoples the earth, Christianity will have ceased to be a paradox.

On the other hand, whoever takes it upon himself to explain the paradox, assuming he knows what he wants, will concentrate on showing that it has

⁴² Latin: sum total, in sum, the long and short of it.

⁴³ A play on ‘hæve’ (raise, cancel, suspend) and ‘ophævelse’, a tumult but also ‘swelling’.

⁴⁴ Galatians 4:4.

to be a paradox. To explain unutterable joy, for example; what does that mean? Does it mean explaining that it is this thing or that? But then the predicate 'unutterable' becomes no more than a rhetorical predicate, a forceful expression and the like. So the explaining jack-of-all-trades has everything prepared prior to the performance, and now it begins. He takes in the listener, he calls the joy unutterable – and then a new surprise, a truly surprising surprise: he gives it utterance. Now suppose the unutterable joy had its ground in the contradiction that an existing human being is a composite of the infinite and the finite situated in time, so that the joy of the eternal in him becomes unutterable because he is one who exists, and becomes a supreme drawing in of breath that nevertheless cannot articulate itself because the one who is existing exists. The explanation would then be: it is unutterable and cannot be otherwise. No nonsense. But when some profound person first condemns someone or other for denying that there is an unutterable joy and then goes on to say, 'No, I admit that there is an unutterable joy, but I go further than that and utter it', he simply makes a fool of himself and the only difference between him and the one he condemns is that the latter is more honest and straightforward, saying what the profound person also says, since they both say essentially the same.

Explaining what is decisive, is that to transform the expression into a rhetorical turn of speech, so that, unlike frivolous persons, one does not deny all decision but admits it to a certain degree? What does it mean to say of the decision that it is 'to a certain degree'? It means denying the decision. Decision is designed precisely to put an end to that everlasting 'to a certain degree' chatter. So one admits the decision – but then, what do you know!, one does so to a certain degree. For speculation is not afraid to use expressions of decision, only to mean anything decisive by them. And when Christianity wants to be the eternal decision for the existing subject and speculation explains that the decision is merely relative, it does not explain Christianity but rectifies it. Whether speculation is right is quite another question; what we are asking here is how its explanation stands in relation to the Christianity that it explains.

To explain something, does that mean to *suspend* it? I am well aware that the word *aufheben* has various and indeed opposite meanings in the German language, as we are often reminded; that it can mean both *tollere* and *consercare*.⁴⁵ I am not aware that the Danish word 'ophæve' permits of

⁴⁵ 'Raise, remove' and: 'preserve'.

any such ambiguity but I do know that our German-Danish philosophers use it like the German word. Whether it is a good trait in a word that it can mean the opposite I do not know, but anyone who wants to express himself with precision tends to avoid using a word like that in the decisive places. There is a simple popular expression humorously characterizing the impossible: 'To have a mouthful of flour and blow at the same time.' Roughly the same trick is performed by speculation when using a word meaning the very opposite. It is in order to make it perfectly clear that speculation knows nothing of any decision that it itself uses so ambiguous a word to signify the kind of understanding that is speculative understanding. And if one looks at it more closely, the confusion becomes still more evident. *Aufheben* in the sense of *tollere* means to do away with, and in the sense of *conservare* to preserve in a quite unaltered state, to do absolutely nothing to what is preserved. If the government suspends a political organization, it abolishes it; if someone keeps something for me, the point for me is that he should make absolutely no change in it. Neither of these meanings is the philosophical *aufheben*. Speculation thus suspends the difficulty and leaves me with the problem of grasping what it is doing with this *aufheben*. But suppose that we let the word *aufheben* mean reduction to a relative factor, as indeed it does when what is decisive, the paradox, is reduced to a relative factor. What this says is that there is no paradox, no decision, for the paradox and the decisive are what they are precisely by being unyielding. Whether speculation is right is another question, but here we are asking only how its explanation stands in relation to the Christianity that it explains.

Speculation says by no means that Christianity is untruth; on the contrary, it says that speculation grasps its truth. What more can be asked? Has Christianity ever demanded more than to be the truth? And if speculation grasps it, then all is in order. And yet, no, it is not; regarding Christianity systematic speculation is just a little tricky in its use of all kinds of diplomatic turns of phrase that beguile the gullible. For Christianity as it is understood by the speculator differs from what plain folk are presented. For them it is a paradox, but the speculator knows how to suspend the paradox. So it is not the Christianity that is, was and remains the truth, and the speculator's understanding is not that Christianity is the truth; no, Christianity's truth is the speculator's understanding of Christianity. The understanding is thus something other than the truth; it is not that once the understanding has understood everything

contained in the truth, then truth is understood, but that once that truth κατὰ δύναμιν⁴⁶ has been understood as the speculator understands it, only then – yes, so it is not speculation that has become true, but the truth itself that has come about. The truth is not first given and its understanding what one then awaits; what is awaited is the completion of the speculative understanding as that which alone can bring about the truth. Speculative knowledge thus differs from knowledge in general, as something indifferent to what is known, so that the latter does not change by being known but stays the same. No, speculative knowledge is itself the object of knowing, so the latter is no longer what it was but has come about simultaneously with speculation as truth.

Whether speculation is right is another question. Here we are asking only how its explanation stands in relation to the Christianity that it explains. And how should this relation be? Speculation is objective, and objectively there is no truth for someone who exists, but only approximating; for by existing he is prevented from becoming wholly objective. Christianity is on the contrary subjective; the inwardness of faith in the believer is the truth's eternal decision. And objectively there is no truth, for an objective knowledge of the truth, or truths, of Christianity is precisely untruth. To know a declaration of faith by heart is paganism, because Christianity is inwardness.

Let us take the paradox of the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness is a paradox in the Socratic sense, in so far as the eternal truth relates to someone existing, and *sensu strictiori*⁴⁷ because the one existing is a sinner, which determination marks out existence a second time, and because it wants to be an eternal decision in time with retroactive power to suspend the past, and because it is connected to God having existed in time. The individual existing human being has to feel himself a sinner (not objectively, which is nonsense, but subjectively, and that is the most profound suffering). With all his understanding (and whether one person has a little more than another makes no essential difference; appealing to one's high intellect is to betray one's defective inwardness or else that it is no doubt lost altogether), and to the last turn, he must want to understand the forgiveness of sins and then despair of understanding. With the understanding directly opposed to it, the inwardness of faith must grasp the paradox; and this struggle on the part of faith, just as the Romans once

⁴⁶ Greek: as far as possible. ⁴⁷ Latin: in a stricter sense.

fought when dazzled by the light of the sun, is precisely the tension of inwardness.⁸ If any other understanding begins to elbow its way forward in him, he is on the point of losing his faith; just as a young woman, having become the beloved's wife, on realizing how easy it is to see why she became her husband's choice should realize how this explanation can be understood as to say that she is no longer in love.

But a speculative philosopher goes about it differently. He appears before an esteemed audience and says: 'Ladies and gentlemen, for so I must address you, since to a congregation of the faithful the paradox can be proclaimed only by a believer, but to an esteemed audience the truth can be proclaimed by a speculator. Thus, the forgiveness of sins is a paradox (general excitement); the pantheistic trend is a fallacy that speculation opposes, but speculation does not stop with the paradox, it explains and cancels it.' So the esteemed speculator has not staked all his understanding when despairing; his despair was only to a certain degree, a feigned movement; he kept a part of it back – for the explanation. This can be called taking advantage of one's understanding. But the believer has absolutely no advantage of his own, he uses it all up in despair; but the speculator knows how to make his go round. He takes the one half to despair with (as though it were not nonsense to despair by halves), and he takes the other half to see that there is no reason for the understanding to despair. Well, of course that must make all the difference, and where is the mistake? Naturally, in the let-down of the first

⁸ That one can fight blinded and yet see to conquer was proved by the Romans at Zama. And now the conflict of faith: is that perhaps a prank, a bluff of chivalrous swordplay, this conflict longer lasting than a thirty years' war, because one fights not just to acquire but even more vehemently to preserve, in which every day is just as scorching as the day of battle at Zama! While the understanding despairs, faith presses on victoriously in the passion of inwardness. But when the believer uses all his understanding, every last turn of despair, merely to discover the difficulty of the paradox, then truly no part is left with which to explain the paradox – but for that reason there may well be an ample firmness of faith in the passion of inwardness. Sitting calmly in a ship in fair weather is no image of faith; but when the ship has sprung a leak, enthusiastically to keep it afloat by manning the pumps yet not seeking harbour: that is the image. And if, in the long run, the image contains an impossibility, then this is an imperfection only in the image, but faith holds out. While the understanding, like the despairing passenger, stretches its arms out towards the shore, faith works for dear life in the depths: joyful and triumphant, it saves the soul against the understanding. Existing in faith is that kind of contradiction, coming to terms with a delusion for someone existing, seeing that an eternal spirit exists is itself a contradiction. Whether anyone has done this, is doing it – what concern is that of mine so long as this is indeed what it is to have faith? And although I am still far from having fully understood the difficulty of Christianity (and an explanation that makes the difficulty easy must be considered a temptation), I can still see that the conflict of faith is not a topic for vaudeville poets nor its strenuousness a diversion for *privat-docents* [concealed references, respectively, to Heiberg and Martensen; see the translator's introduction].

movement, and so really not in his not stopping with faith but in his never having reached it. Suppose now that the paradox of forgiveness of sins has its basis in the fact that the poor existing human being is existing, that he is half godforsaken even when, in the inwardness of faith, he triumphs against the understanding. Suppose that only eternity can give an eternal certainty, while existence has to be satisfied with the combative certainty, gained not as the conflict abates or becomes more illusory, but only by it becoming harder. In that case the explanation is this, that it is and remains a paradox; and it is only when someone grasps that there is no paradox, or only to a certain degree, that all is lost. But, the esteemed audience may say, 'If this is the forgiveness of sins, how can one believe it?' Answer: If this is not what it is, how could it be *believed*?

Whether Christianity is right is another question; here we are asking only how speculation's explanation stands in relation to the Christianity that it explains. But if Christianity should perhaps be wrong, this much at least is certain: speculation is definitely wrong, for the only consistency outside Christianity is pantheism, the taking of oneself out of existence back into the eternal by way of recollection, whereby all existence-decisions become a mere shadow-play against the background of what is eternally decided from behind. Speculation's feigned decision, like all *feigned* decision, is nonsense; for decision is precisely the eternal protest against fictions. The pantheist is eternally mollified backwards; the moment that is the moment of existence in time, the seventy years, is infinitesimal. The speculator, however, wants to be someone existing but one who is not subjective, not in passion, yes, existing *sub specie aeterni* – in short, he is *distract*. But what is explained in distraction is not absolutely to be trusted – such an explanation, and here I am at one with speculation, is only to a certain degree.

If the speculator explains the paradox in such a way as to suspend it and now deliberately accepts that it is suspended, that the paradox is not the eternal essential truth's essential relation to one who exists at the extremity of existence, but only a contingent and relative relation to weaker intellects, then there is an essential difference between the speculator and the simple soul which means that existence is confounded from its very foundations. God is insulted by having hangers-on, an ancillary staff of clever brains, and humanity is offended by there being no equal relationship to God for all. That godly formula advanced above for the difference between the simple soul and the simple wise man's knowledge of the simple, that the

difference is the meaningless trifle that the wise man knows that he knows or knows that he does not know what the plain person knows – this formula speculation respects not at all. Nor does it respect the likeness implied in this distinction between the wise and the simple, that both know the same thing. For the speculator and the simple soul by no means know the same when the simple soul believes the paradox and the speculator knows it to be suspended. But according to that formula, which honours God and loves men, the difference will be that the wise man knows additionally that it must be a paradox, this paradox that he himself believes. Hence they both know essentially the same; the wise man does not know anything else about the paradox but is aware of knowing this about the paradox. The simple wise man will then be absorbed in understanding the paradox as a paradox, and not get involved in explaining the paradox by understanding that there is none. Thus if a simple wise man talks with a simple soul about the forgiveness of sins, the simple soul will no doubt say: ‘But still, I cannot grasp the divine mercy that can forgive sins; the more vital my belief, the less I can understand it.’ (Thus the probability seems not to increase as faith intensifies in inwardness; rather the reverse.) But the simple wise man will no doubt say: ‘It is the same with me; you know that I have had the opportunity to give much time to research and reflection, and yet the *summa summarum* of it all comes at most to grasping that it cannot be otherwise, that it must be impossible to understand. Look, this difference can hardly sadden you, make you think sorrowfully of your own harder conditions of life and your perhaps humbler talents, as if I had any advantage over you. My advantage, when looked at as the fruit of study, is something both to laugh at and to weep over. Yet you must never scorn this study, just as I myself do not regret it, since on the contrary, it pleases me most when I smile at it and just then return with enthusiasm to the exertions of thought once again.’ And such a confession is meant in all sincerity; not once in a while, but present essentially in the wise man whenever he occupies himself in thinking. Reflecting once a year that one is always to thank God is hardly the right way to understand these words. Similarly, to reflect just once in a while, on some special and moving occasion, that before God all men are essentially equal, is not truly to understand this equality. Especially if one’s workaday striving tends in more ways than one to put it out of mind. But to grasp the equality just when most strongly conscious of one’s difference, that is the simple wise man’s noble piety.

Much that is strange, much that is deplorable, much that is outrageous has been said about Christianity; but the most stupid thing ever said about it is that it is true to a certain degree. Much that is strange, much that is deplorable, much that is outrageous has been said about enthusiasm; but the most stupid thing said about it is that it is to a certain degree. Much that is strange, much that is deplorable, much that is outrageous has been said about love; but the most stupid thing said about it is that it is to a certain degree. And when someone has prostituted himself by speaking in this manner about enthusiasm and love, has betrayed his stupidity, which, however, in this case is not on the way to understanding since it is a matter precisely of the understanding becoming too large, in the way that a disease of the liver is caused by an enlargement of the liver, and hence, as another author has remarked, 'is the dullness that salt takes on when it loses its taste'⁴⁸ – then one phenomenon remains, and it is Christianity. If enthusiasm's vision has not managed to help him break with the understanding, if love has not managed to snap him out of his bondage, then let him look at Christianity. Let him be offended, he is still a human being; let him despair of ever becoming a Christian himself, he may still be nearer than he thinks; let him fight to the last drop of his blood to eradicate Christianity, he is still a human being – but if here too he has it in him to say that it is true to a degree, then he is stupid. Someone may think I shudder to say this, that I must be ready for a terrible reprimand from the speculator. Not at all. The speculator will no doubt be consistent once more and say: 'There is some truth in what the man says, only one mustn't stop there.' It would be strange, too, if my insignificance were to succeed where even Christianity had failed – in bringing the speculator to the point of passion. And if that were to happen, then my crumb of philosophy would suddenly take on an importance of which I had hardly dreamed. But the one who is neither cold nor hot⁴⁹ is an abomination, and just as the hunter is ill served by a weapon that misfires at the crucial moment, so too is God ill served by misfiring individuals. Had Pilate not asked objectively what truth is,⁵⁰ he would never have let Christ be crucified. Had he asked subjectively, the passion of inwardness respecting what *he had in truth to do* in the decision facing him would have

⁴⁸ Vigilius Haufniensis. See *SKS* 4, p. 398, quoted inaccurately. The notion of salt (of the earth) losing its taste is from Matthew 5:13.

⁴⁹ Revelation 3:15–16. ⁵⁰ John 18:38.

prevented him from doing an injustice. Then it would not have been only his wife who was troubled by disturbing dreams, Pilate himself would have become sleepless. Yet when one has something so infinitely great before one's eyes as the objective truth, it is easy to forget about one's crumb of subjectivity and what, as a subject, one has to do. The approximating of objective truth is then figuratively expressed by washing the hands,⁵¹ for objectively there is no decision, while the subjective decision proves that one nevertheless was in untruth in not grasping that the decision inheres precisely in subjectivity.

If it is the case, on the other hand, that subjectivity is truth, and subjectivity is the existing subjectivity, then Christianity has, if I may so put it, seen its opportunity. Subjectivity culminates in passion, Christianity is the paradox, paradox and passion are quite in accord, and the paradox is perfectly suited to one situated at the extremity of existence. Yes, in the whole world no two lovers could be found so well suited to each other as paradox and passion, and the quarrel between them is only that of lovers about whether it was he who first aroused her passion or she who aroused his – just as here, the one who exists has been placed in the extremity of existence by the paradox itself. And what is more glorious for lovers than to be granted a long time together with no alteration in the relationship except that it becomes more inward? And this is indeed granted to that most un-speculative understanding between passion and the paradox, since the whole of time has been granted and the change only in eternity. But the speculator goes about things differently; he believes only to a certain degree – he puts his hand to the plough and looks about for something to know.⁵² In Christian terms, whatever he gets to know will hardly be anything good. Even if, as a simple wise man who seeks to apprehend the paradox would strive to show, it cannot be otherwise. Even if the paradox contained a little remainder of divine wilfulness, God is surely still the one allowed to attach importance to his own person, thus not constrained to lower the price of the God-relationship on account of slackness in religiousness (and the term is much more suitable here than when one speaks of a slack grain market). And if God were so inclined, no one with passion in his heart would ever wish it. It never occurs to a girl truly in love that her happiness has been bought at too high a price, but rather that the price she has paid is not high enough. And just as the

⁵¹ Matthew 27:19, 24.

⁵² Luke 9:62: 'No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'

passion of the infinite was itself the truth, so too with the highest: you get what you pay for and a low price means poor trading, while even the highest price in relation to God is no merit, since the highest price is precisely to be willing to do everything yet knowing that this is nothing (for if it is something, the price is lower), and still to will it.

Not being altogether unfamiliar with what has been said and written about Christianity, I could no doubt say a thing or two. But here I will not do so. I merely repeat that there is one thing I shall be careful not to say about it: that it is true to a certain degree. It is indeed possible, after all, that Christianity is the truth; it is after all possible that some day there will be a judgment which hinges on the relation of inwardness to Christianity. Suppose someone stepped forward who had to say, 'I have indeed not believed, but I have so honoured Christianity as to employ every hour of my life in pondering it.' Or suppose someone came forward of whom the accuser had to say, 'He has persecuted the Christians', and the accused replied, 'Yes, I admit it; Christianity has set my soul aflame, and I have wanted nothing else than to root it from the earth, precisely because I perceived its tremendous power.' Or suppose there came someone of whom the accuser had to say, 'He has renounced Christianity', and the accused replied: 'Yes, it is true, for I saw that Christianity was so great a power that if I gave it one finger, it would take all of me and I could not belong to it wholly.' But now suppose that, finally, a snappy *privat-docent* came along, with quick and busy step, and spoke as follows: 'I am not like those three;⁵³ I have not only believed but gone so far as to explain Christianity, shown that what the Apostles propounded and was appropriated in the first centuries is only true to a certain degree, and shown on the other hand how, in the speculative understanding, it is the true truth, for which reason I must beg a suitable remuneration for my services to Christianity.' Which of these four positions would be the most terrible? It is after all possible that Christianity is the truth. Suppose that its ungrateful children want it declared legally incompetent and placed under speculation's guardianship; suppose that Christianity, like that Greek poet whose children also demanded their aged parent be declared legally incompetent, but who, to show that he was still in possession of his faculties, astonished the judges and the people by writing one of his most beautiful tragedies;⁵⁴

⁵³ Cf. Luke 18:11.

⁵⁴ The tragedian Sophocles is said (by Cicero) in his old age to have read *Oedipus at Colonus* to the jury, which then acquitted him of the charge of senility brought by his sons.

suppose it thus rose to its feet rejuvenated: no one's position would be as embarrassing as that of the *privat-docents*. I do not deny there is something grand about standing so high above Christianity. I do not deny that it is comfortable to be a Christian yet exempted from that martyrdom that always remains even if no persecution visits from without, even if a Christian remained unnoticed as though never having lived at all, that martyrdom of believing against the understanding, the deadly peril of lying upon the 70,000 fathoms, only there to find God.

Look at that wader, he is feeling his way forward with his foot so as not to come out of his depth; and similarly with his understanding, the sensible person feels his way forward with probability and where probability turns up trumps finds God, and thanks him on the great festivals of probability once he has got a really good job, with probability besides of early advancement, and when he has acquired a girl both pretty and amusing as his wife, and even Councillor of War Marcussen⁵⁵ says it will be a happy marriage, that the young woman has the sort of beauty that will in all probability last, and is so built as in all probability to give birth to strong and healthy children. To believe against the understanding is something else, and to believe with the understanding cannot be done at all, because the one who believes with the understanding talks only of job and wife and fields and oxen and the like, which are not at all the object of faith, since faith *always* thanks God, is *always* in deadly peril in that collision of finite and infinite which is a mortal danger precisely for one who is composed of both. So little precious, therefore, is the probable to the believer that he fears it most of all, since with it he knows very well that he is beginning to lose his faith. Faith, you see, has two tasks: first to look out for and at every instant discover the improbability, the paradox, so as *then*⁵⁶ to keep hold of it with the passion of inwardness. Ordinarily, the improbable, the paradox is conceived as something to which faith relates only passively; it must content itself for the time being with this relationship, but little by little things will no doubt improve, as indeed is even probable. Ah, what wonderful confusion-mongering in speaking of faith! One's faith is to begin by reliance upon the probability of things becoming better. In this way one manages to smuggle in probability and prevent oneself from believing; in this way it is easy to understand that the fruit of having believed over a longer period is that one stops believing, rather

⁵⁵ A fictitious name. ⁵⁶ Emphasis added.

than, as one might suppose, the fruit being that one believed more inwardly. No, faith relates self-actively to the improbable and the paradox, relates self-actively in discovering it and every instant holding it fast – in order to be able to believe. To stay with the improbable requires all the passion of the infinite and the concentration of the latter; for the improbable and the paradox are not to be reached by an understanding's quantifying of the increasing difficulty. Where the understanding despairs, faith is already present to make the despair properly decisive, so that the movement of faith is not a transaction within the bargaining compass of the understanding. But to believe against the understanding, that is a martyrdom; to begin having the understanding on one's side a little is temptation and regression. This martyrdom is something from which the speculator is exempt. That he has to study, and especially that he has to read many of the modern books, is I admit burdensome, but the martyrdom of faith is something else.

What I shrink from, then, more than death and losing what I treasure most, is to say of Christianity that it is true to a certain degree. If I lived to be seventy, if I shortened the night's sleep year by year and increased the day's work, pondering over Christianity, what a trifle is such a little period of study if intended to justify me in judging so grandly of Christianity! Being embittered towards Christianity after a casual acquaintance with it, declaring it to be untruth, that would be far more pardonable, much more human. Yet this grand attitude seems to me to be the true perdition that makes every saving relationship impossible – and, after all, it is indeed possible that Christianity is the truth.

This almost sounds serious. If I were now to declare loudly that I had come into the world in order, and been called upon, to oppose speculation, that this was my judgmental deed, while my prophetic deed was to divine the coming of a matchless future, for which reason, due to my loudness and being called upon, people might safely depend on what I said, then there would no doubt be many who, rather than taking the whole thing to be a reminiscing fantasy in the head of a fool, took it seriously. But I can say nothing of this kind about myself. The resolution with which I began should rather be considered a thought that struck me; and in any case it is as far as could be from the case that any call was issued to me. On the contrary, the call, if you will, that I followed was issued not to me but to another. Even if a call was issued to him, in following it I myself, however, am without any call.

What happened is quite simple. It was four years ago, on a Sunday – yes, maybe no one will believe me, because, yes, once again it is a Sunday. But still it is quite certain that it was a Sunday, about two months after the one mentioned earlier.⁵⁷ It was late in the day, towards evening. Evening's leave-taking of the day, and of the one who has lived that day, is a speech in riddle. Its reminder is like the solicitous mother's admonition to the child to be home in good time. But its invitation, even if the leave-taking is innocent in being thus misunderstood, is an inexplicable beckoning, as though repose were to be found only by staying out for the nocturnal tryst, not with a woman but, womanlike, with the infinite, persuaded by the night's breeze as in a monotone it repeats itself, breathing through forest and meadow, and sighing as though in search of something, urged by the distant echo in oneself of the stillness as if intimating something, urged by the sublime calm of the heavens, as if this something had been found, persuaded by the palpable silence of the dew as if this were the explanation and infinitude's refreshment, like the fecundity of a quiet night, only half understood like the night's semi-diaphanous mist.

Contrary to my usual practice, I had gone out to that garden called the garden of the dead, where the visitor's leave-taking is again made doubly difficult since it is meaningless to say 'just one more time', because the last time is already past, and there is no reason to stop taking leave when the beginning is made after the last time has passed. Most people had already gone home, just an individual vanishing among the trees, not happy to meet and avoiding contact since he sought the dead and not the living. And there is always in this garden, among the visitors, a beautiful understanding that one does not come out here to see and be seen, the one visitor avoids the other. Nor does one need company, least of all that of a talkative friend, here where all is eloquence, where the dead greets one with the brief word placed on his grave, not like a clergyman who gives sermons on that word far and wide, but as a silent man does who says no more than this, yet says it with a passion as though the dead would burst open the tomb – or is it not strange to have on his grave 'We shall meet again' and to remain down there? And yet what inwardness in the word just because of the contradiction; for that the man who comes tomorrow says 'We shall meet again' doesn't shake you. To have everything against you, to have no direct expression of your inwardness, none, and yet to

⁵⁷ See p. 155.

stand by your word: that is true inwardness. And inwardness untrue to the same degree as the outward expression, in countenance and mien, in words and assurances, is there, ready to hand for instant use, not exactly because the expression itself is untrue, but because the untruth is that the inwardness was just one element. The dead man remains quite still while time goes by; on the renowned warrior's grave they have laid his sword, and impudence has torn to pieces the palings surrounding it, but the warrior has not risen, has not seized his sword to defend himself and his resting-place; he does not gesticulate, he gives no assurances, he does not flare up in momentary inwardness. Silent as the grave and still as death, he preserves his inwardness and stands by his word. Praise be to the one living who outwardly relates as a dead man to his inwardness, and just for that reason preserves it, not as an instant's excitement and a woman's infatuation, but as the eternal which has been won through death. Such a one is a man. For it is not unlovely that a woman gushes over in momentary inwardness, nor is it unlovely for her soon to forget it again. But the one corresponds to the other and both to the feminine, and to the everyday understanding of inwardness.

Weary from walking, I sat down on a bench, an awed witness to how that proud ruler, now for thousands of years the hero of the day, and to be so until the last, to how the sun in its brilliant departure cast a transfiguring glow over the whole surroundings, while my eye gazed beyond the wall encircling the garden into that eternal symbol of eternity, the infinite horizon. What sleep is for the body, such rest is for the soul, that it can breathe properly out. That very moment I discovered to my surprise that the trees which hid me from the eyes of others had hidden others from mine, for I heard a voice right beside me. It has always stung my shame to witness another person's expression of feeling when he abandons himself to it as one does only in the belief that one is unobserved; for there is an inwardness of emotion which is befittingly hidden and only revealed to God, just as a woman's beauty would be concealed from all and revealed only to the beloved – so I decided to withdraw.

But the first words I heard gripped me strongly, and fearing the noise of my departure might be more disturbing than if I stayed quietly sitting, I chose the latter course and became witness to a situation which, however solemn, suffered no violation from my presence. Through the leaves I saw there were two: an elderly man with chalk-white hair and a child, a boy of about ten. Both were in mourning and sat by a freshly dug grave, from

which it was easy to conclude that it was a recent loss that occupied them. In the transfiguring glow of the evening the old man's dignified figure assumed even more solemnity, and his voice, calm yet emotional, enunciated the words distinctly, also in the inwardness they had for the speaker, who once in a while paused, his voice choked with weeping, or the mood coming to a halt in a sigh. For mood is like the Niger in Africa: no one knows its source, no one knows its outlet, only its length is known!

From the conversation I learned that the little boy was the old man's grandson, and the person whose grave they were visiting was that of the boy's father. In all probability the rest of the family was already extinct, since no one was mentioned, something which I also confirmed upon a later visit, when I read the name on the slab and the names of the many dead. The old man talked with the child about now having no father, no one to cling to except an old man who was too old for him and who himself longed to leave the world, but that there was a God in heaven after whom all fatherliness in heaven and on earth is called, and that there was one name in which there was salvation, the name of Jesus Christ.⁵⁸ He paused for a moment and then said, half-aloud to himself, 'that this solace should become my dismay, that he, my son, who now lies buried in the grave, could escape it! To what end all my hope, to what end all my care, to what end all his wisdom, now that his death in the midst of his error is to make a believer's soul uncertain of his salvation, bring my grey hairs in sorrow to the grave,⁵⁹ make a believer leave the world in alarm, make an old man hurry like a doubter after a certainty and look about him despondently for the one left behind.'

Then he spoke to the child again, about there being a wisdom which would fly beyond faith, that on the other side of faith there was a wide expanse like the blue mountains, a seeming mainland which to the mortal eye might look like a certainty higher than faith, but that the believer feared this mirage as the master mariner fears the like, that it was a show of eternity in which a mortal cannot live, but in which, if he gazes into it, he loses his faith. He fell silent again and then said to himself, half aloud, 'that he, my unhappy son, should have let himself be deceived! To what end, then, all his learning, that he could not make himself understood even to me, that I could not speak to him of his error, because for me it was too elevated!' Then he rose and led the child to the grave, and with a voice

⁵⁸ Ephesians 3:15; Acts 4:12. ⁵⁹ Genesis 42:38.

whose effect on me I shall never forget, he said: 'Poor boy, you are only a child, and yet you will soon be alone in the world! Do you promise me by the memory of your dead father, who if he could speak to you now would say the same, and speaks with my voice; do you promise by the sight of my old age and my grey hairs; do you promise by the solemnity of this hallowed ground, by that God whose name I trust you have learned to call upon, by the name of Jesus Christ, in whom alone there is salvation; do you promise me that you will hold fast to this faith in life and in death, that you will not let yourself be deceived by any phantasm, in whatever way the face of the world changes – do you promise me this?' Overcome by the impression, the little one threw himself on his knees, but the old man raised him up and pressed him to his breast.

I owe truth the confession that this is the most affecting scene I have ever witnessed. What moved me most of all was something that might incline this or that person for a moment to think it all a fiction, that an old man speaks in this way to a child, the unhappy old man who was now alone in the world with a child and with no one but a child to talk to of his concern; and only one to save, a child, yet unable to take for granted the maturity to understand, though not daring to wait for the advent of maturity since he himself is an old man. It is pleasing to be elderly, delightful for the old man to see the new generation grow up about him, a happy calculation to be adding to the sum each time the number increases. But if it falls to his lot to recalculate, to have to subtract instead of add each time death takes its toll – until quits are called and the old man is left to provide the quittance – what then weighs as heavily as being an old man! Just as need can force a person to extremes, so too it seemed to me that the old man's suffering found its strongest expression in what, poetically, might be called an improbability: that an old man have in a child his only confidant, and that the child is one of whom a sacred promise, an oath, is required.

Although a mere spectator and witness, I was deeply gripped. At one moment I seemed myself to be the young man whom the father had buried with dismay; the next, I seemed to be the child who was bound by the sacred promise. I felt no impulse, however, to rush forward in order to bear emotional witness to the old man of my sympathy, assuring him with tears and tremulous voice that I should never forget this scene, or even begging him to put me, too, under oath; since only the over-hasty, barren clouds and scudding rain showers are more precipitate than

oath-taking.⁶⁰ The fact is that, not being able to keep it, they have to be taking it all the time. For my part, ‘wanting never to forget this impression’ differs from saying once in a solemn while, ‘I shall never forget it.’ The first is inwardness, the second perhaps only momentary inwardness. And should one not forget, the solemnity with which it was said seems less important when the continuing solemnity with which one keeps oneself from forgetting it day by day is a truer solemnity. The womanish is always dangerous. A tender squeeze of the hand, a passionate embrace, a tear in the eye, are after all not quite the same as resolution’s quiet dedication; and inwardness of the spirit is always like a stranger and foreigner in the body – so why gesticulations? Shakespeare’s Brutus speaks so truly when the conspirators would bind themselves to their enterprise by an oath: ‘No, not an oath . . . let priests and cowards and tricksters, marrowless old men and crushed souls swear . . . but do not weaken the quiet strength of our purpose, our inner indomitable fire, by thinking that our cause, our performance, is in need of any oath.’⁶¹ The momentary outpouring of inwardness most often leaves behind a lethargy that is dangerous. Moreover, a simple observation has taught me caution in yet another way in making oaths and promises: that true inwardness is even compelled to express itself in the opposite. There is nothing that hasty and easily excitable souls are more prone to than demanding a sacred promise, since the inner weakness needs the strong stimulus of the moment. To have to make a sacred pledge to such a person is a very suspect thing, and it is far better to prevent the solemn episode from taking place while still binding oneself by a little *reservatio mentalis*,⁶² providing there is any justification at all for giving the pledge. This is to the other’s advantage, prevents a profanation of the holy, and frees him from being bound by an oath that it would end with him breaking anyway. So if Brutus, on consideration of the fact that the conspirators were almost without exception men of mercurial minds, and therefore over-hasty in making oaths and giving and taking sacred pledges, had spurned them, had for that reason prevented the pledge, while he, seeing the cause to be a just one, and also some justice in their turning to him, had secretly dedicated himself – then it seems to me his inwardness would have been still greater. As it is, there

⁶⁰ A play on ‘overlede’ (over-hasty), ‘linger’ (driving showers) and ‘ilsom’ (precipitate).

⁶¹ Here translated from the Danish translation of a German translation of Act II, Scene I, of *Julius Caesar*.

⁶² Latin: mental reservation.

is bit of bluster in him, and though there is truth in what he says, there is nevertheless some untruth in his saying it to the conspirators without really making it clear who he is speaking to.

Then I, too, went home. Really, I had understood the old gentleman right away, for my studies had in many ways led me to discern a dubious relation between a modern Christian speculation and Christianity. But it had not occupied me in any decisive way. Now the matter acquired its significance. The venerable old man with his faith seemed to me an absolutely justified individuality whom existence had wronged through modern speculation putting faith's property title in doubt, like a monetary reform. The venerable old man's sorrow over losing his son, not just in death but, as he understood it, still more terribly through speculation, moved me profoundly, while the contradiction in his position, that he was unable even to explain how the enemy force operated, became for me the decisive summons to come on a definite track. The whole thing appealed to me like an intricate criminal case in which the very complex circumstances made pursuit of the truth difficult. This was something for me. And I thought as follows: You are after all tired of life's diversions, you are tired of girls that you love only in passing, you must have something that fully occupies your time. Here it is. Find out where the misunderstanding between speculation and Christianity lies. This, then, was my resolve. I have indeed never spoken about it to any one, and I am certain that my landlady has detected no change in me, either that evening or the day after.

'But,' I said to myself, 'since you are not a genius, and have in no way any mission finally to bring all humankind into a state of bliss, nor have promised anything to anyone, you can take the matter *con amore* and go ahead altogether *methodice*⁶³ as if a poet and a dialectician were following your every step, now that you have acquired a more specific understanding of your own bright idea that you must try to make something difficult.' My studies, which had already in a sense led me to my goal, were now put in more definite order; but whenever I was tempted to transform my deliberations into erudite learning, the venerable figure of the old man hovered before my mind. Mainly, however, I tried through my own reflection to track down the misunderstanding. I have no need to recount my many failures, but in the end it became clear to me that the deviation of speculation, and the presumed right based on it to reduce faith to a

⁶³ Italian: lovingly ... Latin: methodically.

factor,⁶⁴ might not be anything accidental, that it might lie much more deeply in the whole tendency of the age – might indeed lie in the fact that, in all this knowledge, one has forgotten what it is to **exist** and what **inwardness** means.

When I had grasped this, it also became clear to me that, if I wanted to communicate anything on this point, the main thing was that my exposition be in the *indirect* form. For if inwardness is the truth, result is only junk that we should not trouble one another with, and wanting to impart the result an unnatural form of interpersonal association, in so far as every human being is spirit and truth is precisely the self-activity of appropriation, which a result hinders. Suppose a teacher in relation to the essential truth (for otherwise a direct relationship between teacher and pupil is quite in order) has, as one says, much inwardness and would preach his teaching day in and day out. If he assumes a direct relation between the learner and himself, his inwardness is not inwardness but a direct out-pouring, for it is a respect for the learner precisely as one having inwardness in himself that is the teacher's inwardness. Suppose a learner is enthusiastic and in the strongest terms preaches his teacher's praises abroad, thus, as one says, laying bare his inwardness. His inwardness is not inwardness but immediate devotedness, for it is precisely the pious and silent accord by which the learner by himself assimilates what is taught, distancing himself from the teacher because he turns inwards to himself, that is the inwardness. Pathos is no doubt inwardness, but it is immediate inwardness and is therefore publicized; but pathos in oppositional form is inwardness, it remains with the imparter even when expressed, and it cannot be appropriated directly except through the other's *self*-activity: and the oppositional form is precisely the gauge of the inwardness's strength. The more complete the oppositional form, the greater the inwardness; and the less it is present, to the point of the communication being direct, the less inwardness. For an enthusiastic genius wanting to bring blessedness to all people and lead them to truth, it can be hard enough to learn in this way to restrain himself and to grasp the NB of reduplication, because the truth is not like a circular on which signatures are collected, but in the *valore intrinseco*⁶⁵ of inwardness. This understanding comes more naturally to no-goods and the dissolute. As soon as truth, the essential truth, can be assumed known by everyone,

⁶⁴ Danish 'Moment', in the sense of a contributory factor. ⁶⁵ Latin: intrinsic value.

appropriation and inwardness are what must be worked for and can only be accomplished here in indirect form. The position of an apostle differs, for he must preach an unknown truth, for which reason a direct form of communication can always have a provisional validity.

Strange that with such loud insistence on the positive, and on the direct imparting of results, it occurs to no one to complain about God, who, as the eternal spirit and source of those spirits that are derived, would seem able, in imparting truth, to relate to the derived spirit directly, in a sense quite different from that where the relation is between spirits who, viewed *essentially*, are equals in their common derivation from God. For no anonymous author is able to hide himself more cunningly, no maieutic artist able to avoid the direct relation more painstakingly than God. He is in creation, in it everywhere, but he is not there directly, and only when the single individual turns inwards into himself (hence only in the inwardness of self-activity) does he become attentive to and capable of seeing God. The direct relation to God is precisely paganism, and only after the break has occurred can there be any talk of a true God-relationship. But this very break is the first act of inwardness in line with the definition of truth as inwardness. Nature is the work of God, certainly, but only the work is directly present, not God. Is this not, as far as the individual is concerned, behaving like a deceitful author who nowhere sets out his result in large type, or offers it beforehand in a preface? And why is God deceitful? Just because he is truth, and wants, by being that, to keep the person from untruth. The observer does not slip into the result directly but must be at pains to find it by himself, and thereby break the direct relation. But this very break is the breakthrough of inwardness, an act of self-activity, the first determination of truth as inwardness. Or is it the case that God is not so unnoticeable, not so secretly present in his works that someone could very well live on, get married, be respected and well regarded as husband, father, and popinjay⁶⁶ champion, without discovering God in his works, and without ever receiving any impression of the infinitude of the ethical, because, helping himself with an analogy to the speculative confusion of the ethical with the world-historical, he got by through resorting to the customs and traditions prevailing in the city where he lived? As a mother admonishes her child about to attend a party, 'Be sure now to behave yourself, and do as

⁶⁶ From the Middle Ages a figure of a parrot fixed on a pole as a target for shooting.

you see the other well-behaved children do', so could he, too, live and behave as he saw others behave. He would never be the first to do anything, and he would never have an opinion without first knowing that others had it; for precisely this 'the others' would be for him the first. On out-of-the-way occasions he would behave like someone who, on being served some course at a banquet, did not know how it should be eaten; he would look around him until he saw how others did it, etc. Such a person might know a great deal, perhaps even know the system by heart; he might live in a Christian country, know that he must bow his head whenever God's name was mentioned, perhaps he also saw God in nature when in the company of other men who saw God; in short, he could be a congenial party-goer – and yet he would have been deceived by the direct relation to the truth, to the ethical, to God. If one were to portray such a man experimentally, he would be a satire on being human. Properly it is the God-relationship that makes a human into a human being, but he lacked this. Yet no one would hesitate to regard him as in fact human (for you cannot see the absence of inwardness directly), regardless that he was more like a marionette figure very deceptively imitating everything outwardly human – even having children by his wife. At the end of his life, one would then have to say that one thing had escaped him: he had not been alive to God. No doubt he would have been had God allowed a direct relationship. If, for example, God took on the form of a rare, enormously large green bird with a red beak, perched on a tree on the city wall, and perhaps even whistling in a hitherto unheard-of way, then the party-goer would doubtless have his eyes opened; for the first time in his life he would have been able to be the first. All paganism consists in this, that God relates to man directly, as the striking to the struck. But the spiritual relationship to God in truth, i.e., inwardness, is first made possible precisely by the breakthrough of inwardness that corresponds to the divine artfulness that God has nothing, absolutely nothing about him that is striking; indeed, far from being conspicuous, he is invisible, so that one would never dream he was there, although his invisibility is in turn his omnipresence. An omnipresent person, however, is one that you see everywhere, such as a policeman – how deceitful, then, that an omnipresent being should be recognizable precisely by being invisible,^h by this and this alone, since his visibility would neutralize his omnipresence. This

^h To point out how rhetoric can delude, I shall show here how an effect could be produced on a listener rhetorically in spite of what was said being a dialectical step backwards. Suppose a pagan

relation between omnipresence and invisibility is like that between secrecy and revelation, the secrecy signifying that the revelation is revelation in that stricter sense in which the secrecy is all that it can be known by, for otherwise a revelation would be something like the omnipresence of a policeman.

If God wants to reveal himself in human form and grant a direct relation by, for instance, assuming the form of a man twelve feet tall, then our experimental party-goer and popinjay champion will be sure to notice. But, when God does not want to deceive, the fact that there is nothing at all remarkable about his form is just what the spiritual relation in truth requires, so that the party-goer has to say, There is not the slightest thing to see. If there is nothing at all remarkable about the god, perhaps the party-goer is deceived by not coming to notice at all. But this is not the god's fault, and the fact of deception is at the same time the constant possibility of the truth. But if the god does have something remarkable about him, then he deceives through the person's attention being drawn to untruth, and this attention is at the same time the impossibility of truth.

In paganism the direct relation is idolatry; in Christianity everyone knows that God cannot show himself in this way. But this knowledge is by no means inwardness, and in Christianity it may well happen to a know-it-all-by-heart that he becomes utterly 'without God in the world',⁶⁷ as was not the case in paganism, for at least there was the untrue relation of idolatry. And idolatry is no doubt a sorry substitute. But that the rubric 'God' be deleted altogether is even worse.

So not even God relates directly to the derived spirit (and this is the marvel of creation, not producing something that is nothing in the presence of the Creator, but producing something that is something and which, in the true worship of God, can make use of this something to become by itself nothing before God), even less that the one human being can relate to another in this way in *truth*. Nature, the totality of creation, is God's work. And yet God is not there, but within the individual human being there is a possibility (according to his possibility

religious orator says that here on earth the god's temple is in fact empty; but (and now begins the rhetorical) in heaven, where everything is more perfect, where water is air, and air is ether, there are also temples and shrines for the gods, with the difference that the gods actually dwell in these temples – it is a dialectical step backwards that the god actually dwells in the temple, because his not doing so is a way of expressing the spiritual relation to the invisible. But it produces this effect rhetorically. I have had in mind, incidentally, a particular passage by a Greek author, who I shall nevertheless not quote [Plato, *Phaido* 111a f.].

⁶⁷ Ephesians 2:12.

he is spirit) that is awakened in inwardness into a God-relationship, and then it is possible to see God everywhere. The palpable distinction of the great, the astonishing, a southern nation's most vociferous superlatives, these constitute a regression to idolatry compared to the spiritual relationship of inwardness. Is this not just as if an author wrote 166 folio volumes and a reader went on reading and reading, just as people keep on looking and looking at nature, but did not discover that the meaning of this tremendous work lay in the reader himself; because, amazement over the many volumes and the number of lines to a page, which is just like amazement at the vastness of nature and at the countless species of animal life, is after all not understanding.

With respect to the essential truth a direct relation between spirit and spirit is unthinkable. To assume such a relation implies that one of the parties has ceased to be spirit, something many a genius does not bear in mind when helping people into the truth *en masse* and is good-natured enough to think that applause, willingness to listen, the affixing of signatures etc. is acceptance of the truth. Just as important as the truth, and the more important of the two, is the manner in which the truth is accepted, and it would help only very little if one got millions to accept the truth if they were translated by their very manner of acceptance into untruth. And therefore all kindness, all persuasion, all bargaining, all direct appeal by way of one's person, how much one suffers for the cause, how one weeps over humankind, how enthusiastic one is, etc. – all such are a misunderstanding, a faking in relation to the truth, whereby one assists a bunch of people as best as one can to acquire a show of truth.

Think! Socrates was a teacher in the ethical, but he took note of the fact that there is no direct relation between the teacher and the learner, because inwardness is truth, and because inwardness in the two is precisely the path away from each other. It was presumably because he saw this that he was so happy about his favourable appearance. What was that? Yes, just guess! Today we indeed say of a clergyman that he has a really favourable appearance, we find that satisfactory, we understand him to be a handsome man, with a clerical gown that becomes him and a resonant voice, and a figure that must delight every tailor – but what am I saying? – I mean, every listener. Ah, yes, when endowed thus by nature and dressed thus by the tailor, one can certainly be a teacher of religion, even successfully; for circumstances differ greatly with teachers of religion, yes, more so than one thinks when hearing complaints about some livings being so

great, others very small; the difference is even greater, some teachers of religion are crucified – yet the religion is quite the same. And the reduplicated repetition of the teaching's content, in how the teacher's life and person are conceived, is something people care little about. Orthodox doctrine is expounded and the teacher is decked out in pagan-aesthetic categories. Christ is presented in expressions from the Bible. That he bore the sins of all the world will not properly move the congregation, yet the speaker preaches it, and to strengthen the contrast he describes Christ's beauty (the contrast between innocence and sin not being strong enough), and the believing congregation is stirred by this altogether pagan account of the god in human form: beauty.

But back to Socrates. His appearance was not as favourable as the one described; he was very ugly, had clumsy feet, and above all a number of bumps on the forehead and elsewhere, which must have been enough to convince anyone that he was a bad character. Yes, this was what Socrates understood by his favourable appearance, and about which he was so jubilant that he would have considered it chicanery on the part of the god to prevent him from becoming a teacher of morals by being given the pleasant appearance of an affectionate cithara player, the seductive glance of a *Schäfer*,⁶⁸ the small feet of a dance director in the Friendly Society,⁶⁹ and *in toto*⁷⁰ an appearance as advantageous as any job-seeker advertising in *Adresseavisen*,⁷¹ or theological graduate pinning his hopes on a private call, can wish for himself. I wonder, now, why that old teacher was so happy over his favourable appearance, if it wasn't because he realized that it must help to put the learner at a distance, so that the latter was not caught up in a direct relation to the teacher, perhaps admiring him, perhaps having his clothes cut in the same manner, but might understand, through the repulsion of the contrast, which in a higher sphere was in turn his irony, that it is with himself that the learner has essentially to do, and that the inwardness of truth is not that comradely inwardness with which two bosom friends walk arm in arm, but the separation with which each for himself is existing in what is true.

This, then, was something I was quite clear about in my own mind, that every direct communication regarding truth as inwardness is a misunderstanding, even though it can differ in relation to what occasions it, be it a popular bias, a vague sympathy, a secret vanity, stupidity, brashness, and

⁶⁸ Shepherd lad. ⁶⁹ Established in the 1840s for social activities during the winter.

⁷⁰ Latin: altogether. ⁷¹ See p. 66 n. 3.

other things. But having made the form of communication clear to myself, it did not follow that I had anything to communicate, although it was quite in order that the form should become clear to me first, because the form is indeed the inwardness.

My main thought was that in our time, due to the quantity of knowledge, one has forgotten what it is to *exist* and what *inwardness* means, and that the misunderstanding between speculation and Christianity might be explained by this. I now resolved to go back as far as possible, so as not to arrive too soon at the religious mode of existence, to say nothing of the specifically Christian mode, thus leaving unanswered questions behind me. If one had forgotten what it is to exist religiously, no doubt one had also forgotten what it is to exist humanly; and so this must be brought out. But above all it must not be done didactically, for then the misunderstanding would instantly capitalize on the attempt at explanation by making a new misunderstanding, as if existing consisted in getting to know something about this or that. If this is imparted as a piece of knowledge, the recipient is led to the misapprehension that he is getting something to know, and then we are back in knowledge.

Only someone with a notion of the tenacity with which a misunderstanding assimilates even the most strenuous attempt at explanation and remains the same misunderstanding, will appreciate the difficulties of an authorship whose every word must be watched and every sentence undergo double reflection. All one achieves by adopting a direct form of communication in matters of existence and inwardness is to have the speculator benevolently take care of it and slip one in along with it. The system is hospitable! Just as, without regard to compatibility, a bourgeois philistine taking an excursion to the woods invites Tom, Dick and Harry along because there is plenty of room in the four-seated Holstein carriage, the system, too, is hospitable – indeed there is plenty of room. I will not hide the fact that I admire Hamann,⁷² though freely admitting that the pliancy of his thought lacks proportion and that his extraordinary vitality lacks the self-control needed for working in a coherent way. But his aphorisms have the originality of genius, and the pregnancy of the form is entirely suited to the casual throwing off of a thought. Life and soul, and to the last drop of his blood, he is captured in a single phrase: a highly gifted genius's passionate protest against a system of existence. But the

⁷² J. G. Hamann (1730–88), German writer and philosopher. See the translator's introduction.

system is hospitable; poor Hamann!, you have been reduced by Michelet to a §.⁷³ Whether some stone marks your grave I do not know; whether it is now trodden under I do not know; but this I do know, that with the devil's might and main you have been pressed into the §-uniform and stuck into the ranks. I do not deny that Jacobi⁷⁴ has often inspired me, although I am well aware that his dialectical skill is not in proportion to his noble enthusiasm, but in his eloquence he is a noble, genuine, lovable, richly gifted protest of the spirit against the systematic constricting of existence, a triumphant consciousness of, and an inspired struggle for, existence being longer and deeper than the couple of years one spends forgetting oneself in order to study the system. Poor Jacobi! Whether anyone visits your grave I do not know, but I know that the §-plough upturns all your eloquence, all your inwardness, while a few scant words are registered as what you amount to in the system. There it is said of him that he represents feeling with enthusiasm; such a reference makes game of both feeling and enthusiasm, whose secret is precisely that they cannot be reported at second hand, and therefore cannot in so comfortable a manner, like a result, make a paterfamilias happy through a *satisfactio vicaria*.⁷⁵

So I resolved then to begin, and, in order to start from the ground, the first thing I wanted to do was *to let the existence-relation between the aesthetic and the ethical come about in an existing individuality*. The task was set, and I foresaw that the work would be protracted enough, and above all that I would have to be prepared at times to lie quiet, when the spirit refused to support me with pathos. But what happened then I shall tell in an appendix to this chapter.

Appendix

Glance at a contemporary effort in Danish literature

What happens? There I sit and out comes *Either/Or*. It did exactly what I had wanted. The thought of my solemn resolve made me quite wretched. But then I thought again: you haven't promised anyone anything, and seeing it is done anyway, all is well. But matters got worse; step by step, as I was on the point of implementing my plan, out came a pseudonymous book which did as I had wanted. There was something curiously ironical

⁷³ The German Hegelian, C. L. Michelet (1801–93) (see p. 99 n. 74) was the first in print to accord Hamann a place in recent philosophy.

⁷⁴ See Part Two, Section one, Ch. 2 above, pp. 84–9. ⁷⁵ Latin: vicarious satisfaction.

in it all. It was just as well I had never talked to anyone of my decision, and that not even my landlady had seen any sign of it in me. For otherwise people would have laughed at my comic situation, for it is certainly amusing that the cause I had chosen to take up prospered though not through me. And that it indeed prospered was something I was persuaded of from the fact that whenever I read one such pseudonymous work, what I had wanted became clearer. I became in this way a tragicomically interested witness of the productions of V. Eremita and other pseudonyms. Of course, being only a reader, whether my understanding is the authors' I cannot know for sure. On the other hand, I am glad that the pseudonyms themselves, presumably aware of the relation of indirect communication to truth as inwardness, have said nothing, nor misused a preface to take an official position on the production, as if an author were in a purely legal sense the best interpreter of his own words; as if it could help a reader that an author 'intended this and that' when the intention has not been realized; or as if it were certain that it had been realized because the author himself says so in the preface; or as if the existence-deviation were corrected by being brought to a final decision, such as insanity, suicide, and the like, as with women authors especially, and so speedily that they almost begin with it; or as if an author were served by a reader who, owing just to the author's own clumsiness, knew for certain all about the book.

Either/Or, whose very title is suggestive, has the existence-relation between the aesthetic and the ethical come about in existing individuality. This to me is the book's indirect polemic against speculation, which is indifferent to existence. That there is no result and no finite decision is an indirect expression of truth as inwardness, and so perhaps a polemic against truth as knowledge. The preface itself says something about that but not didactically, for then I would be able to know something with certainty, but in the light-hearted form of jest and hypothesis. The fact that there is no author is a vehicle for distancing.

The first of the diapsalmata (Part I, p. 3)⁷⁶ posits a rift in existence as the pain of a poet-existence, as this might have persisted in a poet-existence, which B uses against A (Part II, p. 217, below).⁷⁷ The last sentence in the whole work (Part II, p. 368)⁷⁸ reads as follows: Only the truth that *edifies* is truth *for you*. This is an essential predicate in relation to truth as inwardness, whereby its decisive feature as edifying '*for you*', i.e.,

⁷⁶ SKS 2, p. 27. ⁷⁷ SKS 3, p. 202. ⁷⁸ SKS 3, p. 332.

for the subject, is that in which it differs essentially from all objective knowledge, in that the subjectivity itself becomes the mark of the truth.

Part I is an existence-possibility that cannot gain existence, a melancholy⁷⁹ that is to be worked up ethically. Melancholy is its essential character and so deep that, although autopathic, it deceptively occupies itself with the sufferings of others ('Shadowgraphs') and otherwise deceives, under cover of desire, good sense, corruption. But the deception and the concealment are at once its strength and its impotence, its strength in imagination and its impotence in respect of gaining existence. It is fantasy-existence in aesthetic passion, paradoxical, therefore, and running aground on time. At its maximum it is despair, and therefore it is not existence, but an existence-possibility in the direction of existence, and brought so close to it that one almost has a sense of every moment being wasted in which a decision has not yet been reached. But the existence-possibility in the existing A will not become aware of this, and it holds existence off with the most subtle of all deceptions, thinking. He has thought everything possible and yet not existed at all. This means that only the diapsalmata are purely poetical outpourings, while the rest is rich in thought-content, which can easily deceive, as if to have thought about something were identical with existing. If a poet had planned the work, he would scarcely have thought of doing this and might have brought out the old misunderstanding once again. For the relation is not to be between immature and mature thinking, but between not existing and existing. As a thinker, then, A is advanced, and as a dialectician far superior to B. He has received all the seductive gifts of understanding and intellect. This makes it clearer how B differs from him.

Part II is an ethical individuality existing on the strength of the ethical. It is also Part II that brings out the first part, since A would again grasp that authorship was a possibility, actually carry it out – and then let it lie. The ethicist *has despaired* (see Part II, pp. 163–227⁸⁰ – Part I *was* despair); in the despair he has *chosen himself* (pp. 230ff.).⁸¹ Through this choice he *reveals himself* (cf. Part II, pp. 336:⁸² 'the expression that brings out sharply the difference between the ethical and the aesthetic' is: 'It is every human being's duty to become

⁷⁹ 'Tungsind', as German *Schwermut*: a heaviness of spirit. Eighteenth-century Romantic (especially French and German) literature presents it as a poetic state of pensive sadness sometimes called 'spleen'. The term 'melancholy' is preferred here, since 'spleen' and 'splenetic' have acquired other senses in English.

⁸⁰ SKS 3, pp. 155–210. ⁸¹ SKS 3, pp. 220ff. ⁸² SKS 3, p. 304.

revealed.' – Part I was concealment). He is a married man (A was familiar with every possibility within the erotic range yet so far not actually in love, for then he would, in a way, already have been about to consolidate himself) and, as a direct opposite to the concealment of the aesthetic, concentrates himself on marriage as the deepest form of life's revelation, through which *time* is turned to account for the ethically existing individual, and the possibility of *gaining a history* is continuity's ethical victory over concealment, melancholy, illusory passion, and despair. So, through illusory shapes formed by magic lanterns, through the distractions of an exuberant thought-content, whose execution, if good for anything, is entirely to the credit of the author, we win through to a quite individual human being who is existing on the strength of the ethical. This is the change of scene; or rather, now the stage is set. Instead of a world of possibility, fired by imagination and organized dialectically, we have an individual. An individual has come about – and only the truth that edifies is truth for you; that is, the truth is inwardness, the inwardness of existence, please note, defined here as ethical.

So this dust-up is over. The merit of the book if any is not my concern. If it has some, this will consist essentially in its not providing a result but transforming everything into inwardness: imaginative inwardness in the first part eliciting the possibilities with intensified passion, and transforming everything with dialectic into nothing in despair; in the second part an ethical pathos, with a quiet, incorruptible, and yet infinite passion of resolve, to embrace the modest ethical task, edified and thereby revealed before God and men.

There is no lecturing but that does not mean there is no thought-content; thus thinking is also indeed one thing, existing in what has been thought another. In its relation to thinking, existing is as little something that follows of itself as it is something thoughtless. It is not even a conviction that is imparted and expounded, perhaps with what people call inwardness, for a conviction too can be held in idea and thus so easily becomes dialectical in the direction of more or less true. No, the existing here is in thought, and the book or work has no ultimate relation to anyone. Transparency of thought in existence is precisely inwardness. Thus, for example, if speculation, instead of didactically lecturing on *de omnibus dubitandum*⁸³ and getting a chorus of followers to swear that they

⁸³ Latin: everything is to be doubted. (See the translator's introduction.)

will swear by *de omnibus dubitandum*, had made an attempt at having a doubter like that come about in the inwardness of existence, so that one could see in the smallest detail how he went about it – yes, had it done that, that is, had it started, it would have given up again, and seen with shame that the grand word that every patterer has sworn that he has lived up to is not only an infinitely difficult task but for one who exists an impossibility. And just this is one of the saddening aspects of all communication, that the good communicator, sometimes to win men, sometimes out of vanity, and sometimes in thoughtlessness, fills his mouth so full that not only has he done in a jiffy everything possible for an eminent existing spirit during a long lifetime, he has also done the impossible. One forgets that existing makes the understanding of the simplest truth exceedingly difficult and strenuous for the common man in the transparency of existence. One can with no further ado fake everything to oneself with the help of a result (I have heard people, so thick-headed you could batter open a door with them, say that one cannot just stay standing at Socratic ignorance), and finally end up having, like all windbags, done the impossible. Inwardness has become a matter of knowledge and existing a waste of time. That is why the most mediocre person who puts together a few words these days speaks as if he would have you believe that he had experienced everything, and you need only heed his parenthetical clauses to see that the man is a master trickster; and that is why today anyone who exists with no more energy than that of a mediocre Greek philosopher is regarded as demonic. The patter of pain and suffering is known by heart, likewise the glorious law of steadfastness. Everyone is a patterer. If someone existing exposes himself to a little unpleasantness for the sake of an opinion, he is regarded as a demon – or else stupid, because one knows everything and, not to stay standing there, one also knows that not the least thing is to be made of it, for thanks to external knowledge one is in the seventh heaven, and if one does start, one becomes a poor existing person stumbling again and again, and from year to year making only very little progress. Yes, if at times one can recall with a certain sense of relief that Caesar had the whole Alexandrian library burned,⁸⁴ one might, with all good will, wish that our superfluity of knowledge were once again removed so that we might learn again what it is to live as a human being.

⁸⁴ This is a confusion. The library was burned accidentally in 47 BC during Julius Caesar's occupation of the city, while in AD 642 it was burned down on the orders of the caliph Omar I on the grounds that the Koran was self-sufficient.

I was struck by the fact that *Either/Or* ends precisely with the edifying truth (but without so much as italicizing the words, let alone lecturingly). I could have wished to see this principle stressed in more detail, so that each particular point on the way towards a Christian-religious existence became clear. For the Christian truth as inwardness is also edifying, but from this it in no way follows that every edifying truth is Christian; the edifying is a wider category. I began putting my mind to this matter too, but what happens? Just as I was about to begin, out comes 'Two Edifying Discourses by Magister Kierkegaard, 1843'.⁸⁵ Three more edifying discourses followed, and the preface repeated that these were not sermons. This was something which I too, if no one else, would have protested against, since they employ only ethical categories of immanence, not the doubly reflected religious categories in the paradox. On pain of causing a confusion of languages,⁸⁶ the sermon must be reserved for the religious-Christian existence. Today it is true we sometimes hear sermons that are anything but sermons because the categories are those of immanence. Perhaps the Magister has wished to make this clear indirectly, by seeing how far edification can be pursued purely philosophically, the edifying discourse having indeed its own validity, but by calling attention to this the author indirectly came to the aid of the cause which laughably I call my own, coming as always too late in regard to the doing. But then things took such a bizarre turn, according to what the Magister told me, that some called the edifying discourses straightforwardly sermons, meaning even to honour them with that title,⁸⁷ as if edifying discourse and sermon were related to one another as counsellor of the chancery to counsellor of justice, and as if one honoured the former by calling him the latter. Others, on the other hand, objected to the edifying discourses for not being proper sermons, which is like objecting to an opera that it is not a stage tragedy.ⁱ

ⁱ What this objection may bring to some minds is not so much the fact that the edifying discourses were philosophical and made no use at all of Christian categories, as that they have embodied an aesthetic element on a larger scale than is usual for the edifying address. The more gripping and detailed portrayal of states of mind, with the play of psychological colours, is something that the edifying address usually abstains from, and for whatever reason, whether the individual speaker is unable or unwilling, leaves that to the poet and the poetic *impetus* [impulse]. This, however, can easily create a rift in the mind of the listener, in that the edifying address leaves him without something that he must then look for elsewhere. So far as I can see, there is nothing wrong with including the poetic portrayal. Yet there remains this decisive difference between the poet and the

⁸⁵ *SKS* 5, pp. 59–106. ⁸⁶ Genesis 11:7, 9.

⁸⁷ In an article (signed 'Kts', see p. 220 n. 100) Bishop Mynster had used the word 'sermon' in referring to these discourses.

The ethicist in *Either/Or* had saved himself by despairing, removed concealment in revelation; but here to my mind was a discrepancy. In order to define himself in the inwardness of truth, as distinct from speculation, instead of doubt he had used despair. But still, he made it look as if by despairing he found himself, in the very act of despair itself, *uno tenore*,⁸⁸ as it were. If *Either/Or* were to make clear where the discrepancy lies, the book would have to be planned religiously instead of ethically, and in that case it would be necessary to say already at the start what, to my notion, should be said only successively. But the discrepancy was not touched upon at all, and this was quite in accordance with my own plan. Whether the author has been clear about this, I cannot of course tell. The discrepancy is that the ethical self should be found immanently in the despair, that the individual won himself by persisting in the despair. True, he has used something within the category of freedom, choosing himself, which seems to remove the difficulty, one that presumably has not struck many, since *philosophice*⁸⁹ doubting everything and then finding the true beginning goes one, two, three. But that does not help. In despairing, I use myself to despair, and therefore I can indeed despair of everything by myself. But if I do this, I cannot come back by myself. It is in this moment of decision that the individual needs divine assistance, whereas it is quite correct that in order to be at this point one must first have understood the existence-relation between the aesthetic and the ethical; that is to say that, by being there in passion and inwardness, one surely becomes aware of the religious – and of *the leap*.

Furthermore, the definition of truth as inwardness, its being edifying, must be better understood before it is even religious let alone Christian. It is true of all edification that it first and foremost produces enough of the necessary horror, for otherwise the edification is a delusion. With the passion of the infinite, and in the moment of despair, the ethicist had chosen himself out of the *horror* of having his self, his life, his actuality, in aesthetic dreams, in melancholy, in concealment. There can therefore be no more question of fear from this side; the stage-setting is now ethical

edifying speaker, that the poet has no other *τέλος* [aim] than psychological truth and the art of presentation, while the speaker has, in addition and *principally*, the aim of translating everything into edification. The poet loses himself in portraying passion, but for the edifying speaker this is only the first step and the decisive one for him is the next, to force the obstinate individual into laying down his arms, to mollify, to elucidate, in short, to translate everything into the edifying.

⁸⁸ Latin: without interruption. ⁸⁹ Latin: philosophically.

inwardness in existing individuality. The horror must be a new aspect of inwardness, whereby the individual returns on a higher plane to the point where revelation, which is the life of the ethical, becomes impossible once more but with the relations reversed. The ethical, previously helping revelation (while the aesthetic hindered it), is now what hinders it, and it is something else that helps the individual to a higher revelation beyond the ethical.

To whoever has had inwardness enough to grasp the ethical with infinite passion, duty and the eternal validity of the universal, there can be no horror in heaven or on earth or in the abyss⁹⁰ to compare with that of facing a collision where the ethical becomes the temptation.⁹¹ Yet everyone faces this collision, if in no other way than by being made to relate religiously to the religious paradigm, i.e., through the religious paradigm being the discrepancy but nevertheless the paradigm (which is like God's omnipresence being the invisibility and a revelation the secret), or through the religious paradigm expressing not the universal but the particular (for example, by appealing to visions, dreams, etc.) yet still being the paradigm. But to be the paradigm is precisely to be for all; yet to be a prototype for all surely means being what all are or ought to be, i.e., the universal, and yet the *religious paradigm* is the very opposite (the irregular and the particular), whereas the *tragic hero* expresses the regular declension of the universal for all.

This had become clear to me, and I was waiting only for the spirit's support in pathos, in order to present it in existing individuality; for lecturing was not the way, since the misfortune of the age is in my view precisely that it had acquired too much knowledge and forgotten what it is to exist and what inwardness means. The form therefore had to be indirect. Here again I will put it in another way, appropriately in the matter of inwardness; for sure enough, the person lucky enough to have to do with the multifarious can be entertaining. When he is finished with China, he can take up Persia; when he has studied French, he can begin with Italian, and then go on to astronomy, the veterinary sciences, etc., and always be sure of a reputation as a hell of a fellow. Inwardness has no such compass capable of astounding the sensate. Thus inwardness in love does not consist in getting married seven times to Danish girls and then cutting loose on the French, the Italian, etc., but in loving one and the same, and in being constantly renewed in the same love, so that in its

⁹⁰ Philippians 2:10.

⁹¹ 'Anfægtelsen' here, as before, and in what follows. See the 'Note on the translation'.

mood and exuberance it constantly blooms afresh, which in the matter of communication means the inexhaustible renewal and fertility of the expression. Inwardness cannot be imparted directly because it being said directly is precisely externality (the direction outwards, not inwards), and the direct expression of inwardness is no proof at all of its presence (the direct outpouring of feeling is no proof at all of its possession, the gauge of inwardness's strength is the resilience of the oppositional form), and to receive inwardness is not to reproduce what is imparted directly, for that is echo. The repetition of inwardness is the resonance in which what is said remains absent, as with Mary when she *hid* the words in her heart.⁹² And not even this is the true expression of the repetition of inwardness in the relation between human beings; for she *concealed* the words as a treasure in the beautiful setting of a good heart, but inwardness is when the thing said belongs to the recipient as if it were his own – and now it is indeed his own. To communicate in that way is the most beautiful triumph of resigned inwardness. Therefore no one is as resigned as God, for he communicates creatively, so that in creating he *gives* independence *vis-à-vis* himself. The most a human being manages in respect of resignation is to acknowledge the given independence in every human being and, as best one can, do everything truly to help someone to retain it. But such things are not talked of in our time, for example, as to whether it is permissible, as one says, to 'win' a person for the truth, whether it is permissible for someone with any truth to impart, and who has the art of persuasion, knowledge of the human heart, the ingenuity to catch unawares, the deciphering skill to capture slowly, to put this to use in order to gain adherents for the truth. Or should he not rather, in humility before God, loving human beings in the feeling that God does not need him,^j and that every human being is essentially spirit, use all these gifts precisely to prevent the direct relationship, and instead of comfortably having some adherents, be dutifully reconciled to accusations

^j For God is not like a king in a fix, who says to the highly entrusted minister for internal affairs: 'You must do everything, you must win support for our proposal and get public opinion on our side. You can do it, use your head. If I can't depend on you, then I have no one.' In relation to God there is no secret instruction for any human being, let alone a secret stair, and even the most eminent spirit who meets to present a report had best do it in fear and trembling. For God is not at a loss for geniuses; after all he can create a legion [Matthew 26:53] or two; and wanting to make oneself indispensable in the service of God means *eo ipso* dismissal. And every human is created in the image of God. This is the absolute; the crumb he has to learn from Peter or Paul [an equivalent of Tom, Dick and Harry deriving from the Apostles] not worth much.

⁹² Luke 2:19.

of frivolity, lacking earnest, etc., because he disciplines himself in truth and saves his life from the most dreadful of all untruths – having an adherent?

As mentioned, I had grasped that most dreadful of collisions of inwardness and was waiting only for the spirit to come to my assistance – when what happens? Yes, Magister Kierkegaard and I, each in our own way, cut a ridiculous figure with respect to the pseudonymous books. That I sit there, in total privacy, all the time intending to do what the pseudonymous authors do, is something that no one knows. Magister Kierkegaard, on the other hand, has to bear the brunt every time such a book appears.⁹³ And this much is certain: if all the many things said in learned tea-circles, and in friendly societies besides, for this man's refinement and improvement, if invective's fright and accusation's stern voice and denunciation's judgment could properly be turned to his advantage, he must in short order become an unusually good man. While one teacher has ordinarily several disciples to improve, he is in the enviable position of having a highly respected age of men and women, learned and unlearned, and chimney sweeps, all taking care of his improvement. The only thing is that the chastising and what is intended for the understanding's and heart's improvement takes place and is said in his absence, never when he is present; otherwise something would surely come of it.

What happens? A book comes out: *Fear and Trembling*.⁹⁴ Here the inability to become open, concealment, is a horror compared with which the concealment of the aesthetic is child's play.

It would have been impossible to represent this existence-collision in an existing individuality, since the difficulty of the collision, though lyrically extorting the utmost passion, holds back its expression *dialectically* in absolute silence. Johannes *de silentio* is therefore not himself portrayed as such an existing individual; he is one who reflects and, with the *tragic hero* as *terminus a quo*,⁹⁵ the interesting⁹⁶ as *confinium*⁹⁷ and the religious paradigmatic discrepancy as *terminus ad quem*,⁹⁸ constantly runs as though up against the understanding's brow, the lyric

⁹³ Whenever a pseudonymous work appeared, a signed edifying work was published simultaneously.

⁹⁴ *SKS* 4, pp. 99–210. ⁹⁵ Latin: boundary, or point, from which, point of departure.

⁹⁶ 'Det Interessante'. A term of art current in Denmark since the 1830s but coined by the German Romantics (Friedrich Schlegel [1772–1829] and Novalis [1772–1801]) to express a new focus on style, means and effect, rather than mere result. 'The Seducer's Diary' in *Either/Or* is sometimes taken as exemplary.

⁹⁷ Latin: borderline or boundary area. ⁹⁸ Latin: limit, or point, towards which, goal or aim.

being the reaction to the repulse. This is the way Johannes has presented himself. To call this book 'eine erhabene Luge',⁹⁹ as the signature Kts did,¹⁰⁰ calling Jacobi and Desdemona to mind, strikes me as significant in that the very expression contains a contradiction. The clash of the form is altogether necessary for every production in these spheres. In direct communication's form, bawling's form, fear and trembling are of no importance, for the direct form indicates precisely that the direction is outwards, out towards shrieking, not inwards into the abyss of inwardness, where 'fear and trembling' first becomes fearful and, if expressed, can only be so in a deceptive form. How things really are with Johannes *de silentio* I of course cannot tell for sure, since I am not personally acquainted; and even if I was, I am not exactly disposed to credit him with the wish to make a fool of himself through giving a direct communication.

The ethical is the temptation; the God-relationship has come about, the immanence of ethical despair been *broken, the leap posited, the absurd the notification*.

Having understood this, I thought that as a precaution it might be as well to make sure that what was won should not come to nothing in a *coup de main*,¹⁰¹ making concealment into what people call that, a bit of aesthetic, and faith becoming what people call immediacy, for example, the vapours,¹⁰² and the religious paradigm what people call a prototype, for example, a tragic hero. What happens? Just then I receive a book from Reitzel entitled *Repetition*.¹⁰³ No lecturing here, far from it, and it was just what I wanted, since in my view the misfortune of the age was that it has acquired too much knowledge and forgotten what it is to exist and what inwardness means. In such circumstances it is desirable that the imparted know how to draw aside, and here a confusing oppositional form is just what can be of service. And Constantin Constantius wrote, as he calls it, 'a queer book'.¹⁰⁴ Repetition is basically the expression of immanence, so

⁹⁹ 'A noble lie'.

¹⁰⁰ 'Kts' (see p. 215) was the name with which Bishop Mynster signed his works. In his review of *Fear and Trembling*, the German (not rendered accurately here) was in fact part of a quotation from Jacobi, which also mentions Desdemona.

¹⁰¹ 'Surprise attack'.

¹⁰² 'Vapours, hysteria'. A fashionable condition attributed to women and once associated, along with its male equivalent 'hypochondriasis', with alleged physical causes of melancholy or spleen. See p. 212, n. 79, above.

¹⁰³ SKS 4, pp. 7–96.

¹⁰⁴ In fact it is Vigilius Haufniensis who thus describes it, in *Begrebet Angest (The Concept of Anxiety)*, SKS 4, p. 325.

one despairs to the last drop, and has oneself, and then one doubts to the last drop, and has the truth. Constantin Constantius, the aesthetic schemer who normally despairs of nothing, despairs of repetition, and the young man makes clear that if repetition is to come about, it must be as a new immediacy, so that it is itself a movement *on the strength of the absurd*, and the teleological suspension *a trial*. Trial corresponds in turn to the religious paradigm's being the discrepancy, for from the ethical viewpoint a trial is unthinkable, it being precisely through being valid always that the ethical is universally valid. The trial is the religious paradigm's highest earnest, but for the merely ethical point of view a trial is a joke, and far from being earnest, to *exist on trial* is a comic motif which, incomprehensibly enough, no poet has hitherto used to portray lack of will maximally to the point of near madness, as though one would enter into a trial marriage, etc. But, for the highest earnest of the religious life, being recognized in the joke is just like the paradigm being the irregularity, or the particularity, and God's omnipresence his invisibility, and revelation the secret.

On its title page the book was called 'psychological experiment'. That this was a doubly reflected communication form soon became clear to me. By taking place in the form of the experiment, the communication creates a clash for itself, and the experiment establishes a yawning gap between reader and author, places the divorce of inwardness between them, making direct understanding impossible. The experiment is the conscious, teasing revocation of the communication, which is always of importance to someone existing who writes for those who exist, in case the situation be changed to that of a patterer writing for patterers. If a man were to stand on one leg, or in a grotesque dancing posture wave his hat, and in that pose propound something true, his few listeners would separate into two classes, and these would indeed be few, since most would promptly give him up. The one class would say, 'How can what he says be true when he gesticulates like that?' The other class would say, 'Well, whether he clicks his heels in the air or stands on his head, even if he turned somersaults, what he says is true; I will make it my own and let him go.' So also with the experiment. If what is said is earnest in the writer, he keeps the earnest essentially to himself. If the recipient apprehends it as earnest, he does so essentially by himself, and it is just this that is the earnest. Indeed, one makes a distinction even in elementary education between 'reading by rote' and 'intellectual exercise', a distinction

that is often striking when it comes to systematic 'learning by rote'. The experiment's *settlement* favours the inwardness of the two away from each other in inwardness. This form won my complete approval and I believed also to have found in this that the pseudonymous authors constantly kept *existing* in view, and thus maintained an indirect polemic against speculation. When someone knows everything but by heart, the experimental form is a good exploratory procedure;¹⁰⁵ in this form one may even tell him what he knows: he does not recognize it. Later, a new pseudonym, *Frater Taciturnus*,¹⁰⁶ has indicated the experiment's place in relation to the aesthetic, ethical, and religious production. (Cf. *Stages on Life's Way*, p. 340 and ff., § 3.)¹⁰⁷

Whether *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition* have any value otherwise, I shall not decide. If they do, the measure by which to judge them will not be didactic paragraph-gravity. If it is the misfortune of the age to have forgotten what inwardness is, there should be no writing for 'paragraph-swallowers';¹⁰⁸ existing individualities must be portrayed in their distress when their existence presents itself to them as a confusion, which is something other than reciting *de omnibus dubitandum* in the security of the chimney corner. If the production is to be meaningful, it should therefore always have passion. Constantin Constantius has even used a love affair, always a serviceable theme in relation to existing, even if *philosophice* it is folly with regard to patten. He has used a betrothal. This I wholly approve, and when it is said of two people that they loved each other, it is only superannuated novel-readers who are used to taking this and savouring it in the way the lowest rabble profanely understand the word. An engagement is a promise, a broken engagement is a broken promise, but there is no secret footnote that would make a woman blush. What follows is not that an engagement should have a more frivolous side, but that its earnest and the horror of the breach are more clear-cut. Calling it a promise, a broken promise, when a man makes the novel's heroine pregnant and then abandons her, is thoughtless and immoral, and above all forbids all further dialectical treatment. For such behaviour does not allow this treatment; sound common sense easily tells you that here at least four crimes have been committed: making the girl pregnant (even if

¹⁰⁵ 'Explorations-Middel', a medical term referring to the manual exploration of bodily cavities.

¹⁰⁶ Latin: taciturn (silent or reserved) brother (friar).

¹⁰⁷ SKS 6, pp. 404-12. ¹⁰⁸ A term used in *Frygt og Bæven* (*Fear and Trembling*), SKS 4, p. 103.

one were to marry her afterwards, it is still a crime), thereby making the child illegitimate (even if one were to remedy this afterwards, it would still be a crime), abandoning the mother, abandoning the child; and then no doubt, as the hero of the novel, getting involved with a new mistress, whereby, according to the Scriptures,¹⁰⁹ even if this new relationship were a proper marriage, one commits adultery and reduces the abandoned heroine's marriage to a life of fornication, should she enter into one, again according to the teaching of the Scripture.¹¹⁰

To that extent I can well understand^k why a betrothal was chosen, and later also by *Frater Taciturnus*.¹¹¹ The cleaner the broken relationship, as horror of prime¹¹² quality grows and increases, the more there will be for dialectics to discover. But to use it in connection with something best suited to the second protocol of the criminal court,¹¹³ indeed even to use a miserable crumb of dialectic to let the hero off altogether, that must be left to novel-writers. A novelist would consider an engagement such a trivial matter that he would simply be incapable of entering into what such a broken promise means. With the pseudonymous authors, dialectic is used expressly to make the situation as horrific as possible, and it is the passion with which the hero grasps the horror within himself, and as decisive for his life, that makes him a hero, and the cleanliness consists precisely in the breach being grasped in view of a teleological suspension,¹¹⁴ the hero's purity in his highest passion being to undo it, and the hero's martyrdom in, among other things, his realization that to most people, who as a rule understand the ethical and the religious about as well as most novelists, his life becomes senseless. One becomes a hero ethically and religiously not by being a hail-well-met fellow, able to take everything lightly, but on the contrary, by taking life infinitely hard; please note, not in the form of half an hour's womanish screaming, but in the form of lasting power in inwardness.

^k Similarly, I can also understand well enough why the pseudonymous author or authors repeatedly bring up marriage. People usually let go just where the difficulties begin. According to ancient custom, poetry takes the love affair, leaving marriage to get along as best it may. But in modern poetry (the drama and the novel) it has even come to the point where adultery is used as an elegant background to a new love affair. Innocent poetry brings no light to marriage; guilty poetry sees it in the light of adultery.

¹⁰⁹ Loosely based on Matthew 19:9. ¹¹⁰ Matthew 5:32.

¹¹¹ In *Stages on Life's Way*, SKS 6, pp. 173–368. ¹¹² *Prima*. See p. 368 n. 95.

¹¹³ A court established in 1842 with powers to detain suspicious characters.

¹¹⁴ A suspending of an accepted principle in the light of an overriding consideration or goal.

Yet trial (its dialectic, cf. *Repetition*)¹¹⁵ is transitional; the person tested returns again to exist in the ethical, though retaining an everlasting impression of the horror, a more inward impression than when grey hair reminds the person tried and tested of the moment of fear and mortal danger when he became grey-haired. The teleological suspension of the ethical must have a yet more definite religious expression. Then the ethical with its infinite requirement is there every moment, but the individual is incapable of realizing it. This impotence in the individual must not be understood as part of the incompleteness implicit in a continued striving towards an ideal, for in that case suspension is no more posited than an official is suspended for performing his duties moderately well. The suspension consists in the individual finding himself in a state that is the exact opposite of that required by the ethical, so that far from being able to begin, every instant he remains in this state he is increasingly prevented from beginning. He relates to actuality not as possibility but as impossibility. Thus the individual is suspended from the ethical in the most horrifying way; in this suspension he is heterogeneous with the ethical, which nevertheless has a claim on him, that of the infinite, and exerts it every moment on the individual, and every moment thereby designates all the more the heterogeneity as heterogeneity. Abraham, in his temptation (when *God* tempts a person, as is said of Abraham in Genesis),¹¹⁶ was not heterogeneous with the ethical; he was well able to realize it, but prevented in doing so by that something higher which, by accentuating itself *absolutely*, transformed the voice of duty into temptation. Once that something higher sets the tempted one free, all is in order, even though the horror forever remains that this could happen even if just for a tenth of a second. For it is less important how long the suspension lasts; the crucial thing is that it is there. But people do not bother themselves with such things; the sermon presentation keeps on breezily using the category 'trial' (where it is the ethical that is the temptation), which causes absolute confusion in the ethical as well as in all plain human thinking at all, and it proceeds as if it were nothing – nor doubtless is it much more.

The situation is now different. Duty is the absolute, its claim the absolute, and yet the individual is prevented from realizing it; indeed, the individual is in a despairingly ironical way excused (in the same way that Scripture speaks of being freed from God's law)¹¹⁷ through having become heterogeneous in respect of it; and the more profoundly its claim is proclaimed to him, all the

¹¹⁵ SKS 4, pp. 76–8.

¹¹⁶ Genesis 22:1.

¹¹⁷ Romans 8:2.

more clear he becomes about his fearful exemption. The fearful exemption from doing the ethical, the individual's heterogeneity with regard to the ethical, this suspension from the ethical, is *sin* as a state in a human being.

Sin is a crucial expression of the religious existence. So long as sin is not posited, the suspension becomes a passing element that disappears again, or remains outside life as something altogether irregular. Sin, however, is the crucial point of departure for the religious existence. It is not an element in something else, within another order of things; it is itself the beginning of the religious order of things. None of the pseudonymous books brought up sin. True, the ethicist in *Either/Or* had given a religious gloss to the ethical category of choosing oneself by accompanying the act of despair with repenting oneself out of continuity with the race.¹¹⁸ But this was a melting into air¹¹⁹ presumably due to the work having to be kept ethical – just as I would have wished, so that each element becomes clear on its own. The edifying observation with which *Either/Or* ends, that ‘in the face of God we are always in the wrong’,¹²⁰ in no way defines sin as fundamental but is the disparity between the finite and the infinite put to rest in the reconciliation of the infinite in enthusiasm. It is (in the sphere of freedom) the last enthusiastic cry of the finite spirit to God: ‘I cannot understand you, but I will love you; you are always in the right, yes, even if it seemed to me as though you would not love me, I will still love you.’ This is why the theme was called ‘the edifying that lies in the thought,’ etc. The edifying is sought not in cancelling the misunderstanding but in the enthusiastic will to put up with it, and as if cancelling it in this final act of courage. In *Fear and Trembling* sin was used as the occasion to throw light on the nature of Abraham’s ethical suspension,¹²¹ but no more than that.

That is how the matter stood when out came a work ‘on *The Concept of Anxiety*, a simple psychologically oriented deliberation aimed at the dogmatic problem of original/hereditary sin’.¹²² Just as *Either/Or* had saved the teleological suspension from being mistaken for aesthetic concealment, so now the three pseudonymous books saved sin, once brought up, from being mistaken for one thing or another, with weakness and imperfection, from sorrow over it being confounded with everything possible, with sighs and tears as well as self-pity and this vale of tears, and from the suffering involved being confounded with a *quodlibet*.¹²³ Sin is crucial for a whole

¹¹⁸ SKS 3, p. 207. ¹¹⁹ ‘Forflygtigelse’, volatilization. In other contexts here also ‘attenuation’.

¹²⁰ SKS 3, pp. 320–32. ¹²¹ SKS 4, pp. 155 and 188. ¹²² SKS 4, pp. 307–461.

¹²³ Latin: whatever you like.

existence–sphere, the religious sphere in the strictest sense. Just because in our age people know only too much, it is easy enough to confuse everything in a confusion of language, where aestheticians adopt the most decisive Christian religious categories with intellectual wit, and priests use them thoughtlessly in bureaucratic formalisms that are indifferent to the content.

But if it is the misfortune of our age to have acquired too much knowledge and to have forgotten what it is to exist and what inwardness means, then it is important that sin not be understood in abstract terms in which it cannot be apprehended at all, decisively, that is, since it stands in an essential relation to existing. As for that, it was a good thing that the work was a psychological inquiry, which itself explains that sin has no place in the system, presumably just like immortality, faith, the paradox, and other such, which are essentially related to existence but which are just what systematic thinking ignores. The term ‘anxiety’ puts one less in mind of paragraph–gravity than of existential inwardness. Just as ‘fear and trembling’ was the state of the teleologically suspended person when God tempts him, so too is anxiety the teleologically suspended person’s state of mind in that despairing exemption from realizing the ethical. The inwardness of sin, as anxiety in the existing individuality, is the greatest possible and most painful distance from the truth when truth is subjectivity.

I shall not enter further into the work’s contents. I mention these books only in so far as they form moments in the realization of the idea I had conceived but from which I was ironically exempted from realizing. And when I look at them in this way, something bizarre occurs again, just like the prophecy about the relation between Esau and Jacob, that the bigger will serve the smaller:¹²⁴ the large pseudonymous works serve my *Crumbs* in the same way. Still, I will not be so presuming as to say this, but rather that while the works have their importance, they are also significant for my little crumb of production.

The Concept of Anxiety furthermore differs essentially from the other pseudonymous works in having a direct and even slightly didactic form. Perhaps the author thought that an imparting of knowledge might be needed at this point, before a transition could be made to inward deepening, which latter concerns someone presumed to be essentially knowledgeable and hence in need not of just being told something but of being personally affected. The work’s slightly didactic form was undoubtedly the reason why,

¹²⁴ Genesis 25:23.

compared with anything by the other pseudonyms, it found a little favour in the eyes of the university lecturers. I will not deny that I consider this favour a misunderstanding, which is why it pleased me that a jolly little book was published simultaneously by Nicolaus Notabene.¹²⁵ The pseudonymous books are commonly ascribed to a single signature,¹²⁶ and now, on seeing light literature from the same hand, everyone who had for a moment entertained hopes of a didactic author had straight away to give up hope.

Finally then, came my *Crumbs*,¹²⁷ for by this time the determining of existence-inwardness had come to the point where the Christian-religious could be brought out without immediately being confused with all manner of things. But one thing more. Magister Kierkegaard's edifying discourses had steadily kept pace, in my eyes a hint that he himself had been keeping up, and to me it was striking that the four last discourses¹²⁸ took on a meticulously contrived gloss of humour. This is no doubt how it ends with what is to be had in immanence. Although the ethical requirement is enforced, although life and being are accentuated as a laborious course, the decision is nevertheless not posited in a paradox, and the metaphysical retreat through recollection into the eternal is always possible, giving to immanence the gloss of humour as a revoking of it all by infinitude in the conclusiveness of eternity behind.¹ The

¹ The humorous element appears when one answers the problem of the *Crumbs* ('can there be a historical point of departure for an eternal happiness?') not with the yes or no of a decision, but with a sad smile (this is the lyrical element in the humour), which means that both the old man's seventy years and the almost stillborn child's half hour of life are too little to become a decision for an eternity. Just as one can cover one's head luxuriantly under the eiderdown and not give the world a damn, the humorist with the help of immanence pulls recollection's eternity over himself and smiles sadly at temporal existence with its breathless haste and illusory decision. The humorist does not teach immorality. Far from it; he honours the moral life and for his part does what he can and again smiles at himself. But he is effeminately infatuated with immanence, and recollection is his happy marriage and recollection his happy longing. A humorist might well get a notion of working more eagerly than anyone else, and of having a more niggardly association with time than someone who works from duty, and he might actually do so. But if it were supposed that this labour should have the least significance for the decision of an eternal happiness, he would smile. Temporality is, for him, a fleeting episode and of extremely doubtful significance, and for him, within it, this is the foretaste of his happiness, that through recollection out of temporality he has eternity assured behind. In terms of eternity, only an eternal happiness is thinkable. The paradox is therefore this (just as much as it consists in thinking an eternal unhappiness), that life in time is to be a point of departure, as if the one who exists had lost the eternity of recollection behind, as if he would receive an eternal happiness at a definite moment in time, whereas indeed an eternal happiness eternally presupposes itself. Whether humour and speculation are in the right is another question, but they can never be right in declaring themselves to be Christianity. – When eternity's essential conclusiveness is to be reached backwards by way of recollection, then quite consistently, the highest spiritual relationship to

¹²⁵ *SKS* 4, pp. 463–527.

¹²⁶ They were commonly assumed to be by Kierkegaard, though following the conventions of the day this was not openly acknowledged until Kierkegaard did so in the 'declaration' appended to the present work.

¹²⁷ *SKS* 4, pp. 211–306. ¹²⁸ *SKS* 5, pp. 285–381.

paradoxical expression of existence (i.e., existing) as sin, the eternal truth as the paradox through having come about in time, in short, what is decisive for the Christian-religious, is not to be found in the edifying discourses, which as the Magister said some people thought one could *very well* call sermons, while others objected that they were not proper sermons. When using Christian categories, humour is a false rendition of the Christian truth, since humour does not differ essentially from irony but does differ essentially from Christianity, and differs from Christianity essentially in no other way than irony does. It differs from irony only in appearance by apparently having assimilated all that is essentially Christian, yet without having appropriated it in a *decisive* manner (what is essentially Christian being precisely the decision and the conclusiveness), whereas what is essential to irony, namely recollection's withdrawal out of the temporal into the eternal by way of recollection, is in turn what is essential to humour. It seems that humour accords greater significance to existing than does irony, but immanence is nevertheless *übergreifend*¹²⁹ and the more or less is an infinitesimal quantifying compared with the qualitative conclusiveness of what is essentially Christian. Humour therefore becomes the last *terminus a quo* in defining what is Christian. When it uses Christian categories (sin, forgiveness of sin, atonement, God in time, etc.) humour is not Christianity but a pagan speculation that has come to *know* all that is essentially Christian. It can come deceptively close to the essentially Christian, but there, where the decision takes possession, where existence keeps the one who exists prisoner, just as the table does the card played,¹³⁰ so that he must stay there, while the bridge of recollection and immanence behind is cut off; there, where the decision comes in the instant and the movement is forward towards the relation to the eternal truth that came about in time – there humour does not follow. Modern speculation deceives in the same way; well, one cannot even say that it deceives, since soon there will be no one left to be deceived, and speculation does it *bona fide*.¹³¹ Speculation carries off the trick of understanding the whole of Christianity, but note well,

God is that the god dissuades, restrains, because existence in time can never be commensurate with an eternal decision. Thus, as we all know, the genius of Socrates was only dissuasive, and this too is how the humorist must understand his God-relationship. The absolute metaphysical power of eternal recollection to resolve and dissolve wings itself above the disjunction which the humorist does not reject but acknowledges and yet; and yet, despite all acknowledgment, dissolves in the conclusiveness of eternity behind. In the paradox it is the reverse: there the spirit propels; but this is in turn the paradoxical expression of how paradox, time and existence have been accentuated.

¹²⁹ 'All-encompassing'. ¹³⁰ The card, once played, cannot be exchanged.

¹³¹ Latin: in good faith.

it does not understand it Christianly but speculatively, which is precisely the misunderstanding, since Christianity is the very opposite of speculation.

Presumably Magister Kierkegaard knew what he was doing in calling the edifying discourses by that name and abstaining from Christian-dogmatic categories, from mentioning Christ's name, etc., as one otherwise does freely these days even though the categories, the thoughts, the dialectic in the presentation are only those of immanence. Just as the pseudonymous works, besides what they are directly, are indirectly a polemic against speculation, so also are these discourses, not because they are not speculative, for speculative is just what they are,^m but because they are not sermons. If the author had called them sermons he would have been a scatterbrain. They are edifying discourses; in the prefaces the author repeats word for word that he 'is not a teacher', and that the discourses are not 'for edification', by which stipulation their teleological significance is humorously revoked already in the preface. They are 'not sermons'; the sermon corresponds to what is essentially Christian, and to the sermon there corresponds a priest, and a priest is essentially what he is through ordination, and ordination is a teacher's paradoxical transformation in time, by which he becomes, within time, something other than what would be the immanent development of genius, talent, gifts, etc. Surely no one is ordained from eternity, or able as soon as he is born to recall being ordained. On the other hand, ordination is a *character indelebilis*.¹³² What else does this mean but that time here again becomes crucial for the eternal, thus preventing the immanent withdrawal into the eternal in recollection. The Christian *nota bene*¹³³ stands there at ordination too. Whether this is right, whether speculation and humour are not in the right, is quite another question. But even if speculation were ever so much in the right, it can never be right in making itself out to be Christianity.

^m The signature Kts [Mynster], in Prof. Heiberg's *Intelligensblade* [*Intelligence Papers*] was therefore quite right in excepting the one discourse: 'The Lord Gave and the Lord Took Away; Blessed be the Name of the Lord' [Job 1:21], and in saying of the others that they were too philosophical to be sermons. But he was wrong to overlook the fact that in calling them edifying discourses the author had said the same himself, and by explicitly calling attention in the preface to the fact that they were not sermons. That speculation in our day is on the point of confusing the way the sermon is presented, of that there is no doubt. It is something one can point to directly, e.g., by writing a little article in a journal. But it can also be done indirectly and in that case costs more effort, as in the writing of edifying discourses that are philosophical and are not sermons. When people then say of these that they could very well be called sermons, this indicates that the confusion is there, but it also shows that the author in question, who expressly calls attention to the misunderstanding, does not exactly need to be told that it is there.

¹³² Latin: indelible mark. According to the Catholic Church it is bestowed on the soul at, e.g., baptism, confirmation, ordination.

¹³³ Latin: note well.

So then I came along with my *Crumbs*. Whether the piece succeeded in an indirect way in putting Christianity in relation to what it is to exist, and was able by the use of an indirect form to bring it into relation with an informed reader whose misfortune is perhaps just that he is informed, I shall not decide. It could not be done by direct communication, since this is always only pertinent to a recipient in terms of knowledge, not essentially to one who exists. A direct communication might have aroused a little sensation, but sensation is not pertinent to what it is to exist but rather to what it is to chat. Existing in what is understood cannot be directly communicated to an existing spirit, not even by God, still less by a human being. As I say, whether the piece succeeded in this, I shall not decide; nor can I be bothered to go to the trouble of reviewing it myself, something that again would, in consistency, have to be done in the indirect form of double reflection. Something that seldom occurs with me has happened here: I agree with everyone. If no one else could be bothered to review it then neither can I.ⁿ If it has

ⁿ However, it's true, these last days I learn that it has been reviewed, and strangely enough in a German journal, *Allgemeines Repertorium für Theologie und kirchliche Statistik*. The reviewer possesses an excellent quality: he is brief and refrains almost entirely from what you generally find in reviews, the opening and concluding examination ceremony where the author has his name praised, is summoned to have a distinction conferred on him, or even that and a congratulation too. This I appreciate all the more, since the reviewer's first point (*'diese Schrift eines der produktivsten Schriftsteller Dänemarks ist wegen der Eigentümlichkeit ihres Verfahrens einer kurzen Besprechung nicht unwerth'* [Because of its distinctive mode of procedure this publication by one of Denmark's most prolific writers is not unworthy of a brief review]) – struck terror into me with its words *'Besprechung'* [review] and *'nicht unwerth'* [not unworthy]. The rev. describes the burden of the book as a development of the positive Christian presuppositions, then noting that this is done in such a way *'daß unsere Zeit, die Alles nivellirt, neutralisirt und vermittelt, sie kaum widererkennen wird'* [that our age, which levels, neutralizes, and mediates everything, will hardly be able to recognize them], and then proceeds (accordingly without using the hint of irony contained in what he himself says, about presenting the Christian presuppositions for our time in a way that, regardless that it is finished with them and goes beyond, cannot even recognize them again) to give an account of the content. His account is accurate and on the whole dialectically reliable, but now comes the hitch: in spite of the account being correct, anyone reading it by itself is bound to get an altogether wrong impression of the book. Not, of course, such a great mishap; on the other hand always a little unfortunate where the precise point of a review is the distinctive character of the book. The account is didactic, purely and simply didactic; the reader will therefore gain the impression that the piece itself is didactic. This in my view is the most mistaken impression one can have of it. The clash of form, the experiment's teasing resistance to the content, the poetic cheek (which even invents Christianity), the only attempt made to go further, that is beyond the so-called speculative construction, the tirelessly active irony; the parody of speculation in the entire plan, the satire in so much effort being made as though something *was ganz Ausserordentliches und Zwar Neues* [something quite extraordinary, that is, new] should come out of it, while what constantly emerges is old-fashioned orthodoxy in fitting severity – of all this the reader finds not the least hint. And far from the book being written for the uninformed to give them something to know, the one to whom I introduce myself conversationally in the book is always well informed, which seems to indicate that the book is written for the knowledgeable whose misfortune is that they know too much. The Christian truth, by being common knowledge, has by and by become such a triviality that it is hard

succeeded, so much the better; if not, it is not such a great mishap. A piece like that I can quickly write, and were it to become clear to me that not even by making something in some way difficult was I able to be of service to any of my contemporaries, then this heavy realization also relieves me of all the inconvenience of writing.

to produce a primitive impression of it. This being the case, being able to *impart* becomes in the end the art of *taking away*, or tricking a person out of something. This seems strange and ironic, and yet I believe that I have managed to express exactly what I mean. When a man has his mouth so full of food that he cannot eat and it can only end with him dying of starvation, does feeding him consist in stuffing still more into his mouth, or not rather in taking some of it away so that he can come to eat again? Similarly, with a man who is very knowledgeable but whose knowledge has little or no meaning for him: does a reasonable communication consist in getting hold of more for him to know, even when this is what he loudly insists that he needs, or does it not rather consist in taking something away? When a communicator takes away a part of the knowledge of a well-informed man and imparts it in a form which makes it alien to him, it is as though he took his knowledge from him, at least until by overcoming the obstacle of the form he manages to have it assimilated. Now suppose the very well-informed man's misfortune is that he is used to a certain form, 'that he could demonstrate the mathematical theorem if the letters read ABC but not if they read ACB'; then the altered form indeed takes his knowledge away from him, and yet this taking away is precisely the communication. When a systematically pattering age has done with the understanding of Christianity, and with that of all difficulties, jubilantly proclaiming how easy it is to understand the difficulty, then surely one must form a suspicion. It is better indeed to understand that something is so difficult that one simply cannot understand it, than to understand that a difficulty is so very easy to understand; for if it is so very easy, then perhaps there just is no difficulty, since what marks the difficulty is exactly it being difficult to understand. When the communication, in the context of such a state of affairs, is not about making the difficulty even easier, it is a taking away. One invests the difficulty in a new form, one in which it is really difficult. This is the communication – to the person who has already explained the difficulty so very easily. If it so happens, as the reviewer suggests, that in the presented material a reader can hardly recognize what he himself has done with long ago, the communication will cause him to pause – not, though, in order to impart something new to him, which would be to add to all that knowledge, but in order to take something away from him. – There is nothing to say of the review otherwise, except that the four last lines are again a demonstration of how everything in our didactic age is conceived didactically: '*Wir enthalten uns jeder Gegenbemerkung, denn es lag uns, wie gesagt, bloß daran, das eigenthümliche Verfahren des Verfassers zur Anschauung zu bringen. Im Uebrigen stellen wir es dem Ermessen eines Jeden anheim, ob er in dieser apologetischen Dialektik Ernst oder etwa Ironie suchen will*' [We refrain from any rejoinder, since our only concern, as we said, was with bringing to light the author's distinctive procedure. As for the rest, we leave it to the each person's judgment whether in this apologetic dialectic he wants to look for earnest or for some irony or other]. But my distinctive procedure, if there is to be talk of that, and especially of 'bringing it to light', lies precisely in the oppositional form of the communication, not in whatever new dialectical combinations make the issues clearer. It lies first and foremost in the clashing form and, once this is stressed, there may be a brief mention if need be of a crumb of didactic distinctiveness. In leaving it to each person's judgment whether to look for earnest or for irony in the piece, the rev. is misleading. Usually that is the kind of thing one says when one doesn't know what else to say, and where the presentation in a book is unalloyed, pure-brand didactic earnest, there can be some point in saying it, in so far as one says something about the book that is not in it, the book itself being sheer earnest. Then the reviewer says, 'God knows whether it is irony or earnest', and that is to say something, and to say it by leaving it to the reader *to look* or if he *wants to look* – for something that is not directly in the book. Not so, however, when it can only be a matter of *finding what* is there. But the piece was far from being pure and simple earnest – it was only the account of it that became pure earnest. Up to a

I have really wondered, though, whether I am not the victim of a misunderstanding, whether I am not presupposing something in readers and mistaken in so doing. For I want to be quite honest: my conception of communication through books differs greatly from what I see presented otherwise on the topic, and from what people tacitly accept. Indirect communication makes communicating an art in a sense other than that ordinarily assumed in imagining the communicator as having to present the communication to a knower for him to judge it, or to a non-knower so as to give him something to know. But the sequel is something people do not care about, and it is just this that makes communication dialectically so difficult, that the receiver is one who exists and this being what is essential. Stopping a man on the street and standing still to talk to him is not as difficult as saying something in passing to a passer-by, without oneself standing still or causing the other to pause, without wanting to get him to go in the same direction, but precisely urging him to go his own way instead. And this is how it is between one who exists and another who exists when the communication concerns truth as existence-inwardness. As for my dissenting view on communicating, it has sometimes occurred to me to wonder whether it might not be possible to communicate all this about indirect communication directly. Thus I see that Socrates, who as a rule kept so strictly to question and answer (which is an indirect method), because the long speech, the didactic lecture, the recitation lead only to confusion, sometimes speaks at greater length, and then gives as a reason that his interlocutor needs some information before the conversation can get going. This he does, for instance, in the *Gorgias*. But this seems to me an inconsistency, an impatience that fears that it will take too long before they reach a mutual understanding, for the same goal would be reached by the indirect method, only more slowly. But haste is of no value whatever in relation to understanding where inwardness is the understanding. To me, it seems better to reach a true mutual understanding in inwardness separately, even if it takes time. Yes, to me it seems, even if it never happened because time went by and the communicator was forgotten without coming to be understood by anyone, more consistent on the

point, its concluding comment may well mean something with regard to the account (e.g., as a satire on it), but with regard to the work it is foolish. Suppose a person had been present at one of Socrates's ironic conversations and later gives an account of it to someone but leaves out the irony and says, 'God knows whether talk like that is earnest or irony' – he is then satirizing himself. But it doesn't follow from irony being present that earnest is excluded. That is something only *privat-docents* assume. For while they otherwise do away with the disjunctive *aut* [Latin: 'or'], hearing neither God nor the devil, since they mediate everything – they make an exception of irony: that is something they cannot mediate.

communicator's part not to have made the slightest adjustment in order to get anyone to understand him, and first and last to watch out not to become self-important in relation to others, which, far from being inwardness, is a noisy external business. If he does that he will have this consolation on the day of judgment, when the god judges that he has made no allowances to himself for the sake of winning anyone but has laboured to the utmost of his ability in vain, leaving it to the god whether it should have any significance or not. And this no doubt will be more pleasing to the god than having the hustling man say to him, 'I have won 10,000 adherents for you; some I won by weeping over the world's misery and prophesying its early destruction, others by opening bright and smiling vistas if they accepted my teaching, others in other ways, knocking a little off, adding a little. They all became adherents, a sort of more or less adherents. Indeed, if while I lived you had stepped down on earth to inspect, I would have charmed your eye with the sight of the many adherents, just as Potemkin charmed Catherine's eye.'¹³⁴ Yes, in exactly the way Potemkin charmed Catherine's eye, in exactly that way, with the help of stage props, and the 10,000 adherents to the truth would also be a theatrical entertainment.

That subjectivity, inwardness, is truth was my thesis. I have now tried to show how the pseudonymous authors, as I see them, strive towards this principle, which at its maximum is Christianity. That it is possible to exist with inwardness also outside Christianity has been sufficiently vindicated by the Greeks among others, but in our day we appear actually to have come to the point where, although we are all Christians and know all about Christianity, it is already a very rare thing to come upon anyone even with as much existing inwardness as a pagan philosopher. No wonder that one has done with Christianity so quickly, starting off, as one does, by bringing oneself into a state where even getting the least impression of Christianity is quite out of the question. One becomes objective, it is objectively that one wants to consider, yes – that the god is crucified, something that, when it occurred, allowed not even the temple to be objective, for its curtain was ripped, not even the dead, for they rose from their graves,¹³⁵ something that manages to make even the lifeless and the dead subjective, that is now studied objectively by Messrs Objective. One

¹³⁴ Prince Potemkin had façades constructed to deceive Catherine the Great into believing he had used state funds for the development of villages in the area of which he was the governor-general.

¹³⁵ Matthew 27:51–3.

becomes objective, wants an objective way of considering Christianity, which as a preliminary takes the liberty of making the considerer a sinner if there is to be any question at all of catching sight of anything. And to be a sinner – surely the most dreadful of all sufferings of subjectivity – that too one wants to be – objectively. But then one helps with long systematic introductions and world-historical surveys, in this connection sheer tomfoolery, and in relation to the decision for Christianity sheer procrastination. One becomes objective and objective, the sooner the better, one scorns being subjective, despises the category of individuality, would find comfort in the category of the race, but has no idea of the cowardice and despair implied in the subject grabbing for a glittering something and becoming nothing at all. One is a Christian without further ado, on solemn occasions one still considers the question fitting enough for the stern church fathers, whether pagans could enjoy eternal bliss; and fails to notice the satire that paganism is much closer to Christianity than to an objective Christianity of the kind where Christ has become ‘Yes and No’, while in Corinth, as preached by Paul, he was not ‘Yes and No’ (2 Corinthians 1:19)! Existing subjectively with passion (and to exist objectively can be done only in distraction) is an absolute condition for being able to have any opinion at all on Christianity. Anyone unwilling to do so but nevertheless wanting to get to grips with Christianity, whoever he may be and however great in other respects, is in this matter essentially a fool.

Whether my grasp of the pseudonymous authors coincides with what they themselves have wanted, I cannot decide, for I am only a reader. But that they bear a relation to my thesis is clear enough. This is seen if in nothing else than their abstaining from teaching. That one should not teach is in my view the true interpretation of the confusion of the age, which consists precisely in the wealth of teaching. University lecturers of high standing have shown sufficient disparagement of the pseudonymous books, including my own little piece because it was not lecturing. Many have unquestioningly concluded from this that it was because the authors, and I, too, were incapable of the heights required for such teaching, required for the objectivity that is the standpoint of the lecturers. Maybe so, but suppose that subjectivity were truth; then there would always be something disturbing about the teachers’ elevation. It has also surprised me that, while any theology graduate is assumed more or less capable of teaching, people could still not persuade themselves that the pseudonymous authors, including myself, Johannes Climacus, might be

able to teach about as well as most of those who do, but find themselves, on the contrary, easily disposed to believe that we are all to be singled out as such poor creatures as to be unable to manage what nowadays, when an entire German literature has been developed solely in that direction, is about as easy for a student who wants to excerpt German books as it is, nowadays, to write verse, an accomplishment that may soon be required of domestics. Be that as it may, it is always good to be known for something, and I ask for nothing else than to be singled out as the only one *unable* to teach, and thereby also as the only one who does not understand the demands of the times.

That subjectivity, inwardness, is the truth is my thesis; that the pseudonymous authors relate to it is easy enough to see, if from nothing else than their eye for the comic. The comic is always the mark of maturity; and the only thing is that in this maturity the new shoot should appear, and the *vis comica*¹³⁶ not stifle pathos but simply indicate the beginning of a new pathos. The power of comedy is something I regard as an indispensable legitimation for anyone who is to be regarded today as authorized in the world of the spirit. When an age is as thoroughly reflective as ours is, and is said to be, then if this is the truth, the comic must have been discovered by everyone and discovered primitively by everyone who has anything to say. But so devoid are the university lecturers of the power of comedy that it is awful. Even Hegel, as a zealous Hegelian assures us,¹³⁷ is altogether devoid of a sense of the comic. A ridiculous intransigence and paragraph-gravity, which give a lecturer a striking resemblance to a bookkeeper out of Holberg,¹³⁸ are what lecturers call earnest. Anyone lacking in this horrible solemnity is frivolous. Perhaps, but what does it mean *really* to have reflected oneself out of the immediate, yet without having become a master in the comic – what does that mean? Well, yes, it means that one is lying. What does it mean to make assurances that one has reflected oneself out of the immediate, and then communicate this in a direct form as a piece of information? Well, it means that one is talking through one's hat. In the world of the spirit the various stages are not like cities on an itinerary, where it is perfectly in order for the traveller to tell directly, for instance, that 'we left Beijing and came to Canton, we were in Canton on the fourteenth'. Such a traveller

¹³⁶ Latin: comic force.

¹³⁷ Presumed to be H. G. Hotho, cited in *Begrebet Angst (The Concept of Anxiety)*, SKS I, p. 335.

¹³⁸ A reference to Holberg's *Den Stundesløse (The Busy Trifler)*.

changes places but not himself, and so it is quite all right for him to talk about it in the direct, unaltered form and thus to *tell of* the change. But in the world of spirit, to change places is to be oneself changed, and so all direct assurances of having arrived at this or that place are attempts in the Münchhausen manner. That one has arrived in the world of spirit at that far-off place is something the presentation itself demonstrates. If it testifies to the contrary, all assurance is nothing but a contribution to the comic. Power in the comic is the police badge, the badge of authority which today every agent must bear who really is an agent. But this is not hot-tempered or vehement comedy, its laughter shrill; on the contrary, it attends with care to the immediacy that it sets aside. The reaper's scythe is equipped with some wooden slats that run parallel to the sharp blade; and while the scythe cuts the grain, the grain sinks down almost luxuriantly on to the supporting cradle, to be laid neatly and beautifully on the stubble. So it is with legitimate comedy in respect of matured immediacy. The task of cutting is a solemn act, the cutter is not a grim reaper; yet it is to the sharp blade of the comic and its biting edge that the immediate yields, not unbecomingly, and even in its falling supported by the cutting. This comedy is essentially humour. If the comedy is cold and comfortless, it is a sign that no new immediacy is sprouting, and then there is no harvest, only the empty passion of a barren wind raging over the naked fields.

To be recognized for something can always be a good thing; I ask for nothing better than to be recognized as the only one in our *earnest* age who is not earnest. Far from wanting any alteration in this judgment, my only wish is that the honoured lecturers, both those who gesticulate from the lectern and those whose voices are raised round the tea-tables, abide by their judgment and have not suddenly forgotten the frequent declamations of earnest phrases directed against the pseudonymous authors in private, so that on the contrary they clearly remember that it was they who wanted to turn the comic into a qualification of earnest, and to find in jest a saviour from the sorriest of all tyrannies: the tyranny of intransigence, stupidity, and rigidity. The pseudonymous authors, myself included, were all subjective. I ask for nothing better than to be recognized in our *objective* age as the only person who did not manage to be objective.

That subjectivity, inwardness, is the truth; that existing is the crucial thing; that it was down this path we should be directed to Christianity, which precisely is inwardness, though note well, not just any inwardness, which was why the preliminary stages had to be firmly insisted upon – that

was my idea. I believe to have found a similar effort in the pseudonymous works, and I have attempted to make clear my interpretation of it and its relation to my *Crumbs*. Whether I have caught the authors' meaning, I cannot know for sure, but in any case I wish here to offer them my apologies for having in a way reviewed them, although by refraining from entering into a discussion of the content, my discussion is not really a review. I have never been puzzled why the pseudonymous authors asked time and again to be excused from being reviewed. Since the oppositional form of the presentation makes it impossible to recount the content, for the very reason that any account of it takes away the most important thing and falsely transforms the work into an instructive lecture, the authors have a perfect right to be satisfied with a few actual readers rather than being misunderstood by the many who through a review have found something they can go on about. This is also my opinion *qua* author; and I am reminded here of a remark by Zeno, who in connection with Theophrastus having so many disciples, said, 'His is the larger chorus, mine the more harmonious.' I have just recently read this again in Plutarch, in a little essay on 'praising oneself inoffensively'.¹³⁹

My *Crumbs* approached the problem of Christianity in a decisive way but without mentioning its name or that of Christ. In an age of knowledge, in which all are Christians and know what Christianity is, it is all too easy to use the sacred names without attaching any thought to them, to recite the Christian truth without it having the least impression on you. Should anyone want to assume that the reason why the names were omitted was my ignorance, that I did not know that the founder of Christianity was called Christ, and that his teaching is called Christianity, he is welcome to do so. It is always good to be recognized for something; and for my part I ask for nothing better than, in the midst of Christianity, to be the only one who does not know that the founder of Christianity was Christ. Being ignorant is after all always better than being informed about it as about a hundred other trivialities.

When my *Philosophical Crumbs* had come out and I was considering a postscript to 'clothe the problem in its historical costume',¹⁴⁰ yet another pseudonymous work appeared: *Stages on Life's Way*, a work that has attracted the attention of only a few (as it itself predicts on pp. 309, 376),¹⁴¹ perhaps also because here, unlike *Either/Or*, there was no

¹³⁹ Plutarch, *Moralia*. ¹⁴⁰ SKS 4, p. 305. ¹⁴¹ SKS 6, pp. 369 and 446ff.

‘Seducer’s Diary’, which was what people mostly read and naturally contributed especially to the sensation. Its relation to *Either/Or* is evident enough and is shown definitively in the use, in its first two sections, of names familiar from that work. Had the author of the *Stages* consulted me, I should have advised him for aesthetic reasons against bringing an earlier work to mind by using familiar names.^o With regard to all that must be thought risky, and to be so through being dependent on luck, evoking memory is always a dubious thing. Avoiding this is easy, but to do it is to try oneself and one’s luck in a gamble, the danger of which comes out in several places in the work.^p There is a story about a sailor falling from the top of the mast without coming to any harm; when he picked himself up he said, ‘Follow that.’ But presumably he too refrained from attempting a repeat. In view of its requiring luck and inspiration, the repetition is always a gamble. The ensuing comparison sets up an absolute claim on the fertility of expression, since to repeat one’s own words, or repeat word for word expressions that have been felicitously chosen, is not hard. Repeating the same means, in addition, making changes under conditions made difficult by what came before. While the merely inquisitive reader is put off by its being the same, since the inquisitive reader demands changes in externals, in names, scenery, clothes, hairstyles, etc., the attentive reader is made stricter in his demands, because there is nothing at all seductive, nothing distracting, no extra trappings, no details concerning the outward appearances of the unknown characters, or about the climatic conditions of distant regions, etc. But the gamble was made, and the unknown author has not been unaware of the risk, just as he can hardly have been unaware of the reason why Socrates staked his honour and pride on one thing: keeping on saying the same about

^o There is another reason why I would have advised the author (assuming, as one commonly does, that the pseudonymous works are those of just the one author) against the demanding work it involves. Good sense dictates that one should not be all that zealous and persevering in one’s work. Stupid people will only think it slipshod. No, much ado and little result, then the *plebs* think it is something. But perhaps it would have been to no purpose, for it is not unthinkable that the author has seen this himself but then scorned acting from good sense and found it questionable to win the admiration of a number of people.

^p Cf. p. 16 [SKS 6, p. 33]. ‘How easy to hold a banquet, and yet Constantin has maintained that he would never again risk it! How easy it is to admire, and yet Victor Eremita has maintained that he will never again express his admiration (for Mozart, that is), because a defeat is more terrible than becoming an invalid in the war!’ As an ethicist, the Assessor expresses the opposite with ethical passion, p. 86 [p. 112]: ‘This may have to be enough on the subject of marriage. At this moment I have no more I want to say; another time, perhaps tomorrow, I shall say more; but “always the same and about the same thing”, for it is only gypsies and bands of brigands and small-time profiteers who have the motto: Never return to where you have once been.’

the same.¹⁴² In making this gamble, the pseudonymous author has won an indirect victory over an inquisitive reading public. When this public peeks^r into the book and sees the familiar names: Victor Eremita, Constantin Constantius, etc., it tosses the book aside saying wearily, ‘It’s just the same as *Either/Or*.’ The inquisitive reader says accordingly: It is the same. And if such a reader says it aloud, perhaps the pseudonymous author will then think to himself like this: ‘If only it really were as you say, for this judgment is a compliment; it can’t be taken to mean that it is literally the same; but it’s true, I do indeed feel that fertility in inwardness on such a scale is something I lack, and so it is only in a considerably abridged form that I have risked repeating what I said, and with important changes in points of departure. As an author I do, however, have one fortunate advantage over the editor of *Either/Or*, because interest in its novelty, the size of the book, and the “Seducer’s Diary” created a stir, people thinking that here something was afoot, so that the book was bought and is even said to be sold out. A very dubious argument, alas, for its merit; one is almost tempted to think that it was a New Year gift. I, on the other hand, am free from the sniffing attentions of the curious.’

Along with Tivoli entertainments¹⁴³ and literary New Year gifts, the supreme law for the catch-penny artists¹⁴⁴ and those caught by them is

^q Something that offers an opportunity in general to acquire deep insight into a man’s soul, as to whether he has a spiritual or sensate disposition, is to take note of what he understands by an author’s wealth and what by an author’s poverty. If a clergyman could keep preaching for an entire year on one and the same text, constantly rejuvenating himself in a new fertility of expression, he would in my eyes be matchless. But a sensate listener would find him boring. If Oehlenschläger [A. G. Oehlenschläger (1779–1850), Danish poet, playwright, and professor of aesthetic] had been able the moment he had finished writing his *Valborg* to write it over again, then he would in my eyes have been still greater than he is. Writing *Signe* is already easier, because the circumstances, the country where the action takes place, the surroundings, etc. differ. But to write *Valborg*, have the reader read it and then write the same *Valborg* over again; the same, that is to say, all the externals remaining the same and familiar, only the delicious expression of love on Valborg’s lips being new, new as a fresh arrangement of flowers; yes, however many might be bored, I would presume to find it amazing. One of the things I have most admired in Shakespeare is his Falstaff, among other things because he is repeated. True, Falstaff does not have many scenes at a time, but if Shakespeare could have kept Falstaff unchanged in all five acts, and then again in all five acts, then no matter how many found it boring, I would presume to find it divine.

^r It is indubitable with regard to such an inquisitive reader that the first third of the book has as its epigraph these words by Lichtenberg: *Solche Werke sind Spiegel: wenn ein Affe hinein guckt, kan kein Apostel heraus sehen* [Such works are mirrors: when an ape looks in, no apostle can look out]. [Motto from the German scientist and satirist Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742–99), *Über Physiognomik*, used in *Stages on Life’s Way* (SKS 6, p. 16).]

¹⁴² See Plato’s *Gorgias*, where in reply to Callicles’s complaint that Socrates always says the same, Socrates replies that, yes, he does that, but also says it about the same.

¹⁴³ The Copenhagen Tivoli opened in 1843, the year in which the first of the pseudonymous works were published.

¹⁴⁴ ‘Stüvenfingere’.

variety, but regarding truth as inwardness in existence, regarding a more incorruptible joy in life, which has nothing in common with the craving of the life-weary for diversion, the opposite holds and the law is: the same and yet changed and still the same. That, you see, is why Tivoli fanciers value eternity so little, for it is the nature of eternity always to be the same, and sobriety of spirit can be recognized by its recognizing that change in externals is diversion but change in the same, inwardness. But so inquisitive, by and large, is the reading public that an author who wants rid of it can dispose of it just by giving a little hint, just a name, and then it will say: It is the same. Otherwise the way in which *Stages* departs from *Either/Or* is obvious enough. Besides the fact that two-thirds of it differs about as much as category distinctions allow,⁵ in the first third, Victor Eremita, formerly simply an editor, is now transformed into an existing individuality, Constantin and Johannes the Seducer are more definitely defined, the Assessor's preoccupation with marriage adopts a quite different perspective from that in *Either/Or*, while the most attentive reader will find hardly a single expression, a single turn of thought or phrase, the same as in *Either/Or*.

I have deliberately dwelt on this at some length, since even if it can be congenial to an author who stands on his own, and for whom this isolation is exactly what he loves, to me it means something else, it being connected with what I have constantly stressed, that the age has forgotten what it is to exist and what inwardness means. It has lost faith in the ability of inwardness to make the seemingly scanty content richer, while change in externals is simply the diversion that life-weariness and life-emptiness clutch at. This is why the tasks of existence are rejected. One learns to know in passing what faith is, and then, of course, it is something one knows. One then clutches at a speculative result and again comes no nearer. Then astronomy is brought out, and then one wades through all the sciences and spheres yet does not live, while the poets, merely to amuse readers, roam about in Africa, America, and way off in Trebizond and R-,¹⁴⁵ so that if poetry is not to say 'pass', a new continent will have to

⁵ And yet also regarding the two-thirds the work itself predicts that the reading public will find it boring (cf. pp. 268 top, 367 bottom and 368 top [*SKS* 6, p. 322, lines 24–30, 436f.]). A love story is a love story, says a reading public of that kind, and if one is to read about it once more, the setting must be in Africa, for the scenery is what provides the variety, and a reading public of that kind requires 'parades, locations, many characters – and then the cows'.

¹⁴⁵ A free quotation from Holberg's *Mester Gert Westphaler*.

be found before long. And why? Because inwardness is being lost more and more.

So let us begin with the last two-thirds of the work, the content of which is *a story of suffering*. Now, suffering may very well be present everywhere in the various stages of existence, but when an aesthetic stage, then an ethical stage, and finally a religious stage are arranged in a work and the word 'suffering' is employed only in the latter, this would seem to indicate that suffering is related to the religious otherwise than to the aesthetic and ethical. The phrase 'story of suffering' seems therefore to be used in a pregnant sense as a category, as if suffering has a decisive meaning in connection with the religious. As a title, 'A Story of Suffering' would appear here to mean something other than in Goethe's *Leiden des jungen Werthers*, or Hoffmann's *Leiden eines armen Theaterdirectors*.¹⁴⁶ Suffering in connection with aesthetic and ethical existence is accidental; it can be absent and yet the mode of existence still be aesthetic and ethical, or if it acquires a deeper meaning here, it will be as an element of transition.¹⁴⁷ Otherwise here, where suffering is posited as something crucial for a religious existence, and just for that reason as definitive of inwardness: the more the suffering, the more religious existence, and the suffering persists. The author, then, has not chosen the title 'A Story of Suffering' for his work because he did not know what else to call it; he has had something very definite in mind and has emphasized it himself (see pp. 353ff., all § 5, especially the middle of p. 357).¹⁴⁸ While aesthetic existence is essentially enjoyment, and ethical existence essentially struggle and victory, religious existence is essentially suffering – and not as transitional but persisting. The suffering is, to recall the Friar's¹⁴⁹ words, the 70,000 fathoms upon whose depth the religious person constantly remains.¹⁵⁰ But suffering is precisely inwardness and that which marks it off from aesthetic and ethical inwardness. It is usual, however, even in everyday speech, when it is said of someone that they must have suffered much, to link this straight away with the notion of inwardness.

The title of the story of suffering is "“Guilty?” – “Not guilty?”" The question marks obviously allude to legal court proceedings. A novelist would most likely have telescoped the two parts of the title, and a reading

¹⁴⁶ *The Sufferings of Young Werther*, and *The Suffering of a Poor Theatre Director*.

¹⁴⁷ 'Gjennemgangsmoment'. ¹⁴⁸ *SKS* 6, pp. 420–9, especially pp. 424f.

¹⁴⁹ The Friar's. ¹⁵⁰ See p. 117.

public that wants a result would no doubt have preferred that. The title would then have been, 'Unfaithful yet a Man of Honour', 'A Broken Promise yet an Eternal Fidelity', *ad modum*¹⁵¹ 'An Officer of the Hussars yet a Good Husband', etc., what's what is decided straight away on the title page and the reader reassured. Nor is the reader unsettled by existence, or by the dialectical accuracy of the categories; the story is an amiable hodge-podge of a bit of the aesthetic, a bit of the ethical, and a bit of the religious. But what really occupies a thinking person is not getting to know something after the event but precisely becoming contemporary in his existence with the one who is existing. And it is in the tension between the inquisitorial questions, cornered by the question's keen examination, that the experiment's *Quidam*¹⁵² exists. If it is the misfortune of the age to have forgotten what inwardness means and what it is to exist, the important thing is especially to get as close as possible to existence. Hence the experiment does not take a later moment in time as its starting-point, tell of an interesting conflict as something past, nor does it relax the tension of the conflict in a reassuring result; but, with its teasing form, it makes the reader a contemporary still more completely than he can become in the case of an actual contemporary event, and by not giving him a result it leaves him stuck there. No doubt a book without an ending has been written before. Maybe the author died or could not be bothered to finish it, etc. But here this is not the case; the absence of an ending, of a result, is understood, just as suffering earlier, as a categorial requirement in respect of religious existence. *Frater Taciturnus* develops this himself (§ 3, pp. 340, top of 343).¹⁵³ But it is the very absence of a result that defines inwardness, because a result is something external and the communication of results an external relation between a knower and a non-knower.

The 'Story of Suffering' was called an experiment and the Frater himself explains its meaning (§ 3).

The 'Story of Suffering' (see pp. 313, bottom of 339)¹⁵⁴ contained a relation to *Repetition*. However, when it comes to categories, the only aspect that can be of interest to thought, the difference is very obvious; whereas it is difference in masquerade costume that interests the gallery, which therefore most likely takes the greatest actress to be she who can

¹⁵¹ Latin: in the manner of.

¹⁵² Latin: a certain person. The name given to a figure in the latter part of *Stages on Life's Way*.

¹⁵³ SKS 6, pp. 404–12, 407f. ¹⁵⁴ SKS 6, pp. 373 and 404.

play not just in a variety of fantastic female costumes, but also plainly in trousers and jacket with turned-up collar, the compass of the player's art being measured by the costumes, so that the poorest actress is the one who is especially given parts where she wears her own clothes. In *Repetition*, common sense and the higher immediacy of youth were kept apart in Constantin, as the man of common sense, and the young man as the one in love; but in *Stages* the two factors are brought together in one, in *Quidam* of the experiment, so that the double movement becomes necessary and evident, and even *earnest* is a compound of jest and earnest (see p. 283).¹⁵⁵ It is the same person who with his good sense sees the comic also suffers the tragic,¹ and from the unity of the comic and the tragic chooses the tragic (see pp. 327 and top of 328).¹⁵⁶ In *Repetition*, irony and sentimentality were brought into relation with each other; in the 'Story of Suffering' humour is brought out. Constantin had to participate himself and take on the role, whereas *Frater Taciturnus* stands wholly outside like a street inspector,¹⁵⁷ for *Quidam* has enough sense, this being precisely why humour is reached, since he is himself both of these moments. If we leave out the feminine character, she being present in the 'Story of Suffering' as in *Repetition* only indirectly, then there are two characters in *Repetition*, while the 'Story of Suffering' has just one. 'It becomes more and more boring; and there is not even so much as a suicide, or insanity, or a clandestine childbirth, or anything else of the kind; and besides, when the author has already written a love story, he has exhausted that source and ought to try his hand at something new, such as a tale of robbers.'

Frater Taciturnus defines his own existence as lower than *Quidam*'s, inasmuch as the latter has a new immediacy. Constantin had not been disinclined to define himself in relation to the young man, but he had the good sense and irony that the young man lacked. Usually, one thinks of it differently, assuming that the experimenter, the observer, is higher, or is on a more elevated level, than what he presents. Which is why it is so easy to give a result. Here the opposite is the case; it is the person experimented with who discovers and marks out the higher, higher not in the direction of understanding and thinking, but in the direction of inwardness. What distinguishes *Quidam*'s inwardness is its being defined by his

¹ A little motto by *Quidam* puts one immediately in mind of the humorous double mood, while a Latin epigraph 'Perissem nisi perissem' [I had perished, had I not perished] is a suffering, humorous revoking of the whole.

¹⁵⁵ SKS 6, pp. 339f. ¹⁵⁶ SKS 6, pp. 389f. and 391. ¹⁵⁷ Cf. SKS 6, pp. 421 and 433.

having the contrast within himself, by his perceiving as comic what is nevertheless within him with all the passion of inwardness. A feminine inwardness in the form of devotion is a lesser inwardness, because its trajectory is obviously outwards, over towards, while it is precisely the trajectory inwards that the presence of the contrast signifies. *Quidam* is himself a unity of the comical and the tragic and yet more than the unity, since he is the subsequent passion (the comitragic, cf. § 2 *passim*).¹⁵⁸ The Frater is essentially a humorist and just for that reason marks out the new immediacy as something to be put off by.

So now we have humour promoted as the *terminus a quo* in relation to the Christian-religious. In modern scholarship humour has become the highest *after* faith.¹⁵⁹ Faith is the immediate, and humour is reached through speculation, which goes beyond faith. This is a general confusion in all systematic speculation in so far as it wants to take care of Christianity. No, humour rounds off immanence within immanence, lies still essentially in the withdrawal out of immanence into the eternal in recollection, and only then do faith and the paradoxes begin. Humour is the last stage in existence-inwardness before faith. For that reason, according to my notion, it had to be promoted, so that no prior stage should go unnoticed that might cause confusion later. This has now been done in the 'Story of Suffering'. Humour is not faith but is prior to faith; it is not after faith or a development of faith. Understood in the Christian way, there is no going beyond faith, because faith is the highest – for someone existing, as has been adequately adumbrated in the above. Even when humour wants to try its hand at the paradoxes, this is not faith. Humour, then, does not take on the suffering side of the paradox or the ethical aspect of faith, but only the amusing aspect. For it is a suffering, a faith's martyrdom even in times of peace, to have the eternal happiness of one's soul related to something over which the understanding despairs. Immature humour, on the other hand, which still lies behind what I really call humour in equilibrium between the comic and the tragic – this immature humour is a sort of jauntiness that has sprung out of reflection still too early. Weary of time and its endless succession, the humorist runs away and finds humorous relief in stating the absurd; just as it may be a relief to parody the meaning of life by paradoxically accentuating the trivial, by giving everything up and concentrating on playing bowls and

¹⁵⁸ *SKS* 6, pp. 385–404.

¹⁵⁹ In Hegelian philosophy humour succeeds rather than precedes faith.

riding horses. But this is immature humour's false version of the paradox as something to excite the arbitrariness of a melancholic passion. Far from being religiousness, this immature humour is an aesthetic refinement that skips past the ethical.

That faith and the Christian-religious have humour preceding them shows, moreover, what a tremendous range of existence is possible outside Christianity, and on the other hand, what experience of life is required for properly embracing Christianity. But in our time one does not exist at all, and so it is natural that it is all right for everyone to be a Christian as a matter of course. One becomes a Christian even as a child, which may be beautiful and well meant on the part of Christian parents, but ridiculous when the person in question himself assumes that this decides the matter. It is true that stupid clergymen appeal quite straightforwardly to a Bible passage straightforwardly understood – that no one enters the kingdom of God unless he enters it as a little child.¹⁶⁰ Yes, what a dear little thing Christianity can become with the help of the childishness of clergymen like these! This, indeed, would have excluded the apostles, for I have no knowledge of them having entered as small children. To say to the most mature spirit, 'Yes, my friend, just see to it that you become a child again, then you shall become a Christian' – but think, that is a difficult saying, as befits the teaching that was an offence to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks.¹⁶¹ Yet to understand this dark saying as if all difficulty were removed by being baptized as a little child and then dying, the sooner the better, is a stupidity that is quite the opposite of the category of Christianity (which paradoxically accentuates temporal existence) and has failed even to grasp the paganism that has small children weeping in Elysium because they died so soon,¹⁶² which at least makes some concession to time. Christianity, on its entrance into the world, was not proclaimed to children but to a superannuated Jewish religiousness, a superannuated world of science and art. First the first and then the next. If only the age had as much existence-inwardness as a Jew or a Greek, then at least there could be some talk of a relation to Christianity. But if it was once terribly difficult to become a Christian, soon it will surely be impossible because it all becomes trivial. A Greek philosopher was truly a man who could think, and therefore it means something when Christianity defines itself as the teaching that is an

¹⁶⁰ Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17. ¹⁶¹ 1 Corinthians 1:23. ¹⁶² Virgil, *Aeneid*, book 6, verses 426f.

offence to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks; for the Jew still had enough religious inwardness to be capable of taking offence. But all this is now out of date in our now-living sullen generation, which although unquestionably having on average far more culture than was previously the case, has the passion neither of thought nor of religiousness. It is possible both to enjoy life and to give it meaning and substance outside Christianity, just as the most famous poets and artists, the most eminent of thinkers, even men of piety, have lived outside Christianity. This is something to which Christianity has itself no doubt been privy and yet not found itself justified in changing the terms; and the more maturity of spirit in the subject, the more terrible that business of the paradox, the unchanged condition of Christianity, the signal for the offence and folly. But let us not transform Christianity in its old age into an out-of-pocket innkeeper who needs to come up with something to attract customers, or into an adventurer intent on making a hit in the world. Certainly, Christianity can hardly be said to have made a hit when it came into the world, since it went ahead with crucifixion, flogging and the like. But God knows whether it really wants to make a hit here in the world. I rather imagine it is ashamed of itself, like an old man who saw himself decked out in the newest fashion; or, better, I imagine it is storing up wrath¹⁶³ for people when it sees this distorted figure supposed to be Christianity, a scent-drenched and systematically accommodated, soirée-introduced scholarliness, whose whole secret is half measures and thus truth to a certain degree, a radical cure – and it is only as such that it is what it is – transformed now into a vaccination, and one's relation to it the same as having a certificate of vaccination. No, the Christian paradox is not this kind of this-and-that, something strange and yet not so strange; its truth is not like Salomon Goldkalb's opinion: *vieles fore und aft, yes und no as well*.¹⁶⁴ Nor is faith something that everyone has and no cultured person can be seen to stop at. If it can be grasped and held on to by the simplest person, that makes it only the more difficult for the cultured to reach. What a wonderful, inspiring Christian humanity: the highest is common to all and the most fortunately gifted only those most strictly taken to task.

But back to the *Stages*. In its tripartition it differs markedly from *Either/Or*. There are three stages: an aesthetic, an ethical, a religious – not abstract

¹⁶³ Romans 2:5.

¹⁶⁴ 'Much fore and aft, yes and no, also', a reference to a passage in Heiberg's comedy *Kong Salomon og Jørgen Hattemager* [*King Solomon and Jørgen Hatter*].

in the way of immediate, mediate and unity, but concretely, in terms of the category of existence, as pleasure–perdition; action, action–victory; suffering. But in spite of this tripartition the book is just as much an either/or, for the ethical and the religious stages are essentially related. What was wrong with *Either/Or* was that its closure was ethical, as indicated. In the *Stages* this has been made clear and the religious has stood its ground.

The aesthetic and the ethical stages are presented once more, as in a way a recapitulation and yet as something new. It would also be a poor testimony to existence–inwardness if every such stage could not be rejuvenated in the presentation of it, even if, in the attempt to play down the specious assistance of externals, there is a risk of highlighting the difference as in the choice of new names and the like.

The ethicist focuses once again on marriage as the dialectically most complex revelation of actuality. He nevertheless brings out a new aspect and especially asserts the category of time and its significance as the medium for the beauty that increases with time, while from the aesthetic point of view time and existence in time are more or less a regression.

The existence positions that the stages have to each other are altered by the tripartition. In *Either/Or* the aesthetic standpoint is an existence possibility, while the ethicist is existing. Now the aesthetic is existing, the ethicist combative, fighting *incipiti proelio*¹⁶⁵ against the aesthetic, over which he again readily gains the victory, not through the seductive gifts of the intellect but with ethical passion and pathos, and against the religious. In rounding off, the ethicist does his utmost to protect himself against the decisive form of a higher standpoint. That he protects himself in this way is as it should be; he is, after all, not a standpoint but an existing individuality. It is also a fundamental confusion in the recent science¹⁶⁶ unreflectively to mistake the abstract consideration of standpoints for existing, so that knowing about these means that a person is existing; whereas every existing individuality must be more or less one-sided. Certainly, from the abstract point of view, there is no decisive conflict between the standpoints, just because abstraction removes that in which the decision lies: the *existing subject*. But the immanent transition is a chimera anyway, an illusion, as though the one standpoint necessarily determined itself on its own into the other, since the category of transition is itself a break with immanence, a *leap*.

¹⁶⁵ Latin: in a battle with uncertain outcome.

¹⁶⁶ A reference to Hegel's *Wissenschaft*. See the translator's introduction.

The aesthete in *Either/Or* was a possibility of existence, a young, richly talented, in part hopeful human being, experimenting with himself and with life, one 'with whom it is impossible really to be angry, because the evil in him, as in the medieval conception, has a certain admixture of the childlike',¹⁶⁷ and because he was no real actuality but 'a possibility of everything'.¹⁶⁸ This is how, so to speak, the aesthete strode about in the Assessor's living-room.^u The Assessor was jovial towards him, ethically sure and essentially admonitory, in just the way that a somewhat older and more mature person relates to a younger whose talents and intellectual superiority he in a way recognizes, though having absolutely the upper hand in his assurance, experience and inwardness in living. In *Stages* the aesthetic comes out in existence in a more pronounced way, and it therefore becomes latently clear in the presentation itself that an aesthetic existence, even where a softer light falls on it, as if essentially that existence is always brilliant, is perdition. But it is not an alien standpoint, as in the case of the Assessor's, that makes this clear as a warning to a young person whose life is not yet in the deepest sense conclusive. To admonish a decisively aesthetic existence is too late; to want to warn Victor Eremita, Constantin Constantius, the Fashion Designer, or Johannes the Seducer is to make a laughing-stock of oneself and produces just as comical an effect as a situation I once experienced. In the flush of danger a man grabbed a toy stick from his child to strike a huge desperado who had forced his way into the room. Though sharing the danger I could not help laughing, because it looked as if he were beating clothes. The relationship between the Assessor and the aesthete in *Either/Or* made it natural and psychologically correct for the Assessor to be admonitory. However, even in that work there was no decision in the finite sense (see the Preface), letting the reader say, 'See, that settles it.' A reader who needs the reassurance of a reprimand¹⁶⁹ to see that a standpoint is in error, or else of an unfortunate consequence (for example, insanity, suicide, poverty, etc.), really sees nothing, he only imagines it; and for an author to behave like that is to write effeminately for childish readers.^v Take a

^u Even the 'Seducer's Diary' was only the possibility of horror, which the aesthete in his accumulative existence had conjured up precisely because, not being anything actual himself, he had to try his hand at everything in possibility.

^v I wish to recall again here something *Frater Taciturnus* among others often stresses. Hegelian philosophy culminates in the proposition that the outer is the inner and the inner the outer. With

¹⁶⁷ *SKS* 3, p. 18. ¹⁶⁸ *SKS* 3, p. 25.

¹⁶⁹ 'Straffetale'; corrective oration with bitter invective, a philippic.

character like Johannes the Seducer. Anyone who needs him to be mad or to shoot himself to be able to see that his standpoint is perdition does not see it, he imagines it. For whoever does grasp it does so the moment the Seducer opens his mouth; he hears in every word the ruination and the judgment upon him. The reader who needs the outer punishment only makes a fool of himself, for you can take a very decent person and have him become mad, and then a reader like that will believe the standpoint to be unentitled.

The aesthetic stage is represented by '*In Vino Veritas*'.¹⁷⁰ Those who put in an appearance here are doubtless aesthetes but they are by no means ignorant of the ethical. Therefore they are not presented simply; they are presented as clearly knowing how to give an account of their existences. It is thought in our age that knowledge settles everything, and that one is helped if one only acquires knowledge of the truth, the quicker and shorter the better. But existing is something quite other than knowing.

The Young Man comes closest to being only a possibility and therefore a still hopeful case. He is essentially thought-melancholy (the ethicist adumbrates him pp. 87, 88 top, 89).¹⁷¹ Constantin Constantius is understanding's callousness (cf. the ethicist, p. 90).¹⁷² Constantin's grasp of jealousy is found on pp. 99, bottom, and 100, top).¹⁷³ Victor Eremita is sympathizing irony (cf. the ethicist, pp. 107 and 108).¹⁷⁴ Victor's attack on marriage is found on p. 85.¹⁷⁵ The Fashion Designer is demonic despair in passion. Johannes the Seducer is perdition in coldness, a

this Hegel has done. But this is essentially an aesthetic-metaphysical principle, and thus the Hegelian philosophy is happily and safely finished without having engaged with the ethical and the religious. Or it has become finished in a deceptive way by combining everything (including the ethical and the religious) in the aesthetic-metaphysical. Even the ethical posits a kind of opposition between the outer and the inner in so far as it places the outer in indifference. As material for action, the outer is indifferent, the ethical accent being on the purpose. The outcome, as the externality of action, is indifferent, the ethical accent lying on the purpose, and concern with the outcome being precisely what is immoral. Victory in the outer proves nothing at all ethically, because ethically one asks only about the inner. Punishment in the outer is a trifle; and far from demanding with aesthetic fuss that the punishment be visible, the ethical says proudly, 'I will punish, be sure', i.e., in the inner, and to rate punishment in the outer as comparable to the inner is precisely what is immoral. – The religious posits the opposition between outer and inner in a definitive way, defined as precisely the opposition within which suffering lies as the existence category for the religious, but within which also lies the inward infinity of interiority. If our age had not been marked out for a total neglect of existing, it would be unthinkable that a wisdom like the Hegelian could be regarded as the highest, as presumably it can be for the aesthetically contemplating but not for the ethically or religiously existing.

¹⁷⁰ Latin: in wine [there is] truth. ¹⁷¹ SKS 6, pp. 113f., 114, 115. ¹⁷² SKS 6, p. 116.

¹⁷³ SKS 6, pp. 127f. ¹⁷⁴ SKS 6, pp. 136–8. ¹⁷⁵ SKS 6, pp. 111f.

'marked' and burnt-out individuality. All of them are consistent to the point of despair. Just as in the second part of *Either/Or* you will find answers to and correction of every deviation in the first part, so here too you will find the adumbration in the ethicist, except that essentially he expresses himself and nowhere takes direct account of what, indeed according to the plan of the work, he cannot be assumed to know. It is thus left to the reader's discretion whether he should put it together all by himself; nothing is done for a reader's convenience. It is the latter, of course, that readers want. They want to read books in the royal manner, in the way that a king reads a petition, where a summary in the margin relieves him of the inconvenience of the longwindedness of the petitioner. Regarding the pseudonymous authors this must surely be a misunderstanding on the part of the reader, since, from the impression I have of them, I am not conscious of them seeking any kind of favours with the exalted majority-majesty of the reading public. That would also strike me as a very strange thing to do. I have always imagined an author as someone who knows something more than the reader, or who knows the same but in another way. That is why he is an author and he should not meddle with authorship otherwise. On the other hand, it has never occurred to me that an author is a supplicant, a beggar at the reader's door, a peddler who, with the devil's gift of the gab and some gold on the binding that really hits the daughters' fancies, can palm off his books on the families.

Johannes the Seducer ends with *that woman is only the moment*.¹⁷⁶ This, in its generality, is the essential aesthetic principle, namely, that the moment is everything, and to that extent essentially in turn nothing, just as the sophistic proposition that everything is true means that nothing is true. The significance attached to time is quite generally decisive for every standpoint up to the paradox, which accentuates time paradoxically. As much as time is accentuated, so, to the same extent, is there an advance from the aesthetic, the metaphysical, to the ethical, the religious, and the Christian-religious.

Where Johannes the Seducer ends, the Assessor begins: *woman's beauty increases with the years*. Here time is accentuated ethically, but not otherwise than as still to allow withdrawal out of existence into the eternal by way of recollection.

¹⁷⁶ 'Øieblikket': alternatively the 'instant'.

The aesthetic stage is very briefly indicated and the author, presumably in order to put proper emphasis on the religious, has called the first part 'A Recollection', pressing the aesthetic back, the more to bring the ethical stage and especially the religious to the fore.

As for the details of the work's contents, I shall go no further into these. The work's importance, if it has any, will consist in the existence-inwardness of the various stages as variously exemplified in passion, irony, pathos, humour, dialectic. Naturally, such things do not occupy university lecturers. *Am Ende*¹⁷⁷ it is perhaps not unthinkable that a lecturer should carry his courtesy so far as to say *en passant*, in a clause, in a remark affixed to a paragraph of the system: He represents inwardness. The author and an ignorant reading public would then have learned everything. Passion, pathos, irony, dialectic, humour, enthusiasm, etc. are regarded by lecturers as something subordinate which everybody has. So when it is said that he represents inwardness, in these brief words which everyone can say, everything is said, and much more than the author has said. Anyone knows thereby what he is to think, and any lecturer could quite certainly have managed everything in this area, but they have left it to reduced subjects. Whether everyone really knows concretely what inwardness is, and is able in the capacity of an author to produce something in this area, I leave undecided. Of everyone who remains silent I am prepared to assume it, but the lecturers do not remain silent.

Still, as said previously, I have nothing to do with the contents of the work. My thesis was that subjectivity, inwardness is truth. For me this principle was decisive regarding the problem of Christianity, and the same consideration has led me to follow a certain effort in the pseudonymous works, which to the very last have honestly abstained from lecturing, and to pay special attention to the last of these works, because it was published after my *Crumbs* and, by freely reproducing the earlier, calls them to mind, and through humour as *confinium*.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ 'In the end'. ¹⁷⁸ Latin: boundary.

Chapter 3

Actual, ethical subjectivity; the subjective thinker

§ 1

Existing; actuality

The difficulty with existence and one who exists never really emerges in the language of abstract thought, much less receives an explanation. Just because abstract thinking is *sub specie aeterni*,¹ it disregards the concrete, the temporal, the becoming of existence, the predicament of the existing individual due to his being a composite of the temporal and the eternal situated in existence.^a If, of course, you are willing to assume that abstract thinking is supreme, it follows that science and the thinkers are proud to abandon existence, leaving the rest of us to face the worst. Yes, something also follows for the abstract thinker himself, that he, also being one who exists, must in one way or another be *distract*.

To ask abstractly about actuality (supposing it is correct to ask about it abstractly, since the particular, the accidental, is a property of the actual and directly opposed to abstraction) and to answer abstractly is not nearly

^a The fact that, in his *Logic*, Hegel nevertheless is constantly bringing in an idea all too well informed by the concrete and its consequent, and which the professor needs every time he is to go further, in spite of the transition being a necessary one, is of course a mistake, as Trendelenburg [*Logische Untersuchungen*] has excellently pointed out. To cite a ready example: how is the transition formed by which *die Existenz* is the existents? *Die Existenz ist die unmittelbare Einheit der Reflexion-in-sich und der Reflexion-in-Anderes. Sie ist daher (?) die unbestimmte Menge von Existirenden* [Existence is the immediate unity of reflection-into-self and reflection-into-another. It follows from this (?) that existence is the indefinite multitude of existents. (Tr. William Wallace, *Hegel's Logic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), § 123, p. 179)].

¹ Latin: under the aspect of eternity.

so hard as it is to raise and answer the question of what it means that this definite something is an actuality. This definite something is just what abstraction disregards, but the difficulty lies in bringing this definite something and the ideality of thought together through wanting to think it. Abstract thought cannot even so much as concern itself with such a contradiction, since the abstraction itself prevents it from arising.

The suspect nature of abstract thought becomes evident exactly in connection with all existence-questions, where the abstraction removes the difficulty by dropping it and then priding itself on having explained everything. It explains immortality in general and, what do you know?, everything goes excellently in as much as immortality becomes identical with eternity, the eternity that is essentially the medium of thought. But whether an existing individual human being is immortal, which is just the difficulty, this is something that abstract thought does not trouble itself with. It is disinterested. Yet the difficulty with existence is what interests one who exists, and the one who exists is infinitely interested in existing. Abstract thinking thus helps me with my immortality by killing me off as a particular existing individual and then making me immortal, and so helping rather like the doctor in Holberg who with his medicine took the patient's life but then also expelled the fever.² The impression one gets, on contemplating an abstract thinker unwilling to clarify to himself, and to admit to, the relation his abstract thought has to his being someone existing, is a comic one however distinguished he may be, because he is on the point of ceasing to be a human being. While, as a composite of the finite and the infinite, an actual human being has his actuality precisely in keeping these together, infinitely interested in existing, an abstract thinker of this kind is a two-fold creature, a fantastical one who lives in the pure being of abstract thought and, now and then, a pitiful professorial figure whom the abstract creature sets aside, as one does a walking-stick. When reading the story of such thinker's life (for his writings may be excellent), one trembles to think of what it means to be a human being.^b If a child lace-maker were to produce ever so beautiful laces, it is still a sad thing to picture this cowed little creature. Similarly it is a comical sight to observe a thinker who in spite of all the bravura, exists personally as a pettifogger, married in person but hardly familiar with or moved by the power of love, and whose marriage

^b And on reading in his writings that thought and being are one, and considering his life and its story one thinks: the being which is identical with thought can hardly be that of a human being.

² Holberg's comedy, *Barselstuen* (*The Lying-in Room*) (1723).

was no doubt for that reason as impersonal as his thought, and his personal life devoid of pathos and emotional conflict, concerned in a philistine way only with which university offered the best livelihood. One would think such an anomaly impossible with regard to thinking, and to be a part only of the misery of the world outside where one human being slaves for another so that it is impossible to admire the lacework without also shedding a tear at the thought of the lace-maker. One would have thought that a thinker lived the richest of human lives – so it was in Greece.

It is another matter with the abstract thinker who, not having understood either himself or the relation of abstract thinking to existence, simply follows the prompting of a talent, or becomes such a thing by being drilled into it. I am well aware that one tends to admire an artist-career in which the artist simply pursues his talent without accounting for what it means to be a human being, so that the admirer forgets him in admiration of his art. But I know, too, that someone who exists in this way has his share of the tragic in being a person apart in a way that finds no personal reflection in the ethical; and I also know that in Greece a thinker was not someone leading a self-effacing existence who produced works of art, but was himself an existing work of art. One would think that being a thinker was the last thing in the world to distinguish one from being a human. If it is to be taken for granted that a certain abstract thinker lacked a sense of the comical, this is *eo ipso*³ proof that all his thinking is the product of a possibly outstanding talent but not of a human being who, in an eminent sense,⁴ has existed as such. Yet one is taught that thinking is supreme, that thinking includes everything else under it, and at the same time no objection is raised against the thinker failing to exist essentially *qua* human being but only as a differential talent. That the teaching about thinking does not have its counterpart in the concept of the thinker, that the thinker's own existence contradicts his thinking, shows that one is merely lecturing. That thinking is higher than feeling and imagination is taught by a thinker who has himself neither pathos nor passion. That thought is higher than irony and humour is taught by a thinker who lacks altogether any sense of the comic. How comic! Just as all abstract thinking regarding Christianity and all problems of existence is an essay in the comic, so is so-called pure thinking in its entirety a psychological curiosity, a remarkable piece of ingenious combination and construction in that fantastic medium, pure being. Unquestioningly to

³ Latin: by that very fact, by the same token.

⁴ A scholastic expression: in a higher sense than 'formally' (i.e. merely by definition).

idolize this pure thought as the highest we can reach shows that the thinker has never existed *qua* human being, that among other things he has not in an eminent sense acted – not, that is, in the way of exploits but of inwardness. But acting in the eminent sense belongs essentially to existing *qua* human being. Through acting, through risking what is decisive (of which every human being is capable) with the utmost subjective passion in full consciousness of an eternal responsibility, one learns something else, plus that being a human being is something other than year in and year out hammering something together into a system. Through existing essentially *qua* human being one also acquires a sense of the comic. I do not say that everyone who actually exists as a human being is therefore capable of comic poetry or of being a comic actor, but he is receptive to these.

That the language of abstract thought does not really allow the difficulty with existence and for the one who exists to emerge can be illustrated by reference to a crucial problem about which so much has been said and written. As everyone knows, the Hegelian philosophy has done away with the law of contradiction, and Hegel himself has more than once passed a scathing judgment on those thinkers who remained in the sphere of understanding and reflection, and therefore insisted on an either/or. Since then, when anyone lets fall a hint about an *aut-aut*,⁵ it has become a favourite sport for a Hegelian to come riding clippety clop (like Jens the park ranger in Kallundsborgs-Krøniken),⁶ win his victory and then ride off home again. Here in Denmark too,⁷ the Hegelians have several times been in the saddle, especially after Bishop Mynster, to win speculation's splendid victory, and Bishop Mynster has more than once become a defeated standpoint, though for one who is beaten he seems to be doing very nicely, so that one may rather fear for the undefeated victors, that in their tremendous effort they may have overexerted themselves. And yet, at the root of the conflict and the victory there may be a misunderstanding. Hegel is utterly and absolutely right in saying that when viewed eternally, *sub specie aeterni*, in the language of abstraction, in pure thought and pure being, there is no *aut-aut*. Where the devil should it be, once abstraction has taken away the contradiction? Hegel and the Hegelians should rather take the trouble to explain what is meant with the humbug

⁵ Latin: either/or.

⁶ Jens Baggesen's verse narrative, *Kallundborg Krønike, eller Censurens Oprindelse (The Kalundborg Chronicle, or the Origin of Censorship)* (1786).

⁷ 'Ogsaa hos oss': also here at home.

of introducing contradiction, movement, transition, etc. into logic. Champions of an either/or are in the wrong when they barge into the domain of pure thought and want to defend their cause there. Like the giant who wrestled with Hercules but lost his strength as soon as he was hoisted from the earth, the either/or of contradiction is *eo ipso* abrogated once hoisted out of existence and introduced into the eternity of abstraction. On the other hand, Hegel is just as wrong when, in forgetting the abstraction, he plunges out of it and down into the realm of existence in order, with might and main, to annul the double *aut*. To do this in existence is impossible, for then he abrogates existence as well. If I take existence away (abstract from it), then there is no *aut-aut*; taking it away in existence means taking away existence, and then I do not abrogate it in existence. If it is incorrect to say that there is something true in theology which is not true in philosophy,⁸ it is quite correct to say that there is something true for one who exists which is not true in abstraction, and it is also true ethically that pure being is fantasy and that one who exists is prohibited from wanting to forget that he exists. So caution must be exercised when dealing with a Hegelian, and one must above all make sure with whom one has the honour of speaking. Is he a human being, an existing human being, is he himself *sub specie aeterni*, even when he sleeps, eats, blows his nose and whatever else a human being does? Is he himself the pure 'I am I', something that has certainly never occurred to any philosopher? And if not that, how does he – in existing – relate to it, to the middle term in which the ethical responsibility in, by, and through existing, is duly respected? Does he exist? And if he exists, is he then not on the way to being? And if he is on the way to being, does he not then relate to the future? Does he never relate to the future in such a way as to act? And if he never acts, will he not then forgive an ethical individuality for saying of him, in passion and with dramatic truth, that he is an ass? But if he does act, *sensu eminenti*,⁹ does he then not relate to the future with infinite passion? Is there not then an *aut/aut*? Is it not the case that eternity is not for one who exists – not eternity but the future, and that eternity is eternity only for the Eternal one, who is not on the way to being? Ask him to answer the following question, i.e., if such a question can be addressed to him: This giving up existing, as far as is possible, in order to be *sub specie aeterni*, is it something that happens to

⁸ The scholastic doctrine, resulting from a dispute in Paris in the late Middle Ages, that there could be truths of philosophy that were false in theology.

⁹ Latin: in an eminent sense. See n. 4 above.

him, or is it something one does through coming to some conclusion, or perhaps even something one ought to do? For if I ought to do it, then an *aut-aut* is *eo ipso* established even in respect of being *sub specie aeterni*. Or was he born *sub specie aeterni* and has he lived *sub specie aeterni* ever since, so that he cannot even understand what it is that I am asking about, never having had anything to do with a future, and never having come across a decision? In that case, I must realize that this is not a human being with whom I have the honour of conversing. But I am not finished yet. To me it is a strange affair that such enigmatic beings show up. Before an outbreak of cholera a kind of fly comes along that is not otherwise seen. May not the appearance of these incredibly pure thinkers be a sign of a disaster in store for humankind, such as, for example, going without the ethical and the religious? So, one must be wary with an abstract thinker who wants not only to stay in abstraction's pure being, but that this be a human being's highest goal, and wants a kind of thinking that leads to ignoring the ethical and misunderstanding the religious to be the most elevated kind of thought. On the other hand, do not go around saying that *sub specie aeterni*, 'where everything is and nothing comes into being'^c (the Eleatic teaching), there should be *aut/aut*. It is only where everything is in the course of becoming, where only so much eternity is present as can keep hold of the passionate decision, where eternity relates as the future to the one who is on the way to being – it is there that the absolute disjunction belongs. When I put together eternity and becoming, it is not repose that I get but the future. That, no doubt, is why Christianity has proclaimed eternity as the future, preached, as it was, in existence, for which reason it also assumes an absolute *aut/aut*.

All logical thinking is in the language of abstraction and *sub specie aeterni*. To think existence in this way is to disregard the difficulty,

^c Misled by constant talk of a continual process in which opposites combine in a higher unity, and then in a higher unity again, etc., people have drawn a parallel between Hegel's doctrine and that of Heraclitus, that everything is in a flux and nothing remains constant. But this is a misunderstanding, because everything said in Hegel's philosophy about process and becoming is an illusion. That is why the system lacks an ethics, why the system knows nothing when the living generation and the living individual seriously pose the question of becoming in order to act. So, in spite of all his talk of process, Hegel understands history not from the point of view of becoming, but helped by the illusion of pastness, in terms of a finality from which all becoming is excluded. That is why a Hegelian cannot possibly understand himself through philosophy; he can only understand what is past and done with. But someone still living is surely not dead. He no doubt consoles himself with the thought that, having understood China and Persia and 6,000 years of world history, a single individual can go hang even if it is himself. I don't see it in that way and understand it better conversely: if a person cannot understand himself, his understanding of China and Persia etc. is probably something special.

namely that of thinking the eternal in becoming, as one is surely obliged to do, since the thinker himself is in the course of becoming. Thinking abstractly is therefore easier than existing if this is not to be understood as what people usually call existing, just as with being a subject of sorts. Here again we have an example of how the simplest task is the most difficult. One thinks that existing is nothing, even less an art, after all we all exist, but to think abstractly, that is something. However, truly to exist, that is, to permeate one's existence with consciousness, at once eternal as though far beyond it and yet present in it, and nevertheless in the course of becoming – that is truly difficult. If thinking in our time had not become something strange, something learned parrot-wise, thinkers would make a quite different impression on people, as in Greece, where a thinker was also someone inspired in existing and impassioned by his thought, as was once the case in Christendom, where a thinker was also a believer enthusiastically seeking to understand himself in the existence of faith. Were this the situation with thinkers in our time, pure thinking would have ended in one suicide after the other, for in existence suicide is the only consistent outcome of pure thinking when it will not see itself as just part of being human, and come to terms with a personally ethical and religious existence, but as everything and supreme. We do not praise suicide, but passion certainly. But now, on the contrary, a thinker is a curious beast which is at certain times of day unusually clever but has nothing in common otherwise with a human being.

To think existence *sub specie aeterni* and in abstraction is essentially to rescind it, and the merit of this is much like that of the widely trumpeted rescinding of the law of contradiction. Existence without motion is unthinkable and motion is unthinkable *sub specie aeterni*. Leaving out motion is not exactly the cleverest of moves, and introducing it into logic as transition, and with it time and space, is only a new confusion. But in so far as all thought is eternal, the difficulty is one for the one who exists. Existence, like motion, is a very difficult matter to deal with. If I think it, I do away with it, and then do not think it. It might seem, then, that the right thing to do is to say that there is something that cannot be thought, namely, existing. But the difficulty is still there, that existence has it that the thinker exists.

Since Greek philosophy was not *distract*, motion is a constant object of its dialectical endeavours. The Greek philosopher was one who exists and did not forget that fact. He therefore resorted to suicide, or to dying from

the world in the Pythagorean sense, or to being dead in a Socratic sense to be able to think. He was conscious of being a thinking being, but he was also conscious that existence, as his medium, by putting him in the constant course of becoming, prevented him from thinking all the time. So, to be able truly to think, he took his own life. Modern philosophy smiles loftily at such childishness, as though every modern thinker did not know, as well as he knows that thought and being are one, that to be what he thinks is not worth the effort.

It is this point about existing, and the demand ethics makes on the one existing, that must be insisted upon when an abstract philosophy and a pure thought would explain everything by explaining away the crucial factor. Unafraid, one has only to risk being a human being, not allowing oneself to be frightened or tricked in embarrassment into becoming some sort of phantom. It would be another thing if pure thought were to explain its relation to the ethical and to an ethically existing individuality. But this is what it never does, indeed not even makes a show of so doing, on pain of having to involve itself in another kind of dialectic, namely, the Greek or the existence-dialectic. The stamp of ethical approval is what everyone existing has a right to demand of anything calling itself wisdom. Once the beginning has been made, the transition is imperceptible whereby, little by little, a person forgets to exist in order to think *sub specie aeterni*. The objection then must be of another kind. There may be many, many objections that can be made to Hegelianism within the realm of pure thought, but this leaves everything essentially unchanged. As willing as I am in the capacity of a humble reader to admire Hegel's *Logic*, by no means aspiring to judge it, and as willing as I am to admit that there may be much for me to learn when I return to it, I shall be just as proud, just as defiant, just as assertive, just as fearless in my contention that the Hegelian philosophy puts existence into confusion through not defining its relation to someone existing, by ignoring the ethical. The most dangerous scepticism is always the one that looks least like it; but the idea that pure thought should be the positive truth for one who exists is scepticism, for this is a chimerical positivity. To be able to explain the past, all of world history, is fine; but if the ability only to understand the past is to be the highest for one still living, then a positivity like that is scepticism, and a dangerous scepticism because the huge amount one understands offers such a deceptive appearance. That is why the awful thing can happen to Hegel's philosophy that the indirect assault proves the most dangerous

one. Let a doubting youth, but an existing doubter with youth's endearing and boundless confidence in a scholarly hero, look confidently for the truth in Hegelian positivity, the truth for existence – he will write a terrible epigram on Hegel. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean that every youth is capable of overcoming Hegel, far from it. If a young man is conceited and foolish besides, his attack is meaningless. No, the young man is never to think of attacking Hegel. On the contrary, he must be willing to submit to Hegel unconditionally, with feminine devotion, but also with the strength to stick to his question – then without suspecting it he is a satirist. The youth is an existing doubter: constantly suspended in doubt, he reaches out for the truth – so as to exist in it. He is consequently negative and Hegel's philosophy is after all positive – no wonder he puts his trust in it. But, then just look: pure thought, for someone existing, is a chimera when the truth is to be existed in. Having to exist under the guidance of pure thought is like travelling in Denmark with a small map of Europe on which Denmark shows no larger than a steel pen-point – yes, even more impossible. The young man's admiration and enthusiasm, his boundless confidence in Hegel, are precisely the satire on Hegel. This is something that would have been realized long ago if pure thought had not kept itself going by a reputation that so impresses people that they dare not say anything except that it is excellent, that they have understood it – though in a sense this is impossible, since no one can be led by this philosophy to understand himself, which is surely an absolute condition for all other understanding. Socrates has said rather ironically that he did not know for certain whether he was a human being or something else, but in the confessional a Hegelian can with all due solemnity say: I do not know whether I am a human being – but I have understood the system. For my part, I would rather say: I know that I am a human being and I know that I have not understood the system. And having said so quite directly, I would add that, if any of our Hegelians would take me in hand and help me towards an understanding of the system, there will be no hindrance from my side. I shall try hard to make myself as stupid as possible so as not to have a single presupposition except my ignorance, so that I can learn all the more and just to be sure of learning something, to be as indifferent as possible to all charges of un scholarliness.

Existing, unless by this we are to understand an existing of a kind, is impossible without passion. That is why every Greek thinker was also

essentially a passionate thinker. I have often reflected how one might bring a person into a state of passion. Thus I have imagined having him put on a horse and making this shy and set off in the wildest gallop. Or better still, properly to bring out the passion, taking a man who wanted to get somewhere as quickly as possible (and was therefore already in some state of passion) and putting him astride a horse that could scarcely walk – and yet that is what existing is like if one is to be conscious of it. Or if a driver were not otherwise especially prone to passion, hitching together a Pegasus and a worn-out jade and saying, ‘Now drive’ – I imagine that might work. And this is what existing is like if one is to be conscious of it. Eternity, like that winged horse, is infinitely fast; time is a worn-out jade; and the existing individual is the driver, that is, if existing isn’t to be what people usually call that, for in that case the one existing would be no driver but a drunken peasant asleep in the wagon, leaving the horses to their own devices. Yes, he too drives and is a coachman, and there are many who, similarly, ‘also exist’.

In so far as existence is motion there must be something continuous holding it together, for otherwise there is no motion. Just as the fact that everything is true means that nothing is true, similarly that everything is in motion means that there is no motion.^d Immobility belongs to motion as its goal, in the sense of its τέλος and μέτρον.¹⁰ Otherwise the fact that everything is in motion, if one also takes away time and says that everything is always in motion, is *eo ipso* standstill. Therefore Aristotle, who stresses motion in so many ways, says that God, himself unmoved, moves everything. While pure thought now without further ado rescinds all motion, or else meaninglessly brings it into logic, the difficulty for one who exists is how to give existence the continuity without which everything simply vanishes. An abstract continuity is no continuity, and that someone existing exists essentially prevents it, while passion is the momentary continuity that at once restrains and is the movement’s impulse. The goal of motion for someone existing is decision and repetition. The eternal is motion’s continuity, but an abstract eternity is outside motion, and a concrete eternity in the one who exists is the maximum of passion. For

^d This was unquestionably what the disciple of Heraclitus meant when he said that one could not pass through the same river even once. Johannes *de silentio* referred to this remark in *Fear and Trembling*, but with more of a rhetorical flourish than truth.

¹⁰ Greek: goal, end, and measure. The Danish ‘Maal’ (here goal) can mean both end and measure.

the fact is that all idealizing^e passion is an anticipation of the eternal in existence, in order for one who exists to exist.^f Abstraction's eternity is arrived at by disregarding existence. Pure thought is something someone existing can only have come into through a suspect start, something that wreaks its revenge by the existence of the one existing becoming trivial and his talk somewhat insane, as is pretty well the case with the mass of humankind in our day, when a person is rarely or never heard speaking as though conscious of being an individual existing human being but pantheistically lets himself grow dizzy when also *he* talks of the millions and the nations and world-historical development. For the one who exists, however, the passionate anticipation of the eternal is not an absolute continuity but the possibility of an approximation to the only true continuity there can be for someone existing. Here we are reminded again of my thesis that subjectivity is truth, because for one who exists the objective truth is just like the eternity of abstraction.

Abstraction is disinterested, but for one who exists his existing is the supreme interest. The one who exists has therefore constantly a τέλος, and it is of this τέλος that Aristotle speaks when he says (*De anima*, III, 10, 2)¹¹ that νοῦς θεωρητικός differs from νοῦς πρακτικός τῷ τέλει.¹² But pure thought is detached altogether, not like abstract thought which though disregarding existence still retains a relation to it, whereas pure thought, suspended mysteriously between heaven and earth, and with no relation to someone existing, explains everything in its own terms except itself, making the crucial explanation regarding the real question impossible. Thus, to one existing who asks how pure thought relates to one existing, and what he should do to enter into it, pure thought provides no answer but merely explains existence within pure thought, and confuses everything through existence, that on which pure thought must run aground, being ushered in an attenuated sense to a place within pure thought, thereby essentially revoking everything that might be said in it about existence. When there is talk in pure thought of an immediate unity of reflection-in-itself and reflection-in-the-other, and of this immediate

^e Earthly passion gets in the way of existence by transforming it into the instantaneous.

^f Art and poetry have been called an anticipation of the eternal. If one wants to call them that, then one must note nevertheless that art and poetry are not related in an essential way to one who exists, for the contemplative enjoyment of them, 'joy over the beautiful' [a reference to Kant's *Critique of Judgment*] is disinterested, and the spectator is contemptively outside himself *qua* existing person.

¹¹ *De anima*, 433a 15–16.

¹² Greek: theoretical reason, and practical reason with its goal or end.

unity being rescinded, something must of course intervene between the moments of the immediate unity. What is this? Yes, it is time. But time cannot find a place within pure thought. What, then, do the rescinding, the transition and the unity amount to? What does it at all mean to think in such a way as merely to put on a show of thinking, because everything that is said is taken absolutely back? And what does it mean not to admit to thinking in this way yet continually noise abroad the positive truth of this pure thought?

Just as existence has put thought and existing together by making one who exists a thinker, so there are two media: the medium of abstract thought and the medium of actuality. But pure thought is yet a third medium, discovered quite recently. It begins, so it is said, after the most exhaustive abstraction. The relation that abstraction still always has in relation to that from which it abstracts is something of which pure thought is – how shall I put it? – piously or thoughtlessly unaware. There is in this pure thought a putting to rest of all doubt; here is the eternal positive truth and whatever else it pleases one to say. That is, pure thought is a phantom. And if the Hegelian philosophy is free from all postulates, it has achieved this through one insane postulate: the beginning of pure thought.

For one who exists, what interests him most is existing, and his being interested in existing is his actuality. What actuality is cannot be put in the language of abstraction. Actuality is an *inter-esse*¹³ splitting the hypothetical unity of abstraction's thought and being. Abstraction deals with possibility and actuality, but its grasp of actuality gives a false account, since the medium is not actuality but possibility. Only by suspending actuality can abstraction grasp it, but to suspend it is precisely to transform it into possibility. Within abstraction, everything said about actuality in the language of abstraction is said within possibility. For in the language of actuality, all abstraction relates to actuality as a possibility, not to an actuality within abstraction and possibility. Actuality, existence, is the dialectical moment in a trilogy whose beginning and end cannot be for someone who exists, who *qua* existing is in the dialectical moment. Abstraction merges the trilogy. Quite right. But how does it do that? Is abstraction some thing, or is it not the act of the abstracting person? But the abstracting person is after all someone who exists, and someone existing is accordingly in the dialectical moment which he cannot mediate

¹³ Latin: to be between.

or merge, least of all absolutely, as long as he is existing. If he does do this, then this must relate as a possibility to actuality, to the existence in which he himself is. He must explain how he goes about it, i.e., how he goes around as someone existing, or whether he ceases to be that, and whether one who exists is permitted to do so.

The moment we begin asking such questions, we are asking ethically, and hold the one who exists to the claims of ethics, which cannot be that he is to abstract from existence but that he is to exist, which is also what most interests someone existing.

As one who exists, suspending the dialectical moment (existence) is least of all something he can maintain absolutely. For that, some other medium than existence, which is precisely the dialectical moment, is needed. Any familiarity that an existing person can have with such a suspending can only be as a possibility that is unsustainable once interest is posited, for which reason his familiarity can only be disinterested, something not wholly possible for him *qua* existing, and which *qua* existing, ethically speaking, he is not at all allowed *approximando*¹⁴ to want to attain, since on the contrary the ethical makes the interest of existence infinite for him; so infinite that the law of contradiction becomes absolutely valid.

Here again, as shown previously, the difficulty in existence and for the one who exists is something abstraction simply does not go into. Thinking actuality in the medium of possibility does not present the difficulty of thinking it in the medium of existence, where existence, as becoming, will get in the way of the existing one's thought, as if actuality did not lend itself to thought, even though someone existing is someone who thinks. In pure thought, one is over one's head and ears in profundity, and yet one *mitunter*¹⁵ gets the impression that there is something *distract* about it all, because the pure thinker is not clear about what it is to be an existing human being.

All knowledge about actuality is possibility. The only actuality that one who exists has more than a knowledge of is his own actuality, the fact that he is there, and this actuality is his absolute interest. What abstraction demands of him is that he become disinterested in order to have something to know; what the ethical demands of him is that he be infinitely interested in existing.

¹⁴ Latin: approximately. ¹⁵ 'Now and then'.

The only actuality there is for someone existing is his own ethical actuality; every other actuality is something he only knows of, but true knowledge consists in a translation into possibility.

The trustworthiness of sense perception is a deception. This has been sufficiently demonstrated by Greek scepticism and likewise by modern scepticism. The trustworthiness that knowledge of the historical would have is also a deception in so far as it claims to be the trustworthiness of actuality; for it is only when he has resolved it into possibility that the knower knows historical actuality. (More on this in what follows.) Abstraction is possibility, preceding or subsequent. Pure thought is a phantom.

The actual subjectivity is not the knowing subjectivity, for through knowing he is in the medium of the possible; it is the ethically existing subjectivity. An abstract thinker is also there, of course, but this fact is more like a satire on him. For an abstract thinker to try to prove that he is there through the fact that he thinks is a curious contradiction, because as much as he thinks abstractly he abstracts correspondingly precisely from his being there. True, his being there becomes to that extent clear to him as a presupposition from which he wants to detach himself, but the abstraction itself becomes an odd sort of proof of his being there, precisely because if it were completely successful his being there would cease. The Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*¹⁶ has been repeated often enough. If this *I* in *cogito* is to be understood as an individual human being, then the proposition proves nothing: I am thinking, *ergo* I am; but if I am thinking, then little wonder that I am; that has already been asserted, and the first proposition accordingly says even more than the second. But then if one understands the *I* in *cogito* as meaning a particular existing human being, philosophy shouts: 'Foolishness, foolishness, it is not a question here of your self or my self but of the pure *I*.' But this pure *I* can hardly have any other than a purely thought – yes, existence. So what is the sense of the inferential form? There is no conclusion, for the proposition is a tautology.

If it is said that far from proving by his thinking that he is there, the abstract thinker makes clear rather that his abstraction will not entirely succeed in proving the opposite – if this is said, and from it one infers inversely that someone who actually exists just does not think at all, this is a wilful misunderstanding. Certainly he thinks, but he thinks everything

¹⁶ Latin: I think therefore I am. See Descartes (1596–1650), *Dissertatio de methodo* (*Dissertation on Method*).

inversely in relation to himself, infinitely interested in existing. Thus Socrates was surely a thinking person, but he placed all other knowledge in indifference, infinitely accentuating ethical knowledge, which relates to the existing subject infinitely interested in existence.

To infer from thought to being there is, then, a contradiction. For thinking does just the opposite, taking one's being there away from the actual and thinking it by suspending it, by translating it into possibility. (More on this in what follows.) In respect of every actuality other than the individual's own, it is a matter of his being able to know it only by thinking it. In respect of his own actuality, it depends on whether his thinking can abstract altogether from the actuality. This certainly is what the abstract thinker wants, but it is to no avail: he still exists, and this persistence of existence, this 'sometimes woeful professorial figure',¹⁷ is an epigram on the abstract thinker, not to mention the allegation of ethics against him.

In Greece one did after all pay attention to what it is to exist. That is why the *ataraxy*¹⁸ of the sceptics was an attempt to abstract from existence from within existence. In our time, one abstracts in print, just as in print one doubts everything once and for all. Among the things that have occasioned so much confusion in modern philosophizing is that the philosophers have so many short statements about infinite tasks, and show mutual respect for this paper money, while it almost never occurs to anyone to try realizing the task in existence themselves. It is easy in this way to be finished with everything and to start without presuppositions. The presupposition of, for example, doubting everything would take an entire lifetime. But now, it is no sooner said than done.

§ 2

Possibility higher than actuality; actuality higher than possibility; poetic and intellectual ideality; ethical ideality

Aristotle remarks in his *Poetics* that poetry is higher than history because history merely tells us what has happened, poetry what could and ought to have happened,¹⁹ i.e., poetry commands the possible. Possibility, from the poetic and intellectual points of view, is higher than reality; the

¹⁷ Presumably a reference to Don Quixote, that 'knight of the woeful countenance'.

¹⁸ Or *ataraxia*: freedom from passion, peace of mind.

¹⁹ At 1451a36–b5. Aristotle says 'would happen', not 'ought to have happened'.

aesthetic and the intellectual are disinterested. But there is only one interest, the interest in existing. Disinterestedness is therefore the expression of indifference to actuality. The indifference is forgotten in the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*, which disturbs the disinterestedness of the intellectual and affronts speculation, as if something else should follow from it. I think, *ergo* I think; but whether I am or it is (in actuality's sense, where *I* means a single existing human being, and *it* a definite something in particular) is a matter of infinite indifference. That what I think *is*, in the way thinking sees this, of course needs no proof nor any inference, for it is proved. Once I begin wanting to make my thought teleological in relation to something else, interest comes into play. Once it is there, the ethical is there too and absolves me from any further inconvenience about proving I am there, prevents me, by obliging me to exist, from rounding off with an ethically treacherous and metaphysically obscure inferential flourish.

While in our time the ethical is more and more ignored, this has also had the harmful effect of bringing confusion upon poetry and speculation, which have let go of the disinterested elevation of possibility in order to grasp at actuality: instead of each being given its due, a two-fold confusion has been perpetrated. Poetry makes one attempt after another to look like actuality, as is altogether un-poetical, and speculation keeps on wanting to reach actuality inside its own domain, assuring us that what is thought is actual, that thinking is able not only to think actuality but to provide it, which is quite the opposite, at the same time forgetting more and more what it is to exist. The age and the people in it become increasingly unreal; hence these substitutes that are supposed to replace what is lost. The ethical is more and more abandoned; the life of the individual becomes unsettled, not just poetically but also world historically, and prevented thereby from an ethical existence. So actuality has to be provided in other ways. But this misconceived actuality is just as if a generation or its individuals had become prematurely old and youthfulness now had to be grasped through artificial means. Instead of ethical existence being actuality, the age has become so overwhelmingly contemplative that not only is this something everyone is, but in the end it is made into a counterfeit actuality. One smiles at monastic life, yet no hermit lived in as unreal a way as do people nowadays. For, although a hermit abstracted from the whole world, he did not abstract from himself.

We know how to describe the fantastical setting of a monastery, in a remote place, in the loneliness of the forest, in the distant blue of the horizon, but we are oblivious to the fantastical setting of pure thought. And yet, the pathos-filled unreality of the recluse is much to be preferred to the comic unreality of the pure thinker, and the passionate oblivion of the recluse, though it takes the whole world from him, is much to be preferred to the comic distraction of the world-historical philosopher who forgets himself.

Viewed ethically, the actual is higher than the possible. It is the very disinterestedness of possibility that the ethical wants to annihilate by making existing the infinite interest. The ethical therefore wants to obstruct every attempt at confusion, such as wanting to *observe* the world and humankind ethically. Such ethical observation is impossible, for there is only one ethical observation, self-observation. The ethical instantly enfolds the individual with its requirement that he exist ethically; it does not talk big about millions and about generations; it does not take humanity in round numbers, any more than the police arrest humanity at large. The ethical deals with particular human beings and, note well, with each one. If God knows how many hairs there are on a person's head,²⁰ then the ethical knows how many human beings there are; and the ethical census is not in the interest of a total sum but for the sake of each individual. The ethical exerts its claim on each human being, and when it judges, it again judges each one. Only a tyrant or an impotent person is content with taking one in ten.²¹ The ethical lays hold of the individual and requires of him that he refrain from all observation, especially of the world and of humankind; for the ethical as the internal cannot be observed by someone outside; it can be realized only by the individual subject, who is then able to know what lives within him, the only actuality that does not become a possibility by being known and that cannot be known just by being thought, since it is his own actuality, which before it became actual he knew as a thought-about actuality, i.e., as a possibility; whereas in respect of another's actuality, he knew nothing about it before, by coming to know it, he thought it, i.e., changed it into possibility.

²⁰ Matthew 10:30; Luke 12:7.

²¹ Collective punishment in which lots were drawn and one in ten executed.

It is the case with every actuality outside me that I am able to grasp it only in thought. If I were actually to grasp it, I would have to be able to make myself into the other person, into the one acting, to make the alien actuality my own, which is impossible. For if I make the alien actuality my own, that does not mean that, in knowing about it, I become he; it means a new actuality that belongs to me as distinct from him.

When I think something I want to do but still have not done it, then what I have thought, however precise, however much it might be called *actuality in thought*, is a possibility. Conversely, when I envisage something that someone else has done, and accordingly think something actual, I take this given actuality out of actuality and translate it into possibility, for an *actuality in thought* is a possibility, and higher than actuality in terms of thought but not in terms of actuality. – This also means that ethically there is no direct relation between subject and subject. When I have understood another subject, his actuality is for me a possibility, and this actuality in thought is related to me *qua* possibility, just as my own thought of something I have still not done relates to doing it.

*Frater Taciturnus (Stages on Life's Way, p. 341)*²² says: Anyone who, with regard to the same thing, does not come to the conclusion just as well *ab posse ad esse* as *ab esse ad posse*²³ does not grasp the ideality, i.e., he does not understand it; he does not think it (the reference is to understanding an alien actuality). That is, if the one who is thinking with the resolving *posse* (an actuality in thought is a possibility) comes across an *esse* he cannot resolve, he must say: This is something I cannot think. Accordingly he suspends thought. If he is, or rather if he wants regardless, to relate to this actuality as actuality, he does not relate to it in thought but paradoxically. (Kindly recall from the previously stated definition of faith [in the Socratic sense, *sensu laxiori*, not *sensu strictissimo*]:²⁴ *the objective uncertainty*, due to the resolving *posse* having come upon a refractory *esse*, held fast in passionate inwardness.)

To ask in aesthetic and intellectual terms whether this or that is also actual, did it actually happen, is a misunderstanding that fails to grasp the aesthetic and the intellectual ideality as a possibility, and forgets that to

²² *SKS* 6, p. 406. ²³ Latin: from possibility to actuality ... from actuality to possibility.

²⁴ Latin: in the less strict sense ... in the most strict sense.

rank the values for the aesthetic and the intellectual in this way is tantamount to assuming sensation to be higher than thought. – Asking, Is it actual? is correct when asked ethically, but please note, only when the individual subject asks this ethically of himself about his own actuality. For him the ethical actuality of another is to be grasped only by thinking it, i.e., as a possibility.

Scripture teaches: ‘Do not judge, so that you may not be judged.’²⁵ This is expressed as an admonition, a warning, but it is also an impossibility. One human being cannot ethically judge another, because the one is only able to understand the other as possibility. So when someone takes it upon himself to want to judge another, what this expresses is that it is beyond his power, that it is merely himself that he judges.

In *Stages on Life's Way* (p. 342)²⁶ it says: ‘It is spirit to ask about two things: (1) Is what is said possible? (2) Can I do it?, but spiritless to ask about two things: (1) Is it actual? (2) Has my neighbour Christophersen²⁷ done it, has he actually done it?’ Here the question of actuality is ethically accented. Aesthetically and intellectually, it is foolish to ask if what is said is actual; ethically it is foolish to ask about its actuality in the way of observation; but in asking about it ethically regarding my own actuality I am asking about its possibility, except that this possibility is not aesthetically and intellectually disinterested but an actuality in thought related to my own actuality, that I can, in particular, realize it.

The ‘how’ of truth is precisely truth. It is therefore untruth to answer a question in a medium in which the question cannot arise, as in explaining actuality within possibility, distinguishing between possibility and actuality from within possibility. By not asking about actuality aesthetically and intellectually but only ethically, and then again, ethically only in the way of one’s own actuality, every individual is singled out for himself. Irony and hypocrisy, as the opposite forms but both expressing the contradiction that the outer is the inner (hypocrisy by appearing good, irony by appearing bad), tellingly drive home the observational question of ethical internality: that actuality and deception are equally possible and that the deception can extend just as far as actuality. Only the individual himself

²⁵ Matthew 7:1. ²⁶ SKS 6, p. 407.

²⁷ A reference to Holberg’s comedy *Jeppe paa Bierget* (*Jeppe of the Hill*) (1723).

can tell which is which. To inquire into another person's ethical internality is already unethical, in as much as it is a diversion. If it is asked about none the less, the difficulty is that I can lay hold of the other's actuality only by thinking it, that is, by translating it into possibility, where the possibility of deception is just as thinkable. – It is a useful propaedeutic to existing ethically to learn that the individual human being stands alone.

To ask aesthetically and intellectually about actuality is a misunderstanding; asking ethically about another person's actuality is a misunderstanding, since only one's own is to be asked about. Here that in which faith (*sensu strictissimo*, which refers to something historical) differs from the aesthetic, the intellectual, the ethical, comes to light. To ask with infinite interest about an actuality that is not one's own is to want to believe, and expresses, the paradoxical relation to the paradox. To ask aesthetically in this way cannot be done except thoughtlessly since, aesthetically, possibility is higher than reality; nor intellectually since, intellectually, possibility is higher than actuality; nor even ethically, since the individual has an infinite interest solely in his own actuality. – Faith's analogy to the ethical is the infinite interestedness, something in which the believer differs absolutely from an aesthete, but in which he differs in turn from an ethicist through being infinitely interested in the actuality of another (for instance, that the god has really been there).

Aesthetically and intellectually, it is the case that an actuality is understood only when its *esse* is resolved into its *posse*. Ethically, it is the case that possibility is understood only when each *posse* is actually an *esse*. When the aesthetic and intellectual scrutinizes, it condemns every *posse* that is not an *esse*, that is, a *posse* in the individual himself, since the ethical has nothing to do with other individuals. – In our day, everything is mixed up: the aesthetic is defended ethically, faith intellectually, etc. One is finished with everything and yet is far from attentive to in what sphere each question finds its answer. In the world of spirit this causes even greater confusion than if, e.g., in civic life clerical matters were dealt with, for instance, by the Commissioners of Paving.

So is actuality the external world? Not at all. Aesthetically and intellectually, it is quite properly insisted that the external is only deception for the person who does not grasp the ideality. *Frater Taciturnus* says

(*loc. cit.*, p. 341).²⁸ ‘Knowledge [of the historical] merely helps one into an illusion that is bewitched by the tangible. What is it that I know historically? What meets the senses? Ideality I know by myself, and if I do not know it by myself, then I do not know it at all; all historical knowledge does not help. Ideality is not personal property that can be transferred from one to another, or something thrown in when purchasing larger consignments. If I know that Caesar was great then I know what greatness is, and this is what I attend to; otherwise I do not know that Caesar was great. History’s narrative, the assurances of reliable people that the view can be accepted without risk since he has been shown to be a great man, that the outcome proves it – helps not at all. To believe the ideality on the word of another is like laughing at a joke not because one has understood it, but because someone has said that it was funny. In that case, for someone who laughs on the basis of belief and respect, the joke can just as well be left unsaid, he can laugh as much either way.’ – What, then, is actuality? It is the ideal. But aesthetically and intellectually ideality is possibility (the retracing *ab esse ad posse*). Ethically, the ideality is the actuality within the individual himself. Actuality is internality infinitely interested in existing, which the ethical individual is for himself.

If I understand a thinker, then as much as I understand him, so equally is his actuality a matter of total indifference (that he exists as a particular human being, has *actually* understood it in this way, etc., or has himself actually lived up to it, etc.). Philosophy and aesthetics are right in this, and it is important not to lose sight of it. But this is no justification for pure thought as a medium of communication. That his actuality is properly indifferent to me, the learner, and conversely, my actuality to him, is no reason at all for the teacher himself to be indifferent to his own actuality. The latter is something his communication should bear the stamp of, though not directly, since it cannot be imparted man to man directly (such a direct relationship being the believer’s paradoxical relation to the object of faith) and cannot be understood directly, but must be there indirectly to understand indirectly.

If the particular spheres are not kept decisively apart, everything is confused. If one is curious in this way about a thinker’s actuality, is interested in knowing something about it, etc., then intellectually speaking

²⁸ SKS 6, pp. 405f.

one is to be faulted, for the maximum in the intellectual sphere is that the thinker's actuality be a matter of complete indifference. But by blathering in the intellectual sphere one acquires a confusing resemblance to a believer. For a believer is indeed infinitely interested in the actuality of another. For faith, this is the decisive thing, but the interestedness here is not just a little curiosity; it is the absolute dependence on the object of faith.

The object of faith is the reality of another; its relation is one of infinite interest. The object of faith is not a doctrine, for then the relation would be intellectual and the thing not to botch it but to reach the intellectual relation's maximum. The object of faith is not a teacher with a doctrine, for when a teacher has a doctrine, the doctrine is *eo ipso* more important than the teacher and the relation intellectual, where the thing is not to botch it but reach the intellectual relation's maximum. The object of faith is the actuality of the teacher, the teacher's actually being there. The answer of faith is therefore absolutely either yes or no. For faith's answer is not in respect of a doctrine, a matter of its being true or not; not in respect of a teacher, a matter of his doctrine being true or not; it is the answer to a question about a fact: Do you take it that he was ever actually there? And note, the answer is with infinite passion. In respect of a human being it is unthinking to put such infinitely great weight on whether he was ever actually there or not. So if it is a human being that is the object of faith, then the whole thing is a prank by a foolish person who has not even grasped the aesthetic and the intellectual. The object of faith is therefore the god's actuality in the sense of existence. But to exist means first and foremost to be a particular individual, and this is why thought must disregard existence, for the particular cannot be thought, only the universal. The object of faith is therefore the actuality of the god in existence, i.e., as a particular individual, i.e., that the god has actually been there as an individual human being.

Christianity is no doctrine of the unity of the divine and the human, or subject-object, not to mention the further transcriptions of Christianity into logic. If Christianity were a doctrine, the relation to it would not be one of faith, for the only relation to a doctrine is intellectual. So Christianity is not a doctrine but the fact that the god has actually been there.

Faith, then, is not homework for beginning pupils in the sphere of the intellect, an asylum for the slow-witted. Faith forms a sphere all of its own, and the sure sign of every misunderstanding of Christianity is its

transforming it into a doctrine, drawing it into intellectuality's embrace. What counts as optimal in the intellectual sphere, to become totally indifferent to the actuality of the teacher, is the opposite in the sphere of faith; its maximum is the *quam maxime*²⁹ infinite interestedness in the actuality of the teacher.

The individual's own ethical actuality is the only actuality. – That this seems surprising to many is no surprise to me. What does surprise me is that one is finished with the system, and with systems, without asking about the ethical. If only we reintroduced the dialogue in the Greek way, so as to test what one does and does not know, then all the contrivance and unnaturalness, all this exaggerated ingenuity, would soon be blown away. I am by no means of the opinion that Hegel should engage in conversation with a manservant, and that anything would be proved should the latter fail to understand him; although these simple words of Diogenes,³⁰ that he philosophized in the workshops and in the marketplace, will always remain a beautiful eulogy on Socrates; this is not what I mean and my proposal is least of all like a street-lounger's attempt to assassinate science. But let a Hegelian philosopher, or Hegel himself, enter into conversation with a cultivated person who has acquired dialectical experience through existing, then all that is affected and chimerical will be frustrated from the start. When someone writes or dictates paragraphs in a continuous stream, promising that everything will be made clear at the end, it becomes more and more difficult to discover where the confusion begins and to find a fixed point of departure. Assisted by 'Everything will be made clear at the end', and with the provisional aid of the category 'Here is not the place to go further into this', the very cornerstone of the system, a category often used as ridiculously as if under the heading 'misprints' one cited one such and then added, 'No doubt there are other misprints in the book but here is not the place to go further into them' – assisted by these two qualifications, one is constantly being made a fool of, for the one cheats definitively, the other provisionally. In the situation of the dialogue, however, the whole fantasy of pure thought would have no appeal whatever. – Instead of conceding that idealism is in the right, but note well, in a way that means rejecting the whole question of actuality (about a

²⁹ Latin: to the greatest possible degree.

³⁰ Diogenes Laertius, the fourth-century Greek writer whose history of philosophy was a favourite source for Kierkegaard.

self-withholding *an-sich*)³¹ in regard to thinking as a temptation, which like all other temptations cannot possibly be cancelled by giving in to it; instead of putting a stop to Kant's deviation,³² which brought actuality into relation with thought; instead of referring actuality to the ethical, Hegel did indeed go further, for he became fantastical and overcame idealism's scepticism by means of pure thought, which is a hypothesis and, in not declaring itself as such, fantastical. This triumph of pure thought (that, in it, thought and being are one) is something to both laugh at and weep over, because in pure thought there can be no real question of the difference. – Greek philosophy assumed without question that thought has reality. Reflection on this would force one to the same conclusion, but why is reality in thought confused with actuality? Reality in thought is possibility, and thought has only to dismiss any further question as to whether it is actual.

The suspect nature of 'the method' is already apparent in Hegel's relation to Kant. A scepticism that takes control over thought itself cannot be put a stop to by thinking it through, since this, after all, has to be done by thought, which is on the side of the insurgent. It must be broken off. To reply to Kant within the fantastical *Schattenspiel*³³ of pure thought is precisely not to answer him. – The only *an-sich* that cannot be thought is existing, with which thought has nothing whatever to do. But how should it be possible for pure thought to be able to settle this difficulty when, as pure thought, it is abstract? And from what does pure thought abstract? From existence, from what it is supposed to explain.

If existing cannot be thought and the one who exists nevertheless thinks, what does this mean? It means that he thinks intermittently; he thinks before and he thinks after. Absolute continuity in thought is beyond him. It is only in a fantastical sense that someone existing can be constantly *sub specie aeterni*.

Is to think the same as to create, to afford life itself?³⁴ I am well aware of the objections made to a foolish attack on the philosophical proposition of the identity of thought and being, and am willing to accede to them. It has

³¹ '(Reality) in itself'. A crucial concept in Kant's critical philosophy.

³² 'Misvisning', used in connection with deviation, declination, or bias, in a compass needle, due either to local conditions or to the changing location of the magnetic pole.

³³ 'Shadow play'. ³⁴ *Give* (in the sense of 'yield'), 'Tilværelse'.

been objected, quite rightly, that the identity of thought and being must not be understood as applying to imperfect existents,³⁵ as if, for example, I could produce a rose by thinking it. (In the same sense, and with a certain disrespect for champions of the law of contradiction, it has been shown that this was most plausibly the case with existents of the lowest order, in the relations of understanding between finite entities: before and behind, right and left, up and down, etc.)³⁶ But then, is it the case regarding the more perfect existents that thought and being are one? In respect, for example, of the ideas? Yes, Hegel is right; and yet we have not come a single step further. The good, the beautiful, the ideas are in themselves so abstract as to be indifferent to existence, and indifferent to anything except thought–existence. The reason why the identity of thought and being holds true here is that, in this case, being cannot be understood as other than thought. But then the answer is an answer to something that cannot be asked where the answer belongs. Now surely a particular existing human being is no idea; and surely his existence is something other than the idea’s thought–existence? Existing (in the sense of being this individual human being), though no doubt an imperfection compared to the eternal life of the idea, is a perfection compared to not being at all. An intermediate state of this kind is just about what it is to exist, something suited to the intermediate being that is human being. How is it, then, with the supposed identity of thought and being in relation to the kind of existence which is that of the individual existing human being? Am I the Good because I think it, or am I good because I think the Good? By no means. Am I there³⁷ because I think it? Champions of the philosophical principle of the identity of thought and being have themselves said that it did not hold true of imperfect existents. But existing as an individual human being, is that a perfect idea–existence? And this is, after all, what the question is about. Here surely the opposite holds, that it is because I am there and am thinking that I think that I am there. Existence here separates the ideal identity of thought and being: I must exist in order to be able to think, and I must be able to think (for example the good) in order to exist in it. Existing as this individual human being is not as imperfect an existence as, for example, being a rose. That is also why we human beings say that however unhappy one is, it is always a good thing to exist, and I recall a melancholic who once in the midst of his

³⁵ E.g. Hegel’s *Logic*, § 51. ³⁶ E.g. Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, II, ch. 2, remark 2. ³⁷ *Er jeg til*.

sufferings, and wishing himself dead, was prompted at the sight of a basket of potatoes to ask himself whether, after all, he did not get more joy out of existing than a potato. But being an individual human being is not a pure idea-existence either; only the pure human being exists in that way, i.e., does not exist. Existence is always the particular, the abstract does not *exist*. To conclude from this that the abstract has no reality is a misunderstanding, but it is also a misunderstanding to confuse speech by asking about existence in this respect, or about actuality in the sense of existence. So if *one who exists* asks about the relation between thought and being, between thinking and existing, and philosophy explains that it is identity, then it does not answer the question, for it does not answer the questioner. Philosophy explains: Thought and being are one, though not in connection with things that are what they are just by being there, for instance, a rose, which has absolutely no idea in itself, and therefore no connection with where one most clearly sees what it is to exist as against to think; but thought and being are indeed one in connection with that whose existence is essentially indifferent, since its abstractness is such that it can only have a thought-existence. But this fails to give an answer to what was actually asked, existing as an individual human being. For this is not being in the same sense in which a potato is, but nor in the same sense in which an idea is. Human existence has idea in it but is nevertheless not an idea-existence. Plato gave the idea second place as the link between God and matter, and as existing the human being must of course participate in the idea, but is not himself the idea. – In Greece, as in philosophy's youth generally, the difficulty was to win through to the abstract and to leave behind the existence that always yields the particular; now the difficulty, conversely, is to attain existence. For us, abstraction is easy enough, but people withdraw more and more from existence, and pure thought is the furthest from existence. – In Greece, to philosophize was an action, and the philosopher therefore someone existing. He knew but little, yet the little he did know he knew to some purpose, because he busied himself with the same thing from morning to night. But what is it nowadays to philosophize, and what is it nowadays that a philosopher genuinely knows anything about? – for that he knows everything I do not deny. – The philosophical proposition of the identity of thought and being is precisely the opposite of what it seems; it expresses the fact that thought has abandoned existence altogether, that it has emigrated and found a sixth continent where it is absolutely sufficient unto itself in the absolute

identity of thought and being. Abstractly, existence will in an attenuated metaphysical sense end up being identified as evil; abstractly, in a humorous sense, it will become a very *langweilig*³⁸ affair, a ridiculous delay. Yet there is still a possibility of the ethical imposing some restraint, since the ethical accentuates existing, and abstraction and humour still have a relation to existing. But pure thought has got the better of its victory and has nothing, nothing, to do with existence.

If thinking could afford actuality in actuality's sense, and not thought-reality in possibility's sense, then thinking would also have to be able to take away one's being there,³⁹ take away from the one who exists the only actuality to which he relates as actuality, his own (to the actuality of another he relates, as shown above, only as thinking); i.e., in actuality's sense he would have to be able to think himself away so that he actually ceased being there. But I would like to know if anyone will make this assumption, which would betray as much superstition concerning pure thought as is inversely illustrated by the remark of a madman (in a novel) that he is going to climb down into Dovrefjell and blow up the entire world with a single syllogism.⁴⁰ – One can be *distract*, or become *distract*, through constant association with pure thought, but it does not altogether succeed, or rather it altogether fails, and with the help of 'the at times woeful professorial figure', one becomes what the Jews feared so much: a byword⁴¹ – I can abstract from myself, but my abstracting from myself means precisely that I am also there.⁴²

God does not think, he creates; God does not exist, he is eternal. Human beings think and exist, and existence separates thought and being, holds them apart from each other in succession.

What is abstract thought? It is thought where there is no one who thinks. It ignores everything but the thought, and only the thought is in its own medium. Existence is not unthinking, but in existence thought is in a medium foreign to it. What, then, does it mean to ask in the language of abstract thinking about actuality in the sense of existence, when this latter

³⁸ 'Tedious'. ³⁹ 'Tilvær'.

⁴⁰ A reference to a short story, 'Fjorten Dage I Jylland' ('Fourteen Days in Jutland'), by the Danish lyric poet S. S. Blicher (1782–1848); Dovrefjell is a mountain in Norway famous in folk literature.

⁴¹ Deuteronomy 28:37. ⁴² 'Tillige er til'.

is just what it ignores? – What is concrete thinking? It is thought where there is also one who thinks, and a definite something (in the sense of ‘particular’) that is thought, where existence gives the existing thinker thought, time, and space.

If Hegel had published his *Logic* under the title ‘Pure Thought’, published it without the author’s name, without a date, without preface, without notes, without didactic self-contradiction, without confusingly explaining what could only explain itself, published it as a parallel to the sounds of nature in Ceylon,⁴³ pure thought’s own movements, that would have been the Greek treatment; that is how a Greek would have done it had he conceived the idea. Reduplication of content in form is of the essence of art, and it is particularly important to refrain from utterances of the same in an inadequate form. As it is, with all its notes the *Logic* makes as funny an impression as were a man to display a letter purporting to have fallen from heaven but with the blotter too enclosed, all too clearly revealing its mundane origin. – In a work like this, to indulge in polemics against this or that person by name, to give guiding hints to the reader, what does that mean? What it means is that here we have a thinker who thinks pure thought, a thinker who talks with ‘thought’s own movements’, and who is no doubt speaking to another thinker, with whom he therefore wishes to engage. But once a thinker thinks pure thought, that very instant the whole of Greek dialectic, together with the security police of existence–dialectic, lay hold of his person, seizing him by the coat-tails not, however, as an adherent, but to find out how he goes about relating to pure thought, and that same instant the magic is gone. Just try adding Socrates to this. Helped by the notes, he will soon have Hegel in a sweat, and being unused to being put off by the assurance that everything will be clear with the conclusion, he who did not even let people speak for five minutes at a time, let alone lecture for seventeen volumes, would do everything he could to restrain Hegel – just to tease him.

What does it mean to say that being is higher than thought? If this statement is supposed to be something we can think, then thought is *eo ipso* again higher than being. If it is thinkable, then thought is higher; if it is not thinkable, then no system of life itself is possible. To be polite or rude to being helps not at all, whether letting it be something superior that

⁴³ A reference to a work (1801) by the German nature philosopher G. H. Schubert (1780–1860).

nevertheless follows from thought and can be reached syllogistically, or else something so inferior that it simply follows along with thought. So, when it is said that God must possess all perfections, or that the supreme being must possess all perfections, and since being is a perfection, *ergo* God or the supreme highest must be,⁴⁴ then the whole train of thought is a deception.⁴⁵ For if in the first part of this talk God is really not conceived as being, then the talk cannot even begin. It will go as follows: a supreme being, who (please note) does not have being, must possess all perfections including that of being; *ergo*, a supreme being who does not have being has being. This would be a strange conclusion. The supreme being must either not have being at the beginning of the talk, so as to come by it in the conclusion, and so cannot have being,⁴⁵ or did have being, and so cannot come by it, so that the conclusion is a deceptive form of predicate expansion, a deceptive redescription of a presupposition. Otherwise the inference must be kept purely hypothetical: if a supreme being is assumed to be, it must also be assumed to possess all perfections; to be is a perfection, *ergo*, it must be – assuming that it is. By drawing a conclusion within a hypothesis, one cannot draw a conclusion outside the hypothesis. For example, if so and so is a hypocrite, he will behave like a hypocrite; a hypocrite would do such and such, *ergo*, so and so has done such and such. Similarly, in the argument about God, when the inference is made, God's being is just as hypothetical as it was at the beginning, but within the hypothesis an inference has been made from a supreme being to being as perfection; just as in the other argument from being a hypocrite to there being a particular manifestation of hypocrisy. The confusion is the same as that in explaining actuality within pure thought. The § is entitled 'Actuality', actuality is explained, but that the whole thing is inside the pure thought category of possibility has been forgotten. That a man were to begin a parenthesis but it became so long that he himself forgot it, that would not help. As soon as one reads it aloud it becomes meaningless simply to let the parenthetical clause transform itself into the principal clause.

When thought turns to itself in order to think about itself, a scepticism arises, as we know. How is this scepticism to be brought to a stop, based as

⁴⁵ Hegel, however, does not speak in this way. Thanks to the identity of thought and being, he is above more childlike ways of philosophizing, as he reminds us, e.g., in connection with Descartes.

⁴⁴ 'Må være'. ⁴⁵ 'Og saa kan det ikke blive til'.

it is in thought instead of being of service by thinking something, wanting selfishly to think of itself? When a horse bolts, and if one disregards the damage that might be done in the meantime, it is perfectly all right to say, 'Just let it run, it will tire.' The same cannot be said of thinking's self-reflection, for it can go on for any length of time and runs in circles. Schelling put a stop to self-reflection and understood intellectual intuition, not as a discovery within self-reflection to be arrived at just by rushing ahead, but as a new point of departure.⁴⁶ Hegel sees this as a mistake and speaks *absprechend*⁴⁷ of intellectual intuition – so then came the method. Self-reflection keeps going for as long as it takes until finally cancelling itself; thought presses through triumphantly, gaining reality once more; the identity of thought and being is won in pure thought.^h What does it mean to say that self-reflection keeps on going for as long as it takes to cancel itself? There is no need for self-reflection to go on for long before something suspect is found in it. On the other hand, it is suspect in the very same way as long as it does go on. What does it mean to say 'for as long as it takes until'? This is nothing but a blandishment aimed at coaxing the reader into thinking it better to understand self-reflection as self-cancelling if only a long time elapsed before that happened. This quantifying is a counterpart to the astronomers' infinitely small angles, which in the end become so small (angles) that they can be called parallel lines. The story of self-reflection keeping going 'for as long as it takes until' distracts attention from what is dialectically the main issue: how it is that

^h That, at the bottom of all scepticism, there is an abstract certainty that is the foothold of doubt, like the baseline on which the figure is drawn, and that even the most strenuous attempt of Greek scepticism to curtail scepticism's brooding by stressing that the statement of doubt must not be taken θετικῶς [thetically], all this is quite certain. But it still does not follow that doubt overcomes itself. That basic certainty supporting doubt cannot hypostatize itself so long as I doubt, because doubt is constantly departing from it in order to make doubt possible. If I want to continue doubting, I shall never in all eternity come any further, since doubt consists precisely in, and is made possible by, passing that certainty off as something else. By holding fast for a single moment to this certainty as certainty I must in that very moment cease to doubt. A mediocre doubter will therefore be the first to succeed in getting certainty, and next a doubter who simply puts categories together to make things as plausible as possible, but without in the least troubling to put any of it into effect. – I cannot refrain from returning to this point, since it is so crucial. If it is true that doubt overcomes itself, that through doubting everything one wins truth in this very doubt, without a break, with no absolutely new point of departure, then not one single Christian category can be sustained, and Christianity is then abolished.

⁴⁶ F. W. J. Schelling (1775–1854), once Hegel's fellow student, refuted Hegel by proposing intellectual intuition as an organ for all transcendental thinking. See Kierkegaard's notes on Schelling's Berlin lectures, *SKS* 19, pp. 313–15.

⁴⁷ Disparagingly.

self-reflection is cancelled. If someone is said to have gone on telling a lie in jest until he himself believed it to be true, then the ethical accent is on the transition, but the mitigating, the diverting element, is this 'for as long as it takes until'. Because it takes such a long time one almost forgets the transition's decision. In narrative, description, the rhetorical address, the abstract 'for as long as it takes until' produces a great illusory effect, whether an optical illusion (for example, the book of Judith, ch. 10, verse 10: 'Judith went out, accompanied by her maid. The men of the town watched her *until* she had gone down the mountain and passed through the valley, where they lost sight of her'; 'the girl sat by the beach and followed the beloved with her eyes – until she saw him no more'), or as the fantastical vanishing of time, because there is no measure and nothing to measure with in the abstract 'for as long as it takes until'. (His passion then overcame him and he strayed from the path of truth – *until* the bitterness of remorse halted him – it takes mastery in psychological portrayal to produce in concrete terms as great an effect as this abstract 'for as long as it takes until' that snares the imagination.) But dialectically this fantastical duration is quite without meaning. When a Greek philosopher was asked what religion was, he begged for a postponement. When the deadline came he then begged for another postponement, etc. It was his way of hinting that the question could not be answered. This was Greek and beautiful and ingenious. If, on the other hand, he were to think that its having gone on for so long meant that he was in the remotest way closer to an answer, that would have been a misunderstanding; just as when a debtor remains in debt as long as it takes until it is repaid – it having been unpaid for so long. The abstract 'as long as it takes until' has something curiously corrupting about it. If one says: Self-reflection cancels itself and one then tries to show how, this is hardly something anyone would be able to understand. But if one says: Self-reflection keeps on going until finally it cancels itself, then perhaps one thinks: Yes, that's another matter, there's something to that. One becomes anxious and afraid about this length of time; one loses patience and thinks: Very well – and pure thought begins. – Up to a point, pure thought may be right in not beginning *bittweise*,⁴⁸ as do the older mediocre philosophers. For the reader thanks God that it starts, for fear of the dreadful duration of – until.

⁴⁸ 'By provisionally begging certain questions'; see p. 44 n. 1.

So the scepticism of self-reflection is cancelled by the method, and the method's progress is safeguarded in two ways. First and foremost with the wonderful magical words 'for as long as it takes until'. Every time a transition is to be made, the opposite continues for as long as it takes until finally switching over into its opposite – and this is how one proceeds. And, good heavens, we are all weak mortals and very partial to change, as the saying goes; that is, since it cannot be otherwise, if the opposite keeps on for as long as it takes until switching over into its opposite, that is, keeps on for ever, which would be utterly boring – very well, then, motion accepted! This is how the method proceeds – *by necessity*. But if there should be a stubborn head, an extremely tiresome person, so bold as to object, 'It is as if the method were a human being whom one has to humour and for whose sake something must be done; it is as if rather than speculating methodically for the sake of the truth, one speculates for the sake of the method, which doubtless must be assumed to be such an inordinately great good that one must be not all that scrupulous – if only one gets the method and the system' – if there is such an obstinate head, then woe unto him. What he represents is the bad infinity.⁴⁹ But the method knows how to handle both the good and the bad, and as far as the bad infinity is concerned, the method does not understand a joke. The stubborn objector is marked out as a dunce, presumably for as long as it takes – until. And, good heavens, we are all weak mortals and would all like to be considered intelligent by our respected contemporaries; and since it cannot be otherwise – let it pass. And this is how the method proceeds – by necessity. 'What is he saying; is it not by necessity?' 'O, ye great Chinese god,⁵⁰ what else am I saying? It is by necessity, I will swear to it. If it cannot be otherwise, it has to be by necessity'. – The bad infinity is the method's hereditary foe; it is the hobgoblin that comes with the furniture every time you move house (a transition), and obstructs the transition. The bad infinity holds on to life with infinite tenacity; in order for it to be overcome there must be a break, a qualitative leap, and then it is all over with the method, with the dexterity of immanence, and with the necessity of the transition. That is why the method is so strict; which again explains why people are as afraid of representing the bad infinity as they are of being

⁴⁹ See p. 95 n. 67. ⁵⁰ See p. 145 n. 48.

left with old maid.⁵¹ If the system otherwise lacks an ethics, by way of compensation the category of the bad infinite helps it to be absolutely moral, so hysterically moral as even to use it in logic.

If what is thought were actuality, then the most perfectly worked-out thought, even before I acted, would be the action. In this way there would be no action at all but the intellectual swallows the ethical. To think that the external is what makes the action into an action is foolishness, and on the other hand, wanting to prove how ethical intellectuality is, that it even makes the thought into action, is a sophism owing to an ambiguity in the use of the expression 'to think'. If there is to be any distinction at all between thought and action, this can only be sustained by assigning possibility, disinterestedness, and objectivity to thinking – action to subjectivity. But now a *confinium*⁵² readily comes in sight. Thus, when thinking that I want to do such and such, this thought is not yet an action and differs in all eternity from it qualitatively, but it is a possibility in which the interest of action and actuality is already reflected. Disinterestedness and objectivity are therefore about to be disturbed because actuality wants to come to grips with them. (Thus there is a sin in thought.) – What is actual is not the external action but an internality in which the individual cancels the possibility and identifies himself with what is thought, in order to exist in it. This is action. In its making thought itself into a kind of action intellectuality seems so rigoristic, but this rigorism is a false alarm, since letting intellectuality enter action at all is a laxity. Just as in the analogies cited earlier, to be rigorous *within* a total laxity is an illusion and essentially just a laxity. If, for example, someone were to call sin ignorance and then, *inside* this definition, were to interpret particular sins in a rigoristic manner, this is altogether illusory, since stated *within* the total definition of sin as ignorance, every specific identification of a sin as ignorance becomes essentially frivolous, seeing that the entire definition is frivolous. – The conflation of thinking and action deceives more easily with regard to evil. But it appears, on a closer look, that the reason for this is the good's jealousy of itself, which makes such a claim on the individual as even to define the very thought of evil as a sin. But let us take the good. To have thought something good that one wants to do, is that to have done it? By no means,

⁵¹ 'Sorte Peer' (Black Peter), a round game in cards, using jack as odd card, as in 'old maid'.

⁵² Latin: boundary.

but then neither is it the external that makes the difference, for the person who owns not a penny can be as charitable as the one who gives away a kingdom. When the Levite passed by the unfortunate man who had been fallen upon by robbers on the way from Jericho to Jerusalem,⁵³ the thought may have struck him, while still some distance from the sufferer, that it was a beautiful deed to help someone in distress; he may even already have thought of how rewarding a good deed like this is in itself; perhaps he rode more slowly because immersed in this thought. But as he came closer and closer the difficulties began to appear, and he rode past. Now he probably rode fast in order to get away quickly, away from the thought of the danger on the road, away from the thought that the robbers might be nearby, away from the thought of how easily the victim might come to confuse him with the robbers who had left him lying there. He failed to act. But suppose that, on the way, he was overtaken by repentance, suppose he turned quickly about, fearing neither robbers nor other hazards but only that he might arrive too late. Suppose he did arrive too late, the Good Samaritan having already managed to get the sufferer into the inn – had he not then acted? Certainly he had, and yet he did not come to act in the external world.

Let us take a religious action. Having faith in God. Is that to think how glorious it must be to have faith, to think of the peace and security that faith can bestow? Not at all. Even to wish, where interest – the subject's interest – is far more evident, is not to have faith, not acting. The individual's relation to the envisaged action is still only a possibility that he can go back on. – The fact that there are cases regarding evil where the transition from thought to action goes almost undetected is not denied, but these call for a special explanation. That has to do with the individual being subject to habit: by frequently making the transition from thought to action, he has, in the end, by becoming slave of a habit, lost control over the transition, which at *his expense* makes it go faster and faster.

Between the envisaged and the real action there may be no difference at all in content; in form the difference is always essential. Actuality is the interestedness one has in existing in it.

That the actuality of the action is so often conflated with all sorts of ideas, good intentions, approaches to decisions, mood-setting preludes, etc., that people very seldom really act at all, is not to be denied; on the contrary we can assume this to have contributed greatly to the conflation.

⁵³ Luke 10:30–5. According to Luke the direction of travel was from Jerusalem to Jericho.

But once we take an action *sensu eminenti* all becomes clear. The outward aspect of Luther's action is his appearing at the Diet of Worms; but from the moment that he existed in his willing with all the passionate resolve of his subjectivity, when every relation of possibility to this action would have to be regarded by him as temptation: then he had acted.ⁱ When Dion⁵⁴ embarked on the ship that bore the expedition to overthrow the tyrant Dionysius, he is said to have remarked that, even if he died on the way, he would still have performed a glorious deed – that is, he had acted. That the decision in the external should be higher than the decision in the internal is the contemptuous way in which weak and cowardly and wily men talk of the highest. To suppose that the outer decision can decide something for ever, so that it can never be done over again, is contempt of the holy.

To give thinking supremacy over all else is Gnosticism;⁵⁵ to make the subject's ethical actuality the only actuality might appear to be acosmism.⁵⁶ That it should seem so to a busy thinker who has to explain everything, to a nimble mind that travels the whole world, merely proves how very impoverished is his notion of what the ethical means for the subject. If ethics took away the whole world from a busy thinker of this kind, but let him keep his own self, he would probably think: 'Is this anything? A trifle like this isn't worth keeping, so let it go with all the rest.' – and then, yes, then it is acosmism. But why should such a busy thinker want to speak and think of his own self so disparagingly? Yes, if it had been a matter of his giving up the whole world and being satisfied with another person's ethical actuality, then, yes, he would be right to scorn the arrangement. But, for the

ⁱ Altogether, what marks the difference between the thought action and the (in the inner sense) actual action is the fact that while every further reflection and consideration respecting the former must be regarded as welcome, in respect of the latter it is to be looked at as a temptation. If, in spite of this, it appears important enough to deserve respect, this shows that its path goes through repentance. In deliberating, the trick is precisely for me to think every possibility. The moment I have acted (in the inner sense), what changes is that my task is now to fend off further deliberation, except in so far as repentance requires something to be *done* over again. Decision in the outer world is a joke, but the more lethargically a person lives, the more the outer decision becomes the only one he knows. The eternal decision with oneself is something people have no idea of, but then they believe that once a decision has been drafted on stamped paper, then it is decided, and not before.

⁵⁴ A Syracusan statesman (b. 409 BC), famed for having tried to put Plato's theory of the state into practice.

⁵⁵ Common term for various second-century sects combining Christian and pagan elements, 'gnosis' being revealed but secret (and saving) knowledge of God and his nature. Here used more broadly and by analogy.

⁵⁶ The view that reality lies beyond its mere appearance in the world.

individual, his own ethical actuality ought to mean more to him than heaven and earth and all that is found therein,⁵⁷ more than the 6,000 years of world history, more than astrology, veterinary science, along with what the age demands, which aesthetically and intellectually is a monstrous small-mindedness. If it is not so, so much the worse for the individual himself, for then he has absolutely nothing, no actuality at all, since to everything else he has only, at most, a relation of possibility.

The transition from possibility to actuality is, as Aristotle rightly says, κίνησις, a movement.⁵⁸ This just cannot be said in the language of abstraction, or understood in it, for that language cannot give to movement either time or space, which presuppose it, or which it presupposes. There is a coming to a stop, a leap. If someone says that this is only because I am thinking of something definite and not abstracting, for otherwise I would see that there was no break, my repeated answer is: Quite right, considered abstractly there is no break, but then no transition either, for considered abstractly, everything *is*. On the other hand when time is given to movement by existence and I follow suit, then the leap appears in the way that a leap can appear: that it might come or it has been. Let us take an example from the ethical. It has been said frequently enough that the good contains its own reward and that willing the good is to that extent not only the most correct thing to do, but also the most prudent. A prudent eudaemonist can very easily see this. Thinking in the form of possibility, he may come as close as possible to the good because within possibility, as in abstraction, transition is merely appearance. But if the transition is to be actual, all prudence expires in temptation. Actual time places the good and its reward so far apart for him, so everlastingly, that prudence is unable to bring things together again, and the eudaemonist begs to be excused. Certainly, willing the good is the height of prudence, yet not as prudence has it, but as the good has it. The transition is clear enough as a break, yes, as a suffering. — Often in the preacher's discourse the illusion occurs in which the transition to becoming a Christian is transformed eudaemonistically into mere appearance, whereby the listener is deceived and the transition prevented.

⁵⁷ From N. E. Balle's *Lærebog (Class-book)*, a guide for religious instruction in schools in Denmark and Norway.

⁵⁸ *Physics*, book 3, ch. 1, 201a9–11.

Subjectivity is truth; subjectivity is actuality.

Note. Necessity must be dealt with separately. The fact that modern speculative thought has brought necessity to bear on the grasp of world history has caused nothing but great disarray, putting possibility, actuality and necessity all into confusion. I have tried in a few words to indicate this in *Philosophical Crumbs*.

§ 3

The simultaneity of the individual moments of subjectivity in the existing subjectivity; the simultaneity as contrasting with the speculative process

Assume now that speculative thought is justified in ridiculing a trichotomy such as that of the human consisting of soul, body and spirit; let the merit of speculation be that of defining human being as spirit, and within this plotting the moments of soul, consciousness, spirit as stages of development in that same subject^j unfolding there in front of us. It is another question whether, if as can so easily happen, the scientific approach is transferred directly to existence, a great confusion is not brought about. In science there is an ascent from the lower to the higher and thinking becomes the highest; in the understanding of world history there is an ascent from the lower to the higher, the stages of imagination and feeling being left behind, and thinking, as the highest, coming last. That thinking is the highest is a view that wins support everywhere; science turns increasingly away from primitive impressions of existence; there is nothing to live through, nothing to experience. Everything is finished, and the task of speculation is now to compartmentalize, classify, put the terms of thought methodically in order. One does not love, one

^j What is this same subject? Not, surely, an individual existing human but the abstract definition of pure human being. There is nothing else for the scientific approach to deal with, and in dealing with it science is of course fully within its rights. But here too we often play with words. It is said over and over again that thinking becomes concrete. But how does it become concrete? Not, surely, in the sense in which one talks of a definite existing something? This means that it is *within* the category of the abstract that thinking becomes concrete, that is, it stays essentially abstract; for concretion means to exist, and existing corresponds to the particular which thinking disregards. It can be quite in order for a thinker *qua* thinker to think pure human being; but *qua* existing individual he is ethically forbidden to forget himself, that he is an existing human being. Far from the ethical celebrating the advent of each new thinker, it makes him ethically responsible for defending this use to which he puts his existence, just as the ethical makes everyone else responsible for the use to which they put their lives, not letting themselves be dazzled by what first catches the eye.

does not have faith, one does not act, but one knows what love, what faith, are, and the only question is their place in the system. The domino-player likewise has his pieces lying before him and the game is to put them together. For 6,000 years people now have loved and the poets sung love's praises, so then surely in the nineteenth century one knows what love is. The task, then, is now to usher it, and especially marriage, to its place in the system – since the professor himself marries in distraction. Politicians have pointed out that war will ultimately cease, everything being decided in the chambers of the diplomats who sit and grade the military forces, etc. – if only life does not end up like that so that we cease living while professors and *privat-docents* speculatively determine the way in which the individual moments relate to pure human being. To me it seems that just as something human can be found in the horrors of even the bloodiest war compared to this diplomatic stillness, so too there is something horrific, something bewitched, in the extinguishing of actual life that makes of it a shadow existence.

Scientifically, it may well look as if thinking were the highest, world-historically too, as though the earlier stages have been left behind. But does our generation now give birth to individuals with neither imagination nor feeling? Are we born to begin at § 14 in the system? – Let us above all not confuse the world-historical development of the human spirit with the single individuals.

In the animal world, the single animal is related directly to its species as specimen, partaking without further ado in the development of the species. When, for instance, a breed of sheep is improved, improved sheep are born because the particular specimen merely expresses the species. But surely it is otherwise when an individual, who is qualified as spirit, relates to the generation. Or are we to suppose that Christian parents give birth as a matter of course to Christian children? At least Christianity does not suppose so; on the contrary, it assumes that sinful children are born to Christian parents as much as to pagan parents. Or does anyone suppose that being born to Christian parents brings the child one single step closer to Christianity than one born to pagan parents, provided, it must be stressed, that the latter too is brought up in Christianity? And yet it is this confusion that modern speculation, if not directly causing it, nevertheless often enough occasions by the relating of individuals without further ado (just as the specimen relates to the species) to the development of the human spirit, as though human

development were a possession that the one generation could bequeath to the other, as if not the individuals themselves but the generation was defined as spirit, which is both a self-contradiction and an ethical abomination. Development of spirit is self-activity; in death the spiritually developed individual takes his development with him. If a succeeding individual is to reach the same level, it must be through his own self-activity. He must therefore not skip over anything. No, of course, it is handier and easier and *wohlfeilere*⁵⁹ to shout about being born in the speculative nineteenth century.

If, as a mere matter of course, the single individual were related immediately to the development of the human spirit, it would follow that only defective examples of humans were born in each generation. But there is surely a difference between a generation of human beings and a shoal of herring, despite it having become ever so refined to amuse oneself with the shifting colours of the shoal, and to disdain those individuals as if worth no more than herring. From a scientific and world-historical point of view one can perhaps be indifferent to such an objection, yet ethics should surely add its voice to every life-view. But then again, as we said, ethics has been elbowed out of the system, which as a replacement has received at most a surrogate that conflates the world-historical and the individual, and mistakes the age's bewildering and noisy demands for the eternal demands of conscience on the individual. Ethics concentrates on the individual, and ethically it is the task of every individual to become a whole human being; just as it is the ethical presupposition that everyone is born in the state of being able to become one. That no one should manage is irrelevant; the point is that the requirement is there. And however many cowardly, mediocre and hoodwinked individuals joined in a project of abandoning themselves to become something *en masse* with the help of the generation, ethics does not haggle.

Scientifically, it can indeed be quite proper – and perhaps even so masterly that I am nowhere near being able to presume to judge – to ascend in abstract-dialectical psychological categories from the psychical-somatic to the psychical, and from the psychical to the pneumatic.⁶⁰ But this scientific gain must not throw existence into confusion. In existence this abstract-scientific definition of what it is to be a human being is something that might be higher than being an individual existing human

⁵⁹ 'Cheaper'. ⁶⁰ 'Relating to spiritual existence' (Greek, πνεῦμα: wind, breath, spirit).

being, but perhaps also lower; in any case, in existence there are only individual human beings. As far as existence goes, therefore, it will not do to resolve the differentiation in the direction of thinking, for the progressive method does not correspond to existing *qua* human being. In existence, it is a matter of all moments being present at once. As far as existence goes, thinking is by no means superior to imagination and feeling but of the same order. In existence the supremacy of thinking becomes confusing. When someone, for example, says: The expectation of an eternal happiness *hereafter* is a representation based upon a finite reflection of the understanding, a representation that cannot hold up before thinking, *ergo* one may very well talk about it in a popular address to the simple-minded, who never get beyond the representational sphere, but for the thinking person this distinction is cancelled – then one must reply: Quite right, in the face of thinking, abstract thinking, it cannot hold up; but then abstract thinking in its turn cannot hold up against existence. As soon as I have actually to exist, the distinction is there, and the existence-consequence of cancelling the distinction is, as shown above, suicide.

It is said that the absoluteness of the law of contradiction is an illusion that vanishes in the face of thinking. Correct. But then again, the abstraction of thinking is a phantom that vanishes in the face of the actuality of existence, since, for one who exists, the cancelling of the law of contradiction, if amounting to anything more than a literary whim in the fantasy of a fantastic being, means that he himself has ceased to exist. Faith is said to be the immediate;^k thinking cancels the immediate. Abstractly, that looks plausible enough but I should like to know how an existing individual goes about existing once he has cancelled his entire immediacy. It is not without reason that *Frater Taciturnus* complains that everyone writes books in which immediacy is cancelled, while no one breathes a word about how then to go about existing.⁶¹

Science ranges the moments of subjectivity inside a knowledge of them, and this knowledge is the highest, and all knowledge is cancellation of existence, a removal from it. In existence this is not to the point. If

^k That this way of talking is one of the most confusing in modern speculation has frequently been pointed out by the pseudonymous authors. If one wants to talk about a cancelled immediacy, it must be an aesthetic-ethical immediacy and faith itself be the new immediacy, one which can never be cancelled in existence, since it is the highest, and by cancelling it one becomes a *Null* and *Nichts* [nothing].

⁶¹ See *SKS* 6, p. 445 n.

thinking disdains imagination, then imagination in turn disdains thinking, and the same with feeling. The task is not to elevate the one at the cost of the other; the task is equal proportions, simultaneity, and the medium in which they are united is in *existing*.

Positing the scientific process instead of existential⁶² simultaneity (as task) brings life into confusion. Even with the different ages in life, where succession is so obvious, the task is still one of simultaneity. One may by all means say, as a bright idea, that the world and the human race have become older, but does it mean that not all of us are born as babies? And in the individual it is a matter of refining the successive in simultaneity. To have been young, then to have grown older and finally to die, is a mediocre existence, for the animal also has that merit. But to unite the moments of life in simultaneity, just that is the task. And just as it is a mediocre existence when the adult has cut off all communication with childhood and is a fragmented adult, so is it a poor existence when a thinker, who after all is also one who exists, has left behind his imagination and feeling, which is just as mad as losing one's wits.

Yet this is what people seem to want. They displace and dethrone poetry as a superseded moment because it corresponds most nearly to fantasy. In a scientific process you may by all means rank it as a superseded moment, but in existence it is a matter, as long as there is a human being who wants to lay claim to a human existence, of his having to preserve poetry, and all his thinking must not get in the way of poetry's enchantment, but rather enhance it. Likewise with religion; religion is not in this sense something for childlike souls, something to be put aside with the years; it is, on the contrary, a childish superstition about thinking to want to do that. The true is not higher than the good and the beautiful, but the true and the good and the beautiful belong essentially to every human existence, and are brought together for one who exists, not in thinking it, but in existing.

But just as one era goes about in round hats and another in tricorns, so too would a fashion in the generation have people forget the ethical requirement. I am well aware that every human is somewhat one-sided, and do not consider it a fault. On the other hand, it is a mistake if a fashion selects a certain form of one-sidedness and makes it the whole. *Non omnes omnia possumus*⁶³ applies everywhere in life, but that is not a reason for

⁶² First use in the text of the adjective 'existential' (it appears in the work's subtitle).

⁶³ 'We cannot all do everything'.

forgetting the task, and one-sidedness can, on the one hand, be grasped without sadness and, on the other, be due to a powerful resolve to prefer being something in earnest to dabbling in everything. There is always something one-sided about every individuality of distinction, and just this one-sidedness may be an indirect intimation of his actual greatness; but it is not the greatness itself. We human beings are so far from realizing the ideal that the second place, being energetically one-sided, is just about the highest we reach; but that it is indeed only the second place must never be forgotten. One might, of course, say that from this point of view the present generation deserves praise, wanting so one-sidedly as it does to be intellectual and scientific. To that I would reply: its misfortune is not that it is one-sided, but that it is all-sided in an abstract way. The one-sided person clearly and definitely rejects what he does not wish to include; but the abstractly all-sided person wants to have everything through the one-sidedness of thought. For instance, a one-sided believer wants to have nothing to do with thinking; a one-sidedly active person will have nothing to do with science. But the one-sidedness of thinking produces an appearance of having everything; a one-sided person of this kind has faith, has passion as transcended moments of his life, so he says – and nothing is easier to say.

§ 4

The subjective thinker – his task, his form, i.e., his style

If ventures in pure thought are to decide whether or not a man is to be called a thinker, then the subjective thinker *eo ipso* is a reject. But, with his elimination, out too go all the existence-problems, and the sad result is a ‘take note’ of misgiving that is an audible accompaniment to modern speculation’s celebration of the system.

There is an old proverb: *oratio, tentatio, meditatio faciunt theologum*.⁶⁴ Likewise, imagination, feeling and dialectics with passion in the inwardness of existing are what are required for a subjective thinker. But first and last passion, since it is impossible in existing to think about existence without becoming passionate, because existing is a monstrous contradiction which the subjective thinker has not to abstract from, which is no great trick, but to remain in. For a world-historical dialectic, individuals

⁶⁴ Latin: prayer, trial, meditation make a theologian.

vanish into humankind; it is impossible for a dialectic like that to bring you and me, an individual existing human being, to light, even if new magnifying glasses are invented for the concrete.

The subjective thinker is a dialectician in the way of the existential; he has the passion of thought needed to keep hold of the qualitative disjunction. If it is to be used in a quite empty way, on the other hand, applied to the individual human being altogether abstractly, one laughably risks saying something infinitely decisive, being correct in what one says, and yet saying not the least thing. So, then, psychologically it is quite remarkable to see the absolute disjunction used in an underhand way precisely as a subterfuge. Likewise with the absolute disjunction: used in a quite empty way it becomes like an un-sounded letter – it cannot be pronounced, or if it can, it says nothing. The absolute disjunction, belonging as it does to existence, is something that the subjective thinker has, with passion of thought, but he has it as the final decision that ensures that not everything ends up in a quantifying. So he has it on hand, but not in such a way that by resorting to it abstractly, what he does is precisely to obstruct existence. The subjective thinker has, therefore, also aesthetic passion and ethical passion, thereby gaining concretion. All existence-problems are passionate, for existence, when one becomes conscious of it, yields passion. To think of them without passion is not to think of them at all, to forget the point that one is oneself existing. The subjective thinker is nevertheless not a poet even if he is also a poet; he is not an ethicist even if he is also an ethicist; he is also a dialectician, and essentially one who exists, whereas the existence of the poet is, on the other hand, inessential to the poem, and likewise the ethicist's to the teaching and the dialectician's to the thought. The subjective thinker is not a scholar, he is an artist. To exist is an art. The subjective thinker is aesthetic enough for his life to have aesthetic content, ethical enough to regulate it, and dialectical enough to master it in thought.

The subjective thinker's task is *to understand himself in existence*. It is true that abstract thinking talks of contradiction and of contradiction's immanent propulsion, notwithstanding that, by disregarding existence and existing, it cancels the difficulty and the contradiction. But the subjective thinker is one who exists, and yet he is one who thinks. He does not abstract from existence and from the contradiction but is in it, and yet he is to think. In all his thinking, then, he includes the thought that he is someone existing. But then he will always have enough to think

about. Pure humanity is soon done with, likewise world history, for even such huge helpings as China, Persia, etc., are swallowed up, as though they were nothing, by the hungry monster of the world-historical process. Faith is soon done with, viewed abstractly, but the subjective thinker, who is also present to himself in existence as he thinks, will find it inexhaustible when his faith is to be declined in the manifold *casibus*⁶⁵ of life. Nor should one make light of the matter, for existence is the hardest thing for a thinker when he is to remain within it, since the *moment*⁶⁶ is commensurate with the highest decisions and yet, again, a tiny vanishing minute in the possible seventy years. Poul Møller has rightly remarked that a court fool uses more wit in a single year than many a witty author during his whole lifetime.⁶⁷ And why is that, if not because the former is someone existing who must have his wit at his command every moment of the day, while the latter is someone who is witty just for the moment.

If anyone should doubt that difficulties are involved in understanding oneself while thinking in existence, I am more than willing to try this experiment: let one of our systematic philosophers undertake to explain to me just one of the simplest existence-problems. I am very willing to admit that I myself, if I am to be compared to such thinkers, am as nothing, and of no account in terms of systematic accountancy; I am willing to concede that the tasks of systematic thought are far greater, and that such thinkers rank much higher than a subjective thinker. But if that is really the case, then they should also be able to explain the more simple matter.

Instead of understanding the concrete abstractly, as the task of abstract thinking has it, the subjective thinker has the opposite task of understanding the abstract concretely. Abstract thinking looks away from concrete human beings in order to consider pure human being; the subjective thinker understands what is to be the abstract human concretely, in terms of being this particular existing human being.

To understand oneself in existence was *the Greek principle*, and however little content there may at times have been in a Greek philosopher's teaching, the philosopher had one advantage: he was never comic. I know very well that if someone nowadays were to live like a Greek philosopher, i.e., expressing existentially what he would have to call his life-view, and entering existentially into it, he would be considered a lunatic. That is as it may be, but to be clever, cleverer, and extremely clever, and clever to

⁶⁵ Latin: (grammatical) cases. ⁶⁶ 'Øieblikket', the instant.

⁶⁷ A reference to Poul M. Møller's aphorisms (1819–21), *Efterladte Skrifter*, III (1843), pp. 176f.

the point where the esteemed philosopher, although he speculates upon existence-problems (for example, Christianity), never remembers to ask himself who in all the world it could concern, least of all that it might be himself: that I find ridiculous.

All scepticism is a kind of idealism. Thus, when the sceptic Zeno⁶⁸ took up the study of scepticism by trying, in existing, to remain unaffected by whatever he encountered, so that when having once got out of the way of a mad dog he confessed, shamefacedly, that even a sceptical philosopher is sometimes also a human being, I find nothing ridiculous in that. There is no contradiction there, and the comic always lies in a contradiction. When, on the other hand, one thinks of all the miserable idealistic lectern witticisms, the joking and flirting attached to being an idealist at the lectern, so that the lecturer, not even being an actual idealist, only plays the very fashionable game of being one; when one remembers the lectern phrase about doubting everything – at the lectern; yes, then it is impossible to avoid writing a satire simply by telling the truth. If one tried through existing to be an idealist, one would have learned in half a year something very different from this game of hide-and-seek at the lectern. It is not at all hard to be an idealist in imagination, but to *exist* as an idealist is an extremely strenuous life-task, because existing is itself exactly the objection to it. To express in existing what one has understood about oneself, and to understand oneself in this way, is not comic at all; but to understand everything, only not oneself, is exceedingly comic.

There is a sense in which the subjective thinker speaks quite as abstractly as the abstract thinker; for the latter speaks of pure humanity, of pure subjectivity, while the other of the one human being (*unum noris, omnes*).⁶⁹ But this one human being is an existing human being, and the difficulty is not omitted.

To understand oneself in existence is also *the Christian principle*, except that this ‘self’ has acquired far richer and far more profound dimensions that are even more difficult to understand together with existing. The believer is a subjective thinker, and the only difference, as shown above, is between the simple-minded man and the simple-minded wise man. Here again, this ‘oneself’ is not pure humanity or pure subjectivity, and the like, where everything becomes easy because the difficulty is removed and the

⁶⁸ The anecdote in fact refers to the sceptic Pyrrho, not to the Stoic philosopher.

⁶⁹ Latin: if you know one you know all.

whole thing transferred to abstraction's *Schattenspiel*.⁷⁰ The difficulty is greater than for the Greek because still greater oppositions are set up, because existence is accentuated paradoxically as sin and eternity paradoxically as the god in time. The difficulty is to exist in this, not abstractly to think oneself out of it, and thinking abstractly, for instance, of an eternal god-becoming and similar ideas that emerge as soon as the difficulty is removed. So the believer's existence is even more passionate than that of the Greek philosopher (who to a high degree needed passion even with regard to his ataraxy), because if existence itself generates passion, existence paradoxically accentuated generates the maximum of passion.

To abstract from existence is to remove the difficulty, but to stay on in existence in such a way as to understand one thing at one moment, another at another moment, is not to understand oneself. Yet, to understand the greatest opposites together and understand oneself existing in them is very hard. Just pay attention to yourself, and to what people say, and you will see how seldom it succeeds.

One person is good and another shrewd, or the same person acts at one time as a good man, a shrewd one at another; but to see at the same time and in the same matter what is shrewd, and only see it in order to will the good, that is already difficult. One person will laugh, another weep, or the same person does these at different times, but to see the comic and the tragic in the same thing and at the same time, that is difficult. To be contrite over one's sin and then a jolly fellow is not difficult, but to be contrite and carefree at the same time is hard. To think one thing and to have forgotten everything else is not difficult, but to think one and have its opposite in you at the same time, joining it in existence, is hard. At an age of seventy, to have had all possible moods and bequeath a life like a book of samples that one can consult at pleasure is not so very difficult either; but to have the one mood fully and richly and also have the opposite, giving word and pathos to the one while subtly slipping in the opposite, that is hard. And so on.

For all his effort the subjective thinker enjoys but a meagre reward. The more the generation-idea has come to dominate even the common conception, the more terrible is the transition – instead of being part of the race and saying 'we', 'the age', 'the nineteenth century', to become an individual existing human being. That this is an infinitely small thing is

⁷⁰ 'Shadow play'.

not to be denied. That is why considerable resignation is needed not to make light of it. For what is an individual existing human being? Yes, our age knows all too well how little it is, but there precisely lies the age's own special immorality. Each age has its own. The immorality of ours is perhaps not pleasure, enjoyment and sensuality but rather a pantheistic, licentious contempt for individual human beings. In the midst of all the jubilation over our age and the nineteenth century, there sounds a veiled note of hidden contempt for being a human being; in the midst of the importance that the generation attaches to itself, there is a despair over being a human being. Everything, everything wants to come along, world-historically people want to be beguiled into the totality, no one wants to be an individual existing human being. Hence perhaps the many attempts to hang on to Hegel, even by those who have seen what is suspect in his philosophy. One fears that one would disappear without trace if one were to become a single existing human being, so that not even the daily newspapers, still less the critical journals, and even less the world-historical speculators, can catch sight of one. People are afraid that by becoming an individual human being they would have to live in greater seclusion and abandonment than a man in the country, and letting go of Hegel would mean it was even impossible to have a letter addressed to one. And it is undeniable that a person who lacks ethical and religious enthusiasm must despair of being an individual human being – otherwise not.

When Napoleon advanced into Africa, he reminded the soldiers that from the tops of the pyramids the memories of forty centuries were looking down upon them. Just to read of it makes one shudder. No wonder then, that in that spellbinding moment this must have turned even the most cowardly soldier into a hero! But assuming the world has stood for 6,000 years, and that God must have existed at least as long as the world, then the memories of 6,000 years are looking down upon the individual existing human being – is that not just as inspiring? But, in the midst of the generation's show of courage, the despondency and cowardice of the individuals are easy to detect. Just as in the desert one must travel in large caravans from fear of robbers and wild beasts, so now the individuals, having a horror of existence because it is god-forsaken, dare to live only in great droves and cling together *en masse* in order to be at least something.

Every human being must be assumed to be in essential possession of what belongs essentially to being a human being. The subjective thinker's

task is to transform himself into an instrument⁷¹ that clearly and definitely expresses the human in existence. To take comfort in a differential trait in this connection is a misunderstanding, for having a better head, and the like, are only a triviality. That our age has taken refuge in the generation and abandoned the individuals has its basis quite rightly in an aesthetic despair that has not yet reached the ethical. Having seen that it is of no use to be ever so distinguished an individual human being, since every distinction is unavailing, a new mark of distinction has been chosen: being born in the nineteenth century. So everyone, as quickly as possible, makes an attempt to determine his own crumb of existence in relation to the age and consoles himself. But it is of no avail and only a more elevated and more glittering delusion. And just as there have doubtless lived fools in ancient times, and in every generation, who in their vain conceit have confused themselves with some great and distinguished man, wanting to be this one and that, what distinguishes our times is that the fools are not content with confusing themselves with a great man; they confuse themselves with the age, with the century, with the generation, humanity at large.

To want to live as an individual human being (which everyone undeniably is) with the help and on the strength of a difference is insipidity, to want to live as an individual human being (which everyone undoubtedly is) in the same sense in which every other human being is capable of it, that is the ethical victory over life and over all illusion, the victory that is maybe the hardest of all to win in the theocentric nineteenth century.

The subjective *thinker's form*, the form of his communication, is his style. His form must be as many-sided as the oppositions that he holds together. The systematic *ein, zwei, drei* is an abstract form, and must therefore fall short when applied to the concrete. The subjective thinker's form will be concretely dialectical to the same degree that he is himself concrete. But as he himself is neither poet, ethicist nor dialectician, his form can be of none of these directly. His form must relate first and last to existence, and in this respect he must have the poetic, the ethical, the dialectical, the religious at his disposal. Compared with a poet, his form will be foreshortened, while compared with an abstract dialectician his form will be broad. For regarded abstractly, concreteness in the existential is breadth. The humorous, for instance, is breadth compared to

⁷¹ 'Danish instrument', musical instrument, not tool.

abstract thinking, but compared to concrete existence-communication it is not at all breadth unless the humour is in itself broad. The person of an abstract thinker is irrelevant in respect of his thought, while an existentially thinking person must be presented essentially as thinking but in such a way that in presenting his thoughts he also portrays himself. Compared to abstract thought joking is breadth, but not when compared to a concrete existence-communication unless the joke is itself broad. But the subjective thinker lacks the poetic calm to create in the medium of the imagination and to execute aesthetically without involvement, for he is himself essentially an existing individual in existence and does not have the imaginative medium for the illusion of aesthetic production at his disposal. Poetic calm is breadth compared to the existence communication of the subjective thinker. A supporting cast, scenery etc., which all belong to the completeness of the aesthetic production, are breadth; for the subjective thinker has but a single stage, existence, and he has no business with pastoral landscapes and the like. His scene is not the magic world of the imagination where the poet elicits perfection; nor is the scene set in England and what matters historical accuracy. The scene is inwardness in existing as a human being; the concretion is the relation of the categories of existence to one another. Historical accuracy and historic actuality are breadth.

Yet, existence-actuality cannot be communicated, and in his own ethical existence the subjective thinker has his own actuality. When the actuality is to be understood by a third party, it must be understood as possibility, and a communicator aware of this will bear in mind accordingly that his existence-communication, precisely so that it may be directed towards existence, must have the form of possibility. A communication in the form of a possibility brings the recipient, as close as is possible between one person and another, to existing in it. Let me illustrate this once more. One would think that telling that this or that person has *actually* done this and that (something great and remarkable) would bring a reader closer to wanting to do the same, to wanting to exist in the same, than if one simply presents it as possible. Apart from the fact, as duly indicated, that the reader can really only understand the communication by resolving the *esse* of the actuality into *posse*, for otherwise he merely *fancies* that he understands, apart from that, to read that this or that person has actually done this and that can just as well have a delaying as an accelerating effect. The reader simply transforms the person in

question (assisted by the fact that this is an *actual* person) into the rare exception. He admires him and says: But I am too humble to do anything like that. Now, admiration can be all very well in connection with difference, but in connection with the universal it is a total misunderstanding. That a man can swim the English Channel, that another masters twenty-four languages, a third walks on his hands, etc. one may admire *si placet*,⁷² but if the person presented is to be great in terms of the universal, through his virtue, his faith, his high-mindedness, his loyalty, his pertinacity, etc., then the relation of admiration is an unreliable one, or may easily become so. Whatever is great in terms of the universal must therefore not be presented as something to be admired but as a *requirement*. In the form of possibility the presentation becomes a demand. Instead of, as usual, presenting the good in the form of actuality as such and such a person actually having lived and actually having done this or that, thus changing the reader into a spectator, an admirer, an evaluator, it is to be presented in the form of a possibility. This brings home to the reader, as nearly as possible, the question of whether he wants to exist in it. Possibility operates with the ideal human being (understood in terms not of difference but of the universal), which relates to each human being as a requirement. The more one points to it being this particular human being, the easier it becomes for the others to treat him as exempt. One need be no psychologist to know that there is a treachery that wants to make an exception to the ethical impression supported precisely by admiration. Instead of the ethical and the religious example turning the spectator's eye in upon himself, repelling him, which is exactly what happens by positing the possibility between them, as what they have in common, a presentation in the form of actuality attracts a crowd's attention aesthetically to itself, and it will be discussed and tested, turned over and over again whether now actually, etc. and marvelled and wept over that now actually, etc. That Job had faith, for example, should be presented in a way that makes me ask myself whether I, too, wish to acquire faith, and not at all in a way that means I am at a comedy or am a member of an esteemed audience that is to investigate whether now actually, or applaud that now actually. It is likewise a matter for low comedy, this concern which a sensitive congregation and the individual members of the same sometimes have, as to whether they have a pastor of whom it is certain

⁷² Latin: if one so wishes.

whether he actually etc. It is forever untrue that anyone was ever helped to do the good by someone else *actually* having done it; because if he ever actually did come to do it, it would be by understanding the other's actuality as possibility. When Themistocles lost his sleep at the thought of Miltiades's triumphs, it was his understanding the actuality as possibility that made him sleepless. Had he bothered asking whether Miltiades had now actually done it, and been satisfied that Miltiades had now actually done it, he would scarcely have become sleepless, but more likely a sleepy admirer or *höchstens*⁷³ a noisy admirer, but no Miltiades No. 2. And ethically speaking, there is nothing one sleeps so soundly on as admiration over an actuality. And ethically speaking, if anything can rouse a person, it is possibility, when it requires itself ideally of a human being.

⁷³ 'At most'.

Chapter 4

The problem of the *Crumbs*: how can an eternal happiness be built on historical knowledge?

Section 1

For orientation in the plan
of the *Crumbs*

§ 1

That the point of departure was taken in paganism, and why

The reader of the *Crumbs*' crumb of philosophy will recall that the piece was not didactic but experimental. It took its point of departure in paganism in order, experimentally, to arrive at an interpretation of existence which could truly be said to go further than paganism. Modern speculation seems almost to have pulled off the trick of going further than Christianity *on the other side*, or of coming so far in understanding Christianity as practically to return to paganism. That someone prefers paganism to Christianity is not at all perplexing, but to make paganism out to be the highest within Christianity is an injustice both to Christianity, which becomes something it is not, and to paganism, which becomes nothing at all, as indeed it was not. Speculation, which has completely understood Christianity, and at the same time declares itself to be the highest development within Christianity, has thus, remarkably enough, discovered that there is no beyond, that 'beyond', 'hereafter' and the like

are the dialectical parochialism of a finite understanding. The beyond has become a joke, a claim so doubtful that nobody makes it, let alone honours it, so that one simply amuses oneself with the reflection that there was once a time when this idea transformed the whole of life.¹ One sees straight away what answer to expect from that quarter to the problem: The problem is itself a dialectical parochialism, for in the heavenly *sub specie aeterni*² of pure thinking the distinction is cancelled. But just think, it is no logical problem – what indeed has logical thinking in common with the most pathos-filled problem of all (the problem of an eternal happiness)?; and it is an existence-problem, but existing is not a matter of being *sub specie aeterni*. Here again one may see the point in taking precautions before consorting with such speculation: first, that one separate the speculation from the speculator, then as in cases of black magic, witchcraft, and possession by the devil, use a powerful incantatory formula to have the bewitched philosopher changed into, or restored to, his actual form, that of an individual *existing* human being.

That the experiment concerned Christianity is something the piece did not say, to gain breathing-space and not to be swept immediately off into historical, historical-dogmatic, prefatory, ecclesiastical questions about what Christianity actually is and is not. For no human being has ever been so much sought after as Christianity of late. At times it is explained speculatively and made out to be paganism, at times one does not even know definitely what Christianity is. One need only peruse a book-show catalogue to see what age we live in. In everyday life, on hearing shrimps cried out on the streets we naturally think it is midsummer; when garlands are cried out we assume it is spring; and when crying mussels, that it is winter. But when, as last winter, one hears shrimps, garlands and mussels all cried out on the same day, it is tempting to assume that this life³ has become confused and that the world cannot last until Easter. But an even more confusing impression is gathered from a moment's inspection of what is cried out in a book catalogue, both by the authors themselves and by the publishers, who to a high degree have become audible consonants in the literature. *Summa summarum*,⁴ it is a very agitated age we live in, or at least a very confused one.

So to gain a day of rest, something the life-worn Christian terminology, itself calm, profound and unfathomable, yet now well-nigh breathless and

¹ 'Tilværelsen'. ² Latin: under the aspect of eternity.

³ 'Tilværelsen'. ⁴ Latin: in sum, the long and short of it.

without meaning, can sorely need, and in order to avoid as far as possible getting involved in the crush, I chose to suppress the name of Christianity and to refrain from using the expressions that are thrown repeatedly into confusion and tossed about in the discussion. The Christian terminology has been taken over whole by speculation, since speculation after all is Christianity. Even newspapers employ the most sublime dogmatic expressions as brilliant ingredients, and while politicians anxiously anticipate state bankruptcy a far greater bankruptcy perhaps awaits us in the world of the spirit, because concepts are being gradually revoked and the words able to mean everything, so that sometimes the dispute becomes as ridiculous as the agreement. For it is always ridiculous to dispute over loose words and come to agreement on loose words; but when even the most firmly fixed words have become loose, what then? Just as a toothless old man munches with the broken stumps of his teeth, so the modern discourse about Christianity has lost the biting power of a vigorous terminology – and it is all toothless ‘twaddling’.

To me, that the confusion in which Christianity has become involved is due to its having been set back a whole stage in human life is clear enough. That we become Christians as children has led one straightforwardly to assume that we are as anticipated *κατά δύναμιν*.⁵ Infant baptism can well be defended for that reason, and commended both as the well-intentioned interest of the Church, a protection against fanatics, and as the beautiful care and providence of devout parents: the responsibility rests with the individual himself in later life. But it is ridiculous, and always will be, to see people on solemn occasions carry on in the style of Christians when they are Christian solely through having a birth certificate; for the most ridiculous thing that can ever happen to Christianity is to become identified with what people, in a trivial sense, call custom and habit. To be persecuted, loathed, scorned, mocked, or to be blessed and praised: this is appropriate for the mightiest of all powers, but to become a meek custom *bon ton*⁶ and the like is its absolute opposite.

Try just picturing it. For a king it is fitting to be loved by his people, honoured in his majesty; or if things go wrong, well then, let him be toppled from the throne in a revolution, let him fall in the battle, let him languish in a far-off state prison, away from everything that reminds people of him. But a king transformed into a bustling hired servant exceedingly happy in his

⁵ Greek: according to what is possible; here: as what is possible. ⁶ ‘Good taste’.

position: this is a transformation more shocking than to assassinate him. The converse can be ridiculous, that at funerals, for example, Christians resort at times to pagan expressions about Elysium and the like; but it is also ridiculous that a man for whom Christianity has meant absolutely nothing, not even enough for him to take the trouble to renounce it, dies and the priest then ushers him into a state of eternal happiness in the way that Christian terminology understands this. I do not have to be reminded that one must always distinguish between a visible and an invisible Church, and that no one may presume to judge hearts.

Far from it, indeed very far from it. But when people became Christians at a more mature age and were baptized, then it was at least possible to talk of some kind of assurance that Christianity meant something to the baptized. So let it be for God to judge hearts! But when one is baptized at two weeks, and when it must be considered a convenient matter to remain *de nomine*⁷ a Christian, when to renounce Christianity would bring in its wake only trouble and annoyance, when, as noted above, the common judgment would be roughly this: it's rather silly of him to make such a fuss over it, then one can hardly deny that belonging to the visible Church amounts to a very doubtful proof that one is actually a Christian. The visible Church expands in a way that means that in the end the situation is reversed, and just as power and strength of conviction were once required for becoming a Christian, now, though mentioning it is not appreciated, courage and energy are needed to give up being one – thoughtlessness, on the other hand, to be one in this way. So infant baptism can very well be defended; no new custom need be introduced. But since everything is changed, the clergy must themselves perceive that if, when only a few were Christians, it was once their duty to win human beings for Christianity, the task must now rather be to win them by frightening them off – since the misfortune is that this is the way in which they are Christians. When Christianity came into the world one was not Christian and the difficulty was to become that; the difficulty of becoming it now is of having, by one's own self-activity, to transform an initial being-a-Christian into a possibility in order truly to become a Christian. And the difficulty is so much the greater because this is to, and ought to take place quietly within the individual himself, with no outwardly decisive action, so that there should be no Anabaptist heresy⁸ or the like.

⁷ Latin: nominally.

⁸ The view propagated in Germany and Switzerland at the time of the Reformation that adult rebaptism was necessary since infant baptism was invalid.

However, in the outside world everyone knows that to leap into the air from where one stands and then land again on the same spot is the most difficult of all leaps to make; and the leap is made easier when some distance is put between where the leaper stands and where the leap is to be made. Similarly, the most difficult decision is where the one deciding is not standing at a remove from the decision (as with someone who is not a Christian deciding whether to become one), but where it is as though already decided. Here the difficulty of the decision is two-fold: first that the earlier decision only looks like one, a possibility, and then the decision itself. If I am not a Christian and the decision is to become one, Christianity then helps me to become aware of the decision, and the distance between us helps just as the preliminary run-up helps the leaper. But if it looks as though it were decided, then if I am already a Christian (i.e., am baptized, which is after all only a possibility), there is nothing helping me to become properly aware of it; on the contrary, there is something (the added difficulty) that prevents me, namely, the semblance of decision. In short: *it is easier to become a Christian if I am not a Christian than to become a Christian when I am one; and this decision is reserved for the person who has been baptized in infancy.*

What is baptism without appropriation? Yes, it is the possibility, neither more nor less, of the baptized child becoming a Christian. The parallel would be this: just as one must be born, have come about,⁹ in order to become a human being, since an infant is not yet that, so too must one be baptized in order to become a Christian. For in the case of the adult who was not baptized as an infant, what allows him to become a Christian in baptism is that in baptism he can have faith's appropriation. Take appropriation away from what is Christian and what merit is Luther then? But unlock Luther and note in every line the strong pulse-beat of appropriation; note it in the trembling urgency of his whole style, which seems constantly to have behind it the terrible thunderstorm that killed Alexius and created Luther.¹⁰ Did not papism have objectivity and objective categories, the objective, the objective, the objective in superabundance? What did it lack? Appropriation, inwardness. 'Aber unsere spitzfindigen Sophisten sagen in diesen Sacramenten nichts von dem Glauben, sondern plappern nur fleißig von den wirklichen Kräften der Sacramente (the objective), denn sie lernen immerdar, und

⁹ 'Være bleven til', be having come about, or into life ('Tilværelsen').

¹⁰ A thunderbolt having struck at his side when overtaken by a storm in 1505, Luther pledged himself to enter the monastery. Myth has it that the thunderbolt struck his companion, though the latter was in fact later killed in Erfurt.

kommen doch nimmer zu Erkenntniß der Wahrheit'¹¹ (*Von der babylonischen Gefängenschaft*, Gerlach's little edition, vol. 4, p. 195).¹² But it is along that path they would have to travel in order to come to the truth if objectivity were the truth. So let it be ten times true that Christianity does not lie in that in which people differ; let it be earthly life's most blessed solace that, in its sacred humaneness, Christianity can be appropriated by everyone – but is this to be, should it be, understood to mean that everyone is without further ado a Christian, merely by being baptized when fourteen days old?^a Being a Christian has nothing to do with a life of ease. The simple soul must be given leave to exist in it as much as the wise man – so being Christian becomes something else than having a birth certificate lying in the drawer, producing it when one is to be a student or wants a wedding; something else than going through life with a birth certificate in one's waistcoat pocket. But being a Christian has become, by and by, something that one is as a matter of course, and as far as responsibility is concerned, this rests on one's parents rather than on oneself: that they have at least not neglected to have one baptized. Hence the strange phenomenon, though perhaps not so rare in Christendom, that a man who has doubtless thought that his parents took care of his baptism, letting that decide the matter, is quite rightly aroused to a concern to have his own child baptized when he himself becomes a father, so that the worry about becoming a Christian has passed from the individual himself to the guardian. The father is anxious, in his capacity as guardian, to have the child baptized, but perhaps also in view of all the unpleasantness with the police and annoyances that will face the child if not baptized. And eternity, the hereafter, and the solemn earnest of the Judgment (in which, be it noted, it will be decided whether I myself was a Christian, not whether in the capacity of guardian I saw to it that my children were baptized) are transformed into a street setting, or a passport office where the dead come running with their certificates, yes, from the parish clerk.

Then let it be ten times true that baptism is a divine passport to eternity, but if heedlessness and worldliness want to use it as a permit, is it that too?

^a In the *Crumbs* I expressed the peculiarity as being that of trying to naturalize Christianity, so that, in the end, to be a Christian and to be a human being are identical, and one is born a Christian just as one is born a human being, or at least birth and rebirth are drawn together into the space of fourteen days.

¹¹ 'But, when discussing the sacraments, our hair-splitting Sophists say nothing at all about this faith, but merely prate industriously of the real power (the objective) of the sacraments, for they are always learning and yet never arrive at a knowledge of the truth.'

¹² Luther, *Büchlein von der babylonischen Gefängniß der Kirche* (*On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*) (1520).

Baptism, indeed, is not the slip of paper issued by the parish clerk – and on which he sometimes makes mistakes; indeed it is not just the external event that took place at eleven o'clock in the morning on 7 September. To suppose that time, or existence in time, should be decisive for an eternal happiness is in general so paradoxical that paganism is unable to think it; but to have the whole thing decided at the age of fourteen days in the course of five minutes seems just a little too much of a paradox. There remains only to get married in the cradle to this one or that, be registered in this or that municipal post, etc., for everything in one's life will have been decided at the tender age of fourteen days – unless the later decision was to do it over again, which, regarding the projected marriage, one would surely find worth the trouble, but perhaps not so with regard to Christianity. Just think. It was once true that when everything fell apart for a person, there remained at least the hope of becoming a Christian; now we are Christian and in so many ways tempted to forget, yes, to become one.

Under such circumstances in Christendom (on the one hand the suspect nature of speculative philosophy and, on the other, that one is a Christian as a matter of course) it becomes more and more difficult to find a point of departure if one wishes to know what Christianity is. For what speculation gets out of Christianity is paganism, and through baptism to be a Christian as a matter of course makes Christendom into a baptized paganism. That is why I had recourse to paganism and to Greece, the representative of intellectuality, and to its greatest hero, Socrates. Having thus made sure that I had got a grip on paganism, I tried from there to find something as decisively different as possible. Whether the content of the experiment was really Christianity is another question, but at least this much came out of it, that if modern Christian speculation has categories essentially in common with paganism, then modern speculation cannot be Christianity.

§ 2

The importance of a preliminary agreement about what Christianity is before there can be talk of a mediation of Christianity and speculation; the absence of an agreement favours mediation, while its absence also makes mediation illusory; the coming of the agreement prevents mediation

That an eternal happiness is decided in time through the relation to something historical was the substance of the experiment, and what I

now refer to as what is Christian. This surely, after all, is something no one will wish to deny: that the teaching of Christianity in the New Testament is that the eternal happiness of the individual is decided in time, and is decided through the relation to Christianity as something historical. To avoid upsetting things by evoking thoughts of an eternal unhappiness, I want to point out that I am speaking only of the positive, that is, that in time through his relation to something historical, the believer becomes assured of his eternal happiness. Nor, and again to avoid upset, do I want to draw on any other Christian provisions; they are all contained in just this one, and may be consistently derived from it, just as this too forms the sharpest contrast to paganism. I simply repeat once more: I do not decide whether Christianity is right. I have already said in the piece, what I constantly admit, that my crumb of merit, if there is to be talk of such, is to present the problem.

Yet merely to mention Christianity and the New Testament so easily sets off that endless deliberation. Thus nothing will be easier for a speculating thinker than to find one or another Bible passage that he can appeal to in his favour.¹³ For speculative philosophy hasn't even made it clear to begin with how it wants to make use of the New Testament. In one place, the New Testament is said without further ado to belong in the sphere of representations, from which it would seem to follow that one cannot argue from it; in another, whenever speculation finds a Bible passage it can appeal to, much fuss is made about having scriptural authority on its side.

The preliminary agreement on what is what, on what Christianity is before one explains it, so that rather than explaining Christianity one doesn't just hit upon something oneself and explain that as Christianity – this preliminary agreement is of the utmost and decisive importance. This meeting of both parties before the court of conciliation¹⁴ (so that mediation doesn't become one of the parties and also the court where they are to meet) seems not to interest speculation, which would prefer rather only to profit from Christianity. Just as, in a lesser case, one and another person has been much occupied less in understanding Hegel than in the profit had from *going even further* than Hegel,¹⁵ so too, in a matter as great and significant as Christianity, is there a temptation to go further. One has to

¹³ 'Faveur'.

¹⁴ A court established in 1795 to impose settlements in lawsuits and disputes between private parties.

¹⁵ See the translator's introduction.

take Christianity along not exactly for Christianity's sake, but in order to be able to put on a really good show of going beyond. – It is important on the other hand that the deliberation about what Christianity is should not become a learned deliberation; for as soon as that happens we enter an approximation process that can never be finished, as shown in the first part of this book. All mediation between Christianity and speculation will then become impossible for yet another reason, that deliberation can never be finished.

The question of what Christianity is must therefore be raised but not made a learned one, or in a partisan way under the presumption that Christianity is a philosophical doctrine, for then speculation is more than a party, or is both party and judge. So the question must be raised in terms of existence, and it must be possible to answer it and to answer it briefly. For while it is all very well for a learned theologian to devote his whole life to a learned investigation of the Scripture's and the Church's teaching, it would surely be a ridiculous contradiction were an existing individual, in asking what Christianity is in terms of existence, to use his whole life considering the question – for when, in that case, would he exist in it?

The question of what Christianity is must therefore not be conflated with the objective problem of the truth of Christianity, which we dealt with in the first part of this book. It is indeed possible to ask objectively what Christianity is, if the questioner will set this question objectively aside and let the question of it being truth or not (the truth is subjectivity) rest for the time being. The questioner in that case asks to be spared all reverential preoccupation with proving its truth, along with all speculative urgency in going further; he wants peace and quiet, wants neither recommendations nor haste, but to find out what Christianity is.

Or is it perhaps that one cannot find out what Christianity is without oneself becoming a Christian? All analogies seem to speak for the possibility, and Christianity must itself consider as false Christians those who merely know what Christianity is. Here again the matter has become confused through one having acquired the semblance of being a Christian by being baptized right away as an infant. But when Christianity came into the world, or when it is introduced into a pagan country, it did and does not strike a pen through the contemporary generation of adults and seize possession of the small children. At that time the situation was as it should be: it was difficult to become a Christian and one did not meddle with understanding Christianity. Now we have

almost reached the parody that to become a Christian is nothing while to understand Christianity is a very difficult and laborious task.^b Everything is thereby reversed: Christianity is made into a kind of philosophical theory, the difficulty then being quite properly that of understanding it. But Christianity relates essentially to existence, and what is difficult is to become a Christian. This is why faith is dethroned in favour of understanding, instead of being quite properly the maximum when the difficulty is to become a Christian.

Take a pagan philosopher who has had Christianity proclaimed to him, though not as one more philosophical doctrine to understand but with the question of whether he would become a Christian. Has he not been told what Christianity is, so that he could then choose?

That one can know what Christianity is without being a Christian must therefore be affirmed. It is another matter whether one can know what it is to be a Christian without being one, and that must be denied. On the other hand, the Christian must know too what Christianity is and be able to tell us – to the extent that he has become one. I do not think it possible to express more strongly the questionable nature of becoming a Christian at the age of fourteen days than by reminding people that it is due to this that we can find Christians who, yes, who have not yet become Christians. The transition to Christianity is made so early that this transition is simply the possibility of being able to make it again. For anyone who has really become a Christian there must have been a time when he was not a Christian; there must, in turn, have been a time when he found out what Christianity is; and he must, again, provided he has not wholly forgotten how he existed before becoming a Christian, be able, by comparing his earlier life to his Christian life, to say what in his own case Christianity is. As soon as the transitional situation is made contemporary with Christianity's coming into the world, or with its introduction into a pagan country, everything will be clear. To become a Christian then becomes the most fearful of all decisions in a person's life, since it is a

^b In respect of doctrine, understanding is the maximum and becoming an adherent merely an artful way of pretending to understand practised by people who do not understand. Regarding an existence-communication, the maximum is existing in it and understanding merely to shirk the task. Becoming a Hegelian is suspect, understanding Hegel is the maximum; becoming a Christian is the maximum, to want to understand Christianity is suspect. – This corresponds entirely to what was developed in the preceding chapter on possibility and actuality. In respect of a doctrine, the maximum is the relation of possibility, of an existence-communication actuality. Wanting to understand an existence-communication is to want to transform one's relation to it into one of possibility.

matter of winning faith through despair and offence (the Cerberus pair who guard the approach to becoming a Christian).¹⁶ This most fearful of all life's examinations, in which eternity is the examiner, cannot possibly have been passed by a fourteen-days-old infant even with any amount of birth certificates from the parish clerk. But for the baptized person there must also come a later moment answering to the situation of transition when this is contemporary with the coming of Christianity into the world; thus, for the baptized person, there must come a moment when although a Christian, he will ask what Christianity is, yes, in order to become a Christian. In baptism Christianity gives him a name, and he is *de nomine* a Christian; but in the decision he becomes a Christian and gives his name to Christianity (*nomen dare aliqui*).¹⁷

Take a pagan philosopher. At least he did not become a Christian when two weeks old, not knowing what he was doing (truly the oddest explanation of the most decisive step, that it be taken when one does not know what one is doing!); he knew very well what he was doing, that he made a resolution to maintain a relationship to Christianity until that wonderful thing happened to him (if we wanted to put it that way) that he became a Christian, or until he chose to become one. So he knew what Christianity was at the time he accepted Christianity when not yet a Christian.

But while everyone is busy learnedly determining and explaining Christianity speculatively, one never sees the question of what Christianity is put in a way that allows one to discover that the one posing it does so in terms of existence and in the interest of existing. And why does no one do that? Ah, naturally because we are all without further ado Christians. And with the help of this splendid invention of being a Christian with no further ado we have reached the point in Christendom of not knowing for certain what Christianity is. Or, by being conflated with the learned and speculative explanation of Christianity, it has been made into such a voluminous affair that the task is not yet quite done but a new book is expected. The person who actually became a Christian under the presupposition that the situation of transition is contemporary with the coming of Christianity into the world, would of course have to know what Christianity is; and the person who is going actually to become a Christian must feel this need, one that I do not

¹⁶ In Greek mythology Cerberus was the dog guarding the entrance to the underworld.

¹⁷ Latin: give one's name to someone.

believe even the most doting mother will discover in an infant at the tender age of fourteen days. But, then of course, we are all Christians. The learned Christians dispute over what Christianity really is, but it never occurs to them to think of themselves other than as Christians, as though one could know with certainty that one was something, but without knowing with certainty what that something is. The sermon addresses itself to the 'Christian congregation', yet almost always moves *over towards* the Christian,¹⁸ recommends laying hold of faith (hence becoming Christian), entices the people into accepting Christianity – and those addressed are the Christian congregation and therefore surely Christians. Then tomorrow a listener dies who was so deeply moved by the priest's recommendation of Christianity the day before that he thought to himself: 'Only a little more is needed for me to become a Christian',¹⁹ and the day after tomorrow he is buried as a Christian – for he was after all a Christian.

So what in itself seems so obvious, that a Christian must surely know what Christianity is, know it with the concentration and decisiveness which the fact of having taken the most decisive of all steps both presupposes and provides, is no longer to be understood quite straightforwardly. We are all Christians indeed, and a speculating thinker too is baptized when fourteen days old. Now, if a speculating thinker says: 'I am a Christian (NB meaning that he was baptized when two weeks old) and a Christian ought to know what Christianity is; true Christianity, I say, is the mediation of Christianity, and to vouch for the correctness of this, I point to the fact that I am myself a Christian', what are we to say? If someone says: 'I am a Christian, *ergo*, I surely ought to know what Christianity is' and not a word more, then one must leave it at that. It would be silly to contradict him, since he says nothing. But if he goes on to explain what he understands by Christianity, then if it is possible to know what Christianity is without being a Christian, one should be able, even without being a Christian, to know whether this is Christianity or not. If, for instance, what he explains as Christianity is substantially identical with paganism, then one is justified in denying that it is Christianity.

It must first be decided what Christianity is before there can be any talk of mediation. Speculation does not get mixed up with that; the way it works is not first to propose what philosophy is and then Christianity, in order then to see whether the opposites admit of mediation; it does not

¹⁸ *Det Christlige*, that which is Christian. ¹⁹ Acts 6:28.

secure the attested identities of the respective parties before proceeding to a settlement. If speculation is asked what Christianity is, it replies without further ado: the speculative *interpretation* of Christianity, without bothering to inquire whether there is anything in the distinction between something and the interpretation of that something, which would seem here to be important for speculation itself; for if Christianity is itself identical with its speculative interpretation, there will be no mediation, since in that case there will be no opposition, and a mediation between identities is after all meaningless. But then perhaps we had better ask speculation what speculation is. But, then what do you know? We learn that speculation is reconciliation, is mediation – is Christianity. But if Christianity and speculation are identical, what does it mean to mediate them? Moreover, Christianity is then essentially paganism, for speculation will surely not deny that paganism had speculation.

That speculation in a way speaks consistently I am quite willing to admit. But this consistent way of speaking also shows that no preliminary agreement was struck before the reconciling mediation, presumably because no third location could be found where the opposing parties should meet.

But even if speculation assumes a distinction between Christianity and speculation, if only for the satisfaction of being able to mediate them, as long as it still fails definitely and decisively to mark the distinction, one must ask: Is not *mediation* speculation's idea? Consequently, when the opposites are *mediated*, they (Christianity and speculation) are not equal before the mediator, but rather Christianity becomes a moment within speculation, and the latter gains the upper hand because it already had the upper hand, and because that instant of balance in which the opposed entities are weighed against each other never occurred. When two opposites are mediated and these two are reconciled in a higher unity, they may perhaps be *ebenbürtige*²⁰ because neither of them is an opposite of speculation; but when one of the opposites is itself speculation and the other an opposite of speculation, and there is mediation, and mediation is speculation's idea, it is an illusory move to speak of an opposite of speculation at all, since the power that reconciles is speculation itself (its idea, which is mediation).

Within speculation, everything that claims to be speculation can be shown its relative place and opposites mediated, that is to say, opposites that have in common that each of them is in itself a speculative attempt.

²⁰ 'Of equal standing'.

Accordingly, when speculation mediates between the doctrine of the Eleatics and that of Heraclitus,²¹ this can be exactly as it should be, the Eleatic doctrine not being an opposite of speculation but itself speculation, likewise with that of Heraclitus. Not so if the opposite is the opposite of any speculation at all. In that case, if there is to be any mediation (and mediation is indeed speculation's idea), it will mean that speculation judges between itself and its own opposite, and is therefore both party and judge. Or it means that speculation presupposes that there can be no opposite of speculation at all, and that all opposition is only relative through being within speculation. But this was exactly what should have been brought up in the preliminary agreement. Perhaps the reason why speculation is so afraid of coming out clearly about what Christianity is, and why it is in such a hurry to set mediation in motion and to recommend it, is its fear that the worst will happen if it becomes clear what Christianity is. In a state where a rebellious cabinet has seized power it removes the king while ruling in his name; that is how speculation behaves in mediating Christianity.

But the aberration that Christianity should be a moment within speculation has doubtless caused speculation to compromise a little. Speculation has assumed the title 'Christian', wishing with this adjective to recognize Christianity much in the way that a hyphenated name is sometimes formed when two noble families are united by marriage or two businesses under one name. Now, if becoming a Christian is nothing to speak of, as is so easily assumed, Christianity must be jubilant at having made so good a match, acquiring an honour and dignity equal almost to philosophy itself. But if becoming a Christian is, on the contrary, the hardest of all tasks, it appears that the one who profits is the worshipful philosopher, in so far as the firm's joint name makes him a Christian. But becoming a Christian is really the hardest of all tasks, because although the same, the task itself varies according to the abilities of the individual. This is not so with those tasks calling for variable skills. With comprehension, for instance, a person of high intelligence has a direct advantage over one of limited intelligence. But this does not hold of faith. When faith requires him to give up his reason, then it becomes as hard for the most intelligent person to believe as for the most limited, or even harder for the

²¹ The fifth-century BC Eleatic school defended the Parmenidean doctrine that the world was one, indivisible, and unchanging, while Heraclitus (from the same period) claimed that all things are in perpetual motion.

former. One sees, here again, the aberration of transforming Christianity into a doctrine, where it is understanding that matters, for becoming a Christian then becomes a matter of having the right skill.²² So what is lacking here? That preliminary agreement in which the status of each party is settled before the new firm is established.

But to proceed: so this Christian speculation speculates within Christianity. Yet this speculation is something other than that *usus instrumentalis*²³ of reason, and other than the speculation that, since it was speculation *within* Christianity, quite consistently assumed that something was true in philosophy which was not true in theology.²⁴ Understood in that way, it is proper to speculate under a presupposition, as indeed the adoption by that Christian speculation of the predicate 'Christian' suggests. But then if this speculation, which begins under a presupposition, going all the while further and further as speculation, finally speculates the presupposition too, that is to say, removes it – what then? Well, then the presupposition was a sham. There is a story about the inhabitants of Mols,²⁵ who on seeing a tree leaning out over the water, and thinking it was thirsty, decided to give it some help. To that end, the first Molbo²⁶ took hold of the tree, another clung to the first man's legs, and so on, until they formed a chain all inspired by the common idea of helping the tree, under the presupposition that the first man held fast. For the first man was the presupposition. But what happens? To spit on his hands to get an even better hold he suddenly lets go – and then? Why, then all the Molboes fall into the water – and why? Because the presupposition was abandoned. To speculate within a presupposition, so as finally to speculate the presupposition itself, is exactly the same trick as thinking something within a hypothetical 'if' that is so evident that it has the power to transform into actuality the hypothesis within which it has that power.

And what other presupposition can there be any talk of at all in respect of so-called Christian speculation than that Christianity is the very opposite of speculation, that it is the miraculous, the absurd, calling on the individual to exist in it and not waste time on speculatively understanding it. If there is to be speculation under this presupposition, its task will sooner be that of grasping ever more profoundly the impossibility of

²² 'Ligger i Differentsten'. ²³ Latin: instrumental use.

²⁴ The scholastic theory of a double truth. See p. 256 n. 8.

²⁵ The Danish equivalent of Gotham, a place whose inhabitants are renowned for their amusingly hopeless behaviour.

²⁶ Inhabitant of Molbo.

understanding Christianity speculatively, something described above as the task for the simple-minded wise man.²⁷

But here the speculative philosopher may say: 'If Christianity is to be the very opposite of speculation, the absolute opposite, then I simply cannot start speculating on it, because all speculation consists in mediation and in the opposites being only relative.' 'Perhaps so,' I would reply, 'but why speak in this way? Is it to scare me, so as to make me afraid of speculative philosophy, and of the enormous prestige it enjoys in the public mind; or is it to win me over, so that I may regard speculation as the highest good?' Our question here is not whether Christianity is right, but only what Christianity is. Speculation leaves out this preliminary agreement, and that is why it succeeds in mediating. Before mediating it has already mediated, i.e., made Christianity into a philosophical doctrine. But as soon as the agreement posits Christianity as the opposite of speculation, mediation *eo ipso*²⁸ is impossible, since all mediation is within speculation. If Christianity is the opposite of speculation, it is also the opposite of mediation, the latter being speculation's idea – so what does it mean to mediate it? So what then is the opposite of mediation? It is the absolute paradox.

Suppose someone not purporting to be a Christian asks what Christianity is. This simplifies the matter as much as possible, and one avoids the at once sad and comic confusion that Peter and Paul,²⁹ who are Christians themselves *as a matter of course*, are busily occupied explaining Christianity speculatively, which is close to insulting it. For if Christianity were a philosophical doctrine, one could give it credit for being difficult to understand (speculatively); but if Christianity itself takes the difficulty to be that of becoming and being a Christian, then it should not even be difficult to understand it, that is, to understand it enough to be able to begin with the difficulty: becoming a Christian and being one.

Christianity is not a doctrine^c but expresses an existence-contradiction and is an existence-communication. If Christianity were a doctrine it would *eo ipso* form not the opposite of speculation, but rather a moment

^c If only now some smart head doesn't explain to a reading public how foolish my whole book is, as any one can see from my spreading abroad such a thing as that Christianity is not a doctrine. Let us understand one another. Surely a philosophical doctrine which wants to be grasped and speculatively understood is one thing, and a doctrine that proposes to be realized in existence another. If there is to be any talk of understanding in connection with a doctrine of the latter sort, this must consist in understanding that the task is to exist in it, in understanding how difficult that is and what an

²⁷ Recall (see the translator's introduction) that Kierkegaard's working title for *Postscript* had been 'Concluding, Simple-minded Postscript'.

²⁸ Latin: by that very fact, by the same token. ²⁹ See p. 218 n. i.

within it. Christianity relates to existence, existing, but existence and existing are precisely the opposite of speculation. The Eleatic doctrine, for example, does not relate to existing but to speculation; it can therefore be assigned a place in speculation. Exactly because Christianity is not a doctrine, there is in its case, as explained, an enormous difference between knowing what Christianity is and being a Christian. With regard to a doctrine such a distinction is unthinkable, because a doctrine does not relate to existing. I cannot help it that our age has turned the relation around and transformed Christianity into a philosophical doctrine that asks to be understood and has turned being a Christian into a trifle. It being further said that, not being a doctrine, Christianity lacks content, is mere chicanery. When the believer exists in faith, his existence has enormous content but not in the sense that yields a §.

I have tried to voice the existence-contradiction of Christianity in the problem of an eternal happiness decided here in time by a relation to something historical. To say that Christianity is a doctrine of the Incarnation, of the Atonement, etc., would be at once to invite misunderstanding. Speculation commandeers this doctrine, points out the less perfect interpretation etc. in paganism and Judaism. Christianity becomes a moment, perhaps a highest moment, but essentially speculation.

§ 3

The problem of the *Crumbs* as prefatory not to Christianity but to becoming a Christian

Since neither have I presumed in the *Crumbs*, nor do I presume here, to explain the problem, but only to present it, my undertaking is constantly to

enormous existence-task such a doctrine sets the learner. When, in respect of a doctrine of this kind, it comes to a point where it is generally assumed to be very easy to be what the doctrine requires, but hard to understand the doctrine speculatively, then the person who aims to show how difficult it is to comply with this doctrine (an existence-communication) in existing can come to a good understanding with it. With a doctrine of this kind it is a misunderstanding, on the other hand, to speculate upon it. Christianity is a doctrine of this kind. Wanting to speculate upon it is a misunderstanding, and the further one goes in that direction, the greater the misunderstanding one lets oneself in for. If finally one comes to the point of not only wanting to speculate, but of wanting to understand it speculatively, then one has reached the ultimate of misunderstanding. This point is reached in the mediation of Christianity and speculation, and it is therefore quite right that modern speculation is the ultimate misunderstanding of Christianity. This being the case, and when, furthermore, it is granted that the nineteenth century is so frightfully speculative, it is to be feared that the word 'doctrine' will be straight away understood to mean a philosophical doctrine that is to be, and which wants to be, understood. To avoid this malpractice I have chosen to call Christianity an existence-communication, so as to indicate quite definitively how it differs from speculation.

arrive at it, to introduce it, though please note that this introduction is of a special kind, since there is no immediate transition from the introduction to becoming a Christian, this being rather the qualitative leap. Such an introduction is therefore (just because introducing, in the usual sense, is a contradiction in terms of the decision of the qualitative leap) repellent; it does not facilitate entry into what it leads up to; it makes it on the contrary difficult. Good and well intentioned as it may be, seeing that being a Christian is supposed to be the highest good, to want to help people to become that by making the access easy, I make so bold as to take it upon myself, according to my poor ability, to make it difficult, as difficult as possible, yet without making it more difficult than it is – this responsibility I take upon myself, a responsibility that one can surely assume in an experiment. My thought is this: If it is the highest good, then it is better that I know definitely that I do not possess it, so that I can then aim at it with all my might, than that, in the fascination of an illusion, I should imagine that I have it and it does not even occur to me to aim at it. Thus understood, I do not deny either that I consider infant baptism not only to be justifiable as orthodox practice, and laudable as an expression of the piety of parents who cannot bear to be separated from their children with regard to what is a matter of their eternal happiness, but also to be a good in yet another sense of which one is perhaps not aware – because it makes it even more difficult to become a Christian. I have already pointed this out in another place;³⁰ here I shall merely add something. Anticipating the decision to be made in the external by which I become a Christian makes the decision itself, if it occurs, a purely inner one, and its inwardness then even greater than if the decision also took place in the external. The less externality, the more inwardness. There is something profound and wonderful in the fact that the most passionate decision occurs in a person in such a way that, outwardly, it is not at all noticeable – he was a Christian and yet he became that. Thus, if a Christian baptized as an infant becomes truly a Christian, and becomes that with the same inwardness as when someone who was not a Christian turns to Christianity, then the inwardness of his transition must be the greatest precisely because there is no externality. On the other hand, the absence of the external is certainly a temptation,³¹ and for many may easily become a temptation to put the matter off, as can best be seen from

³⁰ See pp. 305ff.

³¹ 'Fristelse', temptation in the ordinary sense, not 'Anfægtelse'. See the 'Note on the translation'.

the fact that one or another person can be shocked at the idea that child baptism should make it harder for them to become Christians. It is nevertheless the case, and all the analogies will confirm the correctness of the principle: the less externality the more inwardness – as long as it is truly there; but also the less externality the greater the possibility that inwardness defaults altogether. The external is the night watchman who disturbs the sleeper; the external is the solicitous mother who calls for one; the external is the bugle call that brings the soldier to his feet; the external is the call to arms that collects one for the great effort; but the failure of the external to appear can mean that inwardness itself calls to one inwardly. Alas, it may also mean that inwardness is an absentee.

Yet this is not the only way in which what I had to call the introduction to becoming a Christian differs utterly from what is ordinarily called an introduction; it differs utterly also from an introduction to Christianity based on the view that Christianity is a doctrine. Such an introduction introduces one not to becoming a Christian but *höchstens*³² to a world-historical perception of Christianity's advantage over paganism, Judaism, etc.

The introduction that I undertake consists, then, in making it difficult for people to become Christian by putting them off, and understands Christianity not as a doctrine but as an existence-contradiction and an existence-communication. It is not historical but psychological, calling attention to how much must have been lived and how difficult it is to become properly aware of the difficulty of the decision. I repeat what I have frequently said but cannot say too often, both for my own sake because it concerns me so deeply, and for the sake of others in case I confuse them: it is not for the simple-minded that this introduction undertakes to make it difficult to become a Christian. That such an individual will also need to exert himself to the utmost in order to become a Christian, I also believe; nor do I believe that anyone does him a service by making it altogether too easy; every essential existence-task pertains to all human beings equally and makes the difficulty therefore proportionate to the individual's endowment. Self-control is thus just as difficult for the wise man as for the simple-minded, and perhaps even more difficult because the wise man's reflection will serve him with many ingenious evasions. Understanding that a human being can do nothing of himself (the beautiful and profound expression for the God-relationship) is as

³² 'At most'.

difficult for a remarkably gifted king as for a poor miserable wretch, perhaps even more difficult for the king because so easily tempted by being capable of so much. So too in connection with becoming and being a Christian. And when culture and the like have managed to make it so easy to be a Christian, it must surely be in order for the single individual, according to his poor ability, to make it difficult, if he nevertheless does not make it more difficult than it is. – But the more culture and knowledge, the greater the difficulty in becoming a Christian.

If we regard the *Hippias* as an introduction to the beautiful,³³ it will serve as a kind of analogy to an introduction such as that of which I am talking. Having marshalled several explanations of what the beautiful is, all of which are demolished, the dialogue ends with Socrates saying that what he has gained from the conversation is to have learnt that it is difficult. Whether Socrates is right in this procedure, seeing that the beautiful is an idea and does not relate to existing, I shall not decide. But when in Christendom people seem in so many ways to have brought things to the point, or wish so to do, where it is forgotten what Christianity is, then I cannot think otherwise than that it be considered a suitable introduction (to say nothing of its always being the only one relevant to becoming a Christian) that instead of following the usual introductions, and by the same token the hired servants that the hotels promptly send to meet travellers at the customs house to recommend accommodation, ends with having made it more difficult to become a Christian, even if the introduction has also tried to show what Christianity is. Well, just think. The hotels need the travellers, but with Christianity it would be more appropriate for people to grasp that they need Christianity. The distinction between knowing what Christianity is (the easier) and being a Christian (the harder) does not apply in the case of the beautiful, or to the *theory* of the beautiful. Had the *Hippias* clarified the notion of the beautiful, there would have been absolutely no remainder that had been made difficult, and the dialogue would have had absolutely nothing corresponding to the two-fold nature of our enterprise: throwing light on what Christianity is but simply making it difficult to become a Christian. But if becoming a Christian is what is difficult, the absolute decision, then the only possible introduction is one that puts people off, which precisely by putting them off draws attention to it being the absolute decision. So, even with the

³³ Plato's early dialogue, *Hippias Major*, in which Socrates debates with the sophist Hippias on the nature of beauty. Readers may recall that the motto chosen for the *Postscript* is taken from this dialogue.

longest of introductions, as far as a decision is concerned one is not brought a single step nearer, for then the decision would not be absolute, the qualitative leap, and instead of being helped one would have been tricked. But this fact, that the introduction at its maximum comes not a single step nearer to what it introduces, expresses once more its ability only to push people away. Philosophy offers an immediate introduction to Christianity, as does the historicizing and rhetorical introduction; and these succeed because they are introductions to a doctrine, but not to becoming a Christian.

Section 2

The problem itself

The individual's eternal happiness is decided in time through the relation to something historical, which is moreover historical in such a way that it includes in its composition that which according to its nature cannot become historical and must consequently become so on the strength of the absurd

The problem is pathetic-dialectic. The element of pathos is in the first part, since a person's passion culminates in the relation of pathos to an eternal happiness. The element of dialectic is in the last part, and the difficulty is precisely the problem's having this composition. To love is straightforward pathos; to relate to an eternal happiness is, in the sphere of reflection, straightforward pathos. The dialectic element lies in the fact that the eternal happiness to which the individual is assumed to relate with proper pathos is itself subject to a dialectic through further conceptual characteristics which in turn have the effect of an incitement to bring the passion to its extreme. When, in existing, one expresses, and has for a time expressed, that one is giving up, and has given up, everything in order to relate to the absolute *τέλος*,³⁴ the fact that there are conditions acquires an absolute influence in stretching the passion to its highest possible pitch. Even with relative pathos the dialectic element is like oil on the flames, multiplying its inner range and inflaming the passion in its intensity. But because it has been

³⁴ Greek: goal, aim.

forgotten what it is to exist *sensu eminenti*,³⁵ and since pathos is generally assigned to imagination and feeling, and the dialectical allowed to abrogate it instead of putting both together in the simultaneity of existence, pathos has come into discredit in our philosophical nineteenth century and the dialectic has become passionless; just as it has become so easy and glib³⁶ to think contradictions – for passion is precisely the tensing in the contradiction; when that is removed the contradiction is a mere pleasantry, a *bon mot*.³⁷ An existence-problem is, on the other hand, pathetic-dialectic; the one presented here requires existence-inwardness for the element of pathos to be grasped, the passion of thought for the dialectical difficulty to be grasped, and concentrated passion because one is to exist in it.

To clarify the problem I shall deal first with the element of pathos and then with the dialectic, but I beg the reader constantly to bear in mind that the difficulty lies ultimately in putting them together, that an existing person who, with his existence, expresses his pathos-filled relation to the eternal happiness in absolute passion, is to relate now to the dialectical decision. As tense as is his relation to his eternal happiness, just so fearful must he be, Socratically, of being in error. The exertion is the greatest possible, the more so since delusion is so easy, there being nothing external to look at. In the case of love, the individual has at least to do with another human being, can hear that person's yes and no; in the case of every enthusiastic undertaking there is, after all, something external for the individual. But in the case of the eternal happiness the individual has only himself to do with, in inwardness. The word is something he has free of charge, in his mother tongue; soon he can learn a bit here and there by rote; externally, the idea of an eternal happiness *profits* him nothing, because it is only present when he has learned to scorn the external and has forgotten the earthly mind's understanding of what is advantageous; externally, it cannot *harm* him that he lacks this conception; without it he may well be 'husband, father, and popinjay champion',³⁸ and if that is the kind of thing he wants, this conception will only get in his way. The essential existential pathos in relation to an eternal happiness is bought so dearly that in finite terms buying it must be considered plain madness, as is quite frequently expressed in various ways: that an eternal happiness is a security whose market price is no longer quoted in the speculative nineteenth century; at best, worshipful ministers to the soul can use a

³⁵ Latin: in an eminent sense. ³⁶ 'Geläufigt'. ³⁷ 'Witticism'.

³⁸ See p. 204 n. 66.

cancelled bond of that kind to hoodwink peasants. So easy is the deception, so easy, that finite good sense must be downright proud to have had nothing to do with this wild scheme. And the reason why it is foolish, unless one's life is dialectical in the manner of an Apostle, wanting to set people's minds at rest in the matter of their eternal happiness, is that when it comes to something that the individual human being can do only with himself, the maximum that one can do for another is to make him uneasy.

A

The element of pathos³⁹

§ 1

The *initial expression* of existential pathos: the absolute orientation (respect) towards the absolute τέλος, actively expressed in the reshaping of existence – aesthetic pathos – mediation's deception – the medieval monastic movement – relating at one time absolutely to one's absolute τέλος and relatively to what is relative

In connection with an eternal happiness as the absolute good, pathos does not mean words; it means, for the one who exists, the transformation by this conception of the whole of his existence. Aesthetic pathos does express itself in words and can, in its true form, signify that the individual abandons himself so as to lose himself in the idea, whereas existential pathos arises through the idea relating to the individual's existence in a reconstructive way. If, in its relation to the individual's existence, the absolute τέλος fails to transform it absolutely, then the individual relates not with existential but with aesthetic pathos, for example, having indeed a correct conception, but having it in such a way that he is outside himself in the ideality of the possible, not at home with himself with its rightness in his existence in the ideality of the actual, with he himself transformed into the actuality of the conception.

³⁹ 'Det Pathetiske'.

For the one existing, an eternal happiness essentially relates to his existing, to the ideality of the actual, and pathos must accordingly follow suit. If you take falling in love in the aesthetic sense, then of the poet's ideal of love it can be said that it is higher than everything actuality offers. The poet can be said to be capable of an ideality compared with which actuality is but a weak reflection; actuality, for the poet, can be said to be merely the occasion that prompts him to depart from actuality to seek the ideality of the possible. Poetic pathos is therefore essentially fantasy. If, however, one wants to establish a poetic relation to actuality ethically, this is a misunderstanding and a step backwards. Here as everywhere it is a matter of keeping the separate spheres apart and respecting the qualitative dialectic, the wrench of decision that changes everything, so that what was the highest in another sphere is to be absolutely rejected in this. If you take the religious, then what matters is its having to pass through the ethical. In the case of the religious poet, therefore, it becomes a little strange; it is through imagination that he wants to relate to the religious, but by doing so he enters into an aesthetic relation to something aesthetic. To *sing the praises* of a hero of faith is just as much an aesthetic exercise as singing those of a war hero. If what is religious is truly the religious, has passed through the ethical and has the latter within itself, then it cannot forget that, religiously, pathos consists not in singing and hymning or writing song books but in one's own existing; so the poetic product, if it doesn't go by the board entirely, or even if it flows as richly as before, is something he considers accidental, which shows that he understands himself religiously, for aesthetically speaking it is the poetic productivity that is essential, and the poet accidental.

A poetic temperament that, through circumstances, upbringing, and the like, has taken a course away from the theatre in the direction of the Church can therefore cause much confusion. Dazzled by the aesthetic in him, people believe that he is a religious personality, alas, even an *outstanding* religious personality (and just this, being an outstanding individuality, is aesthetic reminiscence, since from the religious viewpoint there is no prominence apart from an Apostle's paradoxical-dialectical authority, and prominence from a religious viewpoint, according to the qualitative dialectic that separates the spheres, is simply a step backwards), although he may not be a religious individuality at all. His pathos is poetic pathos, the pathos of the possible, with the actual as an occasion. Even if he has world-historical pathos, this is still the pathos of possibility

and, from an ethical viewpoint, of immaturity; for, ethically speaking, maturity consists in grasping one's own ethical actuality as infinitely more important^d than the grasp of all world history.

The pathos that corresponds adequately to an eternal happiness is the transformation in which, in existing, the existing person changes everything in his existence in relation to that highest good.^e In respect of possibility the word is the highest pathos; in respect of actuality deed is the highest pathos. That, for example, a poet refuses to let himself be influenced by his own poet-production is perfectly in order aesthetically speaking, or else neither here nor there, since aesthetically speaking it is the production and possibility that are the highest. But ethically the contrary is of infinite importance, for ethically speaking it is the poet's product that is infinitely indifferent, while the poet's own existence should be infinitely more important to him than anything. Aesthetically, therefore, the highest pathos on the poet's part would be to annihilate himself, to become corrupted, if this were needed for producing work of the first rank; aesthetically, it would be all right, using a strong expression to call to mind something that surely occurs more often than one thinks, to sell one's soul to the devil – but then to produce wonders. Ethically, the highest pathos might be to renounce the

^d So although one not infrequently comes across a presumptuously religious individuality, so excessively confident in his own God-relationship, breezily assured of his own salvation, but busily occupied, and with great self-importance, in doubting that of others and offering them help, I myself believe that a manner of speech befitting a truly religious person would be for him to say: 'I do not doubt anyone's salvation, the only one I have fears for is myself; even when I see a person sink low, I should never dare to have doubts about his salvation; but if it were myself, I would indeed have to endure this terrible thought.' Regarding others, a genuinely religious individuality is always so mild, so inventive in thinking up excuses; only towards himself is he as cold and strict as a grand inquisitor. Towards others he is as a kindly old man usually is with a younger person; only towards himself is he old and incorruptible.

^e This indeed is how the individual (also) approaches minor matters when planning his life. To work for a living or be privileged in this regard, to marry or remain single, etc., these alter his existence at the moment of choice or acceptance. But because this itself is open to change, for he can suddenly fall in love, become suddenly poor, etc., it cannot without absurdity transform his existence absolutely. But how strange it is: the worldly wisdom that concerns itself with this or that is still not so rare in life, and yet it is not so uncommon to see someone existing, who expresses in his existing his relation to a relative goal and has organized his life around this, giving up what disturbs him in this, and hoping for some gain from doing so. But perhaps an existing individual who in his existing expresses a relation to the absolute good is a great rarity, an existing person who can truthfully say: This is how I exist, this is how I have in renunciation transformed my existence, so that if I hoped only for this life I would be the most wretched creature of all [1 Corinthians 15:19], i.e., would be the most dreadfully deceived, deceived by myself by not going for it. – How alarmed the capitalists become when interest payments suddenly cease; how horrified seafarers would be if the government blocked the ports; but *posito*, I suppose, that the eternal happiness failed to appear – how many of the expectant gentlemen (and of course we all expect an eternal happiness) would find themselves in a fix?

brilliant poet-world without saying a word. When a so-called religious individuality is pleased to portray an eternal happiness with all the magic appeal of the imagination, this means that he is a poet who has absconded from the aesthetic and wants to be naturalized in the religious without even being able to understand its mother tongue. The pathos of the ethical is to act. So when, for instance, a man says that for the sake of his blessedness he has suffered hunger, cold, imprisonment, shipwreck, been despised, persecuted, and scourged, etc.,⁴⁰ this plain speaking is testimony to his ethical pathos in as much as it reports quite simply what, in acting, he has suffered. Wherever the ethical is present, all attention is brought back upon the individual himself, and on acting. The pathos of marriage is accordingly to act, that of falling in love poetry.

Ethically, the highest pathos is interested pathos (which is expressed in my actively transforming the whole of my existence in conformity with the object of the interest); aesthetically, the highest pathos is disinterestedness. When an individual throws himself away to grab hold of something great, his enthusiasm is aesthetic; when he gives up everything to save himself, his enthusiasm is ethical.

What I write here must be regarded as ABC reading, not in the speculative but in a simple sense. Every child knows it, if not with quite the same depth of experience; everyone understands it, if not with quite the same sharpness of definition; everyone can understand it, for the ethical is always, and quite consistently, extremely easy to understand, presumably so that no time is wasted on understanding but a beginning made possible straight away. Except that, in return, it is quite difficult to bring off – as much for the wise as for the simple-minded, since the difficulty is not in the understanding, for in that case the shrewd would have a great advantage.

Existence is compounded of the infinite and the finite, the existing person is infinite and finite. So if an eternal happiness is for him his highest good, this means that in his active life all finite elements are reduced once and for all to what must be renounced in relation to the eternal happiness. An eternal happiness relates with pathos to an essentially existing person, not to a speaker polite enough to include it on his list among the good things for which he supplicates. Ordinarily, people have a horror of denying that such a good exists; so they take it along, but just by *taking it along* they show that they do not have it with them. I don't

⁴⁰ 2 Corinthians 11:23–8.

know whether to laugh or cry over the customary patter: a good livelihood, a pretty wife, health, civic title⁴¹ – and then an eternal happiness, which is like taking the kingdom of *heaven* to be one among the other kingdoms on *earth*, and something you might find out about in the geography book. How odd, that simply by talking about something a man can prove that he is not talking about it; you would think that this could be proved only by his not talking about it. In that case, there would indeed be some talk of the eternal happiness, and yet, when spoken of in this way, nothing will have been said about it, or more exactly, there would be no question of it. Aesthetically, one can very well wish for wealth, good fortune, the prettiest girl; in short, for everything that is aesthetic-dialectical, but then to *wish* for an eternal happiness *in addition* is doubly babble, partly because one does it *in addition*, thus turning an eternal happiness into one of the prizes on the Christmas tree, and partly because it is a *wish*, for an eternal happiness relates essentially to existing, not aesthetic-dialectically to a fantasizing wish-maker. However, often enough the eternal happiness must be satisfied with being included among other *bons bons*,⁴² and it is considered *très bien*⁴³ of a person to at least include it; it is thought to be about the height of what one can do in this respect. And one goes further, for after all, the other good things are not assumed to come just because one wants them; but eternal happiness, that comes just by wishing it. The man of experience knows that the gifts of fortune are variously distributed (because variety is the very dialectic of fortune), but eternal happiness (which, please note, one has also transformed into a gift of fortune) is distributed equally to all wishful gentlemen. Double confusion: first that the eternal happiness becomes a good of that kind (regarded as an unusually lucrative livelihood and the like), and then that it is distributed *equally*, which is a contradiction when it comes to the gifts of fortune. The aesthetic and the ethical have been mixed together into a convenient verbal mush – the definition of kind is taken from the aesthetic, and equality in distribution from the ethical.

But one of the wishful gentlemen, a ‘serious man’ who, let’s say, wants to do something for his eternal happiness, might say, ‘Isn’t it possible to know definitely what an eternal happiness is, short and clear? Couldn’t you describe it to me “while I shave”, as one describes a woman’s beauty, or the royal purple, or far-off landscapes?’ Just as well that I can’t do that, just

⁴¹ ‘Justitsraad’, counsellor of justice, honorary title. ⁴² ‘Goodies’. ⁴³ ‘Very good’.

as well that I am not of a poetic nature or a sweet-tempered clergyman; for then I would be in a position to begin, and I might succeed – in bringing the eternal happiness once more under aesthetic categories, so that the maximum of pathos became the marvel of the description, even if as an aesthetic task, making anything aesthetically out of something so abstract as an eternal happiness, it is one to despair of. Aesthetically, it is quite properly a matter of my being a spectator enchanted by the scenery, theatrical moonlight, and going home after spending a most pleasant evening; but ethically it is a question of the only change being my own. Ethically, it is quite consistently the case that the highest pathos of the essentially existing person corresponds to what, aesthetically, is the most impoverished of conceptions, and that is an eternal happiness. It has been appropriately and wittily remarked (aesthetically understood) that the angels are the most boring of all beings, eternity the longest and most boring of all days, for even a single Sunday is boring enough, and that an eternal happiness is an everlasting *Eimerlei*,⁴⁴ so that even the state of un-blessedness is to be preferred. But ethically this is just as it should be, so that the existing person should not be misled into wasting time in constantly imagining but be urged into action.

Then if one who exists is to relate with pathos to an eternal happiness, it's a matter of whether his existence expresses the relation. Once one knows how an individual exists, one also knows how he relates to an eternal happiness; i.e., whether he does or does not *tertium non datur*⁴⁵ precisely because the absolute *τέλος* cannot be *taken along*. Yet no one knows it except the individual himself, with himself, and therefore there is no need to listen to another person speaking, or to read another person's book, or to go to the priest – in order to see and hear about the theatrical moonlight in the beyond, the murmur of the brook in the green meadows of eternity. He need only attend to his own existence, and then he knows. Unless it transforms his existence *absolutely*, he is not relating to an eternal happiness; unless there is something he will not give up for its sake, he is not relating to an eternal happiness. Even a relative *τέλος* transforms a person's existence partially. But because existing in the speculative nineteenth century has been transformed the more, and the more regrettably, into a thinking about everything possible, an energetic existence oriented exclusively towards a relative *τέλος* is an even rarer sight. The energetic will to amass money, let alone the absolute *τέλος*,

⁴⁴ 'Monotony'. ⁴⁵ Latin: there is no third.

willing in the highest sense, can itself be enough to transform a human life. But all relative willing is recognizable as willing something for the sake of something else; the highest end must be willed for its own sake. And this highest τέλος is not a something, for then it would be relative to something else, and be finite; it is a contradiction to will something finite absolutely, since the finite must have an end, and consequently there comes a time when it can no longer be willed. But to will absolutely is to will the infinite, and to will an eternal happiness is to will absolutely, since it must be possible to will it at every moment. And the reason why it is so abstract, and the most impoverished of aesthetic conceptions, is that it is the absolute τέλος for a willing person who is willing to strive absolutely – not fancying, unthinkingly, that he has finished with it, and not foolishly getting involved in a bargaining through which all he does is lose the absolute τέλος. And the reason why it is foolish in the finite sense is precisely that in the infinite sense it is the absolute τέλος. And that is why someone who is willing does not want to know anything about this τέλος except that it exists, for as soon as he gets to know something about it his pace already begins to slacken.

But the pathos consists in expressing this in existence, in existing; it consists not in testifying to an eternal happiness but in transforming one's own existence into a testimony to it. Poetic pathos is the poor man's pathos, pathos for everyman, for it is possible for each human being to act within himself, and sometimes one finds in a maidservant the pathos one vainly seeks in the poet in his existence. So the individual can easily discover for himself how he relates to an eternal happiness, or whether he does so. He has only to allow resignation to inspect his whole immediacy with all its desires, etc. If he finds a single firm spot, a hardening, it means that he does not relate to an eternal happiness. Nothing is easier – or, if it is difficult, then that is precisely because immediacy refuses to expose itself to the search. But that, of course, is by itself more than sufficient evidence that the individual does not relate to an eternal happiness. For the fact that resignation pays a call on immediacy serves notice on the individual that he must not have his life there, and resignation gives him to understand what can happen to him in life. But if the individual hangs back at this point, whether he is too happy to dare to learn of anything different or, even though imagining himself the unhappiest of mortals, he senses that he could become even happier; whether clever and calculating on probability or weak and relying on others – in short, if he hangs

back at this point, he does not relate to an eternal happiness. – If in its search, however, resignation finds no irregularity, this shows that, at that moment of inspection, the individual is relating to an eternal happiness.

But someone, with a wife and children, a good livelihood and a civic title, ‘a serious man’, who would like after all to do something for his eternal happiness, if only his official duties and his wife and children permit, an enthusiastic man, who is not afraid, no, by God, to spend ten rix-dollars on it, might say: ‘All right, go ahead with this inspection business, but when it is over, and that as quickly as possible, we’ll come to mediation, won’t we? Mediation, I must say, is a glorious invention; it is as though plucked from my very heart; it belongs wholly to the nineteenth century and therefore wholly to me, who also belong to the nineteenth century; and I much admire its great inventor, and everyone may admire him, everyone with a world-historical orientation who has grasped the relative justification of all earlier standpoints, together with the necessity of its having to come to mediation.’ Yes, if one could only stand in mediation’s shoes, be recognized in this way even by people with civic titles, and on top of that by one who contemplates world history, in other words an exceptional civic dignitary indeed – but, no, I am forgetting the time we live in, the theocentric nineteenth century; we all contemplate world history – from God’s point of view. But let us forget the civic dignitary and world history, and whatever these two can have to do with each other. Just think. When a high-ranking official, or the king himself, goes the rounds inspecting coffers, an unfaithful official may sometimes manage to put the exchequer in order for inspection day and say to himself: ‘Once this day is through everything will get back into the old grooves.’ But resignation is not a king inspecting another man’s purse; it lies in the possession of the individual’s own private knowledge of himself. Nor is resignation an itinerant; it takes the liberty of staying on with the one in question so as to make every day a day of inspection, unless it is sent packing, in which case all is lost; and this is hardly mediation. But when resignation stays on and never dozes off, when it is on hand with the least irregularity and does not leave his side when he goes out, whether it is something big or trifling he undertakes, when it lives next door to his most secret thoughts, then what – where is mediation then? I think outside.

For what is mediation, that it wants to force its way into the ethical and the ethico-religious? It is a miserable invention of a person who became

unfaithful to himself and to resignation. It is a forgery of lethargy and arrogance that also passes itself off as resignation, which is the most dangerous of all, as when a thief passes himself off as the police. The same proves true in lesser matters. One keeps up one's enthusiasm for half a year, perhaps a whole year, working away at some enterprise, not asking about wages, or whether one is actually achieving anything, or asking about security and guarantees, because the suspense of enthusiasm is higher than all such things. But then one grows tired, and one wants to be certain, so as to have at least something to show for one's pains. And when people became tired regarding the eternal, became as hard-headed as a peddling Jew, thin-skinned as a pampered priest, sleepy as a foolish bridesmaid;⁴⁶ when they were no longer able to comprehend the truth of existence (what it is to exist) as the time of falling in love, as enthusiasm's running uncertainly⁴⁷ – along came mediation. To be in love for half a year and rashly risk everything, yes, now you are talking; but then you must damned well get the girl and stretch your weary limbs on the privileged marriage bed. And in respect of the relative τέλος mediation can indeed have its significance, and the relative τέλος has to put up with being mediated, since it would be unreasonable to relate absolutely to a relative τέλος. But the absolute τέλος only *is* when the individual relates to it absolutely; and as an eternal happiness relating to one who is existing, they cannot possibly have each other or calmly belong to each other in existence, i.e., in temporality, in the way a girl and a young man can very well get each other in time because they are both existing. But what this means, that these two cannot get each other in time, that is something everyone in love knows; it means that time is in this case the time of infatuation. With respect to a relative τέλος, a part of time is the time of being in love, and then comes the time of certainty. But since the eternal happiness is further up in the world than a little miss, indeed even than a queen, it is quite all right for the time of infatuation in this case to be rather longer, no, not rather longer, for an eternal happiness is not rather higher in the world than the queen, it is the absolute τέλος; but then it is quite as it should be that all of time, existence, is a time for infatuation.

With regard to this orientation towards the absolute τέλος, every outcome, even the most splendid that can spring from a wishful mind and in a

⁴⁶ Matthew 25:1–12.

⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 9:26. As in the English Authorized (King James) Version; the New Revised Standard Version has 'run aimlessly'.

poet's creative imagination, is an absolute loss if it is supposed to be the reward. And the striving person is better off saying: No thanks, just let me relate to the absolute τέλος.

Who has not gazed at Napoleon in awe! Who, with the thrill of self-surrender, just as the child listening to a fairytale, and then again, with an incredulous but, seeing that the adult usually assigns the fairytale to imagination, for that very reason all the greater thrill of wonder – who has not been struck by the thought that here the most fantastic tale has become reality! But now Thiers⁴⁸ has undertaken to tell the story, and just imagine! With the greatest calm and all his statesman's experience, as if this were just as it should be, he says more than once in his admiring presentation of Napoleon's plans for the world: 'But here as always everything depended on the outcome.' I would think that anyone envisaging Napoleon's greatness and at the same time recalling these words of Thiers, thrown out so casually, so glibly,⁴⁹ will receive the saddest possible impression of what human glory amounts to. Truly, if Napoleon is as great as the most reckless idea, if the whole life is like a fairytale, well then, just as in the fairytale, there is yet another figure of fantasy. It is a wrinkled old witch, a shrivelled being, a little animal, a spider on one of whose feelers there are some secret ciphers – it is the outcome. And the fairytale's superhuman hero, whom nothing, nothing at all, can hold out against, is nevertheless in this little animal's power. And unless this little creature so wishes, the whole adventure comes to nothing, or it becomes the tale of a spider with a strange sign on one of its feelers. Look! The poorest and most wretched person who stakes absolutely everything on relating to the absolute τέλος – yes, of course, that will be no fairytale, but nor will it be a fairytale about a small creature with a red dot on one feeler. Even with the cleverest and most daring of plans for reshaping the world, what makes it great is the outcome; but with the simple-minded and trusting resolution of a poor human being it's a matter of the plan being higher than any outcome, its greatness independent of the result. A more blessed thing, after all, than being the greatest man in the world and slave to the outcome, whether it comes as wished or fails to transpire, is to be where we are all small, before God nothing, but where also the outcome is zero and infinitely less than the least in the kingdom of

⁴⁸ L. A. Thiers (1797–1877), French historian and statesman, whose sequel (beginning 1845) to his account of the French Revolution contributed greatly to the retrospective idolizing of Napoleon.

⁴⁹ 'Geläufigt'.

heaven,⁵⁰ whereas in the world it is the lord of lords and the absolute ruler's tyrant.

Who has not stood in awe of Napoleon, that he could be hero and emperor and considered being a poet a matter of secondary importance, for in his mouth the word, the rejoinder – yes, no poet pleased to be the greatest could put a more masterly rejoinder in his mouth. Yet I believe that there was once an occasion when he did not know what he was saying. The story rings true. While making the rounds of the outposts, he came across a young officer who drew attention to himself. On returning to headquarters the officer at such and such outpost was rewarded with a decoration. But, wait, the officer has been relieved and a new one has taken his place. No one understands the why and wherefore of this citation. The person properly in question gets to know and he appeals to Napoleon with a petition requesting that the matter be put right. Napoleon answers, 'No, I cannot use that man, he doesn't have luck with him.' If it is true that a person knows when death walks over his grave, if it is true – and in the fairytale it is, and we are, after all, all of us in the fairytale, when a man standing large as life among others goes to pieces at the uttering of a word, is turned to dust and blown away – then in the spirit of the fairytale this should have happened to Napoleon, for the words were more true of him than of the officer.

In a previous section I have tried to show the chimerical nature of mediation when, for someone *existing*, there is supposed to be a mediation between existence and thought, since everything said for mediation may be true and glorious but becomes untrue in the mouth of someone existing, since as existing he is prevented from getting any foothold outside existence from which to mediate something which, besides being in the course of becoming, also eludes completion. It was also shown that this whole talk of mediation in relation to someone existing is treacherous, since existence is just what abstract thinking, to say nothing of pure thinking, ignores, which ethically speaking has so little merit as to be, on the contrary, condemned. There are two ways in which indeed someone existing can be outside existence, but in neither of these will he be able to mediate. One is by way of abstracting from himself by gaining a sceptical impassivity and ataraxy,⁵¹ an abstract indifference (μέτριως πάθειν),⁵² something that in Greece was considered a very

⁵⁰ Matthew 5:19; 11:11.

⁵¹ Or *ataraxia*: freedom from passion, peace of mind. ⁵² Greek: suffer in moderation.

difficult matter. The other way in which the individual can be outside existence is by being in passion, but the moment of passion is just what gives him the impetus to exist. To assume that someone existing should manage to mediate little by little is the usual attempt, through a fairytale vanishing of time and a specious quantification, to wheedle attention away from the qualitative dialectic.

This is how mediation was spelled out in the philosophical sense, but here we are making an ethical inquiry, and so mediation must be between the separate moments of existence – provided the absolute τέλος is also one moment among the others. Now, this is where the misunderstanding lies, and it will readily appear that mediation as something higher than resignation is precisely a step backwards. Resignation has allowed the individual to confront, or even seen to it that he confronts, an eternal happiness as the absolute τέλος. This τέλος is then not one moment among others. The both-and of mediation, though less naïve, is not much better than the previously described cheerful chatter that includes everything. In the instant of resignation, of composure, of choice, the individual is given a chance to salute the absolute τέλος – but then comes the mediation. A dog may likewise be taught at one moment to walk on two legs,^f but then, yes then comes mediation and the dog walks on all fours, just like mediation. Spiritually, the human being's upright posture is his absolute respect for the absolute τέλος, otherwise he goes on all fours. In respect of relative moments, mediation may have its significance (that they are all equal before mediation), but with the absolute τέλος, any mediation means that it has been reduced to a relative τέλος. Nor is it true that the absolute τέλος becomes concrete in the relative, because resignation's absolute distinction will at every instant secure the absolute τέλος against all fraternizing. It is true that the individual oriented towards the absolute τέλος is situated in relative ends, but he is not situated in them in such a way that the former is exhausted in them. It is true that before God and before the absolute τέλος we are all equal; but it is not true, either for me or for a single individual, that God or the absolute τέλος is on a par with everything else.

^f And not even that, for someone who has never been properly oriented towards the absolute τέλος may indeed degenerate and sink, sink very low. But he can never wholly forget it, something aptly expressed in the saying that height is needed if you are to sink low. But the clever invention of mediation indicates that the mediator has not even been more or less properly oriented towards the absolute τέλος.

It can of course be very commendable for the particular individual to have a civic title, be a hard worker in the office, favourite in the lover parts in the ‘The Permanent Civic Society’,⁵³ a near-virtuoso on the flute, popinjay champion,⁵⁴ director of an orphanage, a noble and respected father, in short, a devil of a fellow who is able to *both-and* and has time for everything. But just let the worshipful man take care not to become all too much of the devil of a fellow, and go on to do *both* all this *and* find time also to direct his life towards the absolute τέλος. For this *both-and* means that the absolute τέλος is on an equal footing with everything else. Yet the absolute τέλος has the remarkable characteristic of wanting to be the absolute τέλος at every instant. If the individual is to grasp this at the instant of resignation, composure, and choice, this cannot mean that the next instant he is to have forgotten it. Resignation therefore, as I expressed it before, remains with the individual; and the task, far from being that of having the absolute τέλος mediated into all sorts of *both-and*, is on the contrary that of coveting that existing that has the pathos of the great instant permanently.

What has particularly helped mediation to flourish and to bring it to its feet in the ethical sphere is the off-putting use made of the medieval monastic movement. People were made to believe that the absolute respect in which the absolute τέλος was held by those existing would mean entering the monastery. The monastic movement itself was a colossal abstraction, monastic life itself a continued abstraction, a life spent in prayer and hymn-singing – instead of playing cards at the club – if there is nothing against caricaturing the one, one must surely be allowed to present the other as it has caricatured itself. In order, then, to stop this monastic movement, which worldly wisdom has known how to use to great advantage, just as even now it sometimes uses it to preach indulgence from all occupation with the divine – indeed in a Protestant country where Protestantism has prevailed for 300 years, where anyone wanting to enter a monastery would be in an even greater predicament than the worried father who wrote, ‘Where shall I send my son to school?’⁵⁵ in this nineteenth century where secularism triumphs, we still sometimes hear a priest, in a discourse designed to encourage participation in life’s innocent joys, warn against entering the monastery; one

⁵³ A social club founded in 1798. ⁵⁴ See p. 204 n. 66.

⁵⁵ Title of a debate-generating book (1834) in which the author notes the paucity of choice of schools at the time, there being only the Latin and the Common School.

hears this and looks, and yes, the priest is perspiring and wipes away the sweat, so gripped is he by his theme – in order, then, to stop the monastic movement people hit upon this indecorous talk of mediation. For just as it is impolite to bring up God's name in ordinary chat, so too is it impolite to place the absolute τέλος on a level with the rank of shooting champion and the like. But even if the Middle Ages erred in eccentricity, it by no means follows that mediation is commendable. The Middle Ages bear some resemblance to Greece, and they had what the Greeks had, namely, passion. The monastic movement is therefore a passionate decision, as is fitting in respect of the absolute τέλος, and it is to that extent preferable in its nobility to the wretched middleman-wisdom of mediation.

Mediation wants to recognize (but treacherously, please note, and it cannot be otherwise) the pathos-filled moment of resignation, the orientation towards the absolute τέλος. But then it wants to have this τέλος in among the others, and it wants to profit in a finite sense from the relation to this τέλος. So let us ask the following question: What is the maximum a person can gain by relating to the absolute τέλος? In a finite sense there is nothing to gain and everything to lose. In temporality, *the expectation* of an eternal happiness is the highest reward, because an eternal happiness is the highest τέλος; and there being not only no reward to expect but also suffering to bear is precisely the mark of one relating to the absolute. Once the individual can no longer be content with this, he regresses to worldly wisdom, to a Jewish attachment to promises for this life,⁵⁶ into chiliasm,⁵⁷ and the like. Exactly in this lies the difficulty of the task of relating absolutely to the absolute τέλος. In life, people time and again seek excuses to be spared having to walk on tip-toe in this way, to be spared – yes, from having to find the relation to the absolute sufficient. Look, the priest says there are of course two paths; and it is certainly devoutly to be wished that the priest say this with all due emphasis. So there are two paths, says the priest, and when he begins on this discourse we know very well what he means but will for that reason gladly hear it again, since this is no anecdote or a witticism that bears no repetition. There are two paths, the one, smiling and carefree, easily travelled, beckoning, strewn with flowers, winding its way through lovely regions, and walking along it is as light as dancing in the meadow; the other is narrow, stony, difficult to begin with,

⁵⁶ See 1 Timothy 4:8.

⁵⁷ The doctrine that Christ in person will reign for a thousand years; see Revelation 20:1–6 and 1 Corinthians 15:20–8.

but little by little ... these are the paths of pleasure and virtue. This is how the priest sometimes speaks, but what happens? It is as though little by little the path of virtue changes,⁵⁸ and then the priest's discourse changes too, and little by little the two paths come to look just about the same. To make virtue appealing to the listener the description of the path of virtue becomes almost seductive. But enticement is a dangerous matter. The speaker abandons the ethical and operates in an aesthetically correct fashion with the help of a foreshortened perspective, and then what? Why, then there are no longer really two paths; or there are two paths of pleasure, one of which is a little more prudent than the other, just as, when climbing a mountain to enjoy the view, it is wisest not to turn back to look too soon, yes, so that one will be able to enjoy it all the more. And what then? Why, then the sensualist (the eudaemonist) is not only mad because he chooses the path of pleasure instead of that of virtue; he is a mad sensualist not to choose the pleasurable path of virtue. As soon as this 'little by little' on the path of virtue receives an aesthetic colouring in a priest's mouth – then you are lying in your teeth, old man!⁵⁸ For in that case it pleases his reverence to forget that he is disposing of existence in a way that no human being dares. He points out a *τέλος* in time and the whole of his theory of virtue is a doctrine of prudence. But if a religious man heard such a sermon he would say to his soul: 'Do not let yourself be disturbed by him; he himself may not be aware that he is trying to deceive you, to make you impatient when this "little by little" becomes a matter of years, perhaps your entire lifetime. No, let me rather know from the beginning that the road can be narrow and stony and thorny to the very end; so that I may learn to keep a hold on the absolute *τέλος*, guided by this light in the night of sufferings, but not led astray by probability and temporary consolations.'

As we know, over the entrance to the temple at Delphi there was also the inscription: *ne quid nimis*.⁵⁹ This is the *summa summarum*⁶⁰ of all finite worldly wisdom. If this were the maximum, then Christianity should immediately be

⁵⁸ I should like to know what New Testament passage the priest uses for his edifying discourse on little by little. In the NT it also says there are two paths, and it says, that path is strait and the gate narrow that leads to blessedness and only few are those who find it [Matthew 7:13–14], but it says nothing at all about little by little. But just as in Copenhagen there is a committee that works at beautifying the city, it would seem there is a modern pastoral wisdom at work beautifying the path of virtue with aesthetic decorations.

⁵⁸ A reference to Holberg's comedy, *Heinrich og Pernille* (1731). The Danish saying is 'to lie in one's throat'.

⁵⁹ Latin: nothing beyond measure. ⁶⁰ Latin: in sum, the long and short of it.

revoked as a juvenile and immature conceit. You need only try applying this *ne quid nimis* to the god who lets himself be crucified and you instantly conjure up a mockery of religion as witty as is seldom heard in this world, for the mockers are generally hot-tempered and thick-headed. It would be about the wittiest possible objection, tinged with humour and abstaining altogether from attacking the historical and eternal truth of Christianity, just to free oneself from the relation to it with: 'That's going much too far, Your Reverence, the god allowing himself to be crucified.' That maxim, *ne quid nimis*, may be valid in many situations, but when applied to the absolute passionate relation to the absolute τέλος, it is nonsense. It is a matter, on the contrary, of risking everything, staking absolutely all, desiring absolutely the highest τέλος; but then it is a matter in turn of not letting this absolute passion and renunciation of everything acquire the appearance of meriting, of earning, an eternal happiness. The first true expression of relating to the absolute τέλος is to renounce everything, but it must be truly understood, on pain of the regression beginning immediately, that this renouncing of everything is nothing if it is supposed to merit the highest good. The error of paganism is in the first position: not willing to risk everything; the error of the Middle Ages is in the second position, misunderstanding what it means to renounce everything; the hodge-podge of our age mediates.

The questionable character of the monastic movement (aside from the error of its supposed merit) lay in the fact that the absolute innerness⁶¹ received its striking expression, presumably in order to afford a properly vigorous demonstration of its existence, in a distinctive and special outwardness, through which, however much one twists and turns, it came to differ only relatively from all other outwardness. Mediation either allows the relation to the absolute τέλος to be mediated in relative ends, whereby it becomes itself relative, or else it exhausts itself, as abstract, in the relative as its concrete form, whereby the majesty of the absolute relationship becomes an empty phrase, becomes a showy introduction to life which stays outside, becomes like a title page not bound with the book.⁶² But the relation to the absolute τέλος cannot be said to exhaust itself in relative ends, because the absolute relation may require renouncing all of them. On the other hand, anyone who relates to the absolute τέλος can quite well stay in the relative precisely in order to practise the absolute

⁶¹ 'Indvorteshed'.

⁶² Perhaps the extra page protecting the title page, removed in the binding.

relation in renunciation. Since almost everyone in our time is a *gemaltig*⁶³ fellow on paper, one sometimes has to cope with fears that have no foundation in reality. One such is the danger that people in our time believe threatens them, namely, that being finished and done with everything so quickly, they are at a loss as what to do to pass the time. One writes down on a piece of paper, 'Doubt everything' – one has then doubted everything; even just getting to be thirty years old means you will be lost for something with which to fill time, especially if 'one has only poorly provided for one's old age by not learning to play cards'. Similarly with renouncing everything – now it is done. It is said that to renounce everything is a huge abstraction – that is why one has to proceed to hold on to something. But if the task is to renounce everything, why not begin by renouncing something? Just as it must be tiresome for the teacher, and just as it is usually the mark of the mediocre pupil in a school to run up with his paper barely ten minutes after the task has been set and say 'I've finished', so also in life the mediocrities come running up straight away and are finished, and the greater the task the quicker they are done – so too it must be tiresome for the power guiding existence to be concerned with a generation like this. Holy Scripture speaks of God's patience with sinners as being inscrutable,⁶⁴ as indeed it is; but how angelic the patience needed to deal with human beings like this, who are finished straight away.

Inasmuch as the individual, having once acquired the absolute orientation towards the absolute *τέλος*, is not supposed to leave the world (and to what purpose this externality? – but let us never forget that innerness without externality is the most difficult innerness, where the possibility of a self-deception is easiest), what then? Well, then the task is to express in existing that he is constantly oriented absolutely towards the absolute *τέλος*, the absolute respect (*respicere*).⁶⁵ He is to express it in existing since pathos in words is aesthetic pathos. He is to express it in existing, and yet there is to be no direct or distinctive externality that is its expression, for then what we have is either the monastic movement or mediation. He must live, then, just like other human beings, but resignation will see to it, from dawn to dusk, that he works at preserving the solemnity with which, in existing, he first acquired the absolute orientation towards the absolute *τέλος*. He knows no *both-and*, nor will he; he detests it as much as he

⁶³ 'Mighty'. ⁶⁴ E.g. Romans 2:4; 3:25; 11:33. ⁶⁵ Latin: respect, lit. look back to or at.

detests taking God's name in vain,⁶⁶ as much as the lover detests the thought of loving another. And resignation, this commanding officer of existence, will be watching. But if it finds out that he is losing elevation, that he longs to go on all fours, that he consorts with a suspicious character, mediation, and that the latter finally comes off the winner – then resignation will stand outside this individual, standing there like the tutelary spirit of death, bending down over an extinguished torch; because there the absolute τέλος vanished before the individual's clouded eyes. There may be no discernible change externally, for the relation to the absolute τέλος did not entail entering the monastery and then donning worldly attire again when one had grown weary of it, so that the change became outwardly recognizable. Nor did the relation to the absolute τέλος mean that it exhausted itself in relative ends, for then again the change that occurred with a person would be outwardly recognizable. There is in a sense something awful in speaking in this way of a person's inner life, that it may be there and not be there without being directly discernible outwardly; but it is also wonderful to be able to speak of the inner life in this way – if it is there; for exactly this is the expression of its inwardness. Once the inner is decisively and commensurably expressed in the external we have the monastic movement. Really, mediation knows nothing of any relation to the absolute τέλος, because mediation exhausts itself in the relative.

What happens then with the inner life? Yes, well, this is what happens. The task is to practise the absolute relation to the absolute τέλος, in such a way that the individual strives to reach the maximum: maintaining a relation to the absolute τέλος and to the relative ends at the same time – not by mediating them but by relating absolutely to his absolute τέλος and relatively to the relative. The latter relation belongs to the world, the former to the individual himself, and it is difficult to relate at once absolutely to the absolute τέλος and in the same instant take part like others in this and that. Even having to do with some great plan or other makes it hard for a person to be like others; he is *distract*, he will not participate in anything else, all the commotion around him is burdensome, he wants a little compartment for himself where he could sit and ponder his great plan – and you might think it a fitting task for diplomats and police agents to acquire the art and self-control necessary to keep to

⁶⁶ Exodus 20:7.

the great plan and at the same time attend balls, converse with ladies, play billiards, and whatever else one desires. But the absolute τέλος is the greatest plan a human being can relate to, and that is why the Middle Ages wanted a little compartment in order to concern itself properly with the absolute; but for that very reason the absolute lost, since it became something external. When a married couple have been busy socially perhaps the whole week through, they sometimes say that the week has gone by without their having had time to live for each other, and that in spite of partying together and therefore having seen each other. So they look forward to having a day when they can really live for each other, and this can be very becoming of married couples. Someone wanting to relate to his absolute τέλος but who is constantly prevented from doing so by being in existence and its multiplicity would seem to be in the same situation. But in that case it might seem quite all right for him once in a while to live a day for his absolute τέλος. Yet just here lies the difficulty. The married couple relate relatively to each other, and so this day, when they really live for each other, is all right. But to relate to one's absolute τέλος once in a while is to relate relatively to one's absolute τέλος, for here it is the relation that is decisive. The task is therefore to practise one's relation to the absolute τέλος so as always to have it with one, while staying within the relative goals of existence – and let us not forget that it was the case at least in the school-room that one could tell the mediocre pupil by his running up ten minutes after the task had been set and saying: I have finished.

So mediation remains outside. Let me take falling in love as a τέλος and have an individual, through a misunderstanding, understand this to be the absolute τέλος. He will not want to run away from the world, he will be like the rest of us, a titled dignitary perhaps, or a merchant, etc. But just as he once understood absolutely that for him his infatuation was the absolute, so will it be his absolute task always so to understand it; and just as he once shuddered at the thought that his love might not be the absolute but be babbled into a both-and, so will he strive with all his might to prevent this from ever happening. What then became of mediation? And what was his mistake? His mistake was in understanding falling in love to be the absolute τέλος. But in respect of the absolute τέλος this is how the individual should conduct himself: in everything he undertakes, wherever he is, whatever his condition, whether the world beckons or threatens, whether he makes fun or is serious, resignation sees to it that the absolute respect for the absolute τέλος is kept absolutely. But it is not

mediating, any more than it is to mediate between heaven and hell to say that a yawning chasm has been fixed between them.⁶⁷ And in this respect just such a yawning chasm has been fixed between the absolute τέλος and the relative.

But if this is how it is, and if the task is to practise the absolute relation, existence becomes exceedingly strenuous, for a double movement has constantly to be made. The monastic movement wants to express innerness through an externality that it assumes is an innerness. Here lies the contradiction, for being a monk is just as much something external as having a civic title. Mediation abolishes the absolute τέλος. But an individual existing in true pathos will at every instant express, to himself, that the absolute τέλος is the absolute τέλος. The profundity of it lies in the quiet incorruptibility of the inner life; but in this also lies the possibility of deception and the temptation to *say*⁶⁸ that one has done it and is doing it. Now, if anyone wants to tell a lie in this respect, that will be his affair; I shall be delighted to believe everything he says. For if it is something great I might perhaps be helped to do the same; and whether he has really done it or not is of absolutely no concern to me. I would only offer him the practical rule not to add that he *also* mediates; for then he gives himself away. Someone existing, who has acquired his absolute orientation towards the absolute τέλος and understands the task of practising the relation, may have a civic title, may be one of the other dignitaries, and yet he is not like the others, even though to look at him he is just like them. He may gain the whole world,⁶⁹ but he is not like one who desires that. He may become king, but every time he places the crown on his head, and every time he holds out his sceptre, resignation looks first to see whether he expresses, in existing, the absolute respect for the absolute τέλος – and the crown pales as once it did in the great instant of resignation, even if he now wears it in the third decade of his reign; it fades as it will one day, in the hour of death before the eyes of the beholders and before his own failing sight, but for him it does so in his full force and vigour. What then became of mediation? And yet there was no one who entered a monastery.

The individual does not stop being a human being, take off finitude's motley in order to be dressed in the abstract garb of the monastery; but nor does he mediate between the absolute τέλος and finitude. In immediacy the individual is rooted in the finite; when resignation has convinced itself that

⁶⁷ Luke 16:26. ⁶⁸ Emphasis added. ⁶⁹ Matthew 16:26; Mark 8:36; Luke 9:25.

he has acquired the absolute orientation towards the absolute *τέλος*, all is changed, the roots severed. He still lives in the finite, but he does not have his life in it. His life, just like anyone else's, has the diverse predicates of a human existence, but he inhabits them as one who goes around in clothes borrowed from a stranger. He is a stranger in the world of the finite, but does not define his difference from *worldliness* by an alien mode of dress (a contradiction, since it would define him as worldly); he is incognito, but his incognito consists precisely in looking just like everyone else. Just as the dentist has loosened the gum around a tooth and cut the nerve, so have the roots of his life in the finite been severed, and it is not his task to have the tooth grow firm again, which would be mediation. Just as in the great instant of resignation one does not mediate but chooses, the task is now to acquire skill in renewing the passionate choice and in expressing it in existing. The individual, after all, is in the finite (and the difficulty that of preserving the absolute choice in finitude), but just as he took from the finite its vital power in the instant of resignation, so the task now is to repeat that. Then let the world offer the individual everything; it is possible that he will accept it, but he says: Oh, all right, and this 'Oh, all right' means absolute respect for the absolute *τέλος*. Let the world take everything away from him; he may wince, but again he says: Oh, all right then – and this 'Oh, all right then' means absolute respect for the absolute *τέλος*. This is how it is not to exist immediately in finitude.

Whether it is equally important for the Eternal, the Omniscient, the Omnipresent that a man forfeits his eternal happiness or a sparrow falls to the ground;⁷⁰ whether, once everything is suspended in eternity, it will appear that the most trivial circumstance was of absolute importance, I do not decide. I can say truthfully that *time* will not permit that, for the simple reason that I am in time. In existence this is not how it can be for someone existing, since he is on the way to being, and for one who exists a high-flown mediation (not even acquired in the Greek sense, laboriously throughout an entire lifetime, but in the German sense, legitimizing itself on paper) is nothing but monkey business. A mortal eye cannot endure, and ethics absolutely forbids him from wanting to endure, the dizzying prospect of the most insignificant thing being just as important as the absolutely decisive, and an *existing* person cannot find, and dare not give himself, the *calm* to become fantastic; for as long as he is in existence he will not become eternal. In existence the watchword is always 'forward';

⁷⁰ Matthew 10:29.

and as long as the watchword is 'forward' the thing is to practise the absolute distinction, a matter of acquiring the ability to make the distinction more and more, and a good self-awareness. But when the much-practised person trusts the knowledge he has of himself as one who makes the absolute distinction with ease and joy, this again is not mediation. Or, when the wife marked by age is happily convinced that her husband is absolutely faithful, of what is she convinced? Is it of his mediating and of his heart being divided in mediation? Or is it not rather of him, in stillness, steadily making the absolute distinction of love, only that she, in happy confidence, is convinced that he does it with ease and reliability and therefore needs no external proof. Just so that one does not forget that marriage is not the absolute τέλος, and that here it can only be a matter imperfectly of what holds absolutely of the absolute.

If God related directly as an ideal to human being, it would be right to want to express the direct likeness. Thus, when I have a distinguished person as my ideal, it is quite correct of me to want to express the direct resemblance, because, both of us being human beings, we belong within the same sphere. But between God and a human being (we can let speculation keep *humankind* to play tricks with) there is an absolute difference, and for that very reason a person's absolute relation with God must express the absolute difference, and the immediate likeness becomes impertinence, frivolity, presumptuousness,^h etc. If God in his loftiness were to say to a human being, 'For me you are no more important than a sparrow',⁷¹ and if it were a human being's task to express the direct likeness with the divine loftiness, then the commendable reply would be, 'Neither are you and your existence any more important to me than a sparrow', whether this should be interpreted positively, because everything had become equally important for this exalted person, or negatively, because everything was of such equal importance that for him nothing was important. But this, after all, would be a mad blasphemy. Precisely due to the absolute difference between God and the human being, the human being will express his own nature most

^h It is another matter when, in a very childlike age, with innocent naïveté God becomes a venerable old man or the like, and lives on a friendly footing with the devout. Thus I remember having read of one of the saintly characters in Weil's *Biblische Legenden der Muselmänner* [*Biblical Tales of Muslims*] that God himself personally followed him to the grave ahead of the coffin and the four angels behind. That this kind of thing is innocent naïveté is seen from the fact, among other things, that to read it now produces a pure and innocent humorous effect. This childlike piety does not, of course, mean to offend God, but on the contrary blissfully to adorn him with the best it can think up.

⁷¹ See Matthew 10:31.

adequately when expressing this difference absolutely. *Worship* is the maximum for a human being's relation to God, and hence also for his likeness with God, since the qualities differ absolutely. But it is worship that signifies that, for him, God is absolutely everything, and the worshipper in turn the one who distinguishes absolutely. One who distinguishes absolutely relates to his absolute τέλος but *eo ipso*⁷² also to God. And the absolute distinction is exactly suited to clearing a space, just as a policeman with a procession. It puts aside the crush, the rabble-riot of relative ends, so that the one who distinguishes absolutely can relate to the absolute. There is absolutely no merit in someone existing wanting to approach the likeness⁷³ that may exist for someone who is eternal. For an existing person the maximum is precisely the passionate decision. It is the same with existing as with walking. When everything *is* and is at rest, everything looks deceptively as though it were of equal importance provided I can acquire an equally calm view of it. But as soon as movement is introduced and I myself am in motion, then the walking is a ceaseless distinguishing. Except that this comparison cannot tell us anything about making the absolute distinction, since walking is only a finite motion.

The fact that the task is to practise the absolute distinction does not mean that the one who exists becomes indifferent to the finite. This was the exaggeration of the Middle Ages; it lacked complete faith in inwardness unless the latter became visible in the outer. But the less visible in the outer, the more inwardness, and inwardness expressed by its opposite (but the opposite is that the individual is just like everyone else and nothing at all is to be noted outwardly) is the highest inwardness – if it is there. It must always also be added: the less outwardly visible the easier the deception. An older man may very well share wholeheartedly in the children's play, be the one that really brings life to the game, but he does not play as a child. Someone understanding it as his task to practise the absolute distinction relates similarly to the finite. But he does not mediate. The Middle Ages were a mistrustful inwardness that wanted for that reason to see it in the outer. It was, so far as that goes, an unhappy inwardness, like a love affair where the lovers are jealously anxious for external expressions of their love; it believed, similarly, that God was jealously anxious for the external expression. True inwardness calls for absolutely no outer sign. In the practising of the absolute distinction there is the passion of the infinite but without jealousy, without

⁷² Latin: by that very fact, by the same token.

⁷³ 'Ligelighed', in the sense here of being of the same kind, or homogeneous.

envy, without mistrust; it does not want to stand out divisively in existence as something noticeable, which would only mean that it suffers a loss, as when God's invisible image is made visible; it does not want to disturb the finite, but nor does it want to mediate. In the midst of the finite and finitude's manifold opportunity for the individual to forget the absolute distinction, it simply wants to be, for him, the absolute inwardness, and besides that he can very well be a titled dignitary, etc. The task's maximum is to relate absolutely to the absolute τέλος and at the same time relatively to relative ends, or always to have the absolute τέλος with one.

If this cannot be done, or if one is unwilling to accept this as the task, analogues to the monastic movement are unconditionally to be preferred, whether in the speculative nineteenth century this proposition provokes cat-calls or cheers, whether one wants to laugh at it or cry. The monastic movement at least had passion and a respect for the absolute τέλος. But entering the monastery must not be made out to be something meritorious. On the contrary, this step must be taken humbly before God and not without a certain shame. Just as a sick child sees no merit in being allowed to stay at home with its parents; just as a woman in love sees no merit in being unable to lose sight of the loved one for one second, and in not gaining strength enough to think of him as she goes about her normal work; just as she sees nothing to be gained in being allowed to sit with him in his workplace and be constantly at his side, so too the candidate for the monastery considers his relation to God. And if he does that, there will be no further objection to his choice, whatever people are pleased to say in the nineteenth century. But the sick child will soon discover the difficulty, not because the parents are not tender and loving, but because their being constantly around him gives rise to so many a little clash, and the woman in love will soon discover the difficulty, not because the one she loves is not a fine fellow, but because the constant sight of him, day in and day out and every hour of the day, can at times make for a certain ennui. So too will the candidate for the monastery be sure to notice it. For here again a priest will often fool us. On Sundays he says that it is so still and solemn in church, and if only we could stay there all the time we would surely become holy people, but we have to go out into the world and its confusion. Shame on the priest for wanting to lead us to believe that the fault lies with the world and not with us. Shame on him for teaching us to boast as though we were choosing the most difficult task, especially if we are not every moment to have the absolute τέλος with us out there. I thought the priest was meant to

teach us humility and therefore say: 'Go home, now, and each look to what God has assigned to you, and give thanks to God, who recognizes human weakness, that you are not required to stay here all day and do nothing but sing hymns and pray, and praise God, in which case you might discover trials of temptation of which God now allows you to remain ignorant.' Through the foreshortened perspective of aesthetics, going to church once a week, when otherwise on the move in life's multiplicity, easily produces an illusion. But just for that reason the priest ought to realize that he should take care and not misuse the Middle Ages so as to mislead the congregation into grand delusions.

In our day there is not really much reason to warn people against the monastery, and in the Middle Ages the reason was not the one that may seem most plausible to us. Had I lived in the Middle Ages I could never have decided to choose the monastery. And why? Because in the Middle Ages anyone entering a monastery was in all seriousness accounted a saint. So if I went down the street and met a poor wretch who is perhaps a far better man than I,ⁱ he would bow to me and take me in pathos and earnest for a holy man. But to me this seems the most dreadful thing and a profanation of the holy, a betrayal of the absolute relation to the absolute τέλος. Were a monastery established in our day anyone entering it would be considered mad. When we read a physician's programme nowadays for a new mental asylum, it bears a certain resemblance to an invitation to a monastery. This I regard as an extraordinary gain. Being thought mad, there is something in that; it is animating; it fences in the quiet inwardness of an absolute relation. But to be taken in earnest for a holy man, that must worry a person to death. Making the monastery into a mental asylum I take to be the nearest thing to an outward appearance just like anyone else's. For in this case the externality does not correspond directly to the inner, which was just where the Middle Ages went astray. I think at least as follows: let me become anything that the world has in store for me, it is unlikely to be much, and be it ever so humble I shall strive to make myself at home in it; but spare me one thing: being regarded in earnest as a holy man, for if it was just to mock me that anyone called me a saint, that would be *was anders*,⁷⁴ there is something to it, it is animating.

ⁱ And this 'perhaps' is not even all that hypothetical, even if I were another than I am; for the human being who seriously and honestly regards another as a holy man *eo ipso* shows, by this humility, that he is better than the other.

⁷⁴ 'Something else', a familiar phrase from a collection of folk tales.

But all due respect for the monastic movement of the Middle Ages. Yes, the priest says that entering the monastery means avoiding the danger, so that the greater thing is to stay amid the perils of life – but surely not with the help of mediation? Let us at least try to understand each other and agree on what is meant by the danger. The monastery candidate saw the greatest danger as that of not at every instant relating absolutely to the absolute τέλος. Mediation knows nothing of this danger; with its help one avoids the absolute danger and the absolute exertion, avoids the solitary and silent association with the absolute in which the least loss is an absolute loss, and the least step backward perdition, here there is no distraction, but where an ever so slight step backwards burns like sunstroke in the memory of the unfortunate who has nowhere to flee, where every weakness, every lack-lustre moment, every disinclination is as if it were a mortal sin, and every such hour like an eternity, because time does not go: this is what one avoids, and this is what the priest calls avoiding the danger, because one remains in relative dangers, the dangers of the manifold, where the simplest experience teaches one that all is never lost (precisely because it is the sphere of the manifold), but that in one way one loses and gains in another, where the dangers are those of business and livelihood and health, and being called names in the newspapers.⁷⁵

It is really sad that the eccentricity of the Middle Ages is misused time and again to teach people to make themselves out to be some devilish fine fellows, and it is as much a parody to talk in this way in our day as for a man in an almshouse to elaborate on the idea that the most courageous thing is not to take one's own life but not to do so, thus giving the simple old wives there the idea that they are the bravest of all – because they had, after all, the courage not to do it! Or as if someone were to speak to a gathering of the most hard-bitten of men on the greatness of taking one's sorrows like a man and leave out the dialectical middle term: actually being able to take one's sorrows like a man. Let us go to the theatre to be deceived, let actor and spectator work there in a beautiful collaboration to carry away and be carried away in illusion: it is glorious. If it comes to that, let me be deceived by my servant who flatters me; by the one who seeks a favour; by my shoemaker because I am his best customer whom he would be loath to lose; but why am I to be deceived and almost fear for myself in a church if I am a good listener! For if I am a good listener, then what I hear is as though the priest were all the time speaking about me, for what is

⁷⁵ A possible reference to the *Corsair* scandal. See the translator's introduction.

otherwise vanity, or perhaps very common in the world, is just what is commendable and perhaps very rare in a church. And why do I almost fear for myself? Is it because the priest describes us human beings (including me, if am a good listener who takes him to be preaching about me) as so corrupt that I shudder to be one such, that I grow pale, and say to myself, trembling, but also with indignation: No, I am not that bad? Alas, no. His reverence describes us human beings (including me, if I am a good listener who take him to be preaching about me) in so glorious a fashion, as so much more perfect than those retiring denizens of the monastery, that I (who assume, after all, that he is referring to me) become quite embarrassed and shamefaced, and red in the face, and am driven in my embarrassment to say: No, your reverence is really far too polite, and look up inquiringly to see whether it is a priest who is speaking or someone seeking a New Year's gratuity.^j

^j You will see that the priest's sermon today differs somewhat from that of last Sunday, where he encouraged the *Christian* congregation to whom he preached to accept the *Christian* faith and become Christians (cf. the preceding chapter). This is perfectly all right when baptism is to make us Christians without further ado, merely by being baptized as infants; the error, as pointed out, is in considering infant baptism to be decisive with respect to becoming Christians. It is something else when without further ado the preacher makes great heroes of all us listeners. The religious address essentially deals with individuals, and its essential function is to serve as an intermediary between the individual and the ideal, maximally assisting the individual in expressing the ideal. Essentially it assumes that all those it addresses are in error; it is informed of error's every wrong, all its hiding-places, of the state of everyone who strays on to the path of error. But in our objective age this sort of preaching is rare. One preaches on faith and the exploits of faith – and one is either aesthetically indifferent as to whether all of us who listen are believers, or else is aesthetically polite enough to assume that we are. Faith becomes, in this way, a sort of allegorical figure, and the priest a kind of troubadour, and the sermon on faith becomes analogous to something like St George's fight with the dragon. The scene is set in the air, and faith overcomes all difficulties [see 1 John 5:4]. Similarly with hope and love. The ecclesiastical address becomes a counterpart to the first medieval foray into drama (the so-called mysteries), when religious material was treated dramatically and comedies played, strangely enough, precisely on Sundays and in the church. That faith, hope, and love, that God and Jesus Christ are spoken of in a solemn tone of voice (be it more or less artistic or the art-defying derisive rough bass of a revivalist) and in a church, by no means implies so far that it is a godly address. What counts in this connection is how the speaker and the listener relate to the address, or are presumed to relate to it. The speaker must relate to his subject-matter, not just through the imagination, but by himself being what he speaks about or, striving in that direction, by having the 'how' of his own experience and the 'how' of continuing experience; and the listeners must be enlightened by the address and assisted in becoming that of which it speaks (in the main, this is the same whether one assumes a direct or an indirect relation between speaker and listener. If an indirect relation is taken to be the true one, then the address will become a monologue but, please note, a monologue about the speaker's personally experienced 'how', and in this 'how' he will, speaking about himself, indirectly speak about the listener). In a godly discourse on faith the main thing is how you and I (i.e., single individuals) become believers, and that the speaker help in wrenching us out of all illusions and that he be informed of the long and laborious path, of relapse, etc. If becoming a believer is made easy (e.g., just by being baptized as an infant), and if the address is only on the subject of faith, then the whole situation is merely aesthetic and we are attending a

No, all due respect for the medieval monastic movement. Mediation, on the other hand, is a rebellion of the relative ends against the majesty of the absolute, which is to be dragged down to the level of everything else, and against the dignity of the human being, who is to become a servant only of relative ends. In so far as it pretends to be higher than the absolute disjunction, it is a device of the imagination.

On paper mediation looks plausible enough. First we posit the finite, then the infinite, and then on the piece of paper we say: this must be mediated. And it is undeniable that an existing someone has also discovered the secure foothold outside existence where he can mediate: on paper. The Archimedean point has been found; it is just that his having succeeded in moving the whole world goes unnoticed. If, on the other hand, the scene is set not on paper but in existence, because the mediating person is one who exists (and thereby prevented from being the mediating person), then anyone who becomes aware of what it means to exist (i.e., that *he* exists) will instantly become the one who distinguishes absolutely not between the finite and the infinite, but between existing finitely and infinitely. For the infinite and the finite are put together in existence, and in the one who exists, who has no need of going to the trouble of creating existence, or of having to think of imitating it, but all the more of existing. On paper people even produce existence with the help of mediation. In the existence where the one that exists finds himself the task is simpler: whether he would be so good as to exist. As someone existing, then, it is not up to him to form existence out of the finite and the infinite. As himself compounded of finite and infinite, as existing, he is to *become* one of them, and one does not *become* both at one time, because one *is* that by *being* an existing person, for precisely this is the difference between being and becoming, and the chimerical proficiency of mediation, if it belongs anywhere, is an expression, yes, of the beginning. This is what in several respects has happened to recent philosophy: that having had the task of correcting a deviation due to reflection, once finished with that, it

comedy – in church. For a mere pittance we gain admission to the priest's dramatic performances, where we sit and gaze at what faith can do – not as believers but as spectator of faith's exploits, just as what we have in our time are not so much speculating thinkers as spectators of *speculation's* exploits. But of course, presumably for a theocentric, speculative, and objective age it is much too little just to get involved in the ultimate difficulties, where the question in the last analysis becomes as acute, as searching, as disturbing, and as uncompromising as possible, the question whether the single individual, you and I, are believers, and how we relate day by day to faith.

confuses the conclusion of this work with the end of everything, instead of the end of this work being *höchstens*⁷⁶ the beginning of the real task.

One can *be both good and evil*, just as we say quite plainly that a person has a disposition to both good and evil. But one cannot *at one and the same time become good and evil*. Aesthetically, it has been required of the poet not to present these abstract models of virtue or diabolical persons, but do as Goethe, whose characters are both good and evil. And why is it right to require this? Because we want the poet to depict human beings as they *are*, and every human being *is both good and evil*; and because the poet's medium is the medium of imagination, is being but not becoming, is at most becoming in a very foreshortened perspective. But take the individual out of this medium of imagination, of this being, and put him in existence, then ethics immediately confronts him with its requirement, whether it might not now please him kindly to become, and then he becomes, yes, either good or evil. In the serious moment of self-communion, and in the sacred moment of confession, the individual takes himself out of the medium of becoming and inspects, in the medium of being, how it is with him. Alas! the outcome of this inquiry is unfortunately that he *is both good and evil*. But as soon as he enters again the medium of becoming, he becomes either good or evil. This *summa summarum*, that all human beings *are both good and evil*, is of no concern at all to ethics, which does not have the medium of *being* but of *becoming*, and therefore condemns every explanation of becoming that wants in an underhanded way to explain becoming within being, whereby becoming's absolute decision is essentially revoked and all talk of it essentially a false alarm. For that reason ethics must also condemn all the jubilation to be heard in our time over having overcome reflection. Who is it that is supposed to have overcome reflection? Someone existing. But existence itself is precisely reflection's sphere, and one who exists is in existence, thus in reflection; how then does he go about overcoming it? That the law of identity is in a certain sense superior in that the law of contradiction presupposes it is not difficult to see. But the law of identity is only the boundary; it is like the blue mountains, or the line which the artist calls the base line, the figure being the important thing. Identity is therefore a lower view than contradiction, which is more concrete. Identity is the *terminus a quo* for existence but not *ad quem*. An existing person can

⁷⁶ 'At most'.

*maxime*⁷⁷ arrive at identity, and keep on arriving at it by abstracting from existence. But since ethics regards every existing person as its bond servant, it will absolutely deny him any moment at which to begin this abstracting. Instead of saying the law of identity annuls the law of contradiction, it is contradiction that annuls identity; or as Hegel so often says, lets it 'go to the ground'.⁷⁸

Mediation would make existence easier for the existing person by leaving out an absolute relation to the absolute τέλος; practising the absolute distinction makes life absolutely strenuous, particularly when one is also to stay in the finite and relate at one and the same time absolutely to the absolute τέλος and relatively to the relative goals. But there is, in this strenuous exertion, nevertheless a tranquillity and a calm, since to relate absolutely to the absolute τέλος, i.e., with all one's strength and renouncing everything else, is no contradiction but absolute reciprocity in giving as good as you get. For the agonizing self-contradiction of worldly passion arises through the individual relating *absolutely* to a relative τέλος. Vanity, avarice, envy, etc., are then essentially madness; for this, relating absolutely to what is relative, is the most common expression of madness and from an aesthetic viewpoint to be seen as comic, since the comic always lies in contradiction. It is madness (comic, seen aesthetically) that a being planned eternally uses all its power to grasp the transitory, clinging to what is inconstant, believes that it has gained everything when it has gained this nothing – and is fooled; to believe that it has lost everything when it has lost this nothing – and is no longer fooled. For the transient is nothing when it is past, and its essence is to be past, as quickly as the moment of sensuous pleasure, the farthest possible remove from the eternal: a moment in time full of emptiness.

However, perhaps someone, a 'serious man', will say, 'But now, is it certain and definite that there is such a good; is it certain and definite that an eternal happiness is in store? For in that case I would surely strive for it; otherwise I would be mad to risk everything for it.' In the priest's address this or a similar form of expression frequently occurs as the transition is made to that part of the address in which, for the comfort and relief of the congregation, it is demonstrated that there is an eternal happiness in store – that the members of the listening congregation may strive for it all the more

⁷⁷ Latin: boundary, or point, from which ... boundary, or point, towards which (aim or goal) ... at most.

⁷⁸ 'Zu Grunde': see esp. ch. 3, 'Einleitung: allgemeiner Begriff der Logik', *Wissenschaft der Logik*, E Logic WW, p. 174. The double sense is that of being annulled but also going back to its basis.

eagerly. Such a demonstration is a titbit for the cat and taken as gospel: 'the practical exercises can as usual be left for later.' It is as well I am no serious man, an asseverating philosopher, or a clergyman going surety for his congregation, for then I too might have to provide a demonstration. Fortunately my light-heartedness excuses me; and as a light-hearted man I venture the view that if a person making up his mind to strive for an eternal happiness does so in *trusting* the asseverations of the philosophers and the surety of the clergy, then he will not strive for it, for it is exactly his *trusting* all the philosophers' asseverations and the sureties of the clergy that prevents him (the priest of course thinks it is lack of trust) and helps him to, why the hell not, *go along with it*, to want to make an intellectual transaction, a profitable speculation on the exchange, instead of a risky venture, helps him to make a simulated movement, a simulated pass at the absolute, although he remains totally within what is relative, a simulated transition, like that from eudaemonism to the ethical within eudaemonism. Altogether, it is quite incredible how ingenious and inventive human beings are in evading the ultimate decision, and anyone who has seen the curious antics of the rural militia when they are ordered into the water⁷⁹ will frequently find analogies in the realm of spirit. The point is this, that it is only through the risky venture that the individual becomes infinite; it is not the same individual, and the venture is not one among many others, one more predicate to attach to one and the same individual; no, through the risky venture he himself becomes another. Before venturing he can only understand it as madness (and this is far preferable to being a thoughtless babbler who sits there imagining he understands it as wisdom – and yet refrains from doing it, whereby he directly declares himself to be mad, while anyone who regards it as madness can at least claim prudence in leaving it alone), and when he has taken the risk he is no longer the same one. In this way, suitable room is made for the *discrimen*⁸⁰ of the transition, an intervening chasmic abyss as a setting that answers to the passion of the infinite, a gulf⁸¹ that the understanding cannot cross over either to or fro.

But since I have not at all involved myself in proving that there is an eternal happiness (partly because it is not my affair but *höchstens*⁸² that of Christianity, which proclaims it; and partly because it would not be there at all if it could be demonstrated, since there being the absolute ethical good can be demonstrated only by the individual who, himself existing,

⁷⁹ Recruited from the farming population and thus inexperienced in an aquatic environment.

⁸⁰ Latin: distinction, turning-point. ⁸¹ See Luke 16:26. ⁸² 'At most'.

expresses that it is there), I shall use a moment to look more closely at that serious man's words. They are surely worth minding. He asks that it should be certain and definite that there is such a good in store. But, really, it is too much to ask that something in store should be certain and definite, for it is just that the future and present have a little instant between them that makes it possible to expect the future but impossible *in praesenti*⁸³ for it to be certain and definite. It is to the present that certainty and definiteness belong, but a present relation to something in the future belongs *eo ipso* to the uncertain, and hence belongs quite rightly to expectation. From the speculative viewpoint it is a matter of my being able to reach the eternal backwards through recollection, a matter of the one who is eternal relating directly to the eternal, but someone existing can only relate to the eternal forwards as something in the future.

The serious man goes on: if he can obtain certainty respecting such a good in store, then he will stake everything on it, otherwise it would be madness. The serious man speaks almost like a joker; it is clear enough that he wants to make fools of us, just like the rural militia man when he makes a run-up in order to jump into the water, and actually makes the run-up – but then doesn't give a hang for the leap. When it is proved, he will risk everything. But then what does it mean to take a risk? Risking is the correlate of uncertainty; once certainty is there, risking stops. If he acquires the certainty and definiteness that he seeks, he cannot possibly come to risk everything; for in that case, even if he gives everything up he risks nothing – and if he does not come by certainty, well, then our serious man says, in dead seriousness, that in that case he will not risk everything, after all it would be madness. The serious man's venture in this way becomes a false alarm. If what I hope to possess by taking a risk is itself certain, then I do not take a risk but *make an exchange*. Thus in giving an apple for a pear I run no risk if I hold the pear in my hand while making the trade. Pettifoggers and rogues understand this very well; they do not trust each other and so want to have in their hands the articles they are to acquire in the exchange. Yes, they have so keen a concept of risk that they consider it risky if the other party turns his back for a moment to spit, in case this should be some hocus-pocus or other. Giving away all I own for a pearl⁸⁴ is not venturing if I am holding the pearl in my hand at the moment of exchange. If it happens to be a false pearl I have been cheated with, then it is a poor exchange, but I have not

⁸³ Latin: in the present. ⁸⁴ Matthew 13:45–6.

risked anything. On the other hand, if the pearl is in a far-off country, in a hidden place in Africa hard of access, if I have never had the pearl in my hand, and then I leave house and home, give everything up, make that long and arduous journey without knowing for certain whether my enterprise will succeed; then I am on a venture^k – and it will no doubt be remarked that same evening at the club, just as the serious man said, that it is madness. But whatever strange events that adventurer may experience on the long and dangerous journey to Africa, I do not believe that anything stranger can befall him than happens to the serious man's words. For in all his seriousness the only true words that remain are these: that it is madness.¹ Yes, it is indeed madness. It is always madness to venture, but to risk everything for the expectation of an eternal happiness is total madness. To ask for certainty and definiteness is prudence, on the other hand, because it is an evasion to escape the strenuousness of action and of risk, and to bring the problem to bear on the realm of knowledge and chat. No, if I am truly to venture, and truly strive for the highest good, there must be uncertainty, and I must, if I may put it in this way, have room to move. But the largest space I can move

^k I shall with pleasure illumine the same with a nobler example. The lover, in the period of courtship, may 'risk' all for his love, for the possession of the beloved; but the married man, who is already in possession of the beloved, risks nothing for her, even if he carries all burdens with her, does everything for her sake, so that for him to use the expression that is the mark of the lover's most sublime infatuation would be to insult his wife. The married man has possession of the beloved; and if the eternal happiness could be similarly present to a person, then he would not be venturing either. But the misfortune is that it cannot itself be present in just that way, even for someone existing who has ventured everything, as long as he is existing, and that little NB once more: he must have risked everything, since he received no certainty beforehand from an asseverating philosopher or a surety-providing priest. For strangely enough, although the eternal happiness is the highest good, far greater than landed properties and kingdoms, what makes it absolutely the good is that the one who gives it away asks no questions at all about the other's surety, and the one who is to receive it would not be helped one bit if even everyone were his guarantor, but the matter is decided simply and solely between the one who gives it away and the respective recipient – almost as great a madness, I was about to say, on the part of the giver, in not having a better regard to his own security and advantage, as on that of the recipient, that he should not become suspicious and smell a rat when he stands there alone when all guarantors have disappeared from view.

¹ True, all worldly wisdom is abstraction, and only the most mediocre eudaemonism has no abstraction whatever and is only enjoyment of the moment. A eudaemonistic philosophy of life is prudent to the degree that there is some abstraction in it; the more prudence, the more abstraction. This gives eudaemonism a fleeting resemblance to the ethical and the ethico-religious, and it can seem for a moment as if they could *proceed in a pair*. Yet it is not so, for the first step taken by the ethical is that of infinite abstraction, and what then? That step is too long for eudaemonism, and although some abstraction is prudence, eudaemonistically an infinite abstraction is madness. Perhaps a philosopher will want to say here that I am moving only within the sphere of ideas. Yes, it is true that it is easier to put things together on paper, where one stakes everything and in the same instant has everything. But if in existence I am to risk everything, and if, with my risky venture, I am to stay in existence, then I must keep on venturing constantly. The esteemed philosopher, as usual, moves the stage from existence to paper.

in, where there is room enough for the most intense gesture of the passion of the infinite, is uncertainty of knowledge regarding an eternal happiness, or the fact that the choice is in a finite sense madness; there, now there is room, now you can venture!

And that is why the eternal happiness as the absolute good has the remarkable trait that *it can be defined solely by the mode of acquisition*, whereas other goods, precisely because the mode of acquisition is accidental, or at any rate relatively dialectical, must be defined by the good itself. Money, for example, can both be acquired and had without acquisition, and these latter can in turn each differ in many ways, but money still remains the same good. And knowledge, for instance, is also variously obtainable according to talent and external circumstances, and therefore cannot be defined solely by the mode of acquisition. But concerning the eternal happiness nothing can be said except that it is the good which is to be attained by risking everything. Every description of the glory of this good is already as though an attempt to make several modes of acquisition possible, one easier, for example, and one more difficult, which proves that the description is not of the absolute good but only fancies itself to be that, while referring essentially to relative goods. And this is why in a certain sense it is so easy to talk about this good, and why the speaker will never find himself in a fix, as when it becomes clear in the case of relative goods that what helps one person does not help another. And this is why talk of this good is so brief, for there is no more to say than 'Risk everything', no anecdotes to tell about how Peter became rich by hard work and Paul by playing the lottery, and Hans by inheritance, and Mads by the change in the value of the currency, and Christopher by purchasing a piece of furniture from a secondhand dealer, etc. But in another sense the talk may be very long, the longest talk of all, because risking everything requires a transparency of consciousness that is acquired only very slowly. It is here that the religious talk has its task. Were it supposed merely to utter the brief words 'Risk everything', there would be no need in all the realm for more than one speaker; on the other hand, the longest address must never forget the risky venture. The religious address may embrace everything, so long as it constantly brings it all to bear on the absolute category of religiousness. It must follow every path, know where the errors are housed, where the moods have their hiding-places, know how the passions understand themselves in solitude (and every man who has passion is always to some extent solitary, only the drivellers are wholly swallowed up in social

life), know where the illusions tempt, where the paths swing off, etc., in order constantly to bring everything to bear on the absolute category of religiousness. If one human being can do something in this respect for another, then he is not to go to the trouble of passing on to China and Persia, because as religious discourse is higher than all other discourse, so all truly religious discourse knows nothing on the other side of the absolute good, an eternal happiness, for it knows that the task is not from the individual to the race but from the individual through the race (the universal) to reach the individual. The religious address is the way over to the good, that is to say, it simulates^m the path, which is as long as life; it simulates the path that the religious person describes, not in the sense in which the planet describes its path or the mathematician describes a circle. But there is no short cut to the absolute good, and since it can be described only by the mode of acquisition, the only mark by which one's relation to the absolute good can be known is the absolute difficulty of the latter. To stumble on it in an easier way (as by being born under especially favourable circumstances, for instance, in the nineteenth century, by being intelligent, by being born in the same town as a great man, or related by marriage to an Apostle), to be a favourite of fortune,⁸⁵ is merely evidence that one is being made a fool of, because Messrs Fortune's Favourites do not belong in the religious sphere. The merit of the religious discourse is to make the way difficult; for it is the way that is decisive, otherwise we have aesthetics. But Christianity has made that way as difficult as possible, and it is only an illusion, which has blinded many, that Christianity has made the way easy, since the only help it has given people is precisely through the beginning becoming far harder than it ever was. If a pagan has caught a glimpse of the absolute good, Christianity has helped – with the absurd. If this is left out, everything indeed has become much easier than in paganism; but if it is kept hold of, then everything is far more difficult; for it is easier to cling to a weak hope through one's *own powers* than to acquire certainty on the strength of the absurd. When an aesthetic sufferer bemoans his fate and seeks solace in

^m We see here again why the religious speaker must not use the foreshortened perspective. Aesthetically there is no path, because the aesthetic bears on immediacy and the foreshortened perspective expresses this. Ethically and ethico-religiously, however, it is precisely the path that is reflected upon, and what is true aesthetically is therefore ethically and ethico-religiously a deception.

⁸⁵ 'Pamphilus', an expression derived from Greek πάμφιλος: loved by all.

the ethical, the ethical really has the solace, *aber*⁸⁶ first it makes the aesthetic sufferer an even greater sufferer than he was before. If this consideration is left out, the ethical makes everything comfortable and easy, but then one is also taking the ethical in vain. However much an aesthetic sufferer bemoans his fate, he may very well come to suffer still more, and when he then sends for the ethical – well, first it helps him out of the frying-pan into the fire, so that he really has something to scream about – and only then does it help. So too with Christianity: it requires that the individual, in existing, risk everything (the pathetic aspect); this is something a pagan can also do, stake everything, for example, on immortality's 'if'. But Christianity requires that the individual also stake his thought, venturing to believe against the understanding (the dialectical aspect). And while that serious man never got as far as risking anything because he demanded certainty, then that there is one certainty is certain, namely that this is the absolute risky venture. Struggling through life on the basis of the 'if' of immortality may seem strenuous enough, and obtaining proof of the resurrection a huge relief – were it not for the fact that the proof is the greatest difficulty of all. To get everything with the help of an intermediary seems easy enough, compared with paganism, where the greatest exertion of the wise brought him but little gain; but now suppose that the most difficult thing of all is the very existence of an intermediary! To get everything with the help of a gospel does seem easy enough – if only there being a gospel were not the greatest difficulty. To be capable of everything through God is easy enough – if only not being capable of anything at all were not the most difficult thing of all, so difficult that in any generation there are probably few who can truthfully say that they are, day in and day out, even moderately aware that a human being is capable of nothing at all. But if you skip the dialectical, what happens? Why, the whole affair then becomes women's prattle and female wailing, for as all know, Jews and women wail in a single minute what a man cannot get through in a lifetime. If you skip over the dialectical, then the proof of the resurrection becomes, ironically enough, too convincing and the certainty of immortality less than in paganism. The intermediary then becomes an ambiguous character, an aesthetically showy person with a halo and a wishing-cap. The gospel becomes rumour, a piece of town gossip. Then the person able to do all things with God, who can do a little

⁸⁶ 'But'.

by himself and is polite enough to pretend it was through God, comes far behind the person who, in existing, even moderately practises the strenuous consciousness that he is capable of nothing. If we skip over the dialectical, all of Christianity becomes a facile make-believe, it becomes nothing but a superstition, yes, the most dangerous of superstitions, because it is superstitious belief in the truth, if indeed Christianity is the truth. Superstitious belief in untruth leaves open the possibility that truth may come and awaken it; but when the truth *is*, and the superstitious mode of apprehending it transforms it into a lie, no deliverance is possible. No, the lightness of Christianity has only one distinguishing feature: the difficulty. It is in this way that its yoke is easy and its burden light⁸⁷ – for him who has cast off everything, yes, all his burdens, those of hope, of fear, of despondency, and of despair – but that is very difficult. And the difficulty is again the absolute difficulty, not the comparative-dialectical one (easier for the one human being than for the other), because the difficulty relates to each individual separately and demands his absolute effort absolutely. For just as the religious sphere has no favourites of fortune or any lottery distributions, so too are there no wronged individualities.

§ 2

The essential expression of existential pathos: *suffering* – fortune and misfortune as aesthetic life-view in contrast to suffering as religious life-view (elucidated in the religious address) – suffering's actuality (humour) – suffering's actuality in the latter connection as the mark of an existing person relating to an eternal happiness – the illusion of religiousness – trial – the basis and meaning of suffering in the former connection: dying to immediacy yet remaining in the finite – an edifying divertimento – humour as the incognito of religiousness

From the preceding § it may be recalled that existential pathos is action or the transformation of existence. The set task was to relate at once absolutely to the absolute *τέλος* and relatively to relative ends. But this task must now be understood more closely in its concrete difficulty, in case the

⁸⁷ Matthew 11:30.

existential pathos is repealed into aesthetic pathos, as if it were existential pathos merely to *say* this once and for all, or once a month, with the passion of immediacy unchanged. If everything were decided on paper, one would begin on the ideal task straight away, but in existence the beginning must be made by practising the relation to the absolute τέλος, and by relieving immediacy of its power. On paper, the individual is a third party, a speedy something at one's disposal. The actual individual, after all, is indeed in immediacy and to that extent absolute within relative ends. Now the individual begins, not, please note, by all at once relating absolutely to the absolute τέλος and relatively to relative ends, since by being in immediacy he is in just the opposite situation, but by practising the absolute relation through renunciation. The task is ideal and maybe no one ever fulfils it; it is only on paper that one begins without further ado and is finished straight away. To relate absolutely to the absolute τέλος the individual must have practised the renunciation of relative ends, and only then can there be a question of the ideal task: relating at one time absolutely to the absolute and relatively to the relative; not before, since until this is done the individual always has something of the immediate and is involved to that extent in relating to the relative absolutely. And, even when he has got the better of immediacy, in his victory he is still in existence and so once more prevented from expressing absolutely the absolute relation to an absolute τέλος. Aesthetic pathos draws away from existence, or is in it through illusion; whereas existential pathos deepens itself in existing and interpenetrates with consciousness all illusions about it, and becomes more and more concrete by transforming existence in action.

Now, it might appear that to act is the very opposite of to suffer, and accordingly strange to say that the essential expression of existential pathos (which is acting) is suffering. This, however, is only how it seems; and here again we see what marks the religious sphere: that it is recognizable through the negativeⁿ (as opposed to the directness^o of

ⁿ The reader will recall: the mark of revelation is mystery, of blessedness suffering, of the certitude of faith uncertainty, of ease difficulty, of truth absurdity. If this is not insisted on, the aesthetic and the religious merge in a mutual confusion.

^o The existence-sphere of paganism is essentially the aesthetic; so it is quite appropriate for this to be reflected in the conception of God that holds that, though unchanged himself, he changes everything. This is the expression for acting in the external. The religious lies in the dialectic of taking to heart ['Inderliggjørelse', or inner absorption] and therefore means, in respect of the conception of God, that he himself is moved, is changed.

immediacy and the relative directness of the reflective), that what marks religious action is suffering. The ambiguity rests in the fact that acting can also mean acting in the external, which may be perfectly true but also means and suggests that we are then talking not in the sphere of the religious but in some other sphere. Acting in the external does indeed transform existence (as when an emperor conquers the whole world and makes its peoples into slaves), but it does not transform the individual's own; and acting in the external does transform the individual's existence (as when a lieutenant becomes emperor or a Jewish peddler a millionaire, or whatever else of the kind comes along), but not the individual's inner existence. All such action is therefore only aesthetic pathos, and the law is that for the aesthetic relation: the individual who is not made dialectical changes the world but remains himself unchanged, because the aesthetic individual never has the dialectical within himself but outside, or the individual is outwardly changed but remains inwardly unchanged. Accordingly, the scene is the external world, and therefore even introducing Christianity into a land can be an aesthetic affair, unless it is an Apostle that does it, for his existence is paradoxically dialectical; otherwise, if the individual is not changed, and does not steadily change within himself, to introduce Christianity into a realm is no more a religious action than conquering other countries. But the essential existential pathos relates to existing essentially; and to exist essentially is inwardness; and the action of inwardness is suffering, because changing himself⁸⁸ is something the individual cannot do, it becomes a kind of putting on of airs,⁸⁹ and that's why suffering is the highest action in the inner life. And just how difficult a business this is will be understood even by someone with but a small share of the impatience of immediacy that wants out and not in; to say nothing of someone turned almost totally outwards – unless this means that he remains entirely ignorant of inwardness being there.

Immediacy is good fortune, for in immediacy there is no contradiction; the one who is immediate, viewed essentially, is fortunate and *the life-view of immediacy is good fortune*. If asked where he got this life-view, this essential relation to good fortune, he might answer with vestal innocence, I don't understand it myself. The contradiction comes from outside and is misfortune. If it fails to come from outside, then the immediate person remains ignorant of its presence. When it does arrive, he *feels* the

⁸⁸ 'At skabe sig selv om'. ⁸⁹ 'At skabe sig Skaberi'.

misfortune yet does not *grasp* the suffering. One who is immediate never comes to terms with the misfortune, that is, he does not become dialectical in himself; and if he fails to free himself from its grip, this shows that he ultimately lacks a grip on himself; i.e., he despairs because he does not grasp it. Misfortune is like a narrow defile on the path of immediacy; the immediate person is now in that defile, but his life-view must essentially always imagine that it will come to an end, since it is alien. If it does not come to an end, he despairs, at which point immediacy ends and the transition is made possible to another understanding of misfortune; i.e., to grasping suffering, to an understanding that grasps not only this misfortune or that, but grasps suffering essentially.

Fortune, misfortune, fate, immediate enthusiasm, despair – these are what the aesthetic life-view command. Misfortune is an occurrence related to immediacy (fate); viewed ideally (in the light of the life-view of immediacy) it is not there or must go. The poet expresses this by elevating immediacy into an ideality where immediacy's good fortune is unlike anything found in the finite world. The poet here uses good fortune. On the other hand, the poet (who must always only operate within the compass of immediacy) has the individual brought low by succumbing to misfortune. This is the meaning, quite generally, of the hero's or heroine's death. But to grasp the misfortune, to come to terms with it, to turn everything around and make suffering the point of departure for a life-view, that is something the poet cannot do, or even want to involve himself in, for then he is fudging.⁹⁰

Inwardness (the ethical and ethico-religious individual), on the other hand, grasps suffering as being essential. While someone who is immediate involuntarily disregards misfortune, and when it is no longer in evidence does not know it is there, the religious individual has suffering constantly with him, demands suffering^P just as the immediate individual demands good fortune, and demands and has suffering even when

^P It is therefore a quite correct religious collision, though at the same time a rather remarkable aesthetic misunderstanding of the religious, when (e.g., in the Weil edition of Mohammedan biblical legends [see p. 346 n. h]) the religious person prays to God to become tried in sufferings as great as those of Abraham or some other chosen one. A prayer of that kind is a frothing over of religiousness, in the same sense as an Aladdin's enthusiasm and a young girl's happiness are a frothing over of immediacy. The misunderstanding rests in the religious person still seeing the suffering as coming from outside, hence seeing it aesthetically. In those

⁹⁰ 'Fuske', originally to do work as an apprentice that only the master should undertake. Hence (and in the following) also to 'fudge' or 'botch' something by working outside the sphere of one's competence, or in the latter respect 'dabble'.

misfortune is externally absent; for it is not misfortune he demands, for then the relation would still be aesthetic and he himself essentially undialectical in himself.

A perfectly executed poetic work may be less of a rarity than seeing or hearing a proper religious address that is clear about what categories it is supposed to use and how. But just as in a poetic work one sometimes finds in a particular character's mouth lines so reflectively self-transparent that the person who utters them is reflected right out of poetry's range, so too, often enough, the religious discourse is a sad hodge-podge of a little from every sphere. But of course, being a poet requires a call – to become a religious speaker you need only pass three exams – and then getting a call is a certainty.

Naturally, the religious address does not always have to speak of suffering, but in whatever it says, wherever it disports itself, whatever path it takes to catch men,⁹¹ and however much it testifies monologically to the speaker's own existence, it must always have its totality category with it as a standard, so that the experienced listener sees at once the total orientation in the life-view of the address. The religious address may therefore speak about everything if only it always, directly or indirectly, has with it its absolute standard. Just as it is confusing to learn^q geography only from large-scale maps, never having seen on a terrestrial globe how the various countries are related to one another, so that, for example, Denmark looks deceptively as if it were as large as Germany, so too the particularities of the religious address produce confusion when the totality category does not everywhere provide orientation, even if only indirectly. The religious address is required to *lift up through suffering*. Just as immediacy has its faith in good fortune, so the faith of the religious sphere lies precisely in suffering. It is required therefore to go out resolutely and mightily upon the deep.⁹² As soon as the religious address glances sidelong at fortune, comforts with probability, provides temporary strength, it is a false teaching, a withdrawal into the aesthetic, and therefore

stories, the religious person usually turns out to be too weak to endure the suffering. This explains nothing, however, and the way out again lies in a not uninteresting *confinium* [boundary] between the aesthetic and the religious.

^q But if one assumes, as I am quite willing to admit is the case with many a religious address, that it is more difficult to be a listener of such an address than to be the speaker, then indeed the religious address is made ironically superfluous and serves only as a purgatory in which the individual disciplines himself so as to be able to be edified by everything in God's house.

⁹¹ Luke 5:10. ⁹² Luke 5:4.

fudging. For in immediacy's eyes poetry is the transfiguration of life, but for religiousness it is a beautiful and amiable jest whose consolation religiousness nevertheless spurns, because it is precisely in suffering that the religious breathes. Immediacy expires in misfortune; in suffering religiousness begins to draw breath. It is a matter of keeping the spheres always sharply apart from one another through the qualitative dialectic, so as not to let everything become one; but the poet surely becomes a fudger when he wants to take along a little of the religious, and the religious speaker a deceiver who holds the listeners back by wanting to dabble in the aesthetic. As soon, then, as a religious address divides people into the fortunate and the unfortunate, it is *eo ipso* a fudging, because from the religious viewpoint all human beings are suffering, and it is a matter precisely of entering into the suffering (not by plunging into it, but discovering that one *is* in it), not of escaping misfortune. From the religious viewpoint, the fortunate person with whom the whole world would go along is just as much a suffering person if he is religious as one to whom misfortune comes from the outside. From the religious viewpoint, the 'fortunate/unfortunate' distinction can still be used, but only jokingly and ironically to cheer people up into entering into suffering so as, from there, to define the religious.

But the religious address one hears today is seldom correct in its categories. The highly honoured speaker forgets that religiousness is inwardness, that inwardness is the individual's relation to himself before God, its reflection within himself, and that it is exactly from here that the suffering comes, but also has the fact of its essential appertaining to religion based in this, so that its absence signifies the absence of religiousness. The speaker perceives the individual as relating only to a world, a small or greater surrounding world, and then dishes out something about fortune and misfortune, that the unfortunate one must not lose courage for there are many people who are even more unfortunate, and besides, there is always the likelihood that 'with God's help things will get better',^r and finally, that it is through adversity that one becomes anything, would the worshipful Madsen ever have become a dignitary if he had not, etc.! There you see! This is something people really like to hear, because it is

^r Thus a great many people straightaway assume that if God's name is mentioned then the talk is religious. In that way swearing is also godly talk if one uses God's name. No, an aesthetic life-view, even interspersed with the names of both God and Christ, is still an aesthetic life-view; and when presented, the address is aesthetic, not religious.

religious to preach remission from the religious, remission from the inspiration of religiousness in suffering. When the religious speaker forgets that his setting is inwardness and the individual's relation to himself, his task is in essence the same as the poet's, and he should remain silent since the poet can do it better. When the religious speaker refers in this way to misfortune, not only is it scandalous from the religious viewpoint (since he makes himself out to be a religious speaker), he also incurs the satirizing nemesis that, as a consequence of what he says, there are favourites of fortune who just do not suffer – the most questionable of all things from the religious viewpoint. The invitation to a religious discourse is quite simply this: Come here all you that labour and are heavy laden⁹³ – and the address presupposes that all suffer, indeed that they all should. The speaker is not to go down among the listeners and pick out one, should there be such, and say to him: 'No, you are much too blessed by fortune to need my talk', since from the lips of a religious speaker this should sound like the most biting irony. The distinction between fortunate and unfortunate is just a joke, and so the speaker should say: 'We are all sufferers, happy in our suffering – this is what we strive for; but there he sits, the lucky one, whom everything, yes, everything favours as in a fairytale, but woe to him if he is not a sufferer.' But the religious address is seldom planned in this way; at best it is only in the third section that the real religious reflection arrives, i.e., after every possible expedient has been tried in the first two-thirds to avoid the religious, and the religious listener left in doubt as to whether he has been attending a dance at the poet's, or edification at the priest's. In this way it easily comes to look as though, instead of being the same for all, and that through the same suffering, which is the victory of the religious over the joke about fortune and misfortune, the religious is after all only for the exceptionally unfortunate – a glorious honour for the religious this, to be included as a squalid subdivision of a section of the aesthetic. Certainly, the religious is the last comfort, but there is a misery greater than that of being in the poetic sense the least fortunate of all; it is to be so incomparably fortunate as to have no grasp at all of the suffering that is the element of the religious life.

No doubt the priest usually thinks of such incomparably fortunate ones as existing only in fairytales, but in life itself misfortune overtakes most people and then the priest has them for treatment once more. Yes, that may be so, but the priest should have enough confidence in the religious not to thrust it

⁹³ Matthew 11:28.

on people in this way. He should joke carelessly about a man having become as lucky as someone in a fairytale, yet mean that suffering is part of true life. He should hit out hard at anyone who wants only to mourn misfortune and hearken only to the consolation that says that his ill luck will surely go away, since a person like that really wants only to avoid the religious. Just as Lafontaine⁹⁴ sat weeping and made his heroes unhappy in three volumes (quite rightly a poet's task), so it is up to the religious speaker to obtain his amusement, if I may so put it, from making his heroes as fortunate as they wish, making them kings and emperors and happy lovers who win the girl, and millionaires, etc. – but at the same time making sure to provide them with suffering in their inner lives. For the more good fortune and favour there is in the external world, when there is nevertheless suffering, the clearer it is that the latter is in the inner world; and the clearer it becomes that the religious here is *prima* as against the priest's *mélange*.⁹⁵

When the religious view of life is asserted in its category, the religious speaker shall have sufficient religious elevation to be able to put the entire compass of poetry to comic use. Take an individuality with a wish. If he goes to the poet, the latter sees straight away that he can use him in two ways, either on the side of good fortune with the help of the wizardry of the wish, or on the side of misfortune to the point of despair. Poetically, and whether fortune or misfortune overtakes him, the task is exactly a swelling up in imagination; and there is to be no fudging. But let the same individual go to the priest: the latter, from his religious elevation, will turn it all into a joke for him; in a religiously inspired conviction of the significance of suffering for the highest life, he will teach him to smile at all wishful longing, and to raise himself above the pain of frustrated desire – by proclaiming greater sufferings. For when in a fix, and the carriage is stuck fast in the impassable, or leans over in the deep ruts, the driver uses the whip not out of cruelty, but convinced that it helps, and only mollicoddlers dare not strike. But no fudging. The religious address claims for itself the respectful freedom to take being human along quite directly, pretty much like death, which also takes human beings along directly, whether they are emperors, civic dignitaries, or hired labourers, whether they are extremely fortunate and distinguished by fortune with the highest grades, or extremely unfortunate and with very low grades. If the priest

⁹⁴ A. H. J. Lafontaine (1758–1831), popular German writer of sentimental novels and short stories.

⁹⁵ A reference to qualities of tobacco.

cannot make a religious person out of the wisher, or more correctly, if this is not what the priest himself wishes, then he is just a poet-quack – and the thing to do then is to let the poet prevail, and either become lucky or else despair. For the situation should be this: if the poet's talk is thrilling enough to make young girls and youth flush with enthusiasm, then the enthusiasm of the religious talk should be enough to make the poet grow pale with envy at the thought of there being an enthusiasm in which becoming fortunate is not the point, nor giving in to the recklessness of despair, no, where the enthusiasm is to suffer. But mundane good sense will say that poetry is a young girl's hysteria, religiousness a man's frenzy.⁹⁶ Therefore the religious speaker has no need of a loud voice,⁹⁷ for he shows his loftiness most surely through the imperturbability with which he stays inside the impregnable position of the religious; for the religious does not contend with the aesthetic as with an equal; it does not contend with it at all but has overcome it as a joke.

Just as the mark of the poet should be his ability to tackle with pathos the imagination-passion of the infinite in fortune and despair, as well as tweak the nose, comically and with no holds barred, of every finite passion and philistinism, so too the mark of the religious speaker should be his ability to tackle with pathos the enthusiasm of suffering and to look in jestingly upon the imaginative passion of the infinite. And just as the poet is to be a benevolent spirit instantly prepared to serve the fortunate in the enchanted land of illusion, or a sympathetic spirit instantly prepared to be of service to the unfortunate, but again benevolently by being for the one who despairs his own loud voice, so too the religious speaker, in confrontation with the imagination-passion of the infinite, is either to be just as morose and constricted and sluggish as the day spent in the living-room, and the night by the sickbed, and the week amid the cares of living – in case it should seem easier in church than in the living-room – or else be even swifter than the poet in making everyone as fortunate as they please, but ironically, please note, so as to show that all this good fortune is an irrelevance, and similarly misfortune, but suffering an essential ingredient in the highest life.

When Juliet sinks down helplessly because she has lost Romeo,⁹⁸ when immediacy has expired in her breast and she has so lost Romeo that even

⁹⁶ See Acts 26:24–5. ⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Act v, Scene 3, of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Juliet stabs herself on waking and seeing Romeo dead beside her.

Romeo himself can no longer comfort, because possession itself might only be a sad everyday recollection; and when the last friend, that last friend of all unhappy lovers, the poet, falls silent – then the religious speaker will dare to break the silence, but then perhaps to offer a little assortment of excellent grounds for comfort? The mortified Juliet would then surely turn to the poet, and the poet, with aesthetic authority triumphant, assigning His Reverence a place in the low comedy parts of the tragedy,⁸ would defend what in all eternity is his by right: the lovable, the despairing Juliet. No, the religious orator shall dare to proclaim new suffering, still more terrible, and this will bring Juliet to her feet again.

Or when the despairing person, even on someone just making an approach to him, summarily condemns him with his proud glance as a traitor, which is to say, as one who would bring comfort; when the wrath on his countenance puts a death sentence on anyone who has the impudence to want to bring comfort, so that all the comforters and grounds for comfort merge in farcical terror, just as milk curdles before a thunderstorm, then the religious speaker will understand how to gain a hearing – by speaking of more terrible suffering and danger.

Above all, the religious address must never use the foreshortened perspective, which corresponds to the aesthetic as a simulated ethical movement. Aesthetically, this perspective is the fascination of illusion and the only thing proper, since poetry relates to someone observing. But the religious address is to relate to one who acts, and whose actions have accordingly to be worked on when he gets home. So if the religious address uses this foreshortened perspective, the wretched outcome is a confusion that makes the task look far easier in church than at home in the living-room, and then going to church can only do harm. The speaker is therefore to spurn the foreshortened perspective as an illusion of

⁸ Once a priest is uncertain of his religious category and mistakes himself for poetic *Anklänge* [harmonics, resonances] bound up with life-experience, then the poet is naturally by far his superior. The person who understands how to compute the relations among the categories will readily perceive that a spiritual adviser of that kind would provide just about one of the most common motifs for a comic figure in a tragedy. An ordinary person who represented the same rubbish, the secret of which is that it has even lost sight of the poetic point, e.g., a barber's apprentice, or an undertaker, would naturally be comic too, but not as fundamentally comic as the spiritual adviser whose name and black gown lay claim to the highest pathos. To use a spiritual adviser with pathos in a tragedy is a misunderstanding, for if he essentially represents what he essentially is, the whole tragedy breaks down; and if he does not represent it essentially, then *eo ipso* he is to be grasped as comic. Hypocritical and malicious monks are common enough in tragedies; I believe that a clerical-secular chatterbox like that in full canonicals would be closer to today's situation.

youth – so that someone being tested in the living-room is absolved from disparaging the speaker's address as an immaturity. When a poet uses it, and the observer sits quietly absorbed in contemplation, it is glorious, enchanting. But when a religious speaker uses it and the listener is an acting person on the move, all he does is help him bang his head against the living-room door. The religious speaker operates in the reverse way, without any ending, there being no outcome precisely because suffering belongs to the religious life essentially. So, while a stupid fuss quite often arises as to whether the priest actually practises what he preaches, my own view is that all presumptuous criticism in that direction should be dropped and held in check. Yet one thing can, and should, be demanded of the speaker, that his address be such that it *can* be acted upon, so that the real listener is not made a fool of, yes, just when he would practise what the priest preaches, for preacher-talk is dust in your eyes, whether he is busy about grand world-historical visions and matchless hawk-eyed views that are impossible to act on; or he talks aesthetically in riddles also impossible to act on; or he describes imaginary states of mind that the acting person seeks in vain in reality; or he comforts with illusions which the acting person does not find in reality; or he conjures up passions that could occur only to those who do not have them; or he overcomes dangers that do not exist, leaving the real dangers untouched, overcomes them with the force of theatrical effects not found in life and leaves real life's vital powers unexploited; in short he plays trump aesthetically, speculatively, world-historically, and in the religious declares 'I pass'.

But suffering as the essential expression of existential pathos means that there is actual suffering, or that its actuality is the existential pathos, and by *the actuality of the suffering is understood its persistence as essential for the pathos-filled relation to an eternal happiness*, so that the suffering is not treacherously revoked, or the individual goes beyond it, which is to go back, contriving somehow to shift the scene from existence to an imaginary medium. Just as resignation saw to it that the individual had the absolute orientation towards the absolute τέλος, so the persistence of suffering guarantees that the individual is in position and holds himself there. One who is immediate cannot grasp misfortune, he only feels it; misfortune is therefore stronger than he is, and this relation of the imagination-passion to immediacy is despair. Through the foreshortened perspective, the poet presents this quite properly in the medium of imagination as if now it were all over. In existence this looks otherwise,

and here the one who is immediate becomes fairly often ridiculous, with an unmanly shrieking just at that moment, which in the next is forgotten. When immediacy in the individual is damaged in this way, receives a little knock, ways out have to be found, since the setting is not in the medium of imagination. Then along comes the whole band of experienced and sensible people, patch-workers and menders, who hammer or hold the pieces together with probability and grounds for comfort. Life proceeds, advice is sought from the wise of clerical or secular station, and it all becomes a muddle – one lets go of the aesthetic yet without getting hold of the religious.

For, as mentioned, from the religious viewpoint it is a matter of grasping the suffering and remaining in it in a way in which reflection is turned *upon* the suffering and not *away from* it. While the poetic production is in the medium of imagination, a poet-existence may indeed at times indicate a *confinium*⁹⁹ to the religious, though differing from it qualitatively. A poet is often a sufferer in existence, but then it is the poetic work resulting from this that we reflect upon. The existing poet who suffers in existence in this way does not really grasp his suffering; he does not enter into it more deeply, but in the suffering he looks for a way out of it, finding relief in the work of production itself, in the poetic anticipation of a more perfect (a happier) order of things. An actor, especially a comic actor, can also sometimes be a sufferer in existence in this way; but he does not enter into it more deeply, he looks for a way out of it, and finds relief in the false identities that his art encourages. But from the enchantment of the work of poetry and the order of things wished for in imagination, from the identification with poetic characters, both the poet and the actor return to the suffering of actuality that they are unable to grasp, due to having their existence in the aesthetic dialectic between fortune and misfortune. The poet can explain (transfigure)¹⁰⁰ all existence, but he cannot make himself clear, because he does not want to become religious and grasp the secret of suffering as the form of the highest life, higher than all good fortune and differing from all misfortune. For this is the severity of the religious, that it begins by making everything more severe, and its relation to poetry is not that of a new

⁹⁹ Latin: boundary.

¹⁰⁰ 'Transfigurere', elevate, glorify. A play here on the two senses of 'forklare' ('explain', or 'make clear', and 'transfigure').

wishing-device, an altogether new evasion undreamed of by poetry, but of a difficulty that creates men just as war creates heroes.

The actuality of the suffering is therefore not identical with the expression's truth, although someone actually suffering will always express himself truly. But here it is not a matter of expression, since speech itself, the word being a more abstract medium than existence, is always foreshortened to a degree. Thus, suppose I imagined a poet-existence suffering bodily and mentally in its final agony, and among the posthumous papers were to be found the following outburst: 'Just as the sick person longs to tear off the bandage, so my sound spirit longs to shake off this bodily fatigue, the suffocating poultice that is the body and its fatigue; just as the victorious general shouts as his horse is shot from under him, A new horse! – Ah, if only my spirit's conquering vigour might cry out for a new body, for only the body is worn out; just as the person in mortal danger in the sea, when another drowning person wants to cling to him, pushes him away with the might of despair, so my body clings like a heavy weight to my spirit to become the downfall of death; just as a steamship in a storm whose machinery is too large for the construction of the hull – that is how I suffer.' One cannot deny the truth of the expression or the horror of the suffering, but what about the actuality of the suffering's pathos? How so, one may ask, isn't this what actual suffering is, this fear? No, because here the existing person understands the suffering as accidental. Just as, abstractly, he wants to shake off his body, so he wants to shake off his suffering as an accident, and for him the actuality of suffering as it is for the religious person would be a hard teaching.

The actuality of the suffering means its essential persistence and is its essential relation to the religious life. Aesthetically, suffering stands in an accidental relation to existence. Accidental suffering may indeed persist, but the persistence of something in itself accidental is no essential persistence. So once the religious speaker uses the foreshortened perspective, whether concentrating all suffering in a single moment or opening up a smiling prospect of better times, he is reverting to the aesthetic realm, and his interpretation of suffering becomes a simulated religious movement. When Scripture says that God dwells in a contrite heart,¹⁰¹ what this expresses is not an accidental, transitory or momentary situation (in that case the word 'dwells' would be extremely infelicitous) but, on the

¹⁰¹ Isaiah 57:15, 'contrite' in the primary sense of 'bruised' or 'crushed'.

contrary, the essential meaning of suffering for the God–relationship. But if, on the other hand, the religious speaker is not at home and a seasoned hand¹⁰² in the sphere of the religious, he will understand the saying as follows: ‘Misfortune comes from outside and crushes a man’s heart; then the God–relationship begins, and then, yes, little by little the religious man becomes happy again’ – but stop a moment, does he become happy through the God–relationship? For in that case he remains in his suffering. Or does he perhaps become happy through coming into a rich uncle’s money, or acquiring a wealthy sweetheart, or with the help of the appeal that His Reverence kindly initiated in *Adresseavisen*?¹⁰³ In that case the discourse regresses,[†] although sometimes it is in this last part that a reverend becomes most eloquent and gesticulates most vigorously, presumably because the religious category hasn’t such a good taste and goes down more easily with a smattering of poetry – yes, smattering, because the very worldly wisdom that a spiritual adviser of this kind adds to the poetic is, for poetry itself, an offence, a disgusting and defamatory attempt to treat Juliet as if she only appeared to be dead. Someone who, having been dead, awakens¹⁰⁴ to the same life, only appeared to be dead, and

[†] In this way the religious talk, too, regresses, e.g., when a man says: ‘After many errors, I learned finally to cling to God in earnest, and he has not left me since. My business is flourishing, my projects prosper, I am now happily married and my children are healthy,’ etc. Here the religious man has returned to the aesthetic dialectic, for even if he is good enough to say that he thanks God for all these blessings, the question is still the way he thanks him, whether he does it directly or first makes the movement of uncertainty that is the mark of the God–relationship. For just as a person in the midst of misfortune has no right to say to God directly that this is misfortune, since in the movement of uncertainty he has to suspend his understanding, so too he may not take all these good things directly as evidence of the God–relationship. The direct relation is an aesthetic one and indicates that in his thanksgiving he relates not to God but to his own idea of fortune and misfortune. For the fact is that if a human being cannot know for certain whether a misfortune is an evil (the uncertainty of the God–relationship), then he cannot know for certain whether his good fortune is a good. The only evidence of the God–relationship is the relationship itself, everything else is ambiguous, because religiously for every human being, however old he becomes, in regard to the dialectic of the external, it is a matter of being born yesterday and knowing nothing [cf. Job 8:9]. Thus the great actor Seydelmann [Karl Seydelmann, German actor (1795–1845)] (as I see from Røtscher’s biography), on the night that he was garlanded in the Opera House ‘to applause lasting several minutes’, on coming home, fervently thanked God for all of this. The very fervour shows that he did not give thanks to God, for had he been hissed off the stage he would have rebelled against God with the same passion. If he had given thanks religiously and so thanked God, then the Berlin audience and the laurel wreath and the applause lasting several minutes would have become ambiguous in the dialectical uncertainty of the religious.

¹⁰² ‘Heelbefaren’, a fully qualified deckhand, able-bodied as opposed to ordinary seaman. See the final sentence of the ‘declaration’ appended to this work.

¹⁰³ See p. 66 n. 3.

¹⁰⁴ Cf., as a matter of interest, the title of Ibsen’s last play, *When We Dead Awaken* (1899).

Catherine (she's not called Juliet, now a peasant girl has arrived, as we say to children, instead of the lovely figure of poetry) will prove it by finding herself a new husband. But anyone dead who awakens to life in a new sphere was, is, and remains in truth dead. No, it is splendid of poetry to have Juliet die, but just as that worldly wisdom is an offence to poetry, so to the religious it is an abomination. The religious address honours Juliet as dead, and will for that very reason work to the very edge of the miraculous by bidding her awaken to a new life in a new sphere. And the religious is a new life, whereas that preacher-talk had neither the aesthetic magnanimity to take Juliet's life^u nor the enthusiasm of suffering to believe in a new life.

The actuality of the suffering means, then, its essential persistence as essential for the religious life, while, aesthetically, suffering stands in an accidental relation to existence; it can just as soon be there, but then also just as soon end. Viewed religiously, however, its ending is also the end of the religious life. Since an existing humorist is the closest approximation to one who is religious, he too has an essential conception of the suffering that he is in, in that he does not grasp existence as one thing and fortune and misfortune as something that happens to the one existing, but exists in a way in which suffering stands in relation to existence. But it is then that the humorist makes the treacherous turn, revoking the suffering in the form of jest. He grasps suffering's meaning in relation to existence but he does not grasp the meaning of suffering. He grasps that it belongs to existing but he does not grasp its meaning otherwise than that suffering does so belong. The first is the pain in the humorous, the second is the jest – and this is why one both weeps and laughs when he speaks. In the pain, he touches the secret of existence, but then he goes back home. The profundity is his grasping suffering together with existing, and that therefore all human beings suffer as long as they exist. By suffering, the humorist does not understand calamities, as if an existing person would be happy if these named misfortunes were not there. This the humorist understands very well, and it may therefore sometimes occur to him to mention some altogether incidental little annoyance that no one else would call a misfortune, and say that, but for it, he would be happy. As,

^u When it was said earlier that the religious address hits out while the aesthetic is sparing, and now it is said that poetry has the courage to take Juliet's life, this is also to direct a blow, and without any contradiction striking the account. Letting Juliet die is the tender sympathy of the aesthetic, but to proclaim new suffering, and accordingly direct a blow, is the harsh sympathy of the religious.

for example, when a humorist says: 'If I could only live to see the day when my landlord has a new bell-pull installed in my apartment building, so that it would be possible to know quickly and for sure whom the bell is ringing for in the evening; I would then count myself extremely happy.' Everyone who understands repartee understands at once, on hearing such talk, that the speaker has cancelled the distinction between fortune and misfortune in a higher lunacy – because all are suffering. The humorist grasps the profundity but at the very same moment it strikes him that getting involved in an explanation is doubtless not worth the trouble. This retraction is the jest. So when an existing humorist converses with someone who is immediate, for instance, an unfortunate who has his life in the distinction between fortune and misfortune, he again gives a humorous effect to the situation. The expression for suffering that the humorist has at his command^v satisfies the unfortunate, but then the profundity comes and takes away the distinction in which the other has his life, and then comes the joke. If the unfortunate were to say, 'For me it's all over,' the humorist might continue: 'Yes, what poor wretches we humans are in all these life's miseries; we all suffer; now if only I could live to see the day when my landlord installs a new bell-pull ... I would count myself extremely happy.' And the humorist says this is by no means in order to hurt the unfortunate's feelings. But the misunderstanding is that, when all is said and done, the unfortunate believes in good fortune (because immediacy cannot grasp suffering), which is why the misfortune is for him something specific, on which he fastens all his attention in the thought that, if it went away, he would be happy. The humorist, on the other hand, has grasped suffering in a way that makes him find all documentation superfluous, and express this by referring to whatever first comes to mind.

The Latinist says *respice finem*¹⁰⁵ and takes the expression seriously; but it contains a kind of contradiction in so far as *finis* as the end has not yet arrived and so lies ahead, while *respicere* is to look back. It is in fact a similar contradiction that we find in the humorous explanation of existence. It assumes that, if existing is something like walking down a path,

^v Irony, by contrast, would be recognizable by its not expressing the pain but in replying teasingly with the help of the abstract dialectic that protests against the excess in the unfortunate's cry of pain. Humour thinks rather that it is not enough, and the humorist's indirect expression of suffering is also much stronger than any direct expression.

¹⁰⁵ Latin: look to the end.

the curious thing about existence is that the goal lies behind – and yet one is obliged to keep going forward, since forward is the metaphor for existing. The humorist grasps the meaning of suffering as inherent in existence, but then he revokes it all, because the explanation lies behind.

As a humorist exists so does he express himself, and at times one does hear a humorist speak. In books his lines are usually exaggerated. But let a humorist say what he has in mind and he will speak, for example, as follows: What is the meaning of life? Yes, good question. How should I know? We're born yesterday and know nothing. But this much I do know, that the most pleasant thing is to trudge along through the world unknown, unknown to His Majesty the King, to Her Majesty the Queen, to His Royal Highness Prince Ferdinand, because such fine acquaintance only makes life uncomfortable and awkward, just as it must be for a prince living in poverty in a village to be known by his royal family. To me it seems likewise that to be known *in time by God* makes life enormously strenuous. Everywhere where he is present each half hour is of infinite importance. Yet to live like that for sixty years is unsupportable. It is difficult enough putting up even with the three years' hard study for an examination, and those are still not as strenuous as half an hour like this. Everything falls apart in contradiction. We are almost harangued into believing that we should live with the full passion of the infinite and purchase the eternal. All right, one grabs hold of oneself, puts one's best foot forward, that of the infinite, and comes running at passion's highest speed; nobody under the bombardment could hurry faster;¹⁰⁶ the Jew who fell from the gallery¹⁰⁷ could not be more precipitate. What happens? We are told: The auction is postponed, the hammer will not fall today, perhaps only sixty years from now. So one packs and is about to leave, and what happens? That very instant the speaker comes rushing up and says: But it is still possible, perhaps this very second, that everything will be decided by the hammer-stroke of death. What does that mean? Everyone gets just as far *am Ende*.¹⁰⁸ It is the same with existence as it is for me with my doctor. I complained of not feeling well. He replied: You are probably drinking too much coffee and walk too little. Three weeks later I speak with him again and say: I really don't feel well but now it can't be the coffee, because I don't touch it; nor lack of exercise since I walk all day. He replies: Well then, the reason must be that you are not

¹⁰⁶ In September 1807 Copenhagen was bombarded for several days by the British fleet.

¹⁰⁷ Seemingly a reference to Eutyclus in Acts 20:7–12. ¹⁰⁸ 'In the end'.

drinking coffee and walk too much. That's how it is; my indisposition was and remained the same, but when I drink coffee it comes from my drinking it, and when I do not drink coffee it comes from my not drinking it. So too with us human beings. Our whole earthly existence is a kind of indisposition. To anyone who asks the reason, one first asks him how he has arranged his life, and then as soon as he has answered, one says: There, that's the reason. When someone else asks, one does the same, and if he says the opposite, one answers: There it is, that's the reason – and then one walks away with an air of importance as though one has explained everything, until one turns the corner, when one sticks one's tail between one's legs and sneaks off. Even if someone gave me ten rix-dollars I would not take it upon myself to explain the riddle of existence. Why should I? If life is a riddle, then the author of the riddle will presumably explain it in the end. I have not invented temporality, but on the other hand I see that in *Den Frisindede*, *Freischütz*¹⁰⁹ and other papers that assign riddles, the explanation follows in the next issue. Now, of course, usually some old maid or state pensioner is mentioned with praise for having guessed the riddle, i.e., knowing the solution one day in advance – the difference is then not so great.

In our day people have been quite frequently inclined to mistake the humorous for the religious, even for the Christian-religious, which is why I keep on trying to come back to it. There is nothing really far-fetched in this, for precisely as the *confinium*¹¹⁰ of the religious is the humorous, it is very comprehensive. It is able to take on, especially in a sad tone of voice, a deceptive likeness to the religious in a wider sense, but then only for someone not used to seeing to the totality-category. No one can know this better than I, who am in essence myself a humorist and, with my life in immanent categories, seek the Christian-religious.

In order to throw light on the actuality of suffering in its essential persistence, I shall now once more highlight a final dialectical attempt to revoke it, to transform it into a constantly annulled moment. Aesthetically, misfortune is related contingently to existence; aesthetically, the reflection is not on the suffering but away from it. Aesthetic babble would have worldly wisdom or prudence give meaning to suffering

¹⁰⁹ *The Free Thinker* (*Den Frisindede*, a Danish journal), *The Free Shooter* (*Der Freischütz*, a Hamburg journal). Both presented their readers with puzzles the solutions to which were given in the next number.

¹¹⁰ Latin: boundary.

in a finite teleology, a person is trained through hardships to become something in the finite; humour grasped suffering together with existing, but revoked the essential meaning of suffering for the existing person. So let us now see if it is possible to revoke suffering with the help of an infinite teleology. Suffering does not itself have meaning for an eternal happiness – *ergo*, I should be happy for my suffering. That is, can an existing person, as he is expressing his relation to an eternal happiness as the absolute τέλος by his suffering, at the same time, by being aware of this relation, be beyond the suffering, seeing that the essential expression for the essential relation to an eternal happiness is not suffering but joy – not of course the direct joy which the religious address sometimes wants us to imagine, taking us back to a little aesthetic, unabashed whoopee – no, joy in the consciousness that the suffering signifies the relation. Let us not now go and put down on paper: Which is the higher? And perhaps having posited that the latter is higher perhaps even be through with it. But let us rather imprint in ourselves that the question of which of these two relations is the higher is not raised *in abstracto*,¹¹¹ but asks, Which of them is possible for someone existing? Because to be in existence is always somewhat constraining and the question is whether this is not just one more of the pressures it imposes, namely, that one who exists cannot effect the dialectical transaction in which suffering is converted into joy. In the eternal happiness there is no suffering, but when someone existing relates to it, the relation is quite properly expressed by suffering. If someone existing were capable, through knowing that this suffering signifies the relation, of raising himself above the suffering, then he would also be able to transform himself from someone existing into someone who is eternal, but no doubt he refrains from doing that. But if that is something he cannot do, he is once more in the situation of suffering, that this knowledge must be held fast in the existence-medium. At that very instant, the perfection of joy is not brought off, as must always be the case when it has to be possessed in an imperfect form. The pain over this is once more the essential expression of the relation.

It is true that we read in the New Testament that when they were scourged the Apostles went away rejoicing, thanking God that it was vouchsafed to them to suffer for the sake of Christ.¹¹² Quite right, and I have no doubt that the Apostles were strong enough in their faith to

¹¹¹ Latin: abstractly. ¹¹² Acts 5:40–1.

rejoice and give thanks to God even in the moment of physical pain, just as indeed we find examples among pagans of a strength of mind that makes them rejoice even in the moment of bodily suffering, as, for example, Scaevola.¹¹³ But the suffering spoken of in that passage is not religious suffering, on which the New Testament says on the whole very little, and if a so-called religious address wants to make us believe that everything an Apostle suffers is *eo ipso* religious suffering, that only shows how unclear such an address is about the categories, for this is a counterpart to the assumption that every address in which the name of God occurs is a godly address. No, when the individual is secure in his God-relationship and suffers only in the external, this is not religious suffering. This kind of suffering is aesthetic-dialectic, just like misfortune in relation to the immediate person – it can come and it can stay away – yet no one can rightly deny that a person is religious because he has suffered no misfortune. However, lacking experience of such misfortune does not mean that he is without suffering if in fact he is religious; for suffering is precisely the expression of the God-relationship, that is, the religious suffering that marks the God-relationship, and the fact that he has not become blessed by being exempted from the relation to an absolute τέλος.

So at the time the martyr (for at this point I do not wish to say more about an Apostle, since his life is paradoxically dialectical, his situation qualitatively different from that of others, and his mode of existence is warranted when it is as no one else's dares to be) is martyred, he may well transcend the bodily pain in joy. But at the time that the individual suffers religiously, he cannot at the same time transcend the suffering in joy over the meaning of this suffering, as though the relationship were beyond the suffering; for the suffering concerns precisely the fact that he is separated from his joy, but it also signifies the relationship, so that to be without suffering means that one is not religious. The immediate person does not exist essentially, for as immediate he is the happy unity of finitude and infinitude, to which correspond, as was shown, fortune and misfortune as coming from outside. The religious person is inflected inwards and conscious, in existing, of being in the course of becoming and yet relates to an eternal happiness. As soon as the suffering subsides and the

¹¹³ Latin: left-handed. C. Mucius, a young Roman who, on being captured by the Etruscan invader (c. 500 BC) and threatened with torture, thrust his right hand into the altar fire and let it burn to show how little he heeded pain, an act that so impressed the Etruscan king that he sued for peace with the Romans. The story is told in various versions, the best-known being that of Livy in *The History of Rome from Its Foundation* (2.12.1–13.5).

individual acquires a sense of security, so that, like immediacy, he relates to fortune and misfortune alone, then this is an indication that he is an aesthetic individuality who has strayed into the religious sphere; and it is always easier to confuse the spheres than to keep them apart. An errant aesthete of this kind may be someone reborn, or a speculating thinker. The one who is reborn is absolutely secure in his own God-relationship (poor fellow, this security is unfortunately the one sure sign that an existing person is not relating to God) and now has only much to do with treating the rest of the world to tracts;¹¹⁴ a speculating thinker has done with it on paper and mistakes this for existence.

There is a passage where the Apostle Paul mentions religious suffering, and there too one finds that the suffering becomes the mark of blessedness. I refer of course to the passage in Corinthians about the thorn in the flesh.¹¹⁵ He tells how it once happened to him though he does not know whether he was in or out of the body when transported into the third heaven. Let us now, once and for all, bear in mind that it is an Apostle who is speaking, and then let us talk of this quite plainly and directly. So it happened to him once, just once. Now of course, to someone existing it can hardly happen every day; the very existing prevents that, indeed prevents it in so far as it is reserved for an Apostle, as the appointed one, to experience such a thing only once. He does not know whether he was in the body or out of the body, but that can hardly happen every day to someone existing, precisely because he is a particular existing human being. Indeed, from the Apostle we learn that it happens so rarely that even to the Apostle, the appointed one, it happened only once. And then what? What mark did it leave on the Apostle that this had happened to him? A thorn in the flesh – that is, a suffering.

We other humans are satisfied with less, but the situation remains just the same. Someone who is religious is not carried away into the third heaven, but neither does he grasp the suffering as the thorn in the flesh. The religious person relates to an eternal happiness, and the mark of the relation is suffering, and suffering is the relation's essential expression – for someone existing.

Just as for one who exists the highest principles of thought can be proved only negatively, and the very attempt to provide a positive proof immediately betrays the proponent, in so far as he is still an existing

¹¹⁴ A pun on 'tractere' (treat) and 'Tractater' (tracts, or treatments). ¹¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 12:2-7.

person, as someone on the point of becoming fantastical, so too, for someone existing, the existence-relation to the absolute good can only be defined negatively as the relation to an eternal happiness through suffering, just as the certitude of faith that relates to an eternal happiness is defined through lack of certitude. If I remove this lack in order to obtain a still greater certitude – then what I get is not a believer in his humility, in fear and trembling, but an aesthetic back-slapping show-off, a hell-of-a-fellow, who, figuratively speaking, wants to fraternize with God but, literally speaking, does not relate to God at all. The lack of certitude is the mark, and certitude without it is the mark of not relating to God. Similarly, in the period of courtship, being absolutely certain that one is loved is the sure sign that one is not in love.^w But, notwithstanding, no one will get a lover to believe that it is not a blessed thing to be in love. So too with the uncertainty of faith; no one, in spite of this, will get it into a believer's head to suppose it is not a blessed thing to believe. But just as a little girl is to a hero, so a lover is to a believer, and why? Because the lover relates again to a woman, but the believer to God – and here the Latin phrase *interest inter et inter*¹¹⁶ applies absolutely. For the same reason, the lover is only relatively in the right in refusing to listen to anything about another kind of certitude. To love, indeed that is beautiful, enchanting. Ah, if only I were a poet properly able to proclaim love's praise and explain its glory; if only at the very least I might deserve to sit on the school bench and listen while the poet does that! But love is still only jest. I do not mean this in a contemptuous way that would make love a transitory feeling; no, even when the happiest love finds its most lasting expression in the happiest marriage, it is, yes, glorious to be wedded and dedicated, with all its trials and tribulations, to this nevertheless so blessed a pastime. Ah, if only I were a speaker able properly to testify to marriage's reputation, so that the unfortunate who remained in his sadness outside it dared not listen to me, and the presumptuous person who stood outside mocking would, by listening, discover with horror what he had forfeited. But it is still only a jest. I see this from the fact that when I place marriage together with the absolute τέλος, with an eternal happiness and, in order to be sure that it is the absolute τέλος I have in mind, let death be the arbitrator that judges between them, I can then say with truth: it is a

^w Since love is not the absolute τέλος, the comparison must be understood *cum grano salis* [with a grain of salt], all the more so because being in love lies in the sphere of the aesthetic and is bliss in a straightforward way.

¹¹⁶ Latin: there is a difference between one thing and another.

matter of indifference whether or not one has been married,¹¹⁷ just as it is a matter of indifference whether one is Jew or Greek, free or slave.¹¹⁸ Marriage is still a jest, a jest to be treated with all seriousness, though without the seriousness resting in marriage itself, but rather as the reflection of the earnest of the God-relationship, a reflection of the husband's relation to his absolute τέλος and of the wife's absolute relation to her absolute τέλος.

But back to suffering as a mark of blessedness. Will one now, because only a reborn succeeds in escaping the suffering, and only a speculating thinker can revoke¹¹⁹ it, making blessedness itself the mark of blessedness (just as all immanent speculation is essentially a revocation of existence, which indeed is what eternity is, though certainly the speculating thinker is not in eternity), that is, will one now, because *someone existing* cannot revoke the suffering and make happiness itself the mark of blessedness, which would mean that the one who exists died and passed over into eternal life, will one now say that religiousness is an illusion? – All right, but kindly bear in mind that it is the illusion that comes after understanding. Poetry is illusion before understanding, religiousness illusion after understanding. In between poetry and religiousness worldly wisdom performs its vaudeville. Every individual who does not live either poetically or religiously is stupid. Why stupid? These wise and experienced people who know the world inside out, and can advise and help everyone with everything, are they stupid? And what is it that makes them stupid? It is that having lost the poetic illusion, they lack the imagination and imagination-passion to penetrate probability's illusion and a finite teleology's trustworthiness, all of which fragments as soon as the infinite stirs. If religiousness is an illusion, then there are three kinds: the beautiful illusion of poetry, of immediacy (the blessedness is in the illusion, and then suffering comes after with actuality); the comic illusion of stupidity; and the blessed illusion of religiousness (the pain is in the illusion, and the happiness comes after). The illusion of stupidity is naturally the only inherently comic one; and while a whole movement in French poetry has been fairly active in presenting the aesthetic illusion in a comic light,¹²⁰ which is an insult to the aesthetic and by no means a merit in the eyes of the religious person (that a poet wants to do it), it

¹¹⁷ A possible reference to Matthew 22:30.

¹¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Galatians 3:28. ¹¹⁹ 'Revocare'.

¹²⁰ A reference to the vaudevilles and light comedies by French playwrights often performed in Copenhagen in Heiberg's adaptations.

would be more to the purpose if poetry were to take proper care of worldly wisdom, which is – and this is the very mark of how comic it is – equally comic whether its reckonings are right^x or wrong, because all its reckoning is a delusion, a hurrying and scurrying within the chimerical notion that there is something certain in the world of the finite. But was not Socrates a man wise in the ways of the world? Yes, but I have explained several times that his first thesis¹²¹ is lunacy from a worldly perspective, just because it makes the movement of infinity. No, poetry is youth, and worldly wisdom is the years, and religiousness is the relation to the eternal, but the years make a person only more and more stupid if he has lost his youth and not gained the relation to the eternal. Think!, the serious man we spoke of who wanted to know that an eternal happiness was certain and definite before staking everything on it, for otherwise it would be madness – one wonders whether he wouldn't find it total insanity to risk everything when suffering becomes the certainty – the correct expression of the uncertainty.

Within religious suffering lies the category of temptation,¹²² and it is only there that it can be defined. Although I am otherwise concerned with the religious address only to the extent that it is the religious life-view's voice, I can nevertheless take note in passing of its factual nature in our day, and throw light in turn on the religiousness of these times with their claim to have gone further than the religiousness of the Middle Ages. While trying to assign to temptation its proper place I can remind in passing that nowadays we hardly ever hear such temptation mentioned, or if we do, we hear it lumped together unquestioningly with enticement,¹²³ indeed even with the tribulations of life. Once we leave out the relation to

^x And perhaps most comical when it reckons correctly, for when it reckons incorrectly one does after all have a little sympathy for the poor fellow. Thus, e.g., if a man counts on making a good match through various connections, and thus with the help of his knowledge of the world, and it works and he gets the girl, and she has the money, then the comic is jubilant because now he has become terribly stupid. Suppose he got the girl but lo and behold it turns out that she didn't have the money. There would still be some sympathy involved, but in general the comic is recognized by most people in something outside, in the unhappy outcome (yet which is not the comic but the pitiable), just as they see pathos as due to something else, in the unhappy outcome (which is nevertheless not what gives pathos but something accidental). Accordingly, it is less comic when, with his fixed idea, a madman brings confusion upon himself and others, causing loss and injury, as it is when existence goes along with his fixed idea. That is, it is not really comic for existence to have one discover that a lunatic is a lunatic, but comic that it hides it.

¹²¹ That Socrates knew only that he knew nothing.

¹²² 'Anfægtelse'. See the 'Note on the translation'.

¹²³ 'Fristelse', temptation in the more usual sense.

an absolute τέλος and let the latter exhaust itself in relative ends, this trial ceases to exist. It is what, in the sphere of the God-relationship, temptation is in the sphere of the ethical relation. When the individual's maximum is the ethical relation to actuality, then temptation is his greatest danger. In that case it is quite in order for the temptation to be left out, and just another case of sloppiness to identify it with enticement. But this is not the only way in which the temptation differs from enticement; the individual's position differs too. In enticement it is the lower that entices; in temptation it is the higher. In enticement it is the lower that wants to attract the individual; in temptation it is the higher which, as though envious of the individual, wants to frighten him back. Temptation therefore originates in the properly religious sphere, and there only on the last stretch, increasing quite properly in proportion to the religiousness, because the individual has discovered the boundary, and temptation expresses the boundary's reaction against the finite individual. It was therefore a false alarm, as shown in the foregoing, when on Sunday the priest says that it is so good to be in church, and if only we could stay there we would doubtless become holy, but we must go out into the world again. For if someone were allowed to stay there, he would discover the temptation, and perhaps come so badly out of that piece of work that he would hardly be likely to thank the priest for it. The instant the individual succeeds in practising the absolute relation through renouncing relative ends (and this can happen in particular moments, though the individual is later drawn back into the conflict again) and is now about to relate absolutely to the absolute, he discovers the boundary. Temptation then becomes an expression of the limit. The individual is surely innocent in the temptation (as is not the case in enticement), but its suffering is no doubt dreadful regardless – I know nothing about this myself, and if anyone should want this ambiguous comfort, I will gladly impart it, namely that anyone who is not very religious is not exposed to temptations, for the temptation is precisely the reaction against the absolute expression of the absolute relation. Enticement falls on the individual in his weak moments, while the temptation is a nemesis upon the strong moments in the absolute relation. Enticement is therefore inside the context of the individual's ethical constitution, while the temptation on the contrary is without continuity and is the absolute's own resistance.

That temptation is there, however, cannot be denied, and for that very reason this can give rise in our time to a not uninteresting psychological

case. Suppose a person with a deep religious need heard constantly only those religious addresses in which everything ends up with the absolute τέλος exhausting itself in relative ends, what then? He would sink into the deepest despair when in himself he experiences something else, yet never having heard the priest talk of it, of inner suffering, the suffering of the God-relationship. He might, out of deference to the priest and his position, be led to construe this suffering as a misunderstanding, or as something that also others experienced but found they could overcome so easily that it was not even mentioned – until, with the same fear as happened the first time, he discovered the category of temptation. Let him happen suddenly on one of the old devotional books and there, sure enough, come upon a description of temptation; yes, he would probably be as glad as Robinson Crusoe was to meet Friday; but what, I wonder, would he think of the Christian religious address he was accustomed to hearing? Really, the religious address should be of such a kind that by listening to it one acquired the most accurate insight into the religious errors of the times, and into oneself as belonging to those times. But what am I saying? That insight might also be gained by listening to a religious address that gives no hint of temptations. The insight is, of course, to be gained through the address but only indirectly.

This, then, is the essential persistence of suffering, its actuality, whereby it persists even with the most developed religious person, even assuming that religious individual had fought his way through the suffering that is dying to immediacy. The suffering therefore persists as long as the individual lives; but so as not to return too quickly to the last suffering, we shall bring the individuals to a halt in the first suffering, since its struggle is so prolonged and relapse into it so frequent that it is rare indeed for an individual to succeed in getting through it or in overcoming it for long.

This suffering has its basis in the fact that, strictly speaking, in his immediacy the individual is inside relative ends absolutely; its meaning is the inversion of the relation, dying to immediacy, or expressing in existing that the individual himself can do nothing at all but is nothing before God; for here again the God-relationship is identifiable by the negative, and self-annihilation the essential form of the God-relationship. And the latter must not be expressed in the external, for then we have the monastic movement and the relationship secularized; and the individual must not imagine that it can be done all at once, for that is aesthetics. And even if it

could be done all at once, being one who exists he would have suffering again in the repetition. In immediacy, the wish is to be capable of everything, and immediacy's faith, ideally, is actually to be capable of everything, its incapability being due to some outside obstacle, which it therefore essentially disregards, in the same way that it disregards misfortune, because immediacy is not dialectical in itself. Religiously, the task is to grasp that one is nothing at all before God, or to be nothing at all and be thereby before God, and he constantly requires this incapability before him, and its disappearance is also that of religiousness. The youthful capability of immediacy can be comic to a third party; the incapability of religiousness, on the contrary, can never be comic to a third party, for there is no trace of any contradiction.^y The religious person cannot in this way become comic, though for him the comical can arise when to the outside world he seems to have been capable of a great deal. But if this joke is to be holy and to continue, it must not be allowed for a moment to disturb for him the earnest that before God he is nothing and is capable of nothing, nor the work of keeping to this, nor the suffering in expressing it in existing. Thus if Napoleon had been a genuine religious individuality, he would have had a rare opportunity for the most divine amusement; since to be seemingly capable of everything and then divinely understand this as an illusion, yes, truly, that is a joke in earnest! Quite generally, the comic is present everywhere, and every existence can be identified and assigned at once to its specific sphere by knowing how it relates to the comic. Someone who is religious has discovered the comic on the largest scale and yet does not consider the comic the highest, for the religious is the purest pathos. But if he does look on the comic as the highest, then the comic is for him *eo ipso* lower; for what is comic lies always in a contradiction, and when the comic itself is the highest, it lacks the contradiction in which the comic *is* and in which it shows itself to advantage. That is

^y There is no contradiction in a person being capable of nothing before God excepting his becoming aware of this fact; since the latter is just another expression of God's absoluteness, and that the person had not even *κατά δόξαν* [potentially] a capacity to do that would be an expression of his not being here at all. There is no contradiction, and so it is not comic either. It would, however, be comic were it to mean anything to God that, e.g., one walked on one's knees, just as, in general, what is comic manifests itself most clearly in idolatry, superstition and the like. Yet one should remember never to lose sight of the childlikeness that can lie behind the error, making it more heart-aching than comic. Just as the oddest things can occur to a child who wants to really please an old man, all of it nevertheless with the pious intention of pleasing him, so too the religious person can make a heart-aching impression when, in his pious zeal, there is nothing he would not do to please God and finally he hits on something quite senseless.

why it is unexceptionally the case that the more proficiently a person exists, the more he will discover the comic.^z Even someone who has done no more than conceive a grand plan for accomplishing something in the world will discover it. For he has his resolve with him, it is for it and it alone that he lives, and then he goes out among people, and then the comic emerges – if he keeps quiet. In fact most people have no grand plans and they speak most often in terms of finite good sense or from sheer immediacy. If he now simply keeps quiet, then almost every other word said affects his great resolution in a comical way. But if he abandons his great resolution, and his tense inner existence in relation to it, then the comic vanishes. If he cannot keep quiet about his big plan but has to blurt it out prematurely, then he himself becomes comic. But the religious person's resolution is the highest of all, infinitely higher than all schemes to transform the world and create systems and works of art. Therefore the religious person of all people must discover the comic – if he is really religious; for otherwise he himself becomes comic. (But more on this later.)

Suffering as dying to immediacy is thus not flagellation and the like; it is not *self-torment*. The self-tormenter expresses not at all that he is capable of nothing before God, for he thinks his self-torment is something. And yet the suffering is still there and can go on as long as a person exists; for as little time as it takes to say that a human being is nothing before God, to express it in existence is that much the harder. However, to describe and portray this in more detail is again difficult, seeing that all speech is after all a more abstract medium than existence, and talk in respect of the ethical somewhat of a deception, since speech, whatever acutely conceived and cunningly contrived precautions one takes, still always gives an appearance of the foreshortened perspective, so that even when speech makes the most enthusiastic and desperate effort to show how difficult it is, or tries its hardest in the indirect form, it will always be more difficult actually to do it than speech makes it appear. But whether or not there is talk of this expressing in existence of the dying to

^z But at its height the comic, like the highest form of pathos, rarely attracts attention, and is something poetry cannot even present. For it does not try to show itself to advantage, as the saying goes ('tager sig ud' [originally German: *sich ausnehmen*; the warrior chief steps out of the ranks to 'show himself to advantage']), while lower forms of the pathetic and the comic do show themselves to advantage in being recognizable by a go-between. The highest in life does not show itself to advantage, because it belongs to the final sphere of inwardness, and is in a holy sense received ('indtaget') into itself.

immediacy, it is still something to be done; and religiousness is not thoughtlessness – saying the highest just once in a while and letting tomorrow take care of itself in mediation. The religious person does not preach indulgence but proclaims that the greatest effort is nothing – but in addition he requires it. Here again the negative is the mark, since the greatest effort is recognized by the fact that by making it one becomes nothing; if one becomes something the effort is *eo ipso* less. How ironic this seems, this, something that is after all already the case in lesser matters, in a lower sphere, since by taking lesser pains and with a little fudging a person can come to imagine that he understands many different sciences and will be a success in the world and widely read, while by taking proper pains and with absolute integrity he will find it hard to understand a tiny little crumb even of what everybody knows, and be looked on as a dreary dawdler. Yet what applies only relatively in this lower sphere applies absolutely in the religious sphere, and with those religious ones who have been tried, one always finds this cited as a final temptation: that the highest effort wants to infatuate one with the importance of being something.

Since I am now obliged to make the woeful admission that I am unable to speak of China, Persia, the system, astrology or veterinary science, and in order to come up with at least something in my sorry plight, I have, to the best of the ability granted me, trained my pen to be able to copy and portray everyday life, as concretely as possible, differing as that life quite often does from the Sunday kind. If anyone finds this kind of portrayal, or mine in particular, boring, then let him. I am not writing for any literary prize and shall, if it is required, gladly admit that it is far harder, involves far more ado and incurs quite another kind of responsibility, to kill off a rich uncle in a novel to have money brought into the story, or to insert a ten-year interval, letting time go by in which the most important thing has happened and then begin with it having happened; that it calls for quite another terseness and pithiness to describe the victory of faith in half an hour than to depict what an ordinary person fills the day with in the living-room. Yes, it does indeed take despatch to write a narrative of thirty pages in which the action takes place over a hundred years, or a drama in which the action takes place over three hours but so much happens and events pile up in such a way that nothing like it ever falls to a person in a whole lifetime! But what does it take to portray a person in everyday life, that is, so long as one is not placed in the predicament that, by being so abstract, language falls short compared with existing in the sense of

actuality? The religious speaker should bring himself to do it all the same, since it is the living-room that he is dealing with, and the religious speaker who does not know how the task looks in everyday life and in the living-room might as well keep quiet, for vistas of eternity on Sunday lead only to moonshine. Certainly, the religious speaker should not remain in the living-room; he must know how to keep hold of the totality-category of his sphere, but also know how to begin everywhere. And it is in the living-room that the battle must be fought, in case the fight put up by religiousness should degenerate into a guard's parade once a week. It is in the living-room that the battle must be fought, not in imagination in the church with the priest beating the air¹²⁴ and the listeners looking on. It is in the living-room that the battle must be fought, for the victory is precisely to be that the living-room becomes a shrine. Let influence be exerted directly in the church, by keeping track of the opposing forces – under whose banner the battle is to be fought, in whose name the victory shall be won – by describing the enemy's position, rehearsing the attack, praising the omnipotent ally and strengthening trust by arousing mistrust, trust in him through mistrust in oneself. Let influence be exerted indirectly through the ironic but therefore tenderest compassion of secret sympathy. But the main thing is that the individual goes home from church with the passion and fervour to carry the fight to the living-room. If the priest's influence in the church is only to be an attempt once a week to manoeuvre the congregations' cargo-ship nearer eternity, then it all comes to nothing; for a human life cannot, like a cargo-ship, lie in the same place until next Sunday. That is exactly why the church is the place where the difficulty has to be presented, and it is better to go from church despondent and to find the task easier than one had thought than to go home full of bravado and become despondent in the living-room. In this way, even the religious speaker will take care not to put emotionally strong moments together in a speech, or to have his strongest moment in the speech, that is, so as not to deceive himself and others. He would rather be like someone who although he might very well speak in a higher key, dare not in case the 'mystery of faith' be defrauded and betrayed and prostituted through too much publicity, and who feels rather that it should be 'held fast' (1 Timothy 3:9) so that it is still greater and has more power within him than appears in his speech. For since it is the speaker's main task, like

¹²⁴ 1 Corinthians 9:26.

that of everyone else, to express in existing what he professes, and not once a week electrify the congregation and making it twitch galvanically, he will take care not himself to experience the disgust that comes with the realization that what looked so glorious in the high-sounding speech turns out so differently in everyday life. But to give in, cut the price, or to haggle, that he must not do for anything in the world; even where he seems furthest from the absolute requirement of religiousness this latter must still be present, deciding the price and the judgment; even where he gets involved in the most paltry fractions of everyday life, this absolute common denominator must be there, even if hidden, ready at every second to posit the absolute requirement.

How, then, does the task look in everyday life, for I am all the while keeping my favourite theme in mind?¹²⁵ Might there not be something wrong with our theocentric nineteenth century's urge to go beyond Christianity, its urge to speculate, its urge for continued development, its urge for a new religion or for the abolition of Christianity? As for my own lowly person, the reader will please recall that I am the one who finds the matter and the task so extremely difficult, which seems to indicate that I have not completed it, I, who do not even make myself out to be a Christian; yet, please note, not in the sense that I have ceased to be a Christian through having gone further. Still, it is *immer*¹²⁶ something to point out the difficulty even if this is done, as here, only in an edifying divertimento, enacted essentially with the help of a scout, one that I have go out among people on weekdays and with the added assistance of a few amateur performers who will play along against their will.

Now listen, last Sunday the priest said: 'You must not put your trust in the world, not in people, and not in yourself, but in God alone, for a human being himself is capable of absolutely nothing.'¹²⁷ And we all understood it, myself included, for the ethical and the ethico-religious are so exceedingly easy to understand, and yet on the other hand so exceedingly difficult. A child can understand it; the most simple-minded person can understand, the moment it is said that we are capable of absolutely nothing, that we should renounce everything, give everything up. On Sunday it is understood so terribly easily (yes, terribly, because fairly often the easiness goes the same way as good intentions) *in abstracto*,¹²⁸ and on Monday it is so exceedingly difficult to understand

¹²⁵ 'In mente'. ¹²⁶ 'Always'. ¹²⁷ John 15:5. ¹²⁸ Latin: abstractly.

that it is this little and particular thing within relative and concrete existence, in which the individual has his everyday life, where the mighty person is tempted to forget humility, and the lowly to mistake relative deference to higher-ups for humility before God; and yet a small quite particular something is a sheer trifle compared with everything. Yes, even when the priest complains that nobody does as he exhorts, this is again so terribly easy to understand; but the next day it is so difficult to understand that even with this particular thing, with this small trifle, one does one's bit, receives one's share of merit.

Then the priest added: 'This we should always keep in mind.' And we all understood it, for 'always', that is a glorious word. It says everything at once and is so terribly easy to understand. Yet, on the other hand, always to do something is the most difficult thing of all, and on Monday afternoon at four o'clock it is so exceedingly difficult to understand this 'always' even just for half an hour. There was even in the priest's speech almost something that drew attention indirectly to this difficulty; for there were certain turns of phrase so formed as to appear to suggest that he hardly always did it himself; indeed that he had hardly done so in any of the few moments in which he meditated on his sermon – indeed hardly did so in any part of the discourse's short duration.

It is now Monday and the scout has plenty of time to consort with people, for the priest speaks in front of people but the scout speaks with them. So he strikes up a conversation with someone and the talk finally comes around to a topic the subject wants to bring up. The scout says: 'That's true enough, but there is still something you cannot do, you are unable to build a palace with four wings and marble floors.' The addressee answers: 'No, you are right about that; how should I be able to do that? I just about make do, perhaps put a little aside each year, but I certainly lack the capital to build palaces, and I know nothing about public works anyway.' So he does not have the ability. The scout leaves him and now has the honour to meet a man of great power. He flatters his vanity and finally the conversation turns to the palace: 'But a palace with four wings and marble floors will surely be too much for you.' 'How so?', replies the addressee, 'You must be forgetting that I have already done that, that my big palace on Palace Square is the very building you describe.' So he does have the ability and the scout retires bowing, offering him congratulations. As he walks along, he meets a third man and tells him the conversation he has had with the other two, and the third man exclaims: 'Yes,

strange the human being's lot in this world, people's capacities can be so extremely varied, one person is capable of so much, another of so very little, and yet every human being is supposed to be capable of something, if only from experience and worldly knowledge he learns to stay within his limits.' So the difference is remarkable, but is not the fact that three different utterances about the difference say one and the same thing even more remarkable? Man No. 1 is incapable of this and that because he does not have the money, i.e., essentially he is capable. Man No. 2 is capable of it, essentially capable, and this fact is revealed through the contingency of his having the money. Man No. 3 manages in his wisdom to do without some of the conditions and still have the ability – what a capable man he would be if only he had the conditions!

But on Sunday, yesterday, the priest said that a human being is incapable of anything at all and we all understood it. When the priest says it in church, we all understand it, and if anyone wanted to express it, existing, and be seen to do so in the six days of the week, we would all be on the point of thinking: he is mad. Even the most God-fearing person will have occasion, dozens of times a day, to catch himself in the delusion that he can at least do something. But when the priest says that a human being can do absolutely nothing, we all understand it so terribly easily; and a speculative philosopher understands this easiness in turn in such a way that, from it, he proves the necessity of going further, of passing on to what is much more difficult to understand: China, Persia, the system, because the philosopher speculatively disdains the weak *Witz*¹²⁹ about the living-room, because, instead of going home to himself from church and the abstract Sunday conception of a human being, he goes straight from church to China, Persia, astronomy – yes, to astronomy.¹³⁰ That old master Socrates did the opposite and gave up astronomy, choosing the higher and more difficult task, that of understanding himself before the god. But the speculative philosopher proves this necessity of going further with such necessity that even a priest loses his poise, and in the pulpit is of the *ex cathedra*¹³¹ opinion that the understanding in which the single individual grasps that he is capable of nothing at all is only for the simple-minded and humble; he even warns them *ex cathedra*, or I should say, from the pulpit, to be satisfied with this humble task and not to become impatient because it is denied them to raise themselves to the

¹²⁹ 'Witticism'. ¹³⁰ A reference to Heiberg. See the translator's introduction.

¹³¹ Latin: from the chair, with authority.

level of understanding China and Persia. And in this the priest is right, that the task is for the simple-minded. But the secret of it is that it is just as difficult for the most eminent intellect, since the task is not comparative, that is, for a simple-minded person compared to a distinguished intellect, but for the distinguished intellect compared to himself before God. And in this the philosopher is right, that understanding China and Persia is, after all, something more than understanding the abstract Sunday conception of the abstract Sunday man, for China and Persia are something more concrete. But more concrete than any other understanding, the one and only absolutely concrete understanding, is that with which the single individual understands himself in comparison with himself before God; and it is the most difficult understanding, because here the difficulty may not serve as an excuse.

So it goes, for the six weekdays we are all capable of something; the king is capable of more than his minister; the witty journalist says, I'll show so-and-so what I can do, that is, make him look ridiculous; the policeman says to the man dressed in a pauper's clothes, Perhaps you don't know what I'm capable of, namely, arresting him; the cook says to the poor woman who comes on Saturdays, Perhaps you've forgotten what I'm capable of, namely, prevailing on upstairs to stop her getting the week's leftovers. We are all capable of something, and the king smiles at the minister's capability, and the minister at the journalist's capability, and the journalist at the policeman's, and the policeman at that of the man who is poorly clad, and the poorly clad man at that of the Saturday woman – and on Sunday we all go to church (except the cook, who never has time, because on Sunday there is always a dinner party at His Honour's) and hear from the priest that a human being can do absolutely nothing – provided we are fortunate enough not to have gone to a church with a speculative priest. But just a moment, we are in church; with a capable sexton's assistance (for the sexton is especially capable on Sundays, and with a silent glance at this or that person makes it known what he is capable of) we are assigned each to our seats according to our particular social capabilities in society. The priest enters the pulpit – even then, at the last moment, a man of great capability arrives late and the sexton has to demonstrate to him his own capability. Then the priest begins, and now all of us, from our various and respective seats and points of view, understand what the priest is saying from his elevated viewpoint, that a human being is not capable of anything at all. Amen. On Monday the

priest is himself a very capable man, as we must all realize, except those who are more capable.

But one of the two must be a joke: either what the clergyman says is a joke, a kind of parlour-game at once in a while calling to mind that a human being is capable of nothing; or else the priest must be right after all: a human being should always keep this in mind – and we others, including the priest and also myself, are wrong when we perform such an indifferent exegesis on the word ‘always’, although a person is granted thirty, forty, or fifty years to perfect himself, even if this makes each day a day of testing as well as of preparation.

It is now Tuesday and the scout is visiting a man who is having a large building constructed outside the city. Again he leads the conversation round to human capability, and to what the esteemed host is capable of. But, look, says this man, not without a certain solemnity, ‘A human being isn’t capable of anything at all, and it is only through God’s help that I’ve been able to amass this great wealth, and through God’s help that I ...’ Here the solemn calm of the conversation is interrupted by a noise from outside. The man excuses himself and rushes out. He leaves the doors behind him half-open and our scout, who eavesdrops, hears to his great amazement blow upon blow accompanied by these words: ‘I’ll show you what I’m capable of.’ The scout is scarcely capable of restraining his laughter – well, the scout is also after all a human being who can at any moment be tempted by the delusion that there is something he is capable of, for instance, that it was he who had caught the capable man in his absurdity.

But if a person, existing, is to keep in mind every day what the priest says on Sunday, and to keep to it, grasping this as life’s earnest, and thus again all his own capability and incapability as a joke, does this mean that he is not supposed to want to do anything at all, because all is vanity and emptiness?¹³² Oh, no, in that case he would have no opportunity to appreciate the joke, for placing that alongside the earnest of life does not produce a contradiction: there is no contradiction in everything being vanity in the eyes of a vain being.¹³³ Indolence, inactivity, superiority in the face of the finite are a bad joke, or rather no joke at all. But to shorten one’s night’s sleep and buy the hours of the day and not spare oneself, and then to understand that the whole thing is a joke: yes, that is earnest. And religiously the positive is always recognized in the negative: earnest in the jest,

¹³² Cf. the refrain in Ecclesiastes, e.g., 1:2.

¹³³ Here in the sense of fleeting, transitory, not vainglorious.

that is religious earnest, not the direct kind of earnest, the stupid official gravity of a man of title, the stupid self-importance of a journalist towards contemporaries, a clever person's stupid importance before God, as if God could not create a million geniuses if in any way he were in a fix. To hold the fate of many human beings in one's hand, to transform the world and then constantly to understand that it is a jest; yes, that is earnest! But for one to be capable of that, all passions of the finite must be extinguished, all selfishness eradicated: the selfishness that wants to have everything and the selfishness that proudly turns its back on everything. But that is just the hitch, and here is the suffering in dying to oneself, and although it is the mark of the ethical to be so easily understood in its abstract expression, it is so difficult to understand *in concreto*.¹³⁴

We ought always to bear in mind that a human being is capable of absolutely nothing, says the priest. When a man wants to take a Deer Park¹³⁵ outing, he is accordingly supposed to bear this in mind, for instance, that he is incapable of enjoying himself, and the illusion that he is quite well able to enjoy himself at the Deer Park, seeing he has such a great desire to go there, is the temptation of immediacy; and the illusion that he is quite able to take this outing, since he can easily afford it, is also the temptation of immediacy. It is now Wednesday, and a Wednesday in the Deer Park season. So let us send out the scout once more. Some or other religious person may think it not seemly of himself to take a Deer Park outing. In that case, by virtue of the qualitative dialectic I must plead respect for the monastery, for fudging leads nowhere. If the religious person is to be in any way conspicuous in his outward appearance, then the only forceful expression of that is the monastery; the rest is only fudging. But of course our times have come further in religiousness than the Middle Ages. What then was it that the religiousness of the Middle Ages expressed? That there was something in the finite world that could not be thought along with, or in existing held together with, the thought of God. The passionate expression for this was to break with the finite. The fact that the religiousness of our times has gone further means that it can keep hold, in existing, of the thought of God in connection with the most feeble expression of the finite, such as, for instance, amusement in the Deer Park, unless the religiousness of our times has gone so much

¹³⁴ Latin: concretely.

¹³⁵ 'Dyrehaven', a large tree-filled park north of Copenhagen, which includes an amusement park ('Dyrehavsbakken').

further as to have returned to childish forms of religiousness, compared with which the youthful enthusiasm of the Middle Ages is a splendour. It is a childish form of religiousness, for example, once a week to seek as it were God's permission to make merry all the following week, and then again the following Sunday to beg leave for the next week, by going to church and hearing the priest say that we are always to keep in mind that a human being is capable of absolutely nothing. The child has no reflection and therefore no urge to put together in thought that which differs. For the child, the moment of earnest is when it has to ask permission from the parents; if only I get permission, thinks the child, I'll be sure to have a good time. And when the child has been in to see father in the office and got permission, it comes out jubilant and confident that the mother will also give her assent. Of the earnest moment in the office he thinks, 'Thank God, that's now over' – that, I believe, is how the child thinks, because really the child does not think. If the same situation repeats itself in an adult's life before God, then it is childishness, which, like the child's talk, can be recognized by its partiality for abstract expressions: 'always', 'never', 'just this once', etc. The Middle Ages made a forceful attempt, in existing, to think God and the finite together but came to the conclusion that it could not be done, and the expression of this is the monastery. The religiousness of our age goes further. But if the God-relationship and the least of the finite (where the difficulty becomes greatest) are to be held together in existing, then it is within the sphere of religiousness itself that the accord must find its expression, and this be such that here the individual does not again pass from the God-relationship into existing entirely in other categories. Forms lower than the monastic movement of the Middle Ages will be at once distinguishable by this split, whereby the God-relationship becomes something for itself and the rest of existence something else. So there are three lower forms: (1) when the individual returns home from the Sunday relationship with God to exist purely immediately in the dialectic of the pleasant and the unpleasant; (2) when the individual returns home from the Sunday relationship with God to exist in a finite ethic and takes no notice of the parsimony of the God-relationship, while looking after his job, earning money, etc.; (3) when the individual returns from the Sunday God-relationship to have his life in a speculative-ethical view that lets the God-relationship exhaust itself without further ado in relative ends, a life-view whose formula is this: proficiency in one's station in life, as king, as

joiner, as tightrope-walker, etc. is the highest expression of the God-relationship, and one has no real need to go to church. All religiousness of this kind, by going to church once a week, absolves itself from taking the God-relationship along in everything every day. On Sunday, it obtains permission – not quite like the child, to make merry all week long – but all week long not thinking more about God.

So the religiousness that is to go further than the Middle Ages must, in its godly reflection, find an expression to the effect that on Monday the religious person is to exist in the same, and must exist on Monday in the same categories. What was venerable about the Middle Ages was that they were seriously concerned with this problem; but then they arrived at the conclusion that it could be done only in the monastery. The religiousness of our times goes further; on Sunday the priest says we are always to keep in mind that we are absolutely incapable but otherwise be just like others; we must not enter the monastery; we can take Deer Park outings – but NB first keeping in mind the God-relationship by way of the religious middle term, that a human being cannot do anything at all. And it is this that makes life so enormously strenuous; and it is this that makes it possible that all human beings may in truth perhaps be genuinely religious, because hidden religiousness is true religiousness, the hidden inwardness in one who is religious, who even uses all his skill just so that no one will notice anything special about him. For just as God's omnipresence is recognized by not being visible, so true religiousness is also recognized by its invisibility, i.e., it is not to be seen. The god one can point to is an idol, and the religiousness that one can point to is an imperfect form of religiousness. But how strenuous! No soprano can produce trills incessantly; a note will be given coloratura treatment only once in a while; but the religious person whose religiousness is hidden inwardness puts, if I may so put it, the trill of the God-relationship into everything, and what is most difficult of all, even when the specific time for it is appointed, he does it so easily as to do it in no time. The witticism then comes in just the right place, albeit he first makes the religious movement quietly in himself. When invited, he comes precisely on time and with all the good cheer one could wish, albeit he first makes the God-movement in himself. Alas, usually, when someone is under only a little external strain, it upsets him as he dresses for a party, and he arrives late, and one can see it in him. But the most strenuous of all thoughts, compared with which even the serious thought of death is easier – the thought of God – can

affect the religious person with the same ease as you and I and Peter and Paul and Councillor Madsen – for it is quite certain that no one notices anything on us.

The scout now goes out. No doubt he will come across a man who is unable to take a Deer Park outing because he has no money, i.e., a man who *is* capable of it. If the scout were to give him the money and say, ‘You aren’t capable of it all the same’, he would probably be thought mad, or the man would assume there was some catch, or perhaps that the money was counterfeit, or the city gates closed and the custom house likewise – in short, out of politeness to the scout, so as not to repay his generosity by straight away declaring him mad, he would doubtless hazard a whole lot of clever guesses, and when all these failed, on the scout denying there was anything of the kind in the way of his going, he would take him to be mad, thank him for the gift – and after that take a Deer Park outing. And that same man would understand the priest very well next Sunday, when he preaches about a human being’s inability to do anything at all, and that we must always bear that in mind. And the amusing side of it is just this, that he can understand the clergyman very well, for if there were even just one single person so simple-minded as not to understand the task which it is essentially up to the priest to propound – who then could endure life!

The scout then meets another man, who says: ‘Taking an outing in the Deer Park, if one can afford it, if one’s business affairs permit, and if the wife and children can come along, yes, the servants too, and be home in decent time, yes, that’s an innocent form of enjoyment, and the innocent pleasures of life are to be shared; one shouldn’t withdraw like a coward into a monastery, which is to avoid the danger.’ The scout replies: ‘But didn’t you say at the beginning of our conversation that you heard the priest say last Sunday that a human being is capable of nothing at all and that we ought always to keep this in mind, and did you not say that you understood it?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Then surely you are forgetting what we are talking about. When you say that it is an innocent pleasure, this is the opposite of a guilty pleasure, but the opposition here belongs to morals or ethics. The priest, on the other hand, was speaking of your relation to God. Saying that a Deer Park outing is ethically permissible is not to say that it is religiously permissible; and it is in any case the latter, according to the priest, that you must prove by thinking it together with the thought of God, and not, please note, just in general terms, for you are not a priest who is supposed to preach on this theme, although in everyday life you,

and many others, seem to confuse yourselves with such, which shows that not even a priest is the most difficult thing to be. A priest speaks in general terms about the innocent pleasures of life, but you, as existing, are to give expression to what the priest says. You are therefore not, today, on the occasion of your taking an outing in the Deer Park, called upon to give a little address on life's innocent joys; that is up to the speaker. What you are to do today, Wednesday, the fourth of July, on the occasion of your taking an outing with wife, children, and servants in the Deer Park, is what the clergyman said last Sunday, that a human being can do absolutely nothing and that you must always keep this in mind. It was about how you go about this that I wished for some information from you, for if it was some kind of address I wanted I would have gone to the priest.' 'How absurd', replies the man, 'to ask more of me than of the priest. I find it quite in order that the priest preaches in this way; it is what the State pays him for; and as for my own spiritual guide, Pastor Michaelsen, I shall always be happy to testify that he preaches the true evangelical doctrine, which is why I attend his church, for I am no heretic who would have the faith changed; and even if, according to what you have said, it may seem doubtful how far I am really a believer, it is certain that I am a true orthodox who abominates the Baptists. But then it never occurs to me to connect such trifles as an outing in the Deer Park with the thought of God. That indeed seems to me to be an affront to God, and I know, too, that it occurs to none of my many acquaintances.' 'So you think it is right, all in order, the priest's preaching in this way, also his preaching about no one doing what he says!' 'Be reasonable', the man replies, 'of course I find it in order for a man of God like that to speak in that way on Sunday, and at funerals and weddings; it is just two weeks since I publicly thanked him in *Adresseavisen*¹³⁶ for the magnificent speech he made, unsolicited, and which I shall *never* forget.' 'Say, rather, you will *always* remember; for this expression brings the topic of our conversation more closely to mind, that we are *always* to keep in mind that a man is capable of nothing at all. However, let us interrupt this conversation, for we do not understand each other, and I am not getting the information out of you that I was looking for, about how you go about doing what the priest says, though on the other hand I willingly concede you an unmistakable talent for the priesthood. You can do me a service, however, if you will. Give me your

¹³⁶ See p. 66 n. 3.

assurance in writing, and, if you can, get me similar attestations from your many acquaintances, that it never occurs to you, or to them, to bring the thought of God together with anything like taking an outing in the Deer Park.’

We would now let the scout withdraw, and in return, just to put him on the spot, ask him how he means to use these attestations and what he really has in mind. He speaks as follows: ‘Why do I want these attestations? Well, I can tell you that. I am told that the clergy hold some conventions, where the reverend brethren raise and answer the question of what the times demand – in religious respects, naturally, for otherwise such a convention would differ in no way from meetings of the municipal representatives. It is said that the convention has recently arrived at the conclusion that what the times demand is a new hymnbook; and that they demand a new hymnbook is very possible, but it does not follow that they need it. Why should the same not happen to the times, as a moral personage, as happens with other moral personages, if not exactly in respect of what makes them moral, that they demand what they do not need; that all their many demands, even if they were satisfied, would not satisfy their craving, because this is: to make demands, to make one’s needs known. Perhaps the times will soon demand that the priest have a new gown all the more to edify; it is not impossible that the times should actually demand this, and in connection with such a demand I would be inclined to assume that the times would actually feel a need for it; my intention is to gather a whole lot of written assurances concerning the way in which the priest’s Sunday sermon is understood on Monday, and the other weekdays, in order if possible to make some contribution towards answering the question of what the times demand – or, as I would prefer to express myself, what it needs; so that the question would not be worded “What is lacking in the religiousness of our age?”, since it is always misleading to introduce the answer into the question, but “What do our times lack?” Religiousness. Everyone fusses about what the times demand; no one seems to care about what the individual needs. Perhaps there is no need at all for a new hymnbook. Why does no one come up with a proposal that is so obvious, perhaps more so than many believe: that as a provisional measure one tries having the old hymnbook rebound in some other way to see if the new binding will do the job, especially if the bookbinder is allowed to print “The New Hymnbook” on the spine. No doubt it would be objected that it was a shame for the old hymnbook,

since, remarkably enough, the congregation's copy of the old hymnbook is said to be in particularly good condition, presumably because the book is so little used, together with the fact that the new binding would be a quite unnecessary expense. But this objection has to be met in a deep, please note a deep, voice; in our seriously troubled times every serious man sees that something must be done – all objections then vanish as nothing. For the fact that particular little private congregations and dogmatic enclaves really felt the need for a new hymnbook, to make their catchwords heard in the arched ceiling of the church from the resonator of awakening,¹³⁷ that would not be such a serious matter. But for the whole age, in unison and polyphonically, to demand a new hymnbook, even several new hymnbooks, then something must be done about it, things can't continue as now, it will be the ruin of religiousness. Why is it that church attendance in the capital is now relatively so sparse? Why, naturally, the answer, as clear as day, is that it is the fault of the old hymnbook. Why is it that those who do attend church are so undisciplined as to arrive just as the priest enters the pulpit or a little after? Why, naturally, the answer, as clear as day, is aversion to the old hymnbook. What was it that destroyed the Assyrian Empire? Dissension, Madam.¹³⁸ Why is it that people leave the church in indecent haste the moment the priest has said "Amen"? Why, naturally, the answer, as clear as day, is aversion to the old hymnbook. How is it that family worship is so rare, even though at home one is free to use other hymnbooks? Why, naturally and as clear as day, it is because aversion to the old hymnbook is so great that people just won't do it so long as the old hymnbook exists; its mere existence is enough to quench all devotion. Why is it that the members of the congregation regrettably put so little of what is sung on Sunday into practice? Why, naturally, as clear as day, it is because the old hymnbook is so bad that it even prevents people from doing what it says. And how is it, then, that all this was the more regrettably the case long before the need of any new hymnbook was mentioned? Why, naturally, as clear as day, it is because it was the need deeply rooted in the congregation, a deep need that had not come to consciousness – since there was no convention. But for that very reason it seems to me that we should hesitate to abolish the old hymnbook, in case we are placed in the predicament of having to

¹³⁷ Presumably a reference to Grundtvig's *Sang-Værk til den Danske Kirke* (*Psalm Collection for the Danish Church*).

¹³⁸ A quotation from Holberg's comedy *Hexerie eller Blind Allarm* (*Witchcraft or False Alarm*) (1723).

explain the same phenomena when the new one is introduced. If the old hymnbook was never of any use before, it is so now, since we can explain everything by it, everything that would otherwise be inexplicable, bearing in mind that the times are so seriously troubled, and the clergy likewise, not just each for his own little congregation and its individual members, but for the entire age. Suppose, however, that something else happened before the new hymnbook was ready; suppose the single individual resolved to place the accent of guilt somewhere else and sorrowfully sought accommodation with the hymnbook, and with the day of confirmation of which it is a reminder; suppose the single individual conscientiously attended church, arrived on time, sang the hymns, listened to the sermon, behaved decorously, retained the impression on Monday, went further and retained it on Tuesday, yes, even on Saturday – then the urge to have a new hymnbook might become less. On the other hand, the individuals having learned little by little to help themselves, the clergy would find time and leisure wholly to devote themselves to sitting on conventions, where the reverend brethren raise and answer the question of what the times demand – in religious respects, naturally, for otherwise such a convention would in no way differ from meetings of the municipal representatives.’

So much for the scout, who must now shift for himself, and back now to what the priest says, that a human being is not capable of anything at all and that we are always to bear this in mind and therefore even when taking an outing in the Deer Park. Probably many readers have wearied long ago of this example, which never ends and yet says nothing compared to our being able to do nothing and having always to bear this in mind. But that is how it is – the ethical and the ethico-religious in their abstract generality are so quickly said and so terribly easy to understand, whereas in the concretion of everyday life speaking about it is so slow and practising it so very difficult. Nowadays a priest hardly dares speak in church on the subject of taking an outing in the Deer Park, or even mention the words, so difficult merely in a godly talk is the task of bringing the Deer Park together with the thought of God. On the other hand, it is something all of us are capable of doing. Where, then, lie the difficult tasks? In the living-room, and on Strandveien on the way to the Deer Park. Nowadays, the religious address, although preaching against the monastery, observes the most rigid monastic propriety and distances itself from actuality quite as much as the monastery, thereby revealing sufficiently indirectly that

people are really existing in different categories in everyday life, or that the religious does not assimilate to itself everyday life. In this way one goes further than the Middle Ages. But then, on the strength of the qualitative dialectic, the religious person must call for the monastery. If this is not to be preached, and if our religiousness is still to be an advance on the Middle Ages, let the priest have the goodness to talk about the simplest of things and abstain from the eternal truths *in abstracto*.¹³⁹ For surely no one will have me believe that it is so very easy to have the thought of God in oneself in the pettiest of trifles. But neither is it the intention that the priest sit in the living-room and talk like an enthusiastic park-goer¹⁴⁰ and about walks in the woods, for that truly is easy enough, unless his dignity should cause him some slight difficulty. No, the intention is that he speak of it devoutly, with the divine authority of the religious, transform talk even of this into an edifying discourse. If he cannot, if he thinks it cannot be done, then he should warn against it – and then speak respectfully when judging the Middle Ages. If, on the other hand, the religious address indirectly strengthens the delusion that religiousness consists in once a week fantasizing about one's own propriety, hearing some eternal truths expounded *in abstracto*, listening to criticism of those who never go to church, and then for the rest living in different categories – what wonder that the confusion of going further acquires more and more the upper hand? A competent clergy should be the moderators of the age, and if it is the task of a priest to bring comfort, he ought also to know how, when necessary, to make the religious so difficult that it makes every mutineer's knees go weak. Just as the gods piled mountains upon the heaven-storming Titans to coerce them, so shall the priest lay the leaden weight of the religious task upon every rebel (by laying it, naturally, upon himself), in case anyone should fancy that the religious is something to fool around with, a prank, or at most something for simple-minded and stupid people; or fancy that religiousness is relatively and comparatively dialectical and identical with the finite's conventional grooming; or that the religious is to be made difficult by world-historical surveys and systematic results, by which it only becomes still easier. When, therefore, in explaining that a human being is absolutely incapable of anything, the religious speaker brings something quite simple into relation with this, he gives the listener occasion to look deeply into his own innermost being,

¹³⁹ Latin: in abstraction. ¹⁴⁰ 'Kildehans', a derogatory term for a visitor to the Deer Park.

helps him to disperse delusions and illusions, to lay aside for at least a moment the bourgeois small-town sugar-coating in which he otherwise finds himself. What the religious speaker ultimately works with is the absolute circumstance that a man is capable of nothing at all, but he makes the transition by means of the particulars that he brings together with it. If he confines himself to merely *saying* 'nothing', 'always', 'never', 'everything', it could easily be that it all came to nothing;^{aa} but if he forgets himself and the underlying absolute nothing, always, never, everything, then he transforms the temple if not into a den of robbers,¹⁴¹ at least into a stock exchange.

If no one else will try to bring the absoluteness of the religious together with the particular, which, together in existence, is the very basis and meaning of the suffering, then I will, I who am neither a religious speaker nor a religious person, but just a humorous experimenting psychologist. If anyone wants to laugh at this then let him, but I should like to see the aesthetician or the dialectician capable of showing in religious suffering the least vestige of the comic. If there is anything I have studied from top to bottom it is the comic. That is precisely why, too, I know that the comic is excluded from religious suffering, that the latter is inaccessible to the comic, because the suffering is precisely the consciousness of the contradiction, which is therefore taken up pathetically and tragically into the religious person's consciousness, and it is just this that excludes the comic.

The way in which a person's conception of God, or of his eternal happiness, affects him is through transforming his entire existence in relation to it, which transformation is a dying to immediacy. This occurs slowly, but then finally^{bb} he will feel absolutely captive in the absolute conception of God, because the absolute conception of God is not having the absolute conception *en passant*¹⁴² but having the absolute conception at every moment. This is the cessation of immediacy and annihilation's sentence of death. Like the bird that once fluttered about unconcernedly when it is now captured, like the fish that fearlessly cleaved the waters and

^{aa} The religious address may therefore just as well be slightly teasing, just as existence is; for the teasing aspect lies precisely in us humans having our heads full of ideas and then existence comes along and decrees the everyday.

^{bb} Here I am using an imaginative form, 'slowly – but then finally', in referring to the vanishing of time. This is acceptable since the special interest of my task is yet to come.

¹⁴¹ Matthew 21:12–14; Mark 11:15–17; Luke 19:45–6. ¹⁴² In passing.

steered unerringly between the enchanted regions of the shoals when it now lies outside its element on dry land – this is the way in which the religious person is captive, for absoluteness is not directly a finite creature's element. And just like someone who is sick and cannot move because it hurts all over, and yet just like someone who is sick but as long as there is life cannot help moving in spite of it hurting all over, so lies the religious person fettered in the finite with the absolute conception of God present to him in the frailty of the human being. Neither the bird in its cage, nor the fish on the beach, nor the invalid on the sickbed, nor the prisoner in the narrowest prison cell, is as captive as he who is captive to the conception of God; for just as God is, so too is the imprisoning conception present everywhere and at every moment. Yes, just as it is said to be terrible for one who is thought to be dead, if he still lives, and has the power of his senses, can hear what those present are saying about him but has no way of expressing that he is still alive, so too, for the religious person, is the suffering of his annihilation when, in his nothingness, he has the absolute conception but no reciprocity. If we may take it, and assume it to be a poetic truth, that even just a great and comprehensive scheme, when it was to be laid down in the human mind and held fast there, has crushed the fragile vessel;¹⁴³ if we may take it that a young woman through being loved by the one she admired is annihilated in the suffering of good fortune, what wonder that the Jew took the sight of God to be death,¹⁴⁴ and that the pagan thought the God-relationship to be the harbinger of madness!¹⁴⁵ Even if it be true that the conception of God is the absolute help, it is also the only help absolutely capable of showing a human being his own helplessness. In the finite, the religious person lies like a helpless infant; he wants absolutely to hold fast to the conception, and this is just what annihilates him. He wants to do everything, and it is in the meanwhile of his wanting that his impotence begins, since for a finite being there is always a meanwhile; he wants to do everything, to express this relation absolutely, but he cannot make the finite commensurate with it.

Does anyone want to laugh? If ever the conjuncture of the stars in the heavens has intimated some awful event, in this conjuncture of the categories there is no intimation of laughter or banter. Try now adding to this an outing in the Deer Park. You will shrink from it, you will look for excuses, it will seem to you that there are higher goals for which

¹⁴³ Cf. 2 Corinthians 4:7. ¹⁴⁴ E.g. Exodus 33:20.

¹⁴⁵ Plato, *Phaedrus* 244a–245b; 256b–d; 265b.

someone can live. Yes, of course. And then you will turn away. But there is always a meanwhile – and in the meanwhile the impotence returns. You will say, Little by little. But there, just where the first beginning of this little by little first appears as the transition from the absolute together with this – that is where the terror lies. Having a year intervene novelistically is naturally only to make a fool of myself and of the religious person.

The religious person has lost the relativity of immediacy, its distraction, its time-wasting – precisely its time-wasting; the absolute consciousness of God consumes him like the scorching of the summer sun when it will not set, like the scorching of the summer sun when it will not leave off. But in that case he is sick; a refreshing sleep would strengthen him, and to sleep, that is an innocent way of making time pass. Yes, let someone who has never had any association except with bedfellows find it in its sleepy order to go to bed; but someone who has only kept company with a great scheme in his head, for him the watchman's cry was certainly a mournful memento¹⁴⁶ and the suggestion of sleep more miserable than the arrival of death. For the sleep of death is but a moment, a moment's pause, but sleep itself is a prolonged delay. But then he must begin on something. Maybe whatever comes along? No, let a nimble-fingered retailer of the finite always have something at hand to fiddle with. The person whose relationship to his beloved was only through the thought of love knows something different, when to be willing to do everything still seems not enough, and the effort of willing everything breeds lassitude, and he stands once again at the beginning. But then he must come to himself, understand himself. Perhaps pronounce the words? If a person who thinks that speaking is just letting one's tongue run on can pride himself on never having been at a loss for words, never having looked for a word in vain, then someone who even human greatness strikes dumb no doubt learned that, at least at that moment, he needed no admonition to curb his tongue. And the person who never went to bed weeping, weeping not because he could not sleep but because he no longer dared to lie awake, and the person who never endured the suffering of the impotence of the beginning, and the person who never became speechless – that person, at least, should never take it upon himself to talk of the religious sphere, but stay where he belongs – in the bedroom, in the shop, in the tittle-tattle of the street. But think how relative whatever it is that allows a

¹⁴⁶ An allusion to *memento mori*, Latin: reminder of death.

person to experience such things can be none the less; how relative compared to the religious person's absolute relation to the absolute!

A human being is capable of nothing at all, he is always to keep this in mind. This is the state that the religious person is in – accordingly he is incapable of taking an outing in the Deer Park, and why? Because in his own eyes he is better than others? *Absit*,¹⁴⁷ that is the piety of the monastery. No, it is because he is someone who is actually religious, not a fantastical priest who talks about ‘always’, or a fantastical listener who understands ‘always – and nothing’, but someone who understands hour after hour that there is nothing he is capable of. In the sickly state, the religious person is incapable of bringing the God-conception together with such a finite contingency as taking an outing in the Deer Park. He grasps the pain, and the fact that he grasps it regarding such an insignificant thing is surely also a profounder expression of his impotence than the high-flown ‘nothing’, which, if no more is said, readily becomes meaningless. The difficulty is not the fact that he cannot manage it (humanly speaking) but, first and foremost, to understand that he cannot manage it and dissolve the illusion (since he is always to bear in mind that he is incapable of anything) – he is over this difficulty and so the difficulty is, with God, to be capable of it. The more critical an undertaking, a resolution, an event, the easier it is (just because it is more direct) to bring the God-conception together with it – yes, the easier it is, that is to say, an ease due to the fact that one can so very easily trick oneself into a delusion. In the great crises in novels and novellas one not infrequently sees either the novel's entire cast grouped picturesquely and kneeling in prayer, or the main character kneeling to pray apart. However, the esteemed authors and authoresses are naïve enough to betray indirectly through the content, its form, and the attitude of the supplicants, that no doubt their heroes and heroines have not prayed many times previously in their lives, and this in spite of the scene being set in the year 1844, in a Christian country, and the active characters being Christian, and both the novel and the novella having the task of presenting the people as they actually are, even a little better. With great inwardness, the novel's hero brings the God-conception together with the extremely important event – but from the religious viewpoint the inwardness of the prayer is precisely not its momentary vehemence, but its persistence. However, the less significant

¹⁴⁷ Latin: far from it.

something is, the harder it is to bring the God-conception together with it. And yet it is exactly in this that the God-relationship is to be recognized. In making a great resolution, with the publication of a work that will supposedly transform the whole world, in an earthquake, at golden-wedding celebrations, in peril at sea, in the concealment of a birth, God's name may be used just as often as an interjection as religiously. One must therefore not be fooled by the fact that a priest omits the petty events of life and concentrates his eloquence and gesticulations on great scenes, and then at most, half-ashamedly, in decency adds in conclusion that in everyday life one should also show the same faith, the same hope, and the same courage (instead of the religious discourse being planned inversely, discoursing on the small events, the everyday, and then, at most, adding a few words of warning against the illusion that can so easily form the basis of the religiousness that makes itself known only on leap-year days),^{cc} because the former is aesthetic, and from an aesthetic viewpoint the invocation of God is neither more nor less than the noisiest interjection and God's revelatory appearance in events a theatrical tableau.

We left the religious person in the crisis of sickness, but this sickness is not unto death.¹⁴⁸ We shall now let him be fortified by the very same conception that annihilated him, the conception of God. Again I use a foreshortened perspective, since it is still not here that the interest of my task lies, and I shall not dwell on how the ethical (which is always rather distant from the absolute God-relationship) must enter regulatively and take command. Nevertheless I shall detain the reader with a comment or

^{cc} All in all, nothing is escorted so protectively by the comic as the religious, and the latter's nemesis is nowhere so close at hand as in the religious domain. When one hears an aestheticizing religious address in church, it is of course one's duty to be edified even if his reverence rattles on ever so rabidly. But on coming back to it later, the comic effect is not without interest, and the law for it is that wherever the speaker spreads every sail of eloquence to express the most sublime, he is being satirical without knowing it. 'The supplicant rises from his prayer so strengthened, oh, so strengthened, so extraordinarily strengthened,' but from the religious viewpoint the true strengthening is that which prepares for the possibility of the struggle beginning afresh the very next moment. 'The individual binds himself to God with a promise, a sacred promise, that he will ever and always, etc., and now feels so reassured, oh, so reassured,' but from the religious viewpoint one is wary of making promises (cf. Ecclesiastes [5:4]), and from the religious viewpoint it is precisely the brevity of the fixed term and self-mistrust that distinguish the inwardness of the promise. No, the inwardness of all the soul, and the assent of the heart purified of all double-mindedness [James 4:8] in the promise for today or for this morning – seen religiously, a promise like that has far more inwardness than this aestheticizing raising of glasses with our Lord. The one procedure suggests that the promise-maker has his everyday life in the religious sphere, the other sufficiently betrays that the one praying is a country member introduced by the priest.

¹⁴⁸ John 11:4.

two. First of all, that there are certainly not many in each generation who go through the suffering even of the beginning of the absolute religious relationship; and secondly, that a beginning in the existence-medium is far from being something decided once and for all, since it is only on paper that one is finished with the first moment and after that has nothing more to do with it. The absolute decision in the existence-medium is still, and remains, just an approximation (just that this is not understood comparatively in relation to the more or less of others, for then the individual has lost his ideality), because the eternal aims from above at the existing person who, by existing, is in motion, and thus the instant the eternal overtakes, he is already a little instant away. The beginning of the absolute decision in the existence-medium is least of all, once and for all, a thing of the past; for someone existing is not an abstract *X* who puts something behind him and then goes on through life, if I may so put it, undigested; a person existing becomes concrete in what is experienced, and in going further he still has it with him, and may therefore at any moment lose it. He has it with him not, however, as one has something in one's pocket; he is, through this, yes, this definite something, more definitely what he is, and in losing it he loses his own more definite determination. Through the decision in existence, the person existing has become, in a more definitely determined way, what he is. If he sets it aside, it is not he who has lost something; he does not have himself but having lost something: he has lost himself, and must now begin from the beginning.

The religious person has got over his illness (tomorrow owing to a small carelessness the relapse may occur). Perhaps he fortifies himself with the edifying reflection that God, who created man, must know best all those many things that to the human appear impossible to bring together with the thought of God, all this earthly distress, all the confusion he can be caught up in, and the need for diversion, for rest, as well as a night's sleep. It is obvious that here it is not a matter of the indulgence that is preached in the world, where one person finds consolation in another, in which they mutually console themselves, and leave out God. Every human being is magnificently planned, but among the things that ruin so many is this accursed man-to-man chattiness about things that ought to be suffered in silence but are also to be matured there, this confession before human beings instead of before God, this cordial communication to this and that person about things that should be private and exist only in secrecy before God, this impatient craving for temporary comfort. No, in the pain of

annihilation the religious one has learned that human indulgence profits nothing; therefore he hears nothing from that side, but is before God and endures the suffering of being a human being, then to be before God. Therefore it can be no comfort to him to know what the human crowd knows among itself, people who have a market town's conception of what it means to be a human being, and a glib,¹⁴⁹ gossipy conception at seventeenth hand of what it means to be before God. It is from God that he must draw his comfort, so that all his religiousness is not reduced to a rumour. This in no way means that he is to discover new truths, etc.; no, he is only to watch out in case, through being babbled into chattiness and the lust for preaching, he is prevented from experiencing within himself what thousands upon thousands before him have experienced. If it is true even of falling in love that a love affair is ennobling only when it teaches a person to make a secret of his feelings, how much more true it is of the religious!

Let us consider what paganism poetized about, that a god fell in love with an earthly woman. If she remained ignorant of his being a god, this relationship would be the greatest possible misery; for under the impression that the same standard should be applied to both, she would despair in demanding of herself the likeness. But if she discovered he was the god, at first she would be as though annihilated in all her lowliness, hardly daring admit to it. She would make one desperate attempt after the other to raise herself to his level. She would be anxious every time her lowliness made it necessary for them to be apart. She would be terrified in the torment of not knowing whether it was lack of will or lack of ability. Let us apply this now to the religious. Where, then, is the boundary for the single individual in his concrete existence between what is lack of will and lack of ability, between what is indolence and earthly selfishness and what the limitation of finitude? When, for one who exists, has the time of preparation gone where this question cannot return in all its first anxious strenuousness? When is that time in existence that is not a period of preparation? Let then all the dialecticians come together, they are incapable of deciding this for a single individual *in concreto*. For dialectic is in its truth a benevolent, ministering power that discovers, and assists in finding, where the absolute object of faith and worship is – there, namely, where the difference between knowledge and ignorance collapses in ignorance's absolute worship, there where

¹⁴⁹ 'Geläufig'.

the objective uncertainty resists in order to torture forth the passionate certainty of faith, there where the conflict of right and wrong collapses in absolute subjection's absolute worship. Dialectic itself does not see the absolute, but it leads, as it were, the individual along to it, and says, Here it must be, that I will vouch for; if you worship here, you worship God. But worship itself is not dialectic. A dialectic that mediates is a guardian angel that has failed.

The earthly woman loved by the god would at first be annihilated in her lowliness but then surely restored in the thought that he must know all this better than she. She would be annihilated by thinking of him divinely but then be restored in the thought that he was thinking of her humanly. Yes, were a girl of lowly station united even with a king of a foreign nation, how she would suffer in finding candour regarding all that reminded her of her lowliness in ways that might upset the relationship, in order to find peace in the border conflict between self-accommodation and making too great demands on herself?

But part of a human being's lowliness is being temporal and unable within temporality to lead the life of eternity uninterruptedly. And if his life is in temporality, then it is *eo ipso* piecemeal. If it is piecemeal, it is of course mixed with diversion, and in diversion he has gone from his God-relationship, or is there yet not as he is in the strong moment. If people say it is a painful thing for lovers to be separated, should it then not be painful for the one who is religious, and is it less painful that it is a diversion, and not something burdensome that separates, when it is precisely the need for diversion that most strongly proves his lowliness? For our religious person is not so placed that the priest is to admonish him to want to seek God; on the contrary, he is so strongly gripped that diversion is necessary if he is not to perish. Well, this is where the monastic proves tempting. Might it not, by a superhuman effort, be possible to approach nearer to God, to keep up the relationship without interruption, if possible without sleep! In another connection we speak of love managing to make the two equal.

Yes, that is correct if one is speaking of the relation of two human beings, because essentially they stand on the same level and the difference is contingent. But since between God and man there is an absolute difference, this direct equality is a blasphemous, mind-boggling thought, although that fact provides no comparative human dispensation from the utmost effort. But since there is this absolute difference between God and man, how does love's equality express itself? Through the absolute difference. And what is

the form of the absolute difference? Humility. What kind of humility? That which entirely admits its human lowliness, with humble candour before God, as the one who surely knows this better than man himself. The monastic movement is an attempt at being more than human, an enthusiastic and perhaps even pious attempt to resemble God. But herein lies the deepest suffering of true religiousness, the deepest thinkable, namely, relating to God with absolute decisiveness and being unable to have any decisive outward expression of it (for happy love between human beings after all expresses itself outwardly in their getting each other), since the most decisive outward expression is only relative, is both too much and too little, too much because it implies arrogance in respect of others, too little because it is still after all a worldly expression.

There are thus two paths to contemplate: the path of humble diversion and the path of despairing effort, the path to the Deer Park and the path to the monastery. To the Deer Park? Oh, yes, let us mention just it; I could as well mention much else that comes within the same categories. A fool will doubtless laugh at this thought, a superior religious person will feel offended, and both prove its correctness. But why mention something like the Deer Park? It is far more polite to speak on Sunday in very indefinite and vague Sunday-best generalities of these innocent pleasures, and then on weekdays speak of them in an everyday way. Yes, certainly it is more polite, and I have a glimmering of the indignation that the words 'Deer Park' will arouse in a good-mannered man in this connection, because they may serve here as an indirect reminder of the sense in which the religiousness of our times has come further than the Middle Ages, and because it is unpleasant having words like that bring the religious so close to home, instead of eyeing it from a distance, when one says: 'nothing', 'everything', 'always', 'never', 'daily vigilance', etc.

Our religious individual chooses the path to the Deer Park, and why? Because he dare not choose the path to the monastery. And why does he not dare? Because it is too exclusive. So then he takes the outing. 'But he does not enjoy himself,' someone will say. But, yes, he certainly does. And why does he enjoy himself? Because the humblest expression of the God-relationship is to admit one's humanity, and because it is human to enjoy oneself. If a woman can succeed in totally transforming herself just to please her husband, why should the religious one in his God-relationship not succeed in enjoying himself if this is the humblest expression of the God-relationship?

Were a poor labourer to fall in love with a princess and he believed she had fallen in love with him, what would be the humblest way of preserving the relationship? Would it not be by being exactly like the other labourers, going to work as usual and sharing with the others; and then, when he fell to thinking about the relationship while at work, heartening himself with the thought that humility would be more pleasing to the princess than all else, as long as he kept the thought of her constantly to himself, and more than happy to express the relationship in stronger ways if he dared? For it could never occur to the humble labourer that the princess was so foolish, and so foolishly worldly, as to derive any satisfaction from the world's attention being attracted, through his strange carry-on, to the fact that she was loved by a labourer. But there is a certain kind of religiousness which, presumably because the first beginning of the annihilation was not carried out effectively and with proper inwardness, conceives God as a jealous despot of limited intelligence and with a sickly desire to have the whole world know through a single person's strange carry-on that a particular human being loved him. As if God desired any distinction, or this were an appropriate distinction for God, since anyone can see that even for a princess it is no distinction to be loved by a labourer! A religiousness like that is itself sickly and ailing, and it therefore makes God sickly too. That it might occur to a power-crazed human being to demand that the world, by their conspicuous submission, be clear about how much power he has over others, proves nothing with regard to God. I wonder whether the religious person might not have scruples about doing all this should it indeed occur to him to think of God in this way, that is, as being really in need, yes, of the world's amazement and the strange song and dance of the reborn, which attracted the world's amazement and in this way directed the world's most sublime attention to the fact that God is there – the poor god, who in the predicament of his invisibility, yet wanting so much to have public attention drawn upon him, must sit and wait for someone to do it for him.

As yet I have kept this rather abstract, and now I shall have it happen as though it were today, for today is a Wednesday in the Deer Park season, and our religious person is going out to the woods while, experimenting, I examine the psychological states. Speaking of it is easy enough, doing it something else. And yet, in a certain sense speaking of it may not be quite so easy. I am well aware of the risk I take staking my crumb of renown as a writer, since everyone will find this utterly boring. It is still the same

Wednesday in the Deer Park season; it all turns on an outing there, yet so many pages have already been filled that a novelist would have been able to relate ten years' most interesting events, with grand scenes and exciting situations and assignations and secret births. Indeed, so many pages have been used that a priest with just half of them could have done with both time and eternity and death and the resurrection, with 'all' and 'always' and 'never' and 'nothing', and have done with them in such a way that one sermon could give you enough for a lifetime.

So it is a Wednesday in the Deer Park season. The religious person shares the common view of the importance of the necessary diversion, but that it is necessary precisely today by no means follows. This is where the difficulty lies with concretion, a difficulty that remains as long as the religious person is in existence, if he is to bring this view together with the particular moment on the particular day, with such-and-such states of mind, under such-and-such particular circumstances. When life is understood in this way, the vain quantitative differences vanish, for it is the 'how' of inwardness that determines the significance, not the quantitative 'what'.

Our religious person happens to be an independent and well-to-do man who keeps horse and carriage and has, as far as that goes and if it should come to that, both the time and the means to take an outing in the Deer Park every day. It is best to present the matter in this way for, as we said earlier, the religious address should possess enough irony to allow people to be exceedingly fortunate in their external circumstances, just so as to be able to make the religious aspect come to view more clearly. A man who has only one Wednesday free during the season may not have all that great difficulty in getting away, but this ease, and the difficulty that he is unable to get away on the other days, also makes it possible for the religious factor not to be the decisive one. It is the same here as with being earnest. Many a man believes he is earnest because he has a wife and children and heavy business engagements. But it does not follow that he has religious earnest; his earnest might perhaps also be sullenness and spite. When religious earnest is to be portrayed, it shows up best in outwardly favoured circumstances, for there it cannot be so easily confused with something else.

He will first make sure, then, that it is not a momentary desire, a whim of immediacy, that decides him; he wants to be inwardly convinced that he actually needs the diversion and trusts that God also no doubt knows it.

This is not the impudent assurance in the face of God of the reborn, of the kind that distinguishes such an aesthetic show-off in general, about having secured once and for all his credentials with God. But although in himself he knows this, and that he seeks diversion not with the desire of immediacy, since he would more than gladly do without it, his concern will still nevertheless arouse self-mistrust as to whether he might perhaps not be able to do without it a little longer. But on this point too he knows, in himself, that as long ago as last Sunday he felt this need of diversion but without giving way, just to prove from which side the impulse came; for he is convinced that God will not leave him in the lurch but will help him to find the right thing to do where the boundary is so hard to locate between what is indolence and what the limitation of finitude.

But what do you know, just when he would possibly, in his worry, go without diversion so as to hold out for one more day, at almost the very same moment there awakens in him that human touchiness that feels keenly the sting of being so dependent in thus having always to understand in this way that one is capable of nothing at all. And this touchiness is defiant and impatient; it all but wants to be united in a dubious conspiracy with the worry, for the worry would waive the diversion out of enthusiasm, but the defiance would waive it out of pride. And this irritability is sophistical: it would make him think that the God-relationship is spoiled by being brought to bear on such trifles, and that it reveals itself in its truth only in bigger decisions. And this touchiness is proud, for although the religious person has assured himself more than once that yielding to the needed diversion is the humblest expression of the God-relationship, it is always enticing to understand, at the heady moment of enthusiasm and while the work is going nicely, what one should perhaps at that moment not be doing, enticing compared with understanding exactly when it is to be done as something quite specific. Nevertheless this temptation¹⁵⁰ vanishes again, because the religious person is silent, and no doubt someone who is silent before God¹⁵¹ learns to give in but he learns also that this is blessed. If our religious person were to have a talkative friend on hand he would have come into the Deer Park easily enough, because it is a small matter when one has horse and carriage and sufficient means and is talkative – but then he would not have been our religious person, and our religious person also comes into the

¹⁵⁰ 'Anfægtelse'. ¹⁵¹ Habakkuk 2:20; Ecclesiastes 5:1–2.

Deer Park. So now the decision to seek diversion has been taken. And in that same instant the task is changed. If, shortly afterwards, the thought flashes through his soul that it was a mistake after all, he simply puts an ethical principle in its path, for in the face of a decision taken on fair consideration a fleeting thought must not play the master. He disarms this thought ethically in order not to be driven back into the highest relationship, something that would turn the importance of the decided-upon diversion to nothing. The direction here, then, is not in that of the God-relationship, as when the priest preaches; rather, it is the God-relationship itself that bids the person seek leave from it for a moment. It is, as it were, an agreement between God's solicitude and the human being's self-defence. The ethical consideration is quite simply this: that, if the choice is to be made, resolutely carrying through a decision is preferable to becoming a chatterer, because chatter is the absolute downfall of every spiritual state of affairs.

Look, we are all waiting for the big occasion that will allow us to demonstrate in action what grand fellows we are, and when a crown prince takes over the government in the mightiest European kingdom, assumes responsibility for the fate of millions, then there is a chance to make a decision and to act *sensu eminenti*.¹⁵² Unquestionably! But this is the profundity and likewise the irony of existence, that it is just as possible to act *sensu eminenti* when the person is a quite ordinary man and the exploit is an outing in the Deer Park. For the supreme achievement, after all, of which His Imperial Highness is capable is to make his decision before God. The accent is on this 'before God', the many millions are only an illusion. But the humblest of human beings can also make his decision before God, and anyone who really was such a religious person as could decide before God on an outing in the Deer Park need not stand in shame at the side of any imperial highness.

So much for the religious suffering that is a dying to immediacy. Let this suffice on that topic. I have a keen sense of what a poor showing it makes to prosecute inquiries into an everyday affair like this, which everybody down to the simplest maidservant and infantryman knows about; of how incautious of me it is to admit its difficulty and thus betray an inability to raise myself even just a small crumb above the lowest class's range of vision; of how close to satire it is that having devoted one's time and application

¹⁵² Latin: in the eminent, or strict, sense.

over a number of years, one ends up coming no further than something the most dim-witted human being knows – instead, alas, of possibly having in the same time, and with the same application, achieved something on China, Persia, even astronomy. There are perhaps not as many as ten people with the staying power to read this account, and hardly one in the whole kingdom who would go to the trouble of putting anything like it together himself; which latter, however, in one way consoles me, because even if everyone can indeed do it, if the account is really only work for a copyist, then my merit will be precisely to have done what all could do (for the weak human heart this is what is so off-putting about it) but no one cares to. So no one can be bothered to give such an account – but as existing to express it, to do it? Well, of course, action always has the advantage over description that what needs a long time to relate can be done so quickly – if one can do it. But before one has come to that point, what about the bother involved in learning? Yes, I say simply: I cannot do it; but since the secret lies in the hidden inwardness of religiousness, perhaps everyone can do it, at least there is no way of telling.

If, on the other hand, anyone shrinks at the thought of the enormous strain that living in this way must involve, and I can tell well enough how much of a strain it is from the fact that I, who am just sitting and experimenting with it, that is, staying essentially outside, still feel the strain of this work – well, I'd rather not say anything else, though I admire the inner exploit of religiousness, admire it as the greatest miracle but also frankly admit that with me it would not succeed: to reach from the highest conception of God and one's eternal happiness to having a good time at the Deer Park. It is, as I see it, miraculous; and I am not talking about it so as to make the life of poor people – supposing it was my business – still harder (ah, far from it!), seeing that it is hard enough; or to torment anyone by making life more difficult for them (God forbid!), seeing that it is difficult enough. On the contrary, I hope to render a service to the cultured, either by eulogizing the hidden inwardness of their religiousness (for the secrecy consists in no one being able to notice anything, and indeed there is no one who notices anything), or, if possible, by making the matter difficult enough to be able to meet the demands of the cultured, since surely in their going further the cultured must already have so very many difficulties behind them. For if anyone shrinks at the thought of the enormous effort involved in living in this way, I find it even more horrific that one goes still further, and further, into the bargain, by passing on to speculation and

world history – I find that even more horrific. But what am I saying? – after all, the mark of everything that goes further is its being *not only* this but *also* something more – so, I find it horrific – and on top of that something more – horrifically stupid.

The meaning of the religious suffering is dying to immediacy; its actuality is its essential persistence; but it belongs to inwardness and must not express itself outwardly (the monastic movement). If we now take someone who is religious, the knight of hidden inwardness, and place him in the existence-medium, a contradiction will appear as he relates to the surrounding world, and this he must become conscious of. The contradiction consists not in his differing from all others (this self-contradiction is precisely the law for the nemesis brought upon the monastic movement by the comic), but in the fact that, with all this inwardness hidden within him, with this pregnancy of suffering and blessing in his inner being, he looks just like other people^{dd} – and his looking just like other people is precisely what hides the inwardness. Something comic is present here, for in this there is a contradiction, and where there is contradiction the comic too is present. This comic aspect is not there for others, however, who know nothing about it; it is there for the one who is religious when humour is his incognito, as *Frater Taciturnus* says (cf. *Stages on Life's Way*). And it is well worth understanding this more closely, for next to the confusion in modern speculation which identifies faith with immediacy, perhaps the most confusing idea is that humour is supreme, for humour is not yet religiousness but its *confinium*,¹⁵³ concerning which one will find some remarks in the preceding, which I must beg the reader to call to mind.

Yet is humour the incognito of the religious person? Is it not his incognito that there is absolutely nothing to notice, absolutely nothing that could arouse suspicion of the hidden inwardness, not even so much

^{dd} Another author [Assessor Wilhelm] has (in *Either/Or*) correctly identified the core of the ethical as it being every human being's duty to become *open*: that is, *the revelation* ['Aabenbarelsen', the being manifest]. Religiousness, on the contrary, is hidden inwardness, but be it noted not the immediacy which is then to become open, not unclarified inwardness, but the inwardness whose clarifying property it is to be hidden. – Besides, one hardly needs reminding that in saying that the religious person's incognito is to look just like everyone else, this is not to be understood as saying that his incognito might be that of the actual robber, a thief, or a murderer. Surely the world has not sunk so low that open breaches of legality can be looked upon as the universally human. No, naturally the expression 'looking just like everyone else' secures legality; but this can also be the case without there being any religiousness in a person.

¹⁵³ Latin: boundary.

as the humorous? At its very maximum, if this can be reached in existence, this would no doubt be so;^{ec} but as long as the struggle and the suffering in inwardness continue, he will not succeed in wholly concealing the inwardness, but he will not express it directly and will prevent that negatively with the help of the humoristic. An observer who goes out among people to discover the religious person would therefore follow the principle that everyone in whom he discovered the humorous become the object of his attention. But if he has made the situation of inwardness clear to himself, he will also know that he can be fooled, for the religious person is not the humorist, though on the surface he is the humorist. Thus an observer on the lookout for the religious person who, intending to recognize him through the humour, comes across me would be fooled. He would indeed find humour but be fooled if he drew any conclusion from that, for I am not one who is religious but a humorist pure and simple. Someone might think it awfully presumptuous on my part giving myself the name of a humorist, and also believe that if I really were a humorist he would be sure to show me respect and honour. I shall not stop to consider this or let it detain me, since the objector is clearly assuming humour to be highest. I say, on the contrary, that someone who is religious *stricte sic dictus*¹⁵⁴ is infinitely higher than the humorist and differs from him qualitatively. And as for him not regarding me as a humorist, well, I shall be happy to have the objector take over my position as observer, letting the observer become aware of him: the result will be the same – the observer is fooled.

There are three existence-spheres: the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious. To these there correspond two boundaries: irony is the boundary

^{ec} A 'knight of faith' of this kind was portrayed in *Fear and Trembling*. But this picture was only a foolhardy anticipation, and the illusion achieved by presenting him in a state of completion and hence in a false medium, instead of in the existence-medium, and the beginning was made by giving the contradiction the slip – how an observer could become at all *aware* of him in such a way as to be able to place himself admiringly outside, and admire that there was nothing at all to *notice*, unless Johannes *de silentio* wants to say that this knight of faith is his own poetic product. But the contradiction then returns in the ambiguous situation of relating as poet and observer to the same person and then as poet producing a character in the medium of imagination (for this is of course the poet's medium), and as observer observing the same poetic figure in the existence-medium. – This dialectical difficulty seems already to have been noted by *Frater Taciturnus*, for he has avoided the anomaly by adopting the form of an experiment. Nor does he adopt an observer's relation to the *Quidam* of the experiment, but converts his observation into a psychological-poetic product and then has this come as close as possible to actuality by, instead of the foreshortened perspective, using linear measures approximating those of actuality, and through the experimental form.

¹⁵⁴ Latin: in the narrow sense of the word.

between the aesthetic and the ethical; humour the boundary between the ethical and the religious.

Let us take irony. Once an observer discovers an ironist, his attention will be aroused, for it is possible that the ironist is an ethicist. But he may also be fooled, for it is possible that the ironist is not an ethicist. One who is immediate is recognizable straight away, and once recognized it is a given fact that he is no ethicist, for he has not made the movement of infinity. The ironical rejoinder, if correct (and the observer is assumed to be a man of experience who knows how to tease and unsettle the speaker into revealing whether it is something he has learned by rote or there is a wealth of irony on account, as is always the case with an existing ironist), betrays that the speaker has made the movement of infinity, but no more than that. The irony arises from continually placing the particularities of the finite together with the infinite ethical requirement and letting the contradiction come about. Whoever can do this with skill, so as not to let himself be caught in any relativity where his skill becomes shy, must have made the movement of infinity, and to that extent it is possible that he is an ethicist.^{ff} The observer will therefore not even be able to catch him in his inability to grasp himself ironically; for it is also within his capacity to speak of himself as a third person, to place himself as a vanishing particular together with the absolute requirement – indeed to *put* them *together*. How amazing that the same expression that signifies the ultimate difficulty of human existence, joining together the absolutely different (such as the conception of God and a Deer Park outing) also serves in our language to signify setting people against each other.¹⁵⁵ But although this is evident, it is still not evident that he is an ethicist. It is only by relating

^{ff} If the observer can catch him in a relativity which he does not have the strength to grasp ironically, then he is not really an ironist. For if irony is not taken in a decisive sense, basically every human being is ironical. As soon as someone who has life in a certain relativity (and just this shows that he is not ironical) finds himself outside it in a relativity that he considers lower (a nobleman, for example, in a circle of peasants; a professor in the company of parish clerks; a city millionaire together with wretched beggars; a royal coachman in a room with peat-cutters; a manor-house cook together with weed-pickers, etc.) he becomes ironical. That is to say, he is not ironical, since his irony is simply the illusory superiority of relativity, but the symptoms and the rejoinders will bear a certain resemblance. But it is all nothing but a game under a certain presupposition, and the inhumanity recognizable from the fact that the person in question cannot grasp himself ironically, and its spuriousness recognizable in the obsequiousness shown by the person concerned when a relativity comes along that is higher than his own. This, alas, is what the world calls modesty: the ironist, he is proud!

¹⁵⁵ 'Sætte sammen', as 'put together' but also 'incite one against the other', 'cause mutual irritation', 'set people at variance' or 'by the ears'.

within himself to the absolute requirement that he is an ethicist. Such an ethicist uses irony as his incognito. In this sense Socrates was an ethicist but, please note, bordering on the religious, which is why the analogy to faith in his life was pointed out in the preceding (second section, chapter 2). What then is irony, if one wants to call Socrates an ironist, and not, like Magister Kierkegaard, consciously or unconsciously to bring out the one side only?¹⁵⁶ Irony is the unity of ethical passion, which in inwardness infinitely stresses one's own *I* in relation to the ethical requirement – and culture, which, outwardly, infinitely abstracts from the personal *I* as one finitude among all the other finitudes and particulars. The result of this abstraction is that no one notices the first, and this is exactly the art of it, and the true infinitization of the first is thereby made possible.⁸⁵ The mass of people live in the opposite way. They are busy with being something, when someone is looking, and possibly in their own eyes they are something; but inwardly, where it is the absolute requirement that watches them, they do not relish this accentuating of the personal *I*.

Irony is an existence-determination, so nothing is more ridiculous than to suppose it to be a figure of speech, or an author's counting himself lucky when once in a while managing to express himself ironically. Anyone who has essential irony has it all day long and is not tied to any specific form, because it is the infinite within him.

Irony is cultivation of the spirit and therefore follows next after immediacy; then comes the ethicist, then the humorist, then the religious person.

But why does the ethicist use irony as his incognito? Because he grasps the contradiction between the manner in which he exists inwardly and the fact that he does not express it outwardly. For the ethicist does become open in so far as he exhausts himself in the tasks of factual actuality, but the immediate one does that too, and what makes him an ethicist is the

⁸⁵ The desperate attempt of the abortive Hegelian ethics to make the state the highest ethical authority is a most unethical attempt to finitize individuals, an unethical flight from the category of individuality into that of the race (cf. second section, chapter 1[second part, subsection 1]). The ethicist in *Either/Or* has already protested against this, directly and indirectly; indirectly at the end of the essay on the equilibrium between the aesthetic and the ethical in the personality, where he himself has to make a concession in the religious direction [SKS 3, pp. 309–13]; and again at the end of the article on marriage (in *Stages*) [SKS 6, pp. 156–69] where although even from the ethics that he champions, which is the direct opposite of the Hegelian, he presses up the price of the religious to as high a level as possible, he still makes room for it.

¹⁵⁶ Kierkegaard's dissertation thesis *Om Begrebet Ironi (On the Concept of Irony)*, SKS 1, where Socrates is made out to be an ironist plain and simple.

movement^{hh} by which he puts his life out there together, inwardly, with the ethical's infinite requirement, and this is not seen directly. In order not to be distracted by the finite, by all the relativities in the world, the ethicist places the comic between himself and the world, and ensures thereby that he himself does not become comic through a naïve misunderstanding of his ethical passion. An immediate enthusiast bellows from dawn to dusk; always big in his boots, he pesters people with his enthusiasm; he fails altogether to see that they are not enthused, unless they beat him. He is doubtless well informed, and the orders are to the effect of a complete transformation – of the whole world; yes, it is here he has heard wrongly, for the orders are to the effect of a complete transformation of oneself. If such an enthusiast is contemporary with an ironist, the latter will naturally know how to take comic advantage of him. The ethicist, on the other hand, is ironical enough to see quite well that what interests him absolutely does not interest the others absolutely; he grasps this discrepancy and interposes the comic, so as with the more inwardness to be able to keep hold of the ethical in himself. Now the comedy begins, for what people think of someone like that is always: nothing has importance for him. And why not? Because for him the ethical is absolutely important; he differs in this from the common run of people, for whom so many things are important, yes, almost everything – but nothing absolutely important. – Yet, as was said, an observer can be fooled if he takes an ironist to be an ethicist, for irony is only possibility.

So too with the humorist and the one who is religious, since according to the foregoing the religious one's own dialectic forbids the direct expression, forbids recognizable difference, protests against the external's commensurability and yet, if the choice has to be made, honours the monastic movement far above mediation. The humorous is constantly (not in the sense of the priest's 'always', but at every time of day, wherever he is, and whatever he is thinking or doing) putting the God-idea together

^{hh} That Socrates took a negative attitude to the actuality of the state was partly a matter of the ethical being just what he was to discover, partly of his dialectical position as an exception and *extraordinarius* [see p. 39 n. 26], and last, of the fact that he is an ethicist bordering on the religious. Just as one finds in him an analogy to faith, so too there is an analogy to hidden inwardness, except that he expressed this outwardly in negative action, by abstaining, and to that extent contributed to letting people become aware of it. In the incognito of humour the hidden inwardness of religiousness escapes attention by being like others, except that there is the undertone of humour in the common rejoinder and an accent of it in the everyday way of life, though it takes an observer to notice it. Socrates's restraint was something nobody could fail to observe.

with other things and bringing about the contradiction – but he himself does not relate to God in religious passion (*stricte sic dictus*).¹⁵⁷ He transforms himself into a playful yet profound right of way¹⁵⁸ for all these transactions to pass through, but he does not relate to God. The religious person does the same, he puts the God-conception together with everything and sees the contradiction, but he relates in his innermost being to God; whereas an immediate religiousness rests in the pious superstition of seeing God directly in everything; and the one who is reborn impertinently retains God, to have with him where he is, so that one may be sure just by seeing the reborn that God is with him, since he has him in his pocket. Religiousness with humour as its incognito is therefore: unity of absolute religious passion (in dialectical absorption) and maturity of spirit, which recalls religiousness from all exteriority in inwardness, and again in this there is indeed the absolute religious passion. The religious one finds that what occupies him absolutely appears to occupy others very little, but he draws no conclusion, partly because he does not have the time, and partly because he cannot know for certain whether all these people are not knights of hidden inwardness. He lets the surroundings constrain him to do what the dialectical absorption demands of him, to place a cover between people and himself in order to protect and ensure the inwardness of his suffering and of his God-relationship. But this does not mean that someone who is religious in this way becomes inactive; on the contrary, he does not leave the world but remains in it, for his incognito is just that. But he absorbs his outward activity inwardly before God by admitting that he is incapable of anything, by cutting off every teleological relation to his activity in its outward direction, to all the proceeds derived from it in the finite world, even though he still works as hard as he can; and precisely this is enthusiasm. Someone reborn always spreads God's name outwards,ⁱⁱ the certitude of his faith is sufficiently secure. But the mark of the certitude of faith is not its being certain, and just as its certitude is the greatest of all, so is the same certitude the most ironic of all, otherwise it is not the certitude of faith. It is certain that with the pious person all that is pleasing to God will succeed – it is certain, oh, so certain! Indeed nothing is as certain as this. But now what comes next, and please note that the investigation is not on paper but in the existence-medium, and the

ⁱⁱ One recalls: the life of an Apostle is paradoxically dialectical, which is why he turns outwards. Everyone who does that and is not an apostle becomes only an aesthete gone astray.

¹⁵⁷ Latin: in the narrow sense of the word. ¹⁵⁸ 'Gjennemgangssted', lit. place of passage.

believer is a particular existing person in the concretion of existence. So this is what is eternally certain, that the pious person will succeed in what is pleasing to God. But now for what comes next: what is it that pleases God? Is it this or that? Is this the occupation he is to choose in life, this the girl he is to marry, this the work he is to begin on, this the project he is to give up? Yes, perhaps, and perhaps not. Is this not ironical enough? And yet it is eternally certain, and there is nothing else so certain, that the pious person will succeed in what is pleasing to God. Yes, but that is why the religious person shall not be concerned so much about the external but with wishing for the highest goods, peace of mind, the salvation of his soul: this always pleases God. And it is certain, as certain as God lives, that the pious person will succeed in what is pleasing to God. So it pleases God that he will do this, but when will he succeed? Is it straight away, or in a year, or perhaps only at the end of this earthly life; might not the conflict and the test last as long as that? Perhaps, perhaps not. Is this not ironical enough? And yet it is certain, so very certain, that the pious person will succeed in what is pleasing to God. If this certitude cracks then faith cracks; but if the uncertainty which is its mark and form ceases, then we have not gone forwards in religiousness, but back to childish forms. As soon as the uncertainty ceases to be the form of the certitude, as soon as the uncertainty no longer keeps the religious person constantly suspended in order constantly to seize the certitude, as soon as certitude as it were affixes a lead seal on the one who is religious, yes, then he is naturally on the point of becoming the mass.

But it seems to follow from the hidden inwardness with humour as its incognito that the religious person is secured against becoming a martyr, something that the reborn would be more than happy to become. Yes, indeed, the knight of hidden inwardness is made safe, he is as a coddled child compared to the awakened who walks boldly towards martyrdom – unless the martyrdom lies in that suffering of annihilation which is dying to immediacy, the resistance of the divine itself against someone existing who is prevented from relating absolutely, and finally, life in the world with this inwardness but with no way of expressing it.

Psychologically, the law holds quite simply that with the same force which when directed outwardly has such-and-such efficacy, an even greater force is required to prevent its having that effect. For with a force directed outwards and the resistance directed inwards, only half the resistance can be counted as resistance, the other half support. Hidden

inwardness has its martyrdom in itself. But then it is surely possible that every other human being is such a knight of hidden inwardness? Yes, why not? Whom can that harm? Perhaps someone who has indeed a little religiousness and who finds it indefensible that this should not be appreciated; that is, someone who couldn't bear the sight of the most passionate inwardness looking deceptively like its opposite. But why does a person who is religious in this way not choose the monastery? You can even find advancement and preferment there, an order of precedence for the religious. The true knight of hidden inwardness cannot be put off by this, for he is wholly occupied with being so, less with seeming so (though as far as that goes he must employ some effort in preventing that), not at all with whether everyone else is so regarded.

But from this hypothetical insight back to the observer: he can be cheated if he unquestioningly takes a humorist to be someone who is religious. In his innermost being the religious one is anything but a humorist; on the contrary, he is absolutely occupied with his God-relationship. Nor does he interpose the comic between himself and others in order to make them ridiculous, or to laugh at them (such an outward direction is away from religiousness). But since he dares not, by virtue of true religiousness being hidden inwardness, express his religiousness outwardly, for that would secularize it, he must be constantly discovering the contradiction. And just because he has not yet wholly succeeded in drawing the inwardness back into himself, humour becomes his incognito and an *indicium*.¹⁵⁹ He hides his inwardness not to be able to apprehend others as comic, but conversely, so that the inwardness in him can be inwardness in truth, and he discovers the comic in consequence of this, though not giving himself the time to comprehend it. Nor does he feel himself to be better than others, for such a comparative religiousness is precisely externality and hence not religiousness. Nor does he think that anyone regards as tomfoolery what to him is most important of all; even were someone to say that, he has no time to listen but knows that the absolute passion marks the limit of mutual understanding. Absolute passion cannot be understood by a third party; this holds for the relation of others to him and for that of himself to others. In absolute passion, the passionate person, through having reflected himself out of every external relativity, is in the very extremity of his subjectivity; but a third party is

¹⁵⁹ Latin: indicator.

precisely a relativity. A person absolutely in love already knows this. A person absolutely in love has no idea whether he is more in love than others or less, for anyone who does know that is precisely not absolutely in love. Nor does he know that he is the only one who has been truly in love; for if he knows that, he knows precisely that he is not absolutely in love – and yet he knows that a third party cannot understand him, because a third party will understand him only in terms of an object of passion in general, and not in the absoluteness of passion. Should anyone think that this is because the object of love has a contingent side through being this particular individual, and then make the objection that God is after all not such a particular, and consequently that the one religious person should be able to understand the other religious person in the absolute passion, the rejoinder must be that all understanding between one human being and another must always be in some third, something more abstract which is neither of them. But it is precisely in absolute passion, which is the extreme of subjectivity, and in the heartfelt ‘how’ of this passion, that the individual is removed as far as possible from this third. But love does, after all, differ dialectically from religiousness, for love can be expressed outwardly while religiousness cannot; that is, if true religiousness is hidden inwardness, and if the monastic movement itself a deviation.

If anyone says that this hidden inwardness with humour as its incognito is pride, he simply betrays the fact that he is not the religious person, since otherwise he would be in just the same case as the other, turned absolutely inward. What the objector really intends with his objection is to sweep the religious individual into a relativity squabble about which of the two is the more religious, and arrive thereby at the result that neither of them is. A large number of objections are on the whole simply self-betrays, and in reflecting on them I am often reminded of the story of an army lieutenant and a Jew who met on the street. The lieutenant grew angry because the Jew was looking at him, and he burst out: ‘What are you staring at, Jew?’ The Jew with appropriate irony answered: ‘How is it that you know, Mr Lieutenant, that it is you I am looking at?’ No, if anything is pride and presumption, and I say this without indicting anyone, much less implying that they are aware of it themselves, then every direct expression of the relationship with God is that, every direct expression through which someone who is religious seeks to make himself recognizable. If the God-relationship is a human being’s highest distinction (even though this distinction is open to anyone), then the direct expression is

presumption, yes, even the direct expression of being what is called an outcast,¹⁶⁰ yes, even transforming the world's mockery of oneself into a direct expression of being the religious person is presumption, for the direct expression implies an indirect indictment of everyone else for not being religious. The characteristically human¹⁶¹ is hidden inwardness in absolute passion; here once more we have the implication that any other human being can be just as capable of approaching God, because the person who in absolute inwardness wants to be conscious of being a chosen one *eo ipso* lacks inwardness, since his life is comparative. It is this comparing and relativizing that treacherously, though no doubt often unconsciously, seeks an alleviating indulgence in the form of a cordial effusiveness towards one another. Someone absolutely in love has nothing to do with any third party. He can happily assume that everyone else is just as much in love. He finds no one to be ridiculous in the role of lover, but he does think it laughable that in the role of lover he is supposed to relate to a third party, just as he would have to be found laughable, conversely, by every lover should he want to be a third party. The religiousness of hidden inwardness does not think itself better than anyone else, does not find itself otherwise marked out by the God-relationship in a way not possible for everyone, and the person who humbles himself before the ideal hardly considers himself good let alone better than others; but he also knows that if a third party is there as witness (with his knowledge, otherwise of course it is as if there were no one) to the fact that he humbles himself before God, then he is not humbling himself before God. But from this it follows, quite consistently, that he will participate in the external divine worship, partly because the need he feels to be there will be like everyone else's, partly because his abstaining would be a worldly attempt to draw attention upon himself negatively, and finally, because there is no third party *there*, at least not to the religious one's knowledge, for he naturally assumes that everyone present is there for their own sake, not to observe others, which is not even the case with someone who, according to the word of a superior landed proprietor, goes to church for the sake of the servants, in order to set them a good example – of how not to go to church.

The comic emerges through hidden inwardness's relation to the surroundings as the religious one actually hears and sees what, when put together with his heartfelt passion, has a comic effect. Therefore, even if

¹⁶⁰ 1 Corinthians 9:27. ¹⁶¹ 'Det humane'.

two who are religious conversed with each other, the one would seem comic to the other, for each of them would constantly have his inwardness in mind¹⁶² and, together with this, now hear what the other said, and hear it as comic because neither of them dared express the hidden inwardness directly. At most the accompanying note of humour would lead each to conceive a suspicion about the other.

Whether anyone who is religious in this way exists, or has existed, whether everyone is like this or none, I do not and cannot possibly decide. In the case of one who is religious in this way I would never, even if I were a real observer, come further than conceiving a suspicion because of the humour – and as far as I myself am concerned, I know only too well that I am not the one who is religious. Still, I can surely be allowed the satisfaction of sitting here experimenting with how life¹⁶³ would be with a person who is religious in this way, without, in speculative fashion, and in breach of the old rule: *conditio non ponit in esse*,¹⁶⁴ incurring the paralogism of arguing from the hypothetical to being; still less, on the strength of the identity of thought and being, inferring from my hypothetical thinking that it is myself. My experiment is as innocent and as far as can be from offending anyone, for it doesn't approach anyone too closely by saying that *they* are the religious person, and it affronts no one by denying they are that.¹⁶⁵ It makes it possible that no one is and that everyone is – with the exception of those that it cannot offend because they themselves say that they are not religious in this way, either saying it directly, as I do, or indirectly by having gone further. Also included here are this or that reborn who would be offended if he were told that he was religious in this way – and no one is supposed to be offended by my experiment. It willingly admits, then, that a reborn of this kind is not the knight of hidden inwardness; that is obvious enough, since the reborn himself is obvious enough. Just as there is an ungodliness that is and wants to be noticed, so likewise a godliness, though one should be aware of the extent to which the way in which a reborn overwhelmed by the religious draws attention to himself is due to his being sick, and the religiousness itself a helplessness under which he himself suffers until the religiousness in him concentrates itself in a healthier way, inwardly. But where godliness wants to be conspicuous, the situation is different. It is a pious and in the strictest sense godly expression of the relation to God to admit to being a sinner;

¹⁶² 'In mente'. ¹⁶³ 'Tilværelsen'. ¹⁶⁴ Latin: an assumption does not bring into being.

¹⁶⁵ A pun on 'nær' (near) and 'fornærme' (insult).

there is an *ungodliness* that wants to be known by the defiance that raucously denies that it is one, but then the other side of this conspicuousness: if three reborns carry on a dispute of honour among themselves as to which is the greatest sinner get into a fist fight about this worthy position, then for them the godly expression has become a worldly title.

In the last century a thesis propounded by Lord Shaftesbury,¹⁶⁶ making laughter the test of truth, led to one or another little investigation into whether or not this was so.¹⁶⁷ In our own time the Hegelian philosophy has wanted to give the comic the ascendancy,¹⁶⁸ which seems especially odd on the part of the Hegelian philosophy, capable, least of all philosophies as it is, of withstanding a blow from that quarter. In everyday life we laugh when something is made laughable and after laughing one sometimes says: But really it's indefensible to joke about something like that. However, if the story is made really amusing, it is hard to stop spreading it – naturally, once the laughter has subsided, with the edifying consequence clause that it is indefensible to joke about something like that. One fails to notice how laughable it is that the contradiction lies here in the feigned attempt to act ethically with the help of an edifying consequence clause instead of abandoning the antecedent. With things as they are now, when the advancement and spreading of culture and polish, when the refinement of life, contributes to developing the sense of the comic, so that a prevailing preference for the comic is characteristic of our time, which in both the right and the wrong senses seems to rejoice in the Aristotelian view that stresses a sense of the comic as a distinguishing mark of human nature – then the religious address must have long been aware of how the comic relates to the religious. For what so much occupies peoples' lives, what constantly comes up in conversation, in social intercourse, in books, in the modifying of the entire life-view, that is something that the religious dare not ignore; unless of course the performances in church on Sunday are meant to be a form of indulgence in which an hour-long grumpy devoutness buys permission to laugh freely all week long. The question of the legitimacy of the comic, of its relation to the religious, whether it might not have a legitimate place in the religious address, this question is of essential

¹⁶⁶ Anthony Ashley Cooper (1671–1713), English writer and philosopher.

¹⁶⁷ In C. F. Flögel, *Geschichte der komischen Litteratur (History of Comical Writing)*, vol. 1, pp. 104–13.

¹⁶⁸ In Hegelian aesthetics, cf. Hegel's *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, tr. T. M. Knox (Oxford, 1975), pp. 1236–7; but also in Heiberg's version of Hegel's aesthetics.

importance for a religious existence in our time, where the comic everywhere runs off with the victory. To cry ‘oh, dear’ and ‘ah, me’ over this manifestation only shows how little the champions of the religious respect what they fight for, since surely it shows far greater respect for the religious to demand that it be instated in its rights in everyday life than by freakishly keeping it away in a Sunday remoteness.

The matter is quite simple. The comic is present in every stage of life (*except that the position differs*), for wherever there is life there is contradiction, and where there is contradiction the comic is present. The tragic and the comic are the same in so far as both are contradiction; but *the tragic is the suffering contradiction, the comic the painless contradiction*.ⁱⁱ That something which the comic interpretation sees as comic can cause the

ⁱⁱ The Aristotelian definition (*Poetics* V [1449a, 34ff.]): τὸ γὰρ γελοῖόν ἐστιν ἀμάρτημά τι καὶ αἰσχος ἀνόδουνον [καὶ] οὐ φθαρτικόν [the laughable may be defined as a mistake or a deformity not productive of pain or harm to others] is not such as to leave entire families of the comic secure in their ridiculousness, and indeed it is doubtful, even with respect to that part of the comic that it covers, whether the definition does not bring us into collision with the ethical. His example, that one laughs at an ugly and distorted face when, note, this brings no pain to the person who has it, is neither quite correct nor so happily chosen as to bring to light the secret of the comic as though in one swoop. The example lacks reflection, since even if the distorted face does not cause pain it is still painful to be thus fated to provoke laughter just by showing one’s face. It is fine and correct of Aristotle to want to separate from the laughable that which tends to arouse sympathy, to which also belong the pitiful and the pitiable. Even in otherwise first-rate comic poets, one finds examples of the use of the laughable that is not unalloyed, but has an admixture of the pitiful (e.g., in several scenes Trop [in Heiberg’s *Recensenten og Dyret* (The Critic and the Beast)] is more pitiful than ludicrous, while the busy trifler [Holberg’s *Den Stundesløse*], on the contrary, is unqualifiedly laughable precisely because he has all the requirements of a happy and carefree life). The Aristotelian example lacks reflection in this sense, but the definition also lacks it itself, in that it conceives the laughable as a something, instead of recognizing that the comic is a relation, the misrelation of contradiction, but free from pain.

I shall throw in a few random examples here to show that the comic is present wherever there is a contradiction, and where one is justified in ignoring the pain as non-essential. Hamlet swears by the fire tongs [*Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, Act III, Scene 2; the English text says ‘these pickers and stealers’, which a commentary glosses as ‘these hands’, and none of the translations available to Kierkegaard in Danish or German gives fire tongs], the comedy resting in the contradiction between the solemnity of an oath and the attribution that annuls it, whatever its object. – If one were to say, ‘I would stake my life on there being fully four shillings’ worth of gold in the binding of this book’ [a dig at Heiberg; cf. *SKS* 18, p. 272, and *KfN* 2, JJ:396] the contradiction is between the highest pathos (staking his life) and the object; it is teasingly sharpened by the word ‘fully’, opening a prospect of there possibly being four and a half shillings’ worth, as though that were less contradictory. – Holophernes [Holberg’s *Ulysses from Ithaca*] is said to be four and a half metres tall. The contradiction rests essentially in the latter part. The four metres are fantastic, but fantasy is not in the habit of speaking of halves; the half metre brings one down to earth. Whoever laughs at the four metres does not laugh appropriately, but anyone who laughs at the four and a half metres knows what he is laughing at.

When the priest gesticulates most violently in the category of a lower sphere, it is comic; it is as though one were to say, calmly and indifferently, ‘I will offer my life for my country’, and then add with the greatest pathos, gesturing and grimacing, ‘Indeed, I would do it for ten rix-dollars.’ But when this happens in church I must not laugh, because I am not an aesthetic spectator but a

comic figure imaginary suffering makes no difference. If it did, then it would be incorrect, for instance, to see the busy trifler¹⁶⁹ as comic. Satire, too, entails pain, but this pain is teleologically dialectical and directed towards healing. The difference between the tragic and the comic rests in the relation of the contradiction to the idea. The comic grasp brings out the contradiction, or lets it

religious listener, whatever the priest is. – It is genuinely comic for Pryssing [a publisher in Holberg's *Recensenten og Dyret*] to say 'he' in speaking with Trop [an eternal student]. And why? Because the Maecenas-relativity that Pryssing wants to establish with Trop in this form of address contradicts the total ridiculousness within which P. and Trop are equals on a level basis. – When a child of four years turns to a child of three and a half and says, patronizingly: 'Come now, my little lamb', this is comic, even if one smiles rather than laughs, because neither of the children is ridiculous *per se* [in itself], and one smiles not without being in a way touched. But the comic rests in the relativity that the one little one seeks to establish in relation to the other little one; what is touching is the childlike manner in which it is done. – When a man applies for a permit to establish himself as innkeeper but is turned down, that is not comic; but if the application is turned down because there are so few innkeepers, then it is comic, a reason in favour being used as a reason against. There is a story of a baker who said to a poor woman, 'No, mother, she [a distancing form of address] doesn't get anything; just now there was one who didn't get anything either. We can't be giving to everyone.' The comic lies in his seeming to reach the sum and result, 'everyone', by subtracting. – When a girl applies for a permit to establish herself as a public prostitute, this is comic. We properly feel that it is difficult to become something respectable (e.g., when an applicant is turned down for the post of master of hounds, that is not comic), but to have an application refused for becoming something contemptible is a contradiction. Of course, if she receives permission, that is also comic, but the contradiction differs, it is that, precisely in showing its power, the legal authority shows its lack of power: its power by making it legal, its lack of power by being unable to make it permissible.

Mistakes are comic and are all to be explained by contradiction, however complicated the combinations become. – When something inherently comic has become customary and a commonplace, it does not give us pause; we laugh at it only when it appears to the second power. Knowing that a man is absent-minded, one gets used to it and does not reflect on the contradiction, until once in a while it becomes two-layered and the contradiction is that what is intended to conceal the first distraction reveals a still greater. An absent-minded person puts his hand into a bowl of spinach served by the waiter, and on discovering his distraction, to conceal it he says, 'Oh, I thought it was caviar', for caviar is not eaten with the fingers either.

A jump in speech can have a comic effect, because there is a contradiction between the jump and the reasonable conception of human speech as being precisely something connected. – If it is a madman speaking we do not laugh. When a peasant knocks at the door of a man who is a German, and talks with him to find out whether there is someone in the house whose name the peasant has forgotten but who has ordered a load of peat, and the German, impatient at being unable to understand what the peasant is talking about, says: 'Das ist doch wunderbarlich [That's strange]', to the great joy of the peasant, who says, 'That's right, Wunderlich, that was the man's name', then the contradiction is that the German and the peasant cannot talk together because language is an obstacle, yet the peasant nevertheless [thinks he] gets the information through the language.

By its involvement in contradiction something that is not inherently ridiculous may cause laughter. If a man ordinarily goes around oddly dressed but then, for once, finally appears in elegant attire, we laugh at this because we recall the other.

If a soldier stands in the street and gazes at the wonderful window display of a fancy-goods store, and comes closer for a better look, with glowing countenance and eyes fixed only on the window display failing to see the basement yard becoming unduly near, and just as he is about to have a

¹⁶⁹ The hero of Holberg's play, *Den Stundesløse*. See p. 235 n. 138.

become manifest, by having the way out in mind;¹⁷⁰ that is why the contradiction is painless. The tragic grasp sees the contradiction and despairs over the way out. It goes without saying that this must be understood in such a way that the various nuances nevertheless obey the qualitative dialectic of the spheres

really good look, he disappears into the basement, then the contradiction is in the movement, the direction upward of the head and gaze, and the direction down, infernally, into the basement. Had he not been gazing upwards it would not have been so ridiculous. So it is more comic for a man who walks about gazing at the stars to fall into a hole in the ground than when it happens to someone not thus elevated above the earthly [as famously happened to the Greek pre-Socratic philosopher Thales].

The reason why a drunk can make such a comic impression is his expressing a contradiction of motion. The eye demands evenness of gait, and the greater the reason for insisting on it, the more comic the effect of the contradiction (a man who is dead-drunk is therefore less comic). If, e.g., a superior comes along and the drunk, seeing him, wants to pull himself together and walk steadily, then the comic becomes more evident since the contradiction does so too. He succeeds for a few steps until the spirit of contradiction carries him off once more. If he manages while passing the superior, the first contradiction becomes another one: that we know him to be drunk and yet this is not apparent. In the one case we laugh at him while he reels because the eye insists on steadiness; in the second case we laugh at him because he holds himself steady when our knowledge of his condition insists that we see him reel. There is also a similar comic effect when we see a sober man engaged in hearty and intimate conversation with someone he does not know to be drunk while the observer does know. The contradiction lies in the mutuality of the two men's conversation, that is, in its absence and the sober man not noticing this.

It is comic when in ordinary conversation a man uses the sermon's rhetorical question (which does not require an answer but merely forms the stepping-stone to answering it himself); it is comic when the man with whom he speaks misunderstands this and interjects the answer. The comic lies in the contradiction between wanting to be, at one and the same time, both orator and conversationalist, or wanting to be an orator in a conversation; the other's error makes this evident and is a just nemesis; for anyone using such forms in talking with another says indirectly, We two are not conversing with each other, but it is I who am the orator.

Caricature is comic. How? Through the contradiction between likeness and unlikeness. The caricature must resemble a person, in fact an actual, particular person. If it does not, it is not comic but a straightforward exercise in meaningless fantasy. The shadow of a man on the wall while you sit and talk with him can have a comic effect, because it is that of the man you are talking with (the contradiction: that at the same time you are seeing that it is not he). If you were to see the same shadow on the wall but no man was present, or if you saw the shadow and not the man, it would not be comic. The more the man's actuality is accentuated, the more comic the shadow becomes. If, e.g., one is caught by the expression on the face, the mellifluousness of the voice, and the appropriateness of the comments, and then at the same time sees the grimacing shadow, then the comic effect is greatest, so long as it is not wounding. If the person you are conversing with is a scatterbrain, then it is less that the shadow appears comic as that it convinces one that the shadow in some way resembles him in an ideal way.

Contrast produces a comic effect through contradiction, whether the situation is that of the inherently non-risible being used to make the risible risible, or of the risible making the inherently non-risible risible, or of the risible and the risible making each other risible, or of the situation making the inherently non-risible and the inherently non-risible become risible. If a German-Danish priest declares from the pulpit, 'The word became pork' (*Fleisch*) [John 1:14], that is comic. The comedy lies here not only in the ordinary contradiction arising when someone speaks in a foreign language unfamiliar to them and the effect produced by their words differs from the one wanted; the contradiction is made more acute by its being a priest and that he is preaching, since speech in the context of a priest's address is used only in a

¹⁷⁰ Latin: *in mente*.

that condemns subjective arbitrariness. Thus if someone makes everything comic with nothing, one sees straight off that his comedy has no relevance, since it lacks a footing in any sphere, and that the inventor himself is open to a comic construal from the ethical sphere, because he himself, as one who exists, must in one way or another have a footing in existence. If someone were to say, Repentance is a contradiction, *ergo*¹⁷¹ it is comic, one would immediately see it

rather special way, and the least that can be taken for granted is that he can speak the language. Furthermore, the contradiction verges on the ethical domain: that one can make oneself guilty of blasphemy innocently. When, in the cemetery, one reads on a gravestone the effusions in verse of a man bewailing in three lines the loss of his little son and who, at the end, bursts out in the verse, Take comfort, reason, he lives!, and this effusion is signed Hilarius, Executioner – this will certainly produce a comic effect in anyone. First, in this connection the name itself (Hilarius) [Greek: Hilaros, good-humoured] has a comic effect; one cannot help thinking, well, yes, with a name like Hilarius, no wonder one knows how to console oneself! Then there is his position as executioner. It is true that every human being can have feelings, but there are certain walks in life that cannot be seen to stand in any close relation to feeling. Finally, the outburst, Take comfort, reason! You might suspect that it would occur to a professor of philosophy to confuse himself with reason, but for an executioner it would be more difficult. If it is objected that the executioner is not addressing himself (Take comfort, you sensible man!) but reason, then the contradiction becomes still more comic, because, say what you will about reason in our time, it would be too rash an assumption to suppose that it was on the way to despair at the thought of Hilarius losing his son.

Let these examples be enough, and let anyone put off by this note leave it unread. It is easy to see that the examples have not been scraped together with scholarly care, but also that they are not the flotsam left by aestheticians. Quite clearly, there is enough of the comic everywhere and at any time, if only one has an eye for it. One could continue for as long as it takes, if in being clear about where to laugh one did not also know where not to laugh. Just let the comic join in; it is no more immoral to laugh than it is immoral to weep. But just as it is immoral to go about whimpering all the time, so too it is immoral to abandon oneself to the vague excitability that lies in laughing when one does not quite know whether to laugh or not, and thus does not have the joy of laughter, and also makes it impossible to be sorry when one has laughed in the wrong place. The reason why the comic has become tempting in our day is that it seems almost as though it wanted to put on a show of illicitness in order to acquire the fascination of the forbidden, and in turn, as what is forbidden, to give the idea that laughter can consume everything. But although I do not have much to be proud of *qua* author, I am nevertheless proud in the consciousness that I can hardly be accused of having misused my pen in respect of the comic, have never let it serve the interest of the moment, never applied the comic view to anyone or anything without first seeing, by comparing the categories, from which sphere the comic came and how it related to the same thing, or the same person, interpreted with pathos. It is also satisfying properly to account to oneself wherein the comic lies, and many a person might lose the laughter if they understood it. But then such a person has really never had a sense of the comic; and yet it is the laughter of such people that all those who dabble in the comic count on. There may also be a person who can be comically productive only in wantonness and abandon, and who, if told, 'Remember you are ethically responsible for the way you use the comic', would lose his *vis comica* [comic power] if he took time to heed the warning. And yet, in respect of the comic, it is precisely the resistance that gives it its pregnancy and prevents it capsizing. As productive powers, wantonness and frivolity produce the shrill laughter of vagueness and sensuous excitability, which differs exceedingly from the laughter that accompanies the quiet transparency of the comic. If one wants a good training, one should for a while give up laughing at what arouses antipathetic passion, where dark forces can so easily carry one away, and practise, rather, perceiving the comic in one thing or another that one cares about, where sympathy and interest, yes, predilection, form the improving resistance to inconsiderateness.

¹⁷¹ Latin: therefore.

was nonsense. Repentance lies in the the ethico-religious sphere, and accordingly so determined as to have only one higher than it, namely, the religious in the strictest sense. But of course it would not be this that one used in order to make repentance ridiculous; *ergo* one would use something lower, in which case the comic is illegitimate or something chimerically higher (abstraction), and then the person given to mirth is himself comic, just as in the preceding I have often sought to object to speculating thinkers, namely, that by becoming fantastical and arriving at the highest along that path they have become comic. The lower can never make the higher comic, that is, cannot legitimately grasp the higher as comic, and lacks the power to make it so. It is quite another matter that the lower, by being placed together with the higher, can make the relation itself ridiculous. Thus a horse may be the occasion to make a man look ridiculous, but the horse itself does not have the power to make him ridiculous.

The different existence-stages rank according to their relation to the comic, in respect of whether they have the comic within themselves or outside, yet not in the sense that the comic is to be the highest. Immediacy has the comic outside it, for wherever there is life there is contradiction, but in immediacy there is no contradiction, so it comes from outside. Finite good sense would apprehend immediacy as comic, but in doing so it becomes comic itself; for what supposedly justifies its comic grasp is that it can be counted on to know the way out, but the way out that it knows is still more comic. This is an unwarranted comic grasp. Wherever there is a contradiction and one does not know the way out, does not know the contradiction to be cancelled and settled in something higher, the contradiction is not painless;^{kk} and where the settlement is a chimerical higher (from the frying-pan into the fire), this is even more comic, because the contradiction is greater. So too with the relation between immediacy and finite good sense. And the comedy of despair is similarly unwarranted, for knowing no way out is just what despair is, not knowing the contradiction to be cancelled, and it ought therefore to grasp the contradiction tragically, which is precisely the way to its being healed. What gives humour its legitimacy is precisely its tragic side: that it reconciles itself with the pain from which despair would abstract though knowing no way out. Irony is warranted in respect of immediacy because the equilibrium – not as mere

^{kk} This, however, should be so understood as to keep in view the fact that not knowing the way out may be seen as comic. The busy trifler is comic in this way, since it is comic for a sensible, well-to-do human being not to know the way out of all this bookkeeper nonsense, the way out that consists quite simply not in taking on still another couple of pen-pushers to confer with, but in sending them all packing.

abstraction but as an existence-art – is higher than immediacy. Therefore only an existing ironist is warranted with regard to immediacy. As with all abstraction, a total, once-and-for-all irony, like a ten-a-penny impulse put down on paper, is unwarranted in relation to every existence-sphere. Irony is indeed an abstraction, an abstract putting-together, but the existing ironist's justification is to be found in the fact that he, himself existing, expresses it, that he keeps his life in it, and does not toy with the grandness of irony while leading a life of philistinism; for in that case his comicality has no warrant.

Immediacy has the comic outside itself; irony has it *within itself*.¹¹ The ethicist who has irony as his incognito is able in turn to see the comic in irony, but is warranted in seeing it only by constantly keeping himself in the ethical and therefore sees it constantly only disappearing.

Humour has the comic *within itself*, is warranted in the existing humorist (since once-and-for-all humour *in abstracto*¹⁷² is, like everything abstract, unwarranted; the humorist earns his warrant by having his life in it), except that against religiousness it is not warranted, though certainly against everything that makes itself out to be religiousness. The religiousness with humour as its incognito is able in turn to see the humorous as comic, but retains its warrant to do so only by constantly keeping itself in religious passion in the direction of the God-relationship, and therefore only sees the comic constantly disappearing.

We are now standing at the border. The religiousness that is hidden inwardness is *eo ipso* inaccessible to a comic grasp. It cannot have the comic outside it, just because it is *hidden* inwardness and so cannot come in contradiction with anything. The contradiction which humour masters, the highest range of the comic, is something it has brought to consciousness

¹¹ Aristotle remarks (*Rhetoric* 3:18): ἔστι δ' ἡ εἰρωνεία τῆς βωμολοχίας ἐλευθεριώτερον: ὁ μὲν γὰρ αὐτοῦ ἕνεκα ποιεῖ τὸ γελοῖον, ὁ δὲ βωμολόχος ἑτέρου [Irony is more free spirited than ribaldry, for the first is employed on one's own account, the second on that of another (1419b 7)]. The ironist himself enjoys the comic in contrast to the prankster, who in making something laughable is at the service of others. An ironist, therefore, who needs the help of relatives, friends and a hurrah-gang in order to be able to enjoy the comic is *eo ipso* [by the same token] a mediocre ironist and on the way to becoming a *scurra* [buffoon, Latin: lit. sponger]. But there is another sense in which the ironist has the comic within him, and by being aware of it has insured himself against having it outside him. Once an existing ironist falls out of his irony he becomes comic, just as, e.g., Socrates would have done if, on the day of his judgment, he had become a figure of pathos. It is here the warrant lies, when the irony is not a malapert impulse but an existence-art, for the ironist then, precisely through the ironic mastery over himself, solves greater problems than a tragic hero.

¹⁷² Latin: in abstraction.

itself and has within itself as something lower. In this way it is armed absolutely against the comic, or is by means of the comic secured against it.

It may be very well intentioned on the part of religiousness in State and Church on occasion to seek legal and police protection against the comic, but it is a question how far the motivation is in the last analysis of a religious nature; and to regard the comic as an enemy of the religious is to do it an injustice. The comic is no more an enemy of the religious – which, on the contrary, everything serves and obeys – than is the dialectical. But the religiousness that essentially lays claim to the external, essentially makes the external commensurable, should look to itself and fear more for itself (in case it becomes aesthetic) than fear the comic, which could indeed legitimately help it to open its eyes. Much in Catholicism can serve as an example. And as for the individual, the case is that the religious person who wants everyone to be serious, even just as serious as himself, because he is stupid in his earnest, is in contradiction, and the religious person who, if it comes to the point of everyone else laughing at what occupies him absolutely, cannot stand it, lacks inwardness and therefore wants to be consoled by illusion, by there being many of the same opinion, yes, the same outlook as his, and edified by eking out his own crumb of actuality with the world historical, ‘since everywhere a new life is now astir, the heralded new year with eye and heart for the cause’.¹⁷³

Hidden inwardness is inaccessible to the comic, as can also be seen from the fact that if someone who is religious in this way could be incited to externalize his religiousness suddenly, if, for example, he so far forgot himself as to come into conflict with one who is religious in a comparative way, and again so forgot himself and the absolute requirement of inwardness as to wish comparatively to be regarded as more religious than the other, then he is comic, and the contradiction lies in his wishing to be simultaneously visible and invisible. Humour makes warranted use of the comic against presumptuous forms of the religious, just because a religious person must surely know the way out if only he is willing. If that cannot be assumed, such a grasp of him becomes dubious in the same way as does a comic grasp of the busy trifler were it the case that he was really a lunatic.

The law for the comic is quite simple: it is everywhere where there is contradiction and where the contradiction is painless by it being seen as cancelled; for although the comic does not cancel the contradiction, a

¹⁷³ Unknown but presumably of Grundtvigian origin.

warranted comic grasp can do that, otherwise it is not warranted. The talent is to be able to represent the comic *in concreto*.¹⁷⁴ The test of the comic is to examine the relation between the spheres contained in the comic. If the relation is not right, the comic is unwarranted, and the comic that belongs nowhere is *eo ipso* unwarranted. Therefore all that is sophisticated in relation to the comic has its foothold in nothing, the realm of pure abstraction, and is expressed by Gorgias in the abstraction: to destroy [the opponents'] earnest with jest and [their] jest with earnest (cf. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* 3:18).¹⁷⁵ Here the balance everything comes out as is like an uncovered cheque¹⁷⁶ and the irregularity easily uncovered in the fact that a person existing has transformed himself into a fantastical *X*. After all, it must be someone existing that wants to adopt this procedure, one which can make him laughable once we apply what in the foregoing was the formula of exorcism against speculating thinkers: May I have the honour of asking with whom I have the honour of conversing; whether a human being, etc.? For, with his discovery, Gorgias ends up in the fantastic common pastures of pure being since, when he destroys the one with the other, there is nothing left over. However, perhaps Gorgias really wants to describe the ingenuity of a pettifogger who wins by changing weapons in response to his opponent's. But a pettifogger is no legitimate court of appeal in respect of the comic. He will have to whistle for his warrant – and be satisfied with the profit which, as everyone knows, has been the pet result for every Sophist: money, money, money, or whatever else on that same level.

In the religious sphere, when this is kept pure in inwardness, the comic is ministering. One might say that, for instance, repentance is a contradiction, *ergo*¹⁷⁷ there is something comic, not certainly to an aesthetic viewpoint or that of finite good sense, which is lower, or to the ethical, which has its strength in this passion, or that of abstraction, which is fantastic and therefore lower (it would grasp as comic from this standpoint what was rejected as nonsense from the preceding), but to the religious itself, which knows a remedy for this, a way out. But this is not so; the religious knows of no remedy for a repentance that ignores repentance. On the contrary, the

¹⁷⁴ Latin: concretely.

¹⁷⁵ Aristotle says that the prominent fourth-century BC Sophist Gorgias recommended destroying the opponent's earnest with jest and his jest with earnest.

¹⁷⁶ The text (*Det Qvitt som Alt her ender med er Skidt*) rhymes the Danish for being 'quits' with a colloquial term for worthless paper money.

¹⁷⁷ Latin: therefore.

religious is constantly^{mmm} using the negative as the essential form. Thus consciousness of sin is a definite factor in the consciousness of its forgiveness. The negative does not occur once and for all, then to be replaced by the positive; the positive is in the negative and the negative is the distinguishing mark, so that the regulative principle *ne quid nimis*¹⁷⁸ finds no application here. When the religious is grasped aesthetically, when indulgence for four shillings is preached in the Middle Ages, and this is assumed to end the matter, if one wants to cling to this fiction, then repentance is to be seen as comic and the contrite person is comic just like the busy trifler, provided that he has the four shillings, because this way out is so easy and this fiction assumes it to be the way out. All this gibberish comes from the religious becoming farce. But just as the negative is abolished in the religious sphere, or treated as if it came just once and for all, and that's it, so, correspondingly, will the comic assert itself against the religious, and rightly so – because the religious has become aesthetics and yet wants to be the religious.

There are examples enough of a misdirected effort to plead the case of the pathetic and earnest in a ridiculous, superstitious sense, as a bliss-making universal balm, as if earnest were something good in itself, something to be taken without prescription, so that all would be well if only and as long as one was earnest, even if it so happened that one was never earnest in the right place. No, everything has its dialectic – not, please note, a dialectic that makes it sophistically relative (this is mediation), but a dialectic by which the absolute becomes recognizable as the absolute on the strength of the dialectical. It is therefore just as questionable, exactly as questionable, to be full of pathos and earnest in the wrong place as it is to laugh in the wrong place. We say one-sidedly that a fool laughs all the time; one-sidedly, for it is true that it is foolish always to laugh; but it is one-sided to brand only the misuse of laughter as folly, since the folly is just as much and just as ruinous when it expresses itself through being always equally stupid in his earnest.

^{mmm} This is also why, even when the religious grasps aesthetic suffering with a certain dash of the comic, it nevertheless does so tenderly, because it is recognized that this suffering must have its day. Repentance, on the other hand, from the religious viewpoint, will not have its day and then be over and done with; the uncertainty of faith will not have its day and then be over and done with; the consciousness of sin will not have its day and then be over and done with. For then we go back to the aesthetic.

¹⁷⁸ Latin: nothing too much, everything in moderation.

§ 3

The *decisive* expression of existential pathos is guilt – that the investigation goes backwards instead of forwards – the eternal recollection of guilt is the highest expression of the relation of guilt-consciousness to an eternal happiness – lower expressions of the consciousness of guilt and corresponding forms of atonement – self-imposed penance – humour – the religiousness of hidden inwardness

The dialectical reader will easily see that the investigation goes backwards instead of forwards. The task set in § 1 was to relate at once absolutely to the absolute τέλος and relatively to what is relative. Just as a start was to be made on this, it became apparent that immediacy had first to be overcome, or the individual die to it, before there could be any question of realizing the task in § 1. Then § 2 made suffering the essential expression of existential pathos, suffering as dying to immediacy, suffering as the mark of the relation to the absolute τέλος of one who exists. In § 3 guilt is made the decisive expression of existential pathos, and the distance from the task in § 1 still greater; not, however, in such a way that the task is forgotten but that, keeping it in view, the investigation goes backwards, deepening itself in existence. This is how it goes in existence and the investigation aims at simulating it. *In abstracto*¹⁷⁹ and on paper it goes more easily. There one presents the task, has the individual be an abstract something ready in every way to be at service just as soon as the task is presented – and then one is finished.

In existence the individual is a concretion, time is concrete, and even while deliberating the individual is ethically responsible for the use of time. Existence is not abstract dispatch, but striving and a ceaseless meanwhile; even at the moment the task is set, something has gone to waste, for there has been a meanwhile and the beginning is not made straight away. This is how things go backwards: the task is brought to the individual in existence, and just as he is straight off about to cut a fine figure (which can only be done *in abstracto* and on paper, since there is a big difference between the abstracter's big-spender's habit and the existence-straitjacket of the one who exists) and wants to start, another beginning is found to be necessary, the beginning of the huge detour that is dying to immediacy; and just as a start is to be made on that, it is found

¹⁷⁹ Latin: in abstraction, abstractly.

out that since in the meanwhile time has been passing, a bad start has been made, and the beginning has to be made by becoming guilty, and from that moment the total guilt, which is decisive, increases with new guilt at a moneylender's rate. The task looked so sublime and the thought was 'like for like; just as the task, surely too he who is to realize it'. But then along came existence with one 'but' after another. Along came suffering as a more definite determinant and the thought then was, 'Oh, yes, that's something the poor wretch who exists has to put up with since he is in existence.' But then along comes guilt as a decisive determinant – now the one who exists is in real anguish; i.e., in the existence-medium.

And this regression is nevertheless progression, in as much as deepening oneself in something is to go forward. *In abstracto* and on paper the deception is that the individual should, in Icarus-fashion,¹⁸⁰ be off and up to the ideal task. But, it being chimerical, this progress is a pure regression, and every time someone who exists begins on anything of the sort, it catches the eye of the inspector of existence (the ethical), who notices that the man is incurring guilt even if he himself does not notice. But the more deeply the individual who has the task deepens himself in existence, the further forward he goes, although the expression, if you will, goes backwards. But just as all deeper deliberation is a going back to the ground,¹⁸¹ so is the task's calling back to the more concrete a deepening in existence. Compared with the totality of the task, fulfilling a little of it is a regression, and yet it is progress compared with the whole task and absolutely nothing being fulfilled. Somewhere I have read a summary of an Indian drama – though the drama itself I have not read. Two armies face each other. Just as the battle is about to begin the commander becomes lost in thought. With this begins the drama containing his thoughts. This is how the task looks to one who exists; it deceives for an instant, as though this view of it were the whole, as if he were finished (for the beginning always bears a certain resemblance to the end); but then existence comes in between, and the more he deepens himself in existence, acting, striving (this being what essentially distinguishes the existence-medium as such, while a thinker abstracts more or less from existence), the further he is from the task, in the task.

¹⁸⁰ Daedalus (a mythical figure whose name means 'cunning craftsman'), in order to allow his son Icarus to escape from the labyrinth in Crete, made wings but fastened them with wax, so that on nearing the sun they fell off and Icarus fell and was drowned.

¹⁸¹ See p. 354 n. 78.

But how can the consciousness of guilt become the decisive expression of the pathetic relation to an eternal happiness and in such a way that anyone existing who does not have this consciousness *eo ipso* does not relate to his eternal happiness? Indeed one would suppose this consciousness to be an expression of one's not relating to it, a decisive expression that it is lost and the relation abandoned. The answer is not difficult. Just because it is someone who exists that is to relate to it, while guilt is at the same time the most concrete expression of existence, the consciousness of guilt is the expression of the relationship. The more abstract the individual, the less he relates to an eternal happiness, and the more he distances himself also from guilt; for abstraction places existence in indifference, but guilt is the expression of the strongest self-assertion of existence, and it is, after all, *one who exists* that is to relate to an eternal happiness. However, the difficulty is surely something else; for to explain the guilt by existing appears to free the one who exists of guilt; it is as though he should be able to throw the blame on the one who placed him in existence, or on existence itself. Then, the guilt-consciousness is nothing but a new expression of suffering in existence, and the investigation has come no further than § 2, for which reason § 3 should be dropped or else treated as an appendix to § 2.

So, the one who exists ought to be able to throw the blame on existence, or on the one who placed him in it, and thus be without guilt? Let us, without all ethical thundering, simply look about us dialectically. The proposed procedure involves a contradiction. It can never occur to someone who is essentially innocent to throw off guilt, for the guiltless person has no business with the category of guilt. So when, in a particular case, someone throws off the blame and thinks he is without guilt, at that very instant he concedes that he is in any case one who essentially is guilty, although he may not be so in this particular case. But here, surely, it is not a matter of someone admitting precisely in exonerating himself that he is essentially guilty and in this particular case throwing off the guilt; it is a matter of the essential situation in existence of one who exists. But then essentially wanting to throw off guilt, i.e., guilt as the total determinant, in order by doing so to become guiltless, is a contradiction, because the very procedure gives one away. However true of other categories, it is certainly true of 'guilt' that just mentioning it traps you;¹⁸² its dialectic is so artful

¹⁸² 'Det fanger', it traps you, as a playing-card does when being committed once placed on the table.

that in the very act of claiming total exoneration one gives oneself away, and claiming partial exoneration is wholly to give oneself away. This is not, however, to be understood in the sense of the old saying: *qui s'excuse s'accuse*.¹⁸³ The meaning of the proverb is that the person who defends or excuses himself in some respect can do so in such a way as to accuse himself with respect to the same thing, so that the excusing and accusing have the same application. That is not what is meant here. No, someone who actually exonerates himself in the particular instance gives himself away totally. Anyone not living in a merely comparative way will note this easily. In everyday affairs, total guilt as a general given is gradually so much taken for granted as to be forgotten. And yet it is this totality of guilt that ultimately makes it possible for one to be guilty or not guilty in the particular instance. Someone who is totally or essentially guiltless cannot be guilty in the particular instance, but a person who is totally guilty can very well be without guilt in the particular instance. So it is not only by being guilty in the particular instance that he shows himself to be essentially guilty (*totum est partibus suis prius*); he does so also by being innocent in the particular instance (*totum est partibus suis prius*).¹⁸⁴

The priority of total guilt is not to be determined empirically, is no *summa summarum*,¹⁸⁵ for no determination of totality is ever produced numerically. The totality of guilt comes about for the individual by putting his guilt, be it a single one, however trivial, together with the relation to an eternal happiness. That is why we began with this: guilt-consciousness is the decisive expression of the relation to an eternal happiness. The person who does not relate to this never comes to grasp himself as totally or essentially guilty. The slightest guilt, even if the individual were thenceforth an angel, when combined with a relation to an eternal happiness is enough, for it is the compound that determines the quality. And it is in *putting together* that all deepening in existence consists. Comparatively, relatively, before a human tribunal, as grasped by memory (instead of with the recollection of eternity), one guilt is (collectively understood) by no means enough for that, nor is the sum of all. The crux is, however, that it is precisely unethical to have one's life in the comparative, the relative, the external; and to have the police court, the court of arbitration, a newspaper, or some of Copenhagen's

¹⁸³ 'Whoever excuses himself accuses himself.'

¹⁸⁴ Latin: 'the whole is prior to the parts'. ¹⁸⁵ Latin: sum of it all.

dignitaries, or the capital city's rabble as the final court of appeal in respect of one's relation to oneself.

One reads in the older orthodox theologians, when they are defending eternal punishment in hell, the thesis that the magnitude of the sin calls for such a punishment, and the magnitude is further defined as being sin against God. The naïvety and externality in this is that it indeed looks as though a court of law, a tribunal, a third party deliberated and voted in the case between God and man. There is always something naïve and external in this way once a third party talks of what essentially concerns the individual exactly in his isolation before God. The naïvety and externality disappear altogether if it is the individual himself putting the conception of God together with the conception of his own guilt, be it ever so little – no, wait! The individual does not know this, for this is again that comparative which leads astray. Once the conception of God comes along, the definition of guilt becomes qualitative. Conjoined with the comparative as measure, guilt become quantitative; confronting the absolute, guilt becomes dialectical as quality.^{nm}

The childishness and comparative guilt-consciousness can be recognized by its not grasping the requirement of existence: to *put things together*. Thus, as regards thinking, the mark of childishness is to think only occasionally in connection with this, that, and the other; it can be recognized by the fact that, basically, it has not one but many thoughts. Regarding guilt-consciousness, childishness assumes that, for instance, today he is guilty in this or that, then for eight days he is guiltless, but then on the ninth day things went wrong again. The mark of comparative guilt-consciousness is to have its measure outside itself, and when on Sunday the priest adopts a very great measure (though without employing

^{nm} In the religious address one occasionally finds examples of the opposite tactic. The religious speaker, bringing the thunder of guilt down upon the individual's head, would force him comparatively into the totality of guilt-consciousness. Just this cannot be done: the more he thunders, and the more abominable he makes him *than* others, the less he manages to do this; and in his most violent gesticulating he is furthest from doing so – to say nothing of the ironic insight into the state thus vouchsafed of his reverence's soul. There is a better way, when the religious speaker, 'humble before God, submissive to the royal majesty of the ethical', in fear and trembling on his own account, puts guilt together with the conception of an eternal happiness, so that the hearer is not goaded but affected indirectly, it seeming to him as though the priest were talking only of himself. On the orator's platform it is a splendid gesture to point accusingly at Cataline, sitting there [a reference to the Roman orator M. Tullius Cicero (106–43 BC)]. In the pulpit things go more effectively if one smites one's own breast, especially when talking about the totality of guilt; for in smiting his own breast the priest prevents any comparison; in pointing to himself we have the comparative again.

eternity's), what the comparing person takes to be the terrible guilt that he has incurred seems on Monday and in good company not to be so bad, and in this way the external situation determines an entirely different conception, which for all its variations always leaves out one thing: the eternal's essential determinant.

Thus the essential consciousness of guilt is the greatest possible deepening in existence, and in addition the expression of the fact that one who exists relates to an eternal happiness (the childish and comparative guilt-consciousness relates to itself and to the comparative); it is the expression of the relation by expressing the misrelation.^{oo} Yet, however decisive the consciousness may be, it is still always the relation that sustains the misrelation, only that the person who exists cannot get a hold of the relation, the misrelation constantly interposing itself as its expression. But on the other hand, they still do not repel each other (the eternal happiness and the one existing) in such a way as to allow the break to establish itself as such; on the contrary, it is only by their being held together that the misrelation repeats itself as the decisive consciousness of guilt, essentially, not of this or that guilt.

That is, the guilt-consciousness that still lies essentially in immanence differs from the consciousness of sin.^{pp} In guilt-consciousness it is the same subject who, by keeping the guilt together with the relation to an eternal happiness, becomes essentially guilty, but the subject's identity is nevertheless such that the guilt does not turn the subject into another, that being the expression of the break. But the break in which the paradoxical accentuation of existence consists is unable to intervene in the relation between an existing person and the eternal, because the eternal is everywhere embracing the existing person and the misrelation therefore remains within immanence. If the breach is to establish itself, the eternal must determine itself as temporality, as in time, as historical, whereby the

^{oo} That is, within the totality in which we find ourselves. The reader will remember (from section 2, chapter 2, in connection with the discussion of the *Crumbs*) that the *paradoxical* accentuation of existence absorbs itself paradoxically in existence. This is what is specifically Christian, and it will come up again in section B. The spheres are related as follows: immediacy, finite good sense, irony, ethics with irony as incognito, humour, religiousness with humour as incognito, and then finally the Christian religiousness, recognizable by the paradoxical accentuation of existence, by the paradox, by the break with immanence, and by the absurd. Religiousness with humour as incognito is therefore not yet Christian religiousness. Even though this latter is also hidden inwardness, it nevertheless relates to the paradox. It is true that humour too has to do with paradoxes, but it still compresses itself into immanence, and it seems constantly aware of something else – hence the joke.

^{pp} On this point cf. the Appendix to B.

one who exists and the eternal in time get eternity between them. This is the paradox (referred to in the preceding, in the second section, chapter 2, and to what follows in B).

In the religious sphere, the positive is recognizable by the negative, the relation to an eternal happiness by suffering (§ 2). The negative expression is now decidedly stronger: the relation recognizable by the totality of guilt-consciousness. With regard to guilt-consciousness as the mark, suffering might seem to be a direct relation (not, of course, aesthetically direct: the happiness recognizable in happiness). If one wants to say this, then guilt-consciousness is the repellent relation. It is more correct, however, to say that suffering is a direct reaction of a repellent relation, guilt-consciousness a repellent reaction of a repellent relation, but, please note, still constantly within immanence, even if someone existing is constantly prevented from having his life in this, or from being *sub specie aeterni*,¹⁸⁶ but has this only as an annulled possibility – not as one annuls the concrete to find the abstract, but as one annuls the abstract by being in the concrete.

Guilt-consciousness is the decisive expression of existential pathos in relation to an eternal happiness. Once the eternal happiness is removed, guilt-consciousness drops out essentially too, or it remains in childish definitions on the level of a child's class report, or it becomes the civil order's self-defence. The decisive expression of guilt-consciousness is in turn therefore the persistence of this consciousness, or the eternal recollecting of guilt, because it is being constantly put together with the relation to an eternal happiness. So this is not a childish matter of making a fresh start, of being a good child again, but nor of a general indulgence, that everyone is like that. Just one guilt, as I said, is enough, and with it someone existing who relates to an eternal happiness is trapped for ever;¹⁸⁷ human justice passes a life sentence only for the third offence,¹⁸⁸ but eternity pronounces an everlasting sentence the first time. He is forever trapped, buckled in the trappings of guilt, and he never gets unharnessed – unlike the draught horse, which at times has its hauling harness removed; unlike the day labourer who has his freedom once in a while – not even in the night is he essentially unhitched. Call this recollecting of guilt a chain, and say that it is never removed from the

¹⁸⁶ Latin: under the aspect of eternity.

¹⁸⁷ 'Evißt fangen', see p. 442 n. 182.

¹⁸⁸ According to an ordinance from 1789.

one who is trapped, and you describe only the one side of it; for chains are associated almost exclusively with deprivation of freedom, while the eternal recollecting of guilt is at the same time a burden to be dragged off from place to place in time; therefore call rather this eternal recollecting of guilt a harness, and say of the one caught: he will never have his harness removed. For the consciousness is that he is decisively changed, though the subject's identity rests in it being himself who becomes conscious of it, by putting guilt together with the relation to an eternal happiness.⁹⁹ Yet he still relates to an eternal happiness, and guilt-consciousness is a higher expression of this than suffering. And in the suffering that is guilt-consciousness again the guilt assuages and gnaws at the same time; it assuages because it is freedom's expression as this can be in the ethico-religious sphere, where the positive is recognizable by the negative, freedom by guilt, not directly recognizable in an aesthetic way: freedom recognizable by freedom.

That is how it goes backwards. To suffer as guilty is a lower expression than to suffer as guiltless, and yet it is a higher expression because the negative is the mark of a higher positive. Someone existing who only suffers guiltlessly *eo ipso* does not relate to an eternal happiness unless the one existing is himself the paradox, with which definition we are in another sphere. In respect of everyone plainly and simply existing, it is the case that if he only suffers guiltlessly (totally understood, of course, not in the sense that he suffers as not guilty in this or that instance, or in many), then he does not relate to an eternal happiness and has avoided guilt-consciousness by existing abstractly. This must be insisted on if the spheres are not to be confused, so that we suddenly drift back into determinants much lower than the religiousness of hidden inwardness. Only in the paradoxical religiousness, the Christian, can it be true also of the paradox that to suffer as guiltless is a higher expression than to suffer as guilty. To rank the spheres in their totalities, one simply uses humour as the term¹⁸⁹ for defining the religiousness of hidden inwardness, and this religiousness as the term defining the Christian religiousness. The Christian religiousness is also recognizable by its category, and wherever this is not present or is used chattily, the Christian religiousness is not

⁹⁹ Sin-consciousness is the paradox and, quite consistently with this, the paradox again that the one who exists does not discover this by himself but gets to know it from outside. The identity is thereby broken.

¹⁸⁹ *Terminus*, in the sense of what defined, e.g., also a limit.

present, unless one assumes that just mentioning Christ's name is Christianity, or even taking Christ's name in vain.¹⁹⁰

The eternal recollecting of guilt-consciousness is the latter's decisive expression; but the strongest expression of despair is not existential pathos in the instant. Relating with existential pathos to an eternal happiness is never a matter of once in a while expressing oneself vehemently, it is the persistence in the relation, the persistence with which it is put together with everything, for it is in this that the whole existence-art lies, and it is perhaps here most of all that human beings fall short. What holy vows a person knows how to make in the moment of mortal danger, but when it has passed, well, yes, the whole thing is so quickly and completely forgotten! And why? Because he does not know how to combine. When the mortal danger does not come from outside, he cannot put it together by himself and by his own effort. When the earth shakes with the volcano's eruption, or when the plague sweeps over the land, how quick, and how completely, is even the dullest person, even the drowsiest, to grasp the uncertainty of everything! But when it is over, yes, then he is no longer capable of the combination, and yet it was exactly then that he ought to be bringing himself to do that, for when life itself¹⁹¹ puts it together for him, when the fury of the elements preaches to him with more than Sunday eloquence, why then, understanding comes pretty much of itself, so easily indeed that the task is rather, through having understood the same thing earlier, that of preventing the despair.

In the eternal recollecting of guilt-consciousness the existing person relates to an eternal happiness, yet not so as now to have come directly closer to it; for now, on the contrary, he is as far from it as possible but still relates to it. The dialectical here, though within immanence, braces itself in opposition so as to raise pathos to a higher power. In the relation underlying the misrelation, in the barely suspected immanence underlying the dialectic's separation, he is tied to the blessedness with as it were the finest thread, with the help of a possibility that is constantly returning to its ground.¹⁹² Just for that reason the pathos is that much stronger, if it is there.

Guilt-consciousness is decisive and the one guilt put together with an eternal happiness is enough, though it is true of nothing so much as of guilt that it is self-seeding. However, it is total guilt that is decisive;

¹⁹⁰ In the sense of Exodus 20:7: 'You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God ...'

¹⁹¹ 'Tilværelsen'. ¹⁹² Hegel, *zu Gründe*; see p. 354 n. 78.

making oneself guilty fourteen times is child's play in comparison – that is why childishness always sticks to numbers. On the other hand, when the consciousness of a new guilt is referred in turn to the absolute consciousness of guilt, the eternal recollecting of guilt is thereby preserved, in case the person existing should be on the point of forgetting it.

If one says that an eternal recollecting of guilt is something that no one can endure, that it must lead to madness or death, then mark well who it is that says this, for finite common sense often speaks in this way in order to preach indulgence. And this kind of talk seldom fails of its effect, provided three, four are gathered together,¹⁹³ for I doubt if this is something with which anyone has been able to deceive himself in solitude; but when there are several together, and one hears that this is how the others are carrying on, one is less embarrassed – and besides, how inconsiderate to want to be better than others! A false pretext once more, for someone alone with the ideal knows absolutely nothing about being better or poorer than others. So is it possible for this eternal recollecting of guilt to lead to madness or death? Well, all right, we know that it is not possible to survive very long on bread and water; but then a physician can judge how things should be arranged for the particular individual, not so that, please note, he comes to live in excess; the starvation diet is carefully calculated to make it possible for him, yes, precisely to live. Just because the existential pathos is not an affair of the moment but calls for persistence, someone who exists who is indeed inspired in pathos and not spoiled by habit, on the lookout for evasions, will seek to find the minimum of forgetfulness needed for holding out, since he is himself aware that the momentary is a misunderstanding. But since it is impossible in this dialecticizing to find an absolute certainty, he will manage, in spite of all efforts, to have guilt-consciousness totally defined again by his never having dared, in respect of an eternal happiness, to say that he had done everything he could to hold fast to the recollecting of guilt.

The concept of guilt as a totality belongs essentially to the religious sphere. Once the aesthetic wants to concern itself with it, this concept becomes dialectical, like fortune and misfortune, and that brings everything into confusion. From an aesthetic viewpoint, the dialectic of guilt is this: the individual is without guilt, then guilt and guiltlessness come along as alternating categories in life, at one time the individual is guilty of this or that, at another not guilty. Had this or that not been so, the

¹⁹³ Cf. Matthew 18:20.

individual would not have become guilty; under other circumstances the person now considered innocent would have become guilty. This *pro et contra* as *summa summarum*¹⁹⁴ (hence not a particular case of guilt or innocence within guilt defined as a totality) is a matter for the attention of the courts, for the interest of novelists, for town gossip, and for the meditation of certain priests. The aesthetic categories are easily recognized, and one can quite well use God's name, duty, guilt, etc., without speaking ethically or religiously. The aesthetic is basically a matter of the individual being ultimately undialectical in himself. He lives for sixty years, is convicted three times and placed under police surveillance; he lives for sixty years and never has a conviction but several ugly rumours circulate; he lives for sixty years, a really excellent man. And what then? Have we learned anything? No, we have on the contrary acquired an idea of how one human life after another can go by in gossip when the one who exists does not have in himself the inwardness that is the native land and homestead of all totality categories.

It is the totality category that the religious address essentially deals with. It can use a crime, it can use a weakness, it can use negligence, in short, whatever the particular might be, but what distinguishes the religious address as such is that it moves from this particular to the totality category through putting this particular together with the relation to an eternal happiness. For the religious address deals always with the totality category, not scientifically (so that the particular is disregarded), but existentially, and therefore has to do with bringing the individual, by fair means or foul, directly or indirectly, in and under the totality, not for him to disappear in it but to put him together with it. If the religious discourse dilates only in particulars, if it serves up praise at one time and blame at another, if it bestows high honours on a few *encomio publico ornatus*¹⁹⁵ and flunks others, it mistakes itself for a solemn announcement of examination results for adults except that it doesn't mention names. If the religious address thinks it is supposed to help the police by being able to thunder against criminals who evade the arm of the law, then it is true again that if the religious address does not thunder by virtue of the totality category – and this is in itself earnest enough not to call for many acts of gesticulating violence – then his reverence mistakes himself for a kind of police sergeant for whom it should be more appropriate to go around with

¹⁹⁴ Latin: for and against (pros and cons) ... sum total. ¹⁹⁵ Latin: honoured with public praise.

a stick and be paid by the corporation. In everyday life, in business dealings, in social intercourse, one person is guilty of this, another of that, and there is nothing more to it; but a religious address has to do with inwardness, where the totality category grips the person. The totality category is the religious; everything else that lacks it is essentially an illusion in which even the greatest criminal is basically guiltless and a good-natured person a saint.

Recollection's eternal conservation of guilt is the expression of existential pathos, its highest expression, higher even than the most enthusiastic penance which would make up for the guilt.^{rr} This safekeeping of guilt cannot find its expression in anything external. That would only finitize it. It belongs therefore to hidden inwardness. Here, as always, the account hurts no one's feelings; it offends no one through declaring that they are the religious one, thus betraying what they hide; it offends no one by denying that they are the religious one, for the crux is precisely that this is hidden – and no one notices anything.

I shall now give briefly some idea of those construals of guilt, and of their corresponding atonements, that are lower than hidden inwardness's eternal recollecting of guilt. Having gone into such detail in the previous §, here I can be more brief. What was indicated in the previous § as being lower has to be reviewed. Here, as always, it is only the category that is to be respected, and that is why I include conceptions that although often called Christian, when referred to the category prove not to be such. That a priest even in silk canonicals, and that a baptized dignitary ranked with real Christians, puts something together surely cannot make this something Christianity, any more than it follows directly from the fact that a physician puts together some words on a prescription form that this something is a medicine – it can also be hogwash. There is nothing new in Christianity in the sense that it might not have appeared in the world previously^{ss} and yet it is all

^{rr} One recalls that the forgiveness of sin is the paradoxical atonement on the strength of the absurd. Even in just becoming aware of how paradoxical it is, the eternal recollecting of guilt as the highest expression must be interposed, in case the spheres become confused and the essentially Christian chatted into childish categories of the forgiveness of sin, which belong where the ethical has not emerged, let alone the religious, and even less the Christian.

^{ss} If there was, then Christianity would be recognizable in a straightforwardly aesthetic way: its newness by novelty, and again everything would be confused. Sheer novelty may be the mark, e.g., of a mechanical discovery, and this novelty is contingently dialectical, but it cannot cause offence. Ultimately, something that causes offence in an individual does so in respect of what is essential,

new.¹⁹⁶ So, if someone uses the name of Christianity and Christ's name but the categories (despite the expressions) are anything but Christian, is this Christianity? Or if someone (cf. section I, chapter 2) holds forth with the thesis that a person should not have any disciple, and another were to set himself up as an adherent to this doctrine, then isn't the misunderstanding between them, in spite of all the adherent's assurances of admiration and of the completeness of the appropriation, yes, isn't it the misunderstanding? The mark of Christianity is the paradox, the absolute paradox. Once a so-called Christian speculation cancels the paradox and reduces this category to a moment,¹⁹⁷ all the spheres are confused.

So every construal of guilt is lower that does not put guilt together with the relation to an eternal happiness through an eternal recollecting, but puts it together with something lower, something comparative (his own or another's contingency), through memory, and lets forgetfulness come between particular instances of guilt. This makes life easy and untroubled, like that of the child, for a child has much (outwardly directed) memory but no recollection, at most the inwardness of the moment. It always remains a question how many in the last resort relate absolutely in the category of spirit. It remains a question – I say no more, for it is indeed possible that we all do that in so far as hidden inwardness is precisely hidden. Only this much is certain, that this question is not at all the same as that about capacities, ranks, skill, learning, etc. The meanest can relate absolutely in the category of spirit quite as well as the gifted; for brilliant parts, learning, talent, are after all a 'what'; but the absoluteness of the relation of spirit is a 'how' in respect of what one is, be it much or little.

Every construal of guilt is lower that puts guilt together momentarily with the conception of an eternal happiness, for example, on Sunday, on

when one would renew for him what he believes he essentially possesses. Clearly, someone with no religiousness at all cannot be offended by Christianity, and the reason the Jews were closest of all to being offended [1 Corinthians 1:23] was that they were closest to Christianity. If Christianity had only wanted to add something new to the old, it would have been able to arouse offence only relatively; it was exactly because it wanted to take all of the old and make it new that the offence was so obvious. If the novelty of Christianity had never entered the human heart, in the sense that in its place the human being had previously possessed nothing that it imagined was the highest, then nor could it ever arouse offence. Offence is possible precisely because the novelty is not straightforward but first has to dispel an illusion. Behind it, therefore, as its term [*Terminus*, see p. 447 n. 189], the novelty of Christianity has the eternal religiousness of hidden inwardness; for in relation to the eternal, a novelty, sure enough, is a paradox. Lumped along with other novelties, or affirmed with the assurance that, among all novelties, it is the most remarkable, it is only aesthetics.

¹⁹⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:17. ¹⁹⁷ Danish 'Moment'.

New Year's morning at early service on an empty stomach, and then being free the rest of the week, or the whole year.

Every mediation is a lower construal of guilt; for mediation constantly exempts from the absolute relation to the absolute and lets this exhaust itself in fractional epithets, in the same way that a hundred-dollar bank note is only so many units. But the absolute relation is absolute precisely through one's having it as one's own for oneself, through relating to the absolute, a gem that can be possessed only whole and cannot be exchanged. Mediation excuses man from deepening himself in the category of totality and makes him busy externally, his guilt external, his pain of punishment external, because the watchword of mediation and its indulgence is that the outward is the inward and the inward the outward, which means that the individual's absolute relation to the absolute is abolished.

To every lower construal of guilt there corresponds an atonement that is lower than that highest construal which is the eternal recollecting and therefore accepts no atonement, although the underlying immanence in which the dialectical is to be found is a possibility hinted at.

The civil concept of punishment is a lower atonement. This concept corresponds to this or that guilt, and is hence altogether outside the totality-category.

The aesthetic-metaphysical concept of nemesis is a lower atonement. Nemesis is externally dialectical; it is the consistency of externality, or natural justice. The aesthetic is unopened inwardness and what is, or is to be, inwardness must therefore appear externally. It is as when, in a tragedy, the hero of a bygone age manifests himself as spirit to the sleeper: the spectator must see the spirit, although the fact of it appearing is the sleeper's inwardness. So too with guilt-consciousness: inwardness becomes externality. Hence, one could see the Furies but this very visibility of theirs makes the inwardness less terrible, and just because of their visibility they had a limit: the Furies dared not enter the temple. On the other hand, if one takes guilt's consciousness even as just remorse in respect of a single guilt, what is terrible is precisely this hiddenness, for no one can see remorse, and remorse accompanies one across every threshold. But the visibility of the Furies expresses symbolically the commensurability of outer and inner, through which guilt-consciousness is finitized, and which has atonement consist in the suffering of punishment in time and atonement in death. And everything ends in the sad exaltation that is death's mitigation, that now it is all over and there was no eternal guilt.

All self-imposed penance is a lower atonement, not just because it is imposed by oneself, but because even the most animated penance has the effect of finitizing guilt by making it commensurable, while its merit is the discovery in one's heart of a guilt that eludes not only the attention of the police, but also that of nemesis. What was said of the monastic movement of the Middle Ages applies again here: all respect for the penance of the Middle Ages. It is after all a childlike and animated attempt at something big, and anyone unable to place himself back in the Middle Ages, and who can really praise forgetfulness and thoughtlessness, and who sees more truth in 'look to my neighbour',¹⁹⁸ must have lost all his imagination and have become with so much good sense just about totally stupid. For if the penance of the Middle Ages was untrue, it was a touching and enthusiastic untruth, and even if forgetfulness and thoughtlessness cannot be accused of a false conception of God, as one who finds pleasure in a person's scourging himself, it is surely an even more dreadful untruth to leave God, if I may say it, out of the game, and take comfort in the fact that one has never been convicted of crime, and that one is even the dance director at the club.¹⁹⁹ The Middle Ages, on the contrary, let God, if I may say so, in on the game. The conceptions are of course rather childlike, but God is nevertheless absolutely along.

Try this thought-experiment: imagine someone putting his guilt together with the conception of an eternal happiness, and who for that very reason becomes alone with himself, with the guilt and with God (where the truth lies, in contrast to all comparative bustle and unconcern in the herring shoal); imagine him desperately pondering the possibility that there might be something he can hit on as an atonement for his guilt, imagine the inventor's anguish in case it were not possible after all to hit on something that would make it up with God: and then laugh if you can at the sufferer who hits on the penance, assuming, as one always may in a thought-experiment, that his intention and desire is in all honesty that God might be moved and mollified by all this suffering.

Certainly there is something comic in this, because this conception makes God into a figure of fable, a Holophernes,²⁰⁰ a pasha with three horsetails,²⁰¹ to whom such things might be pleasing. But is it better to abolish God in such a way that he becomes a title-bearer or a petty quibbler sitting in heaven without a chance of coming along, so no one

¹⁹⁸ A saying. ¹⁹⁹ See p. 208 n. 69.

²⁰⁰ See p. 431 n. jj. ²⁰¹ Highest military rank in the Ottoman empire.

notices him because he can only affect the individual through the compact mass of intermediary causes, and the job becomes therefore an imperceptible touch! Is it better to abolish God by having him tricked into laws of nature and the necessary development of immanence! No, all respect for the penance of the Middle Ages, and for all that is analogous to it outside Christianity, and in which there is always the truth that the individual does not relate to the ideal through the generation or the state or the century or the market price for human beings in his home town, that is to say, is not prevented by these from relating to the ideal but relates to it even if he is mistaken in his understanding. What can't a girl come up with in order to make it up with her lover when she believes him angry! Even if she comes up with something ridiculous, does the love in her not sanctify the ridiculous? And is not this the truth in her, that she relates to her love ideally in its conception's enraptured primitivity, and so does not seek the society of any gossipy girl who could tell her how other girls treat their lovers? Anyone with an eye for the categories readily perceives that the first girl is comic only for a purer view of the matter, which therefore smiles a little at her in a friendly fashion in order to assist her to something better, though always with respect for her passion; and that a gossipy girl, a gadabout, on the other hand, who knows something at third hand, is unconditionally comic in the role of a girl in love, a situation in which outside studies are a sign of sloppiness in sentiment, which, worse than unfaithfulness, shows that she has nothing to be faithful about.

Likewise, too, with the religious person who strays in primitivity; the passion of originality puts him in a kindly light compared to the religious one who learns from the street, the newspaper, from the club, how one deals with God and how other Christians know how to deal with him. Because of the entanglement with the notion of the state and of sociality and of community,²⁰² God can no longer get hold of the single individual. Were God's wrath ever so great, the punishment that should overtake the guilty has nevertheless to be transmitted through all the courts of objectivity: in this way, one has managed, in the most obliging and appreciative philosophical terms, to spirit him away. They are busy arriving at an ever truer idea of God but seem to forget the rudiments, that one shall fear God.²⁰³ An objective religious person in the objective human mass does

²⁰² A threefold reference to Hegel (state), the Liberals (sociality) and Grundtvig (congregation).

²⁰³ Proverbs 1:7.

not fear God; in thunder he does not hear him, for this is a law of nature and perhaps he is right; in events he does not see him, for they are the immanent necessity of cause and effect and perhaps he is right. But what of the inwardness of being alone before God? Yes, for him that is too little; he is not familiar with it, he who is at large in order to realize the objective.

Whether our age is more immoral than other ages, I shall not decide; but just as a degenerate penance was the specific immorality in a period of the Middle Ages, so could that of our age easily become a fantastical-ethical debilitation, a dissoluteness of sensual, milksoppish despair, in which individuals fumble as in a dream for an idea of God without feeling any terror in so doing but, on the contrary, boasting of this superiority which, in a vertigo of thought in the indeterminacy of impersonality, has as though a presentiment of God in the indefinite, and meets with him in fantasy, his presence remaining much like that of the girls in the waves.²⁰⁴ And the same might easily repeat itself in the individual's relation to himself, that the ethical, and responsibility, and energy, and the strong-nerved singling-out of repentance evaporate in a brilliance of dissolution in which the individual dreams metaphysically of himself or lets all of life²⁰⁵ dream of itself, confounding himself with Greece, Rome, China, world history, our age, the century, and immanently comprehending the necessity of his own development, and then again objectively allowing his own *I* to grow mouldy like a small speck above it all, forgetting that even though death changes a man's body to dust²⁰⁶ and mixes it with the elements, it is yet terrible in living life to become mould on the immanent development of the infinite. Let us then sin instead, quite simply sin, seduce girls, murder men, commit highway robbery. That after all can be repented, and a criminal of that kind is one that God can still get hold of. But this superiority, which has reached such heights, is hard to repent; it has a deceptive appearance of profundity. Let us then mock God instead, purely and simply, as has been done before in the world. This is always to be preferred to the debilitating self-importance with which one would prove God's existence. To prove the being-there of one who is there²⁰⁷ is the most shameless assault, for it is an attempt to make the person ridiculous; but the unhappy fact is that people have no inkling of it, that they regard it in all seriousness as a pious undertaking. How could it occur

²⁰⁴ A reference to an engraving portraying a tale from Scandinavian myth. Reproduced in *SKS* K7, p. 355.

²⁰⁵ 'Tilværelsen'. ²⁰⁶ Genesis 3:19. ²⁰⁷ 'Tilvær' and 'er til'.

to anyone to prove his existence unless one has let oneself ignore him; and now one makes it even worse by proving his existence in front of his very nose. A king's existence or presence is ordinarily expressed in its own way as subjection and submissiveness. What if, in his most sublime presence, one wanted to prove that he was there? Does one prove it? No, one makes a fool of him; for it is in expressing submissiveness that one proves his presence, something that can differ widely according to the land's customs: and this is how too one demonstrates God's existence, by worship – not with proofs. A wretch of an author who is dragged from the obscurity of oblivion by a later researcher may indeed be jubilant that the researcher succeeds in proving his existence; but it is only by a thinker's pious ineptitude that an omnipresent being can be brought into this laughable predicament.

But if this can happen, or can happen in certain times, then how otherwise does it come about than precisely by leaving out guilt-consciousness? Just as paper money can be an important means of exchange among people, but is in itself a chimerical entity if in the last resort there is no hard currency to back it up, so too may the comparative, conventional, external, bourgeois apprehension of the ethical be useful enough in ordinary dealings; but if it is forgotten that the hard currency of the ethical must be there, in the inwardness of the individual if it is anywhere at all, and if a whole generation could forget this, then that generation – even if one were to assume that not a single criminal existed but only utterly decent folk (something, incidentally, that enlightenment and culture can by no means unconditionally be said to entail) – essentially is ethically impoverished and on the way to bankruptcy. In company, it is quite proper to treat every third party as a third party, but if this accomplishment in circles of acquaintance also leads each single individual, also in his inwardness before God, to account himself a third party, i.e., only externally, then the ethical is lost, inwardness has flickered out, the thought of God has become meaningless, ideality has vanished, because anyone whose inwardness does not reflect the ideal has no ideality. With regard to the crowd (i.e., when the single individual looks at others; but this applies all round, since each of the 'others' is in turn the single individual), a comparative standard is appropriate; but if use of the comparative standard so gains the upper hand that the individual in his innermost being applies it to himself, then the ethical has flickered out, and the cast-off ethical could find its proper place in a commercial newspaper under the headline: average price and average quality.

What deserves respect in the penance of the Middle Ages is that the individual applied the absolute measure to himself. If one knows nothing higher than the adjusted standard of the comparative, the political, the market-townish, and sectarian revivalist, one should not smile at the Middle Ages. Everyone agrees that philistinism is comic. But what is philistinism? Can one not be philistine in a large city? Why not? Philistinism consists always in the use of the relative as the absolute in connection with the essential. That many a one fails to notice when an obvious relativity is being used only shows his limitation in regard to the comic. As with philistinism, so with irony: everyone, right down to the lowliest, dabbles at being ironic; but where irony properly begins they all desert, and this host of all those, each of whom is relatively less ironical in himself than the next, turns with indignation against the real ironist. In Copenhagen people laugh at being the best person in Køge,²⁰⁸ but to be the best person in Copenhagen is just as laughable, for the ethical and the ethico-religious have nothing whatever to do with the comparative. In making itself out to be the absolute, every comparative measure, be it that of Køge or of Copenhagen or of our age or the century, is philistinism.

On the other hand, once the individual turns with the absolute requirement to himself, there will also appear analogies to self-imposed penance, even if these do not express themselves so naïvely and are, above all, by being preserved in the shelter of inwardness, excluded from the conspicuous externality that so easily becomes an invitation to misunderstanding, as harmful to the individual as to others. For all comparison means delay, which is why mediocrity is so fond of it, and tries with its wretched friendship to trap everyone into it, whether the captive even becomes an object of admiration as something outstanding – among mediocrities – or is tenderly embraced by equals. It is perfectly and altogether proper that every person, even the most excellent, as a third party in relation to another, motivated by sympathy or whatever, applies a lesser measure than every person should and can have within himself through the silent relation to the ideal. So the person who blames others for having corrupted him is talking nonsense, and merely gives himself away as one who has sneaked off from something and now wants to sneak back. For why did he not prevent it, and why does he continue, instead of making up for wasted time by if possible seeking in silence the measure that is in his innermost

²⁰⁸ A small market town, south of Copenhagen, of about 2,300 inhabitants at the time, as against Copenhagen's 127,000.

being? It is perfectly true that a person can require efforts of himself which his most well-meaning friend would advise him against if he knew of them, but let no one blame the friend, let him blame himself for having sought this alleviation by bargaining. Everyone who truly has ventured his life has had the measure of silence; for a friend can and should never recommend it, simply because anyone about to venture his life, and who needs a confidant with whom to discuss it, is unfitted to do so. But when things begin to get heated in there and the final effort is called for – one jumps aside, one seeks relief in a confidant and gets the well-intentioned advice: watch out for yourself, and then time passes and the need vanishes. Then, when later visited by a recollection, one blames people – a new proof that one has lost oneself and has one's ideality among the lost property. But the person who keeps his peace accuses no one but himself, by his effort affronts no one; for it is his triumphant conviction that in every human being there is and can and shall be this privy knowledge of the ideal that demands all and comforts only in annihilation before God. So let anyone who would be a spokesman for mediocrity grunt against him, or make a noise – if one is permitted to defend oneself against a highway robber, then there is also a lawful self-defence, and above all one well-pleasing to God, against the persecutions of mediocrity – it is silence. In the relation of silence to the ideal, a judgment is passed on a person: Woe to him who, as a third party, would dare to judge a person in this way! From this judgment there is no appeal to anything higher, for it is absolutely the highest.

But there is an escape route, and then one receives an indescribably milder sentence. And so when, one day, one dreams one's life over again, one is horrified and blames people as a new proof that one's case is still pending over there in the forum of mediocrity. In the relation of silence to the ideal there is a measure that transforms even the greatest effort into a trifle, transforms the continued year-by-year struggle into an imperceptible span²⁰⁹ – but in talkativeness one makes a giant stride without effort. And then, when discouragement had got the better of a person, when he found it cruel of the sublime that, when all his effort was put together with it, it disappeared as nothing, when he couldn't bear it that impassability should be the path and the measure of the ideal – then he sought relief and found it, found it in one who, perhaps in all honesty and with the best intentions, did what one expects and should expect of a third party, and

²⁰⁹ 'Hanefjed', lit. a cock's stride. A (vanishingly) short measure of length.

thanked him for it, until he ended up foolishly blaming people because on the easily passable path of mediocrity he got nowhere. In the agreement between silence and the ideal a word is missing, its loss is not felt, for neither does what it denotes exist: it is the word 'excuse'. In voices raised high, in the whispered agreement between one neighbour and another, this is the root word and innumerable are its derivations.

Let this be said in honour of the ideality of silence. Someone who lives thus cannot say it, for he is silent. Well, then, I say it, and so need not add that I am not passing myself off as someone who does that.

Someone who turns to himself with the absolute measure will naturally be unable to live on in the blissful feeling that if he keeps the commandments and has never been convicted of anything, and is regarded by the revivalist clique as a really sincere person, he is then an exceptional person who, if he does not die too soon, will in a short while become all too perfect for this world – on the contrary, he will discover guilt again and again, and discover it again within the totality-category: guilt. But it is deeply rooted in human nature that guilt calls for punishment. How natural, then, to come up with something oneself, a toilsome task perhaps, even if it is dialectical in such a way that it might possibly be of benefit to others, charity to the needy, denying oneself a wish, etc. Is this so ridiculous?

I find it childlike and comely. Yet this is still an analogue to self-imposed penance, and it does after all finitize guilt, however well meant it may be. In it there is a childlike hope and a childlike wish that everything could be good again, a childlikeness compared with which the eternal recollecting of guilt in hidden inwardness is terrible earnest. What is it that makes the child's life so easy? It is the fact that quits can so often be called, and that a fresh start is so often made. The childlikeness of self-imposed penance lies in the fact that the individual is inclined piously to imagine that the punishment is worse than the recollection of guilt. No, it is precisely the recollecting that is the hardest punishment. Punishment is hardest for the child because the child has no recollection, and the child thinks like this: if only I could escape the punishment I would be happy and contented. But what is inwardness? It is recollection. The thoughtlessness of the comparative, ten-a-penny people who are just like everyone else here in the city, and resemble one another like tin soldiers in a box, is that they possess no *tertium comparationis*.²¹⁰ The

²¹⁰ Latin: third element as a standard.

childlike inwardness in the adult is attentiveness to themselves, while the cheating aspect is the calling of quits. But the earnest is the eternal recollecting, and not exactly to be confused with that of getting married, having children, gout, taking finals in theology, being a member of parliament, or even public executioner.

Humour, as the *confinium*²¹¹ of the religiousness of hidden inwardness, grasps guilt-consciousness's totality. The humorist, because he grasps the total, speaks rather seldom of this or that guilt; or if he does occasionally stress this or that particular, it is because this is indirectly to express the totality. The humorous effect is produced by letting the childlike reflect itself in the total-consciousness. The cultivation of spirit in putting together the relation to the absolute with childlikeness produces humour. One not infrequently comes upon full-grown humans, past confirmation, 'hearty' people, who although older in years, do everything and leave everything undone just as a child, and who would undeniably have to be looked on even in their fortieth year as promising children, were it customary for every person to become 250 years old. But childishness and rapsallion behaviour differ greatly from humour. The humorist has the childlike but is not had by it, keeps constantly preventing it from expressing itself directly, but only lets it shine through an absolute cultivation. Thus when an absolutely cultivated person is placed with a child, together they always discover the humorous: the child says it without knowing; the humorist recognizes it. On the other hand relative culture placed together with a child discovers nothing, because it overlooks the child and its foolishness.

I recall a remark in a specific situation that I shall recount. It was in one of those fleetingly formed groups in a larger social gathering. It was a young married woman who, in connection with an unfortunate event that had been brought up in conversation, not inappropriately expressed her pain regarding a life that lives up to so few of its promises: 'No, the happy childhood, or rather the happiness of a child!' She fell silent, bent down to a child fondly clinging to her, and patted the little one's cheek. One of those who were speaking, his feelings clearly in sympathy with the woman, continued as follows: 'Yes, and above all, the happiness of

²¹¹ Latin: boundary.

childhood is to get a beating.’^{tt} Thereupon he turned away and talked to the lady of the house, who was just passing by.

Just because the joke in humour lies in the revocation (a beginning profundity that is withdrawn), it naturally often harks back to childhood. If a man like Kant, who stands at the peak of human science, were to say in reference to the proofs for God’s existence, Well, I know no more about

^{tt} People laughed at this rejoinder. That was a pure misunderstanding. They took the remark to be irony, which it was not at all. If it had been irony the speaker would have been a pretty poor ironist; for there was a note of pain, which ironically is wholly incorrect. The remark was humorous and therefore, through the misunderstanding, it made the situation ironic. This again is quite all right, for an ironic remark cannot make the situation ironic; it can at most create an awareness of the situation as ironic, while a humorous remark can indeed make the situation ironic. The ironist asserts himself and gets in the way of the situation. But the humorist’s hidden pain contains a sympathy through which he plays a part in forming the situation, making possible an ironic situation in doing so. But frequently one mistakes what is said ironically for what, when said, can seem ironic in the situation. Here the ironic effect was created by people laughing and taking the rejoinder as a teasing, without seeing that the remark held far more sadness regarding the happiness of childhood than did the remark of the young married woman. The sad interpretation of childhood ranks in proportion to that with which the look of longing is contrasted. But the greatest contrast is the eternal recollecting of guilt, and the saddest longing is quite rightly expressed by the longing to get a beating. When the young married woman spoke, people found it rather touching. At the humorist’s rejoinder, although they laughed, they were almost shocked, and yet he was saying something far more profound. In contrast to all the nonsense in life, to vexation of spirit and sore travail [Ecclesiastes 1:13–14], yes, to the grinding earnest of financial cares, indeed, even to the daily pain of an unhappy marriage, a longing for the happiness of childhood is nowhere near as sad as when in contrast to the eternal recollection, and it was this on which the humorist was sadly reflecting, for against the totality of guilt-consciousness the yearning for an illusory conception of the pure innocence of the child is really tomfoolery, notwithstanding that it is often used to touching effect – by the superficial. The rejoinder was not a piece of impolite teasing; on the contrary, it was sympathetic. – It is told of Socrates that a man came to him complaining that people slandered him in his absence. Socrates replied: ‘Is that anything to worry about? It makes so little difference to me what people do in my absence that, for all I care, they might as well beat me in my absence.’ This rejoinder is proper irony; it is devoid of the sympathy with which Socrates was capable of creating a common situation (and the law for this teasing irony is quite simply this: that the ironist’s cunning constantly prevents the conversation from being a conversation even though that is in every way what it appears to be, perhaps even a cordial conversation). It is ironically teasing even though it is that in an ethical direction, to arouse the man into winning self-assertiveness. That is why Socrates says less than the man says, for slander is a something after all, but getting a beating in one’s absence is meaningless. A humorous rejoinder must, on the other hand, always contain something profound, though concealed in the joke, and therefore it must say more. Thus if someone turns to an ironist in order to confide a secret under pledge of silence and the latter answers, ‘Rely on me implicitly, one can trust me unconditionally with a secret, for I forget it as quickly as it is said’, here the confidentiality is quite properly brought to nothing by means of an abstract dialectic. If the other actually confides his secret, then they are indeed conversing; but taking this to be a confidential conversation would be a misunderstanding. If, on the other hand, the man persecuted by slander had said, e.g., to a young girl what he said to Socrates, complaining of this and that person speaking ill of him in his absence, and the young girl had replied, ‘Then I must count myself lucky, because he has completely forgotten me’, this rejoinder has an echo of humour in it, though it falls short of humour to the extent that it fails to reflect upon any totality-category, the specific contrast to which constitutes the humorous.

what's true there than my father told me, this would be humorous and actually says more than a whole book on the proofs, if this book forgets this. But because there is always a hidden pain in humour there is also a sympathy. In irony there is no sympathy; it is self-assertion and its sympathy is therefore sympathetic in an entirely indirect way, not with anyone in particular, but with the idea of self-assertion as every human being's possibility. Hence in women one often finds humour but never irony. Any attempt at it is unseemly and a purely womanly nature will consider irony a kind of cruelty.

Humour reflects on the consciousness of guilt totally, and therefore it is more true than all comparative sorting and rejecting. But the profundity is revoked in the joke, just as before in the understanding of suffering. Humour grasps the total, but just when it is to explain, it becomes impatient and revokes it all, saying, 'It would very likely be too time-consuming and too profound, I take it all back and return the money.' 'We are all guilty', a humorist would say, 'we fall many a time and into many pieces, all of us who belong to the species called human, which Buffon²¹² describes thus,' and there might follow here a definition in terms purely of natural history. The contrast here has reached its apex: between an individual, who in the eternal recollecting has the totality of guilt-consciousness, and a specimen of an animal species. So here there is no analogy either to the human being's metamorphosis in development in so far as he passes through the highest, subsuming himself under the absolute definition of spirit. The plant as seedling is essentially what it becomes as developed, and likewise with an animal, but not a child, which is why indeed many in every generation never come under the definition of spirit absolutely.^{uu} The humorous swing away from the individual to the species is moreover also a regression to aesthetic concepts, and this is by no means where the profundity of humour lies. The totality of guilt-consciousness in the single individual before God in relation to an eternal happiness is the religious. Humour reflects on this but withdraws it again.

^{uu} We recall that, in this respect, it is not a matter of differences in talent but of this possibility being there for every human being, regardless of the metamorphosis involving a change so clearly qualitative that it is not to be explained in terms of the little by little of a straightforward development, although the eternal consciousness of guilt, once posited, eternally presupposes itself.

²¹² Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon (1707–88), French natural historian.

For, looked at religiously, the species is a lower category than the individual, and to push oneself under the species is to avoid the issue.^{vv}

Humour puts the eternal recollecting of guilt together with everything, but does not relate in this recollecting to an eternal happiness. We come now to the hidden inwardness. The eternal recollecting of guilt cannot be expressed in the external, which is incommensurable with it, since every expression in the external makes the guilt finite. But the eternal recollecting of guilt in hidden inwardness is nevertheless not despair; for despair is always the infinite, the eternal, the total in the moment of impatience; and all despair is a kind of irascibility. No, the eternal recollecting is what marks the relation to an eternal happiness, as far as possible from any direct indicator, yet always enough to prevent the jumping aside of despair.

Humour discovers the comic by putting the total guilt together with the relativity between man and man. The comic lies in total guilt being the basis that sustains the whole of this comedy. For if essential innocence or goodness were the basis of the relative, it is not comic since there is nothing comic in defining more and less inside the positive definition. But if the relativity rests on total guilt, then the more and less rests on what is less than nothing, and this is the contradiction that the comic discovers. To the extent that money is a something, the relativity between richer and poorer is not comic; but when counters are used instead of money it is comic that there is relativity. If the hurrying and scurrying is due to the possibility of avoiding danger, this activity is not comic; but, for instance, on a sinking ship there is something comic in all this running about, for the contradiction is that, in spite of all movement, they are not removing themselves from the site of their downfall.

Hidden inwardness must also discover the comic, not for the fact that the religious man differs from others, but for the fact that, though most heavily burdened by bearing the eternal recollecting of guilt, he is just like everyone else. He discovers the comic, but since in eternal recollecting he is constantly related to an eternal happiness, the comic is a constantly vanishing element.

^{vv} Only in the final fixing ('Bestemmelse') of the religious as the paradox-religious does the race become higher, but also only on the strength of the paradox, and to become aware of the paradox one must have the definition of the religious in between which makes the individual higher than the species, so as not to let the differences between the spheres run together and have people chatter aesthetically about the paradox-religious.

Intermediate clause between A and B

The problem presented (cf. section 2, chapter 4) was an existence-problem, and as such pathetic and dialectical. The subsection (A) has been dealt with, the pathetic part: the relation to an eternal happiness. We proceed now to the dialectical (B), which, for the problem, is the decisive part. For the religiousness dealt with hitherto, and which from now on for the sake of brevity is to be called religiousness A, is not the specifically Christian religiousness. On the other hand, the dialectical part is only decisive in so far as it is put together with the pathetic for there to be new pathos.

Ordinarily one is not aware of both at once. The religious address will represent the pathetic and strike a pencil through the dialectical, and however well-meaning, is therefore at times a confused and disorderly pathos of all sorts, of aesthetics, ethics, religiousness A and Christianity, and therefore at times self-contradictory, 'but there are lovely passages in it', especially lovely for someone who is to act and exist accordingly. The dialectical takes its revenge in covertly and ironically mocking the gestures and big words, and above all in the ironic judgment on the religious address, that it can very well be listened to but not acted upon.

Science would take charge of the dialectical and to that end transfer it into the medium of abstraction, which is to lose sight of the problem once again, it being an existence-problem, and the real dialectical difficulty vanishes when explained in the medium of abstraction, which takes no account of existence. If the disorderly religious address is for emotional people who perspire easily and are quick to forget,²¹³ the speculative view is for pure thinkers, but neither is for persons who act and by the same token exist.

However, the distinction between the pathetic and the dialectical must be defined more closely, for religiousness A is by no means undialectical, but it is not paradoxically dialectical. Religiousness A is the dialectic of taking to heart;²¹⁴ it is the relation to an eternal happiness that is not conditioned by a something, but is the dialectical taking to heart of the relation itself, conditioned alone, that is, by the taking to heart. Religiousness B, as it is to be called from now on, or the paradoxical religiousness, as it has been called up until now, or the religiousness that has the dialectical in second place, does, on the other hand, posit conditions, in such a way that they are not inwardness's deeper dialectical

²¹³ 'Svede' (sweat) and 'svede ud' (quite forget). ²¹⁴ 'Inderliggjorelsens Dialektik'.

taking to heart, but a definite something which more closely defines the eternal happiness (whereas in A the closer definition of inwardness is the only closer definition), not by defining the individual's appropriation of it more closely, but defining more closely the eternal happiness itself, though not as a task for thinking, but precisely as paradox, as repulsing, for there to be new pathos.

Religiousness A must first be present in the individual before there can be talk of becoming aware of the dialectical B. When the individual relates to an eternal happiness in the most decisive expression of existential pathos, then there can be talk of becoming aware of how the dialectical in second place (*secundo loco*) knocks him down into the pathos of the absurd. One sees, therefore, how foolish it is for someone without pathos to want to relate to what is essentially Christian, since before there can be talk even of being simply in the position of becoming aware of it, one must first exist in religiousness A. The mistake has so often been made, however, of turning Christ and Christianity and the paradoxical and the absurd, in short, all that is Christian, without further ado to the account of aesthetic babble, just as if Christianity were a *gefundenes Fressen*²¹⁵ for dunces because it cannot be thought, and just as if defining it as unthinkable were not the most difficult thing of all to keep hold of when having to exist in it – especially for the quick-witted.

Religiousness A can be present in paganism, and in Christianity it can be the religiousness of everyone who is not decisively Christian, whether baptized or not. Of course, becoming a *wohlfeil*²¹⁶ edition of a Christian with all comforts is much easier, and also just about the same as the highest: after all he is baptized, has been presented with a copy of the Bible and a hymnbook; is he not then a Christian, an Evangelical Lutheran Christian? Still, that will be up to the party concerned. My own opinion is that religiousness A (within whose boundaries I have my existence) is so strenuous for a human being as always to be task enough. My purpose is to make it difficult to become a Christian, yet not more difficult than it is, nor to make it difficult for the stupid and easy for the quick, but difficult qualitatively and essentially equally difficult for every human being, for essentially it is equally difficult for every human being to give up his understanding and his thinking and keep his soul fixed on the absurd, and proportionally most difficult for someone with much

²¹⁵ 'A lucky find' or 'lucky morsel'. ²¹⁶ 'Cheap'.

understanding, bearing in mind, however, that not losing one's understanding over Christianity does not prove that one has it. That is my purpose, that is, to the extent that an experimenter who does everything on his own behalf can be said to have a purpose. Every human being, the wisest and the simplest, can draw the distinction just as essentially (the comparative leads to misunderstanding, as when a quick-witted person compares himself with a simple-minded one, instead of understanding that it is the same task for each individually and not for the two compared) between what he understands and what he does not understand²¹⁷ (of course it will be the fruit of his supreme effort, this self-containment, and 2,000 years lie between Socrates and Hamann, the two proponents of this distinction), can discover that there is something there in spite of being against his understanding and thinking. When he stakes his whole life on this absurd, then he makes the move on the strength of the absurd, and he is essentially deceived if the absurd he has chosen proves not to be the absurd. If this absurd is Christianity then he is a believing^{ww} Christian; but if he understands it as not being the absurd then he is *eo ipso*²¹⁸ no longer a believing Christian (be he baptized and confirmed, possessor of the Bible and hymnbook, even if that were the expected new hymnal), until he once again obliterates understanding as an illusion and misunderstanding and relates to the Christian absurd. For if religiousness A does not enter in as *terminus a quo*²¹⁹ for the paradoxical religiousness, then religiousness A is higher than B, for the paradox, the absurd, etc., are in that case not to be taken *sensu eminenti*²²⁰ (as being absolutely impossible to understand for either the wise or the stupid), but are used aesthetically as one among many other marvellous things, things that are indeed marvellous but which can after all be grasped. Speculation (that is, in so far as it would not do away with all religiousness in order to introduce us *en masse*²²¹ into the promised land of pure being) must in

^{ww} The definition of faith was given in part 2, chapter 2, and in chapter 3, on ideality and reality. So long as one reasons as follows: one cannot stop at not understanding the paradox, for it is too little, and too easy or too effortless, a task, the rejoinder must be: no, on the contrary, it is quite the opposite, it is the most difficult thing of all, relating day in and day out, to something on which one bases one's eternal happiness, maintaining the passion with which one understands that one cannot understand, especially since it is so easy to slip into the illusion that one has now understood it.

²¹⁷ See the motto for *Begrebet Angest (The Concept of Anxiety)*, SKS 4, p. 310.

²¹⁸ Latin: by that very fact, by the same token.

²¹⁹ Latin: limit, or point, from which; point of departure.

²²⁰ Latin: in the eminent, or strict, sense. ²²¹ French: in a body.

consistency be of the opinion that religiousness A is higher than B, since it is the religiousness of immanence. But why, then, call it Christian? Christianity will not be content to be an evolution within the total category of human nature; an engagement like that is too little to offer to the gods. Nor, to the believer, does it even want to be the paradox and then surreptitiously supply him little by little with an understanding; for the martyrdom of faith (to crucify one's understanding) is not a moment's martyrdom but precisely the martyrdom of persistence.

It is possible for someone existing religiously to express their relation to an eternal happiness (immortality, eternal life) outside Christianity, and that surely has been the case; for it has to be said of religiousness A that, even if it had not been present in paganism it could have been, because it presupposes only human nature in general, whereas the religiousness which has the dialectical in the second place cannot have preceded itself, nor, having come, can it be said of it that it could have been where it has not been. Specific to Christianity is the dialectical in the second place, only not, be it noted, as a task for thinking (as though Christianity were a doctrine and not an existence-communication; cf. part 2, chapter 2, and chapter 4, section 1, § 2) but a relating to the pathetic as an incitement to new pathos. In religiousness A an eternal happiness is a particular, and the pathetic becomes the dialectical factor in the dialectic of taking to heart. In religiousness B it becomes dialectical in the second place, since the communication is directed towards existence, with the pathos in the taking to heart.

The individual's relation to an eternal happiness heightens in proportion to his expression of existential pathos in existing (resignation – suffering – the totality of guilt-consciousness). So when the eternal happiness, it being the absolute τέλος, is absolutely his only comfort, and when his relation to it is reduced to its minimum through existential taking to heart, by reason of guilt-consciousness being the relation of repulsion and wanting constantly to take this τέλος away from him, and this minimum and this possibility are nevertheless absolutely more to him than everything else, *then* it is fitting to begin with the dialectical. It will, when he is in this state, give rise to a pathos that is still higher. But one does not prepare oneself to become aware of Christianity by reading books, or by world-historical surveys; one does it by deepening oneself in existing. Any other propaedeutic must *eo ipso* end in a misunderstanding, for Christianity is an existence-communication; it would beg to

kindly be excused from being understood (cf. part 2, chapter 2); it is not understanding what Christianity is that is difficult, but being and becoming a Christian (cf. part 2, chapter 4, section 1, § 2).

Comment. Inasmuch as the edifying is an essential attribute of all religiousness, religiousness A will have its edifying aspect too. Wherever the God-relationship is found by the one who exists in the inwardness of subjectivity, the edifying that belongs to subjectivity will also be found, whereas in becoming objective one gives up one's claim to what, even if it belongs to subjectivity, is not arbitrary, as little as is love or falling in love, one's right to which one also waives in becoming objective. The totality of guilt-consciousness is the most edifying aspect of religiousness A.^{xx} What is edifying in the sphere of religiousness A belongs essentially to immanence; it is the annihilation through which the individual puts himself aside in order to find God, since the obstacle is precisely the individual himself.^{yy} Here too, quite rightly, the edifying is recognizable in the negative, by the self-annihilation that in itself finds the God-relationship, which, in enduring the suffering, sinks into the God-relationship, runs aground on it, because God is in the ground²²² only when everything that is in the way is cleared away, and first and foremost the individual himself in his finiteness, in his litigiousness against God. Aesthetically, the holy resting-place of edification is outside the individual, who accordingly seeks that place. In the ethico-religious sphere, the individual himself is the place, when the individual has annihilated himself.

This is what edifies in the sphere of religiousness A. If one does not pay attention to this, and to the importance of having the edifying defined in between in this way, then everything is confused once more when it comes to defining what is paradoxically edifying, which is then taken to be an aesthetic relation directed outwards. In religiousness B the edifying is a something outside the individual;

^{xx} The reader recalls that a direct God-relationship is aesthetic and not actually a relationship with God, any more than a direct relationship to the absolute is an absolute relationship, because there has been no separating out of the absolute. In the religious sphere the positive is recognizable in the negative. The supreme well-being of a happy immanence that sings out jubilantly over God and the whole of existence is a very lovable thing, but not edifying and essentially not any God-relationship.

^{yy} The aesthetic always consists in the individual imagining he is busy grasping for God and grabbing hold of him, that is, in the conceit that the un-dialectical individual is pretty clever if only he can get hold of God as something external.

²²² 'I Grunden', 'in the foundation', cf. p. 354 n. 78.

the individual does not find the edifying by finding the God-relationship within himself but relates to something outside in order there to find the edification. The paradox is that this apparently aesthetic relationship, the individual relating to something outside himself, should nevertheless be the absolute God-relationship; for in immanence God is neither a something, but everything, and infinitely everything, nor outside the individual, since the edification is just that he is within the individual. What is paradoxically edifying therefore corresponds to the definition of God in time as an individual human being; for if that be the case, the individual relates to something outside himself. The paradox is precisely that this cannot be thought. Whether the individual is not repulsed by this is another matter and his own affair. But unless the paradox is held fast in this way, then religiousness A is higher and Christianity as a whole pushed back into aesthetic categories, in spite of Christianity's insistence that the paradox it talks about cannot be thought, and thus differs from a relative paradox, which can *höchstens*²²³ be thought with difficulty. Admittedly speculation keeps to immanence even if it has to be understood as something other than Hegel's pure thought; but speculation must not call itself Christian. That is why I have never called religiousness A Christian, or Christianity.

B

The dialectical aspect

This is what the *Crumbs* essentially dealt with; I can therefore make constant reference to that work and express myself here more briefly. The difficulty is simply to hold fast to the qualitative dialectic of the absolute paradox and brave the illusions. With what can and shall and wants to be the absolute paradox, the absurd, the incomprehensible, it is a matter of the passion needed for holding on dialectically to the distinction of incomprehensibility. Just as ridiculous as it is, therefore, with something that can be understood, to listen to obscure superstition and rhapsodizing about its incomprehensibility, the converse too is just as ridiculous: to see attempts, in connection with what is essentially paradoxical, attempts at wanting to understand it, as though this were the task

²²³ 'At best'.

and not the qualitative opposite, namely, holding on to the fact that it cannot be understood, in case understanding, i.e., misunderstanding, ends up by also confusing all the other spheres. If the paradoxical-religious address is not attentive to this, it places itself at the mercy of a valid ironical interpretation, whether the address peers, with a revivalist's obfuscation and spiritual intoxication, behind the curtain, divines the obscure runic inscriptions, glimpses the explanation, and then sermonizes it in a sing-song voice that echoes the seer's unnatural association with the marvellous, seeing that the absolute paradox expressly begs to be excused all explanation – or the paradoxical-religious address modestly disclaims understanding yet willingly admits to being something much higher; or it makes a shot at an understanding and only afterwards admits the incomprehensibility; or it finds a parallel to the incomprehensibility of the paradox in something else, etc. All this, which irony has to scent out and bring to light, has its basis in the fact that there is no respect for the qualitative dialectic of the spheres, in the fact that what is commendable with regard to what essentially can be understood, namely to understand it, that this is far from commendable regarding what is essentially incomprehensible.

At the bottom of the misunderstanding is the fact that, in spite of Christ's name etc. being used, Christianity has been pushed back into the aesthetic (something the unwittingly super-orthodox are especially good at), where the incomprehensible is the relatively incomprehensible (relative either to the fact that it has not yet been understood, or to the need of a hawk-eyed seer to understand it), which has its explanation as something higher in time, rather than Christianity being an existence-communication that makes existing paradoxical, which is why it remains paradoxical for as long as there is existing, and only eternity has the explanation, without there being, as long as one is in time, the least merit in wanting to dabble in the explanation, i.e., wanting to imagine that one is in eternity, for as long as one is in time, the qualitative dialectic indicts every such attempt as unwarranted fudging. The qualitative dialectic constantly impresses on us not to fool *in abstracto* with what is the highest, and hence want to dabble in it, but must grasp *in concreto*²²⁴ one's essential task and essentially express it.

But there are certain things it is difficult to get into quite a lot of people's heads, among them the passionate definition of the incomprehensible.

²²⁴ Latin: in abstraction ... in concretion.

The address may begin quite correctly, but in a couple of shakes nature outdoes discipline and his reverence can't resist the conceit that catching a glimpse is something higher, then the comedy begins. People even with many a relative problem are quite often able to make fools of themselves in their busy eagerness to explain by a profound hint; but with the absolute paradox this glimpsing and screwing up of the eyes, this attentive silence of the reborn congregation, broken only by one reborn after another standing up and peering intently to make out what his reverence dimly sights, while the women take off their hats²²⁵ so as to catch every prophetic word: all this excitement over what his reverence glimpses is extremely laughable. And the most laughable thing of all is that glimpsing is supposed to be something more elevated than the passion of faith. If anything, it is more to be tolerated as a weakness in a weaker faithful lacking the strength passionately to accentuate the incomprehensibility and so has to do a bit of glimpsing, for all glimpsing is impatience. And, usually, the inclination to glimpse and drop hints is tempting also only to a certain class of limited and fanciful persons. Anyone fairly competent and serious tries hard to know which is which, whether it is something that can and is to be understood, and which he will then not just make out, or something which cannot and is not to be understood, in which case something he should just as little make out, or he will, what in this connection is the same, make fun of,²²⁶ because for all the serious expressions and raised eyebrows, this making something out is only a lark, even if Mr Knud, who does this, thinks it is earnest pure and simple.

All this glimpsing, and all that goes with it, which for one reason or another is certainly not a rare occurrence in our time, is neither more nor less than pious flattery. A Christian clergyman who does not know how, with humility and the passion of the exertion of existing, to hold himself and the congregation in check by preaching that the paradox cannot and is not to be understood, who does not pose the task as that precisely of keeping to this and enduring this crucifixion of the understanding, but has speculatively understood everything, that clergyman is comic. But the more someone stresses the incomprehensible and yet ends in making out something, the more demoralizing is his flattery because it all becomes a compliment to himself: the difficulty and the incomprehensibility may be

²²⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:5–15. Possibly an indirect reference to the fact that among Grundtvig's followers were many women.

²²⁶ A word play on 'skimte' (glimpse) and 'skjemte' (make fun of).

an obstacle to 'the dim', but he is brilliant enough²²⁷ dimly to see something in the dark saying. Christianity is an existence-communication that makes existing paradoxical, makes it harder than ever it was and ever can be outside it, but it is no short-cut to becoming matchlessly brilliant.²²⁸ Perhaps, though, it is especially among reborn students that the phenomenon occurs when people, failing to make any progress along the narrow path of science and learning and thinking, jump aside and become absolutely 'awakened' – and matchlessly bright. Better, then, speculation's misunderstanding where, apart from this latter, there is so much to learn and so much to admire in the men who combine the strength of genius with an iron endurance – better speculation's misunderstanding – that it can explain everything. The same happens with faith's crucifixion of the understanding as with many ethical qualifications. A person renounces personal vanity – but wants to be admired for doing so. A person lets go of understanding, as he says, in order to believe – but then acquires a higher understanding, an understanding so high that on the strength of it he carries on as though he were a matchlessly bright seer, etc. But there is always something questionable in wanting to derive profit, or obtain conspicuous benefit, from one's religiousness. Because an individual in faith gives up understanding and believes against the understanding, he should not for that reason think meanly of the understanding, nor affect on a sudden a splendid distinction within the whole range of the understanding; for a higher understanding is still an understanding. Here is where the presumption of the awakened lies; but just as one should deal respectfully with a Christian, and just as one should show forbearance with the sickliness that can cause confusion and appear confusing in a period of transition, so should one calmly hand over someone who is presumptuously awakened to a treatment by irony. If, in the degenerate period of the Middle Ages, the inhabitant of a monastery would like to have benefited from his life by being honoured as a holy person, it is quite as objectionable and only a little more ridiculous to want, through one's religiousness, to become matchlessly brilliant; and if it is a pitiable error to want to be like God through virtue and holiness, instead of becoming more and more humble, then it is all the more laughable to want to be that

²²⁷ Play on 'aandløse' ('dim-witted', an insult familiar especially in Heiberg) and 'aandrig' ('ingenious'). 'Aandløs' can also mean lacking in the spiritual dimension in a way that is possible also for the ingenious.

²²⁸ A dig at Grundtvig; see p. 32 n. 14.

in consideration of having an unusually brilliant mind; for virtue and holiness stand after all in an essential relation to God's nature, but that other determinant makes God himself ridiculous as the *tertium comparationis*.²²⁹ Someone who has truly given up his understanding and believes against the understanding will always retain a sympathetic respect for the capacity whose strength he is in the best position to know by having it against him; and will, moreover, through the daily effort of keeping himself in the passion of faith, which presses forward against the understanding, which is like rolling a weight up a mountain, be prevented in this effort from playing the genius on his religiousness account. The contradiction in the presumptuous reborn is that, after entering the innermost sanctum of inwardness with faith against understanding, he would at the same time to be out in the streets and be matchlessly brilliant. And, as it proceeds, the farce or benefit performance becomes equally ridiculous whether he turns the world's admiration to account when some of it seems to come his way (a new inconsistency: that the person with the higher understanding should let himself be admired by a world which has, after all, only the lower and whose admiration is therefore nonsense), or he condemns and thunders against the world's spiritual dimness when it refuses to admire (a curious ceremony, since he himself knows that the world has only the lower understanding), complains of being misunderstood, though this is just as it should be, and the complaint is simply a misunderstanding that betrays the secret connection he keeps up with the worldly.

The misunderstanding is due all the time to the false notion that the incomprehensibility of the paradox must be related to the difference between more or less understanding, to the comparison between good and bad minds. The paradox is essentially connected to being a human being, and qualitatively with each separately, whether he has much or little understanding. Thus the most intelligent man can just as well believe (against the understanding), and with his great understanding he is only prevented from doing so by the advantage he has of properly experiencing what it means to believe against the understanding. Socrates, whose ignorance was shown earlier (section 2, chapter 2) to be a kind of analogy to faith (but bearing in mind that essentially there are no analogies to the paradox-religiousness of faith), was no blockhead because he would not be fooled

²²⁹ Latin: third factor as standard of comparison.

into trifling with catching a glimpse of this or that but wanted to be absolutely ignorant. On the other hand, it never occurred to Socrates, having discredited ordinary human knowledge, to want to be admired for a higher understanding, or to consort directly with any person since through his ignorance he had essentially destroyed communication.²³⁰

The reborn quite often busy themselves with the ungodly world that derides them, something they themselves in another way want, so as to be really sure that they are reborn – seeing they are mocked – and then to be able to have the advantage in turn of being able to complain of the world's ungodliness. But it will always be doubtful proof of the world's ungodliness that it laughs at a reborn – especially when he starts catching glimpses, for then he is really ridiculous. Certainly, in our time, with its great tolerance, or indifference, it would not be impossible for a real Christian who being strict with himself did not engage in condemning others, to be allowed to go on living in peace: but of course he would still have within himself the martyrdom of believing against the understanding. But all presuming, when self-contradictory into the bargain, is comic.

Take some examples drawn from lesser life-situations, though always keeping in mind the absolute difference and, as far as applying them is concerned, reminding ourselves that there is no analogy to the sphere of the paradox-religious, and that to understand the application is to revoke it. A man arranges his life in a special way, a way which according to his knowledge of himself, his capabilities, his faults, etc., best serves him and is therefore the most convenient. This way of life, and more especially its being consistently carried through, may well at first glance seem laughable, or from many another way of looking at life. If he is a presuming person his eccentric mode of life will of course be held up as a higher understanding, etc. If, however, he is an earnest man he will listen calmly to other people's views and he will show, through the way in which he enters into conversation about it, that he too can very well see how to a third party it can appear comic – and he will then go home quite calmly and pursue this life-plan as conceived according to his own precise knowledge of himself. So too with someone who is truly a Christian, bearing in mind that there is no analogy. He may well have understanding (yes, he must have, in order to believe against understanding); he is able to use it in all other connections, use it in his association with others (seeing

²³⁰ Here, unusually, 'Communicationen'. See the 'Note on the translation'.

that it is also an inconsistency to want to talk with anyone who does not have the higher understanding if one wants to use it oneself, for conversation is an expression of ordinary and mutual understanding, and the relation between someone with the higher understanding and the ordinary man would be that of an apostle or absolute teacher, not of a fellow human being); he will be well able to see the point of all objections, indeed, to advance them himself as well as any, for otherwise a higher understanding would begin to look suspiciously like the promotion of stuff and nonsense. It is easy enough to jump aside from the laborious task of developing and sharpening one's understanding and so win for oneself a higher whoopee²³¹ and fend off every charge with the remark that it is a higher understanding.^{zz} Accordingly, the believing Christian both has and uses his understanding, respects the universally human, does not put it down to lack of understanding that someone is not a Christian, but with respect to Christianity he believes against the understanding, and here too uses the understanding – to make sure that he believes against the understanding. Nonsense, therefore, he cannot believe against the understanding, as one might fear, for the understanding will precisely see nonsense for what it is and prevent him from believing it; but he makes as much use of the understanding as is needed to become aware of the incomprehensible, and then relates to this, believing against the understanding.

An enthusiastic ethical individuality uses understanding to discover the most prudent thing in order then not to do it; for what we generally call the most prudent thing is seldom the noble thing. But even this conduct (a kind of analogy to that of the believer, except that to understand the application is to revoke it) is seldom understood; and when one sees a man enthusiastically sacrificing himself, enthusiastically choosing exertion instead of an easy life, yes, an exertion that would be rewarded only with ingratitude and loss instead of a life of ease that would be rewarded with admiration and advantage: many a person thinks this a kind of narrowness, looks at him smilingly, and perhaps even goes so far as, in a fit of kindness, to help the poor man see what the most prudent course is – though all he does is help the poor simpleton to gain some small ironic insight into the counsellor's soul. Such counsel is a

^{zz} That is why it was stated in the foregoing that it is always an odd business making something out to be the absurd, incomprehensible, that another can declare easy to understand.

²³¹ 'Hopsasa'.

misunderstanding which has its ground not so much in lack of understanding as in lack of enthusiasm. The enthusiastic ethicist will therefore not take exception to the objections or the ridicule. Long before that happens, he will have realized that most likely they will come his way; he will be as good as any at construing his own effort as comic and then with calm resolve choose to use the understanding to see what is the most prudent thing to do – in order then not to do it. The analogy is not direct, since for an ethicist like this there is no suffering in the relation against the understanding; his enthusiastic action is still an understanding of the infinite, and he breaks only with the misery of prudence. There is no break in himself and no suffering in the break. But a believer who believes, i.e., believes against the understanding,^{aaa} takes the mystery of faith seriously and does not toy with understanding but remains aware of the fact that to be curious about this catching a glimpse is lack of faith and a betrayal of the task.

The dialectical aspect of the problem requires thought-passion – not to want to understand it, but to understand what it means to break thus with the understanding, and with thinking, and with immanence, in order to lose the last foothold of immanence, the eternity behind, and to exist situated at the very edge of existence on the strength of the absurd.

As mentioned, it was with this dialectic in particular that the *Crumbs* dealt. I shall express myself more briefly and in referring to them merely try, as far as possible, to summarize it even more succinctly.

§ I

The dialectical contradiction that is the break: expecting an eternal happiness in time through a relation to something else in time

In this contradiction, existence is paradoxically accentuated and the distinction of here and hereafter absolutely defined by existence being paradoxically accentuated because the eternal itself has come about at a moment of time. Always keep in mind that I am not undertaking to explain the problem but merely to present it.

^{aaa} And faith essentially belongs in the sphere of the paradox-religious, as constantly stressed (cf., among other places, section 2, chapters 2 and 3). All other faith is just an analogy that is none, an analogy that may serve to make aware but nothing more, and to understand which is therefore to revoke it.

How the distinction 'here and hereafter' is understood is decisive for every existence-communication. *Speculation* cancels it absolutely in pure being (it is an expression of the law of contradiction), which cancelling is again an expression of the fact that speculation is no existence-communication, that being its flaw seeing that it wants to explain existence. *Religiousness A*, which is not speculation but still speculative, reflects upon this distinction by reflecting upon existing; but even the decisive definition of guilt-consciousness is still within immanence. *The paradox-religious* defines the distinction absolutely by accentuating existing paradoxically. For, seeing that the eternal came about at a moment in time, the existing individual in time does not come to relate to the eternal or to collect himself in his relation (this is A) but *in time* comes to relate to the eternal *in time*. Accordingly, the relation is within time, which circumstance runs directly counter to all thinking whether one reflects on the individual or on the god.

A person's understanding of the distinction 'here and hereafter' is basically their understanding of what it is to *exist*, and the other differences collect in turn around this, if one observes that Christianity is not a doctrine but an existence-communication. *Speculation* disregards existence; for it, to exist becomes having existed (the past), existence a vanishing and annulled moment in the pure being of the eternal. As abstraction, speculation can never become contemporary with existence and therefore cannot grasp existence as existence but only afterwards. This explains why speculation wisely keeps ethics at bay, and why it becomes ridiculous when it tries its hand at it. *Religiousness A* accentuates existing as actuality, and then eternity, which in the underlying immanence still sustains everything, is lost to view so that the positive then becomes recognizable in the negative. For speculation, existence has vanished and only pure being *is*.²³² For religiousness A there is only actuality's existence, and yet the eternal is constantly hidden by it, and present as hidden. *The paradox-religious* posits the contradiction between existence and the eternal absolutely; for the thought that the eternal *is* at a definite moment of time expresses precisely the abandonment of existence by the hidden immanence of the eternal. In the religious A the eternal is *ubique et nusquam*²³³ but hidden by the actuality of existence; in

²³² Emphasis added here and below. ²³³ Latin: everywhere and nowhere.

the paradox-religious the eternal is at a definite place, and precisely this is the breach with immanence.

In section 2, chapter 2, it was stated that what our age has forgotten, and which explains speculation's misunderstanding of Christianity, is: what it means to exist and what inwardness is. The religious is quite rightly the existing inwardness, and religiousness heightens according to the deepening of this determinant in it, and the paradox-religious becomes the last.

All interpretations of existence rank according to how the individual's dialectical inner absorption is to be defined.²³⁴ Assuming what has been said about this in the present work, I will now merely recapitulate, with the reminder that speculation has no part in it, since, being objective and abstract, it is indifferent to the category of the existing subject and has to do, at most, with the idea of pure humanity, whereas existence-communications understand something else by *unum*²³⁵ in the saying *unum noris omnes*,²³⁶ understand something else by 'yourself' in the saying 'know yourself',²³⁷ understand by this an actual human being, thereby indicating that they are unconcerned with the anecdotal differences between Peter and Paul.

If the individual is in himself undialectical, and has his dialectic outside him, then we have the *aesthetic interpretations*. If the individual is dialectical in himself inwardly in self-assertion, so that the ultimate basis is not dialectical in itself, the self which is at the basis being used to overcome and assert itself, then we have the *ethical interpretation*. If the individual is dialectically defined inwardly in self-annihilation before God, then we have *religiousness A*. If the individual is paradox-dialectical, every remainder of original immanence annihilated and all connection severed, the individual placed at the very edge of existence, then we have the *paradox-religious*. This paradoxical inwardness is the greatest possible, for even the most dialectical determinant, if it is still within immanence, leaves as though a possibility of escape, of a jumping aside, of a withdrawal into the eternal behind it; it is as if not everything after all had been staked. But the break makes the inwardness the greatest possible.^{bbb}

^{bbb} According to this plan one will be able to orient oneself and look only to the categories, without being put off by anyone's use of Christ's name and the whole Christian terminology in an aesthetic discourse.

²³⁴ 'Dialektiske Inderliggjørelse'. ²³⁵ Latin: one.

²³⁶ Latin: if you know one, you know all. ²³⁷ The inscription on Apollo's temple at Delphi.

The various existence-communications rank in turn according to the interpretation of existing. (Speculative philosophy, being abstract and objective, entirely disregards existing and inwardness and is, seeing that Christianity accentuates existence even paradoxically, the greatest possible misunderstanding of Christianity.) *Immediacy, the aesthetic*, finds no contradiction in existing: to exist is one thing, and the contradiction is something else which comes from outside. *The ethical* finds the contradiction but within self-assertion. *The religious A* comprehends the contradiction as suffering in self-annihilation, although within immanence, but by ethically accentuating existing it prevents the one existing from remaining abstractly in immanence, or becoming abstract by wanting to remain in immanence. *The paradox-religious* breaks with immanence and makes existing the absolute contradiction, not within immanence but against immanence. There is no immanent underlying kinship between the temporal and the eternal, because the eternal itself has entered time and would establish the kinship there.

Comment. This can be compared with the first two chapters of the *Crumbs* on learning the truth, the instant, the god in time as teacher. In the *aesthetic interpretation* one is the teacher, the other the learner, and then he in turn teacher, etc., in short, the relation is that of relativity. *Religiously*, there is no disciple and no teacher ('the teacher is only the occasion', cf. the *Crumbs*), every individual is essentially planned equally eternally and essentially relating to the eternal; the human teacher is a vanishing transition. *Paradox-religiously*, the teacher is the god in time, the disciple a new creation²³⁸ ('the god as teacher in time provides the condition', cf. the *Crumbs*). Within the paradox-religious, between persons religiousness A holds true. When therefore a Christian (who is paradoxically a disciple of the god in time, in the sense of being a new creation) within Christianity becomes a disciple of this one and that in turn, an indirect suspicion arises that all his Christianity may well be nothing but a piece of aesthetic gibberish.

The problem constantly dealt with here was: how can there be a historical point of departure, etc.? In religiousness A there is no historical point of departure. The individual discovers merely in time that he must assume that he is eternal. The moment in time is therefore *eo ipso*²³⁹ swallowed up in the eternal. The individual calls

²³⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:17. ²³⁹ Latin: by that very fact, by the same token.

to mind, in time, that he is eternal. This contradiction lies only within immanence. It is different when the historical is outside and remains outside, and the individual, who was not eternal, now becomes eternal, and so does not call to mind what he is but becomes what he was not, becomes, please note, something with the dialectic that as soon as it is, it must have been, for this is the dialectic of the eternal. – What is inaccessible to all thinking is: one can become eternal although one was not eternal.

In *A*, existing, my existence, is a moment within my eternal consciousness (note that it is the moment which is, not the moment which is past, for the latter is speculation's attenuation), thus a lesser thing that prevents me being the infinitely higher thing I am. In *B*, conversely, existing, although even more lowly by being paradoxically accentuated, is nevertheless that much higher that I become for the first time eternal in existence, and consequently, to exist gives rise by itself to a determinant infinitely higher than to exist.

§ 2

The dialectical contradiction that an eternal happiness is based on something historical

For thinking, the eternal is higher as the basis of everything than anything historical. So, in the religiousness of immanence the individual does not base his relation to the eternal on his existing in time; rather, in inner absorption's dialectic the individual's relation to the eternal determines that he transform his existence in accordance with the relation, and that he express the relation through the transformation.

The confusion of speculation is due here, as always, to its losing itself in pure being. Irreligious and immoral life-views make existing into a nothing, tomfoolery. Religiousness *A* makes existing as strenuous as possible (outside the sphere of the paradox-religious), yet it does not base the relation to an eternal happiness on one's existence but lets the relation to an eternal happiness serve as basis for the transformation of existence. The 'how' of the individual's existence results from his relation to the eternal, not conversely, whereby infinitely more comes out of it than was put in.

The dialectical contradiction here lies essentially, however, in the historical coming in the second place. For it is true of all historical learning and knowledge that, even at its maximum, it is only an

approximation. The contradiction is to base one's eternal happiness on an approximation, something that can be done only if one has no eternal determinant in oneself (something that again cannot be thought, just as little as how such a thing could occur to anyone, and the god must therefore provide the condition), which again is why this coheres with the paradoxical accentuation of existence.

With respect to the historical, all knowledge of it is, at its maximum, an approximation, even in respect of the individual's own knowledge of his own historical externality. The reason is in part the impossibility of being able to identify oneself absolutely with the objective, and in part that everything historical is, in being known, *eo ipso* past and has the ideality of recollection. In the second section, chapter 3, the thesis is advanced that the individual's own ethical actuality is the only actuality, but the ethical actuality is not the individual's historical externality. That I intended such and such I can know absolutely in all eternity, for this is precisely an expression of the eternal in me, is my self; but the historical externality is in the next moment²⁴⁰ only to be reached *approximando*.²⁴¹

The historian seeks to arrive at the greatest possible certainty, and the historian is not in any contradiction, for he is not in passion; he has at most the objective passion of the researcher, but he is not in subjective passion. As researcher he is part of a major endeavour from generation to generation; it is always objectively and scientifically important to him to come as close to certainty as possible. But it is not subjectively important to him. If, for example, as would be a mistake in a researcher, it suddenly became a purely personal matter of honour to arrive at absolute certainty on this and that, then he would discover, in the clutches of a righteous nemesis, that all historical knowledge is but an approximation. This is not to belittle historical research, but it throws light precisely on the contradiction in bringing the utmost passion of subjectivity to bear on something historical, which is the dialectical contradiction in the problem, and not a matter of some unwarranted passion but of the deepest passion of all.

The philosopher seeks to permeate historical actuality with thought; he is taken up objectively in this work, and the more he succeeds, the less important the historical detail becomes for him. Here again there is no contradiction.

²⁴⁰ Danish 'Moment', not 'instant' (*Oieblik*). ²⁴¹ Latin: by approximation.

The contradiction first appears when, in the extremity of his subjective passion (in the concern for an eternal happiness), the subject is to base this on historical knowledge whose maximum remains an approximation. The researcher calmly goes on living. In his subjective being and existing he is entirely unconcerned about what occupies him objectively and scientifically. Suppose someone is caught up in one way or another in a subjective passion, and the task is to give this up; the contradiction will then also disappear. But to call for the greatest possible subjective passion, to the point of hating father and mother,²⁴² and then to put this together with a historical knowledge that, at its maximum, can only be an approximation: that is the contradiction. And, again, the contradiction is a new expression of the paradoxical accentuation of existing; for if there is any residue of immanence, any eternal determinant remaining in the one who exists, it cannot be done. The one who exists must have lost continuity with himself, must have become another (not differing from himself within himself) and must now, by receiving the condition from the god, have become a new creation. The contradiction is that becoming a Christian begins with the miracle of creation, and that this befalls someone who is created, and that Christianity is nevertheless proclaimed to all people, who must then be regarded as not being there,²⁴³ seeing that the miracle through which they should come about²⁴⁴ must intervene, as actual or as an expression of the break with immanence, and of the opposition that absolutely makes the passion of faith paradoxical, as long as there is existing in faith, i.e., for a whole lifetime, for his eternal happiness is based all the time on something historical.

To someone in the greatest possible passion, in torment over his eternal happiness, the fact that so and so has been there²⁴⁵ is, or ought to be, a matter of interest; such a person should be interested in the least detail, and yet he can reach no more than an approximation and is absolutely in contradiction. Granting that the historical account of Christianity is true, if all of the world's historiographers were to join in researching and providing certainty, it would still be impossible to come up with more than an approximation. Thus, there are no objections to make historically, but the difficulty lies elsewhere; it comes when the subjective passion is to be put together with something historical and the task not to give up the subjective passion. If a woman in love received the assurance at second

²⁴² Luke 14:26. ²⁴³ 'Ikke tilværende'. ²⁴⁴ 'Bleve til'. ²⁴⁵ 'Været til'.

hand that the one she loved, who was dead and from whose mouth she had never heard the assurance, had affirmed his love for her – let the witness or witnesses be the most trustworthy of persons, let the case be so well prepared that a historian, a hair-splitting and incredulous lawyer would say: It is certain – the lover will soon discover the flaw; and it is no compliment to the lover who does not do so, for objectivity is not a lover's crown of honour. If someone were to seek certainty in the historical documents as to whether he was a legitimate or an illegitimate child, and his whole passion clung to this matter of honour, and the situation was such that there was no court, or other chance authority, that might finally decide the case, so that he might possibly find peace: one wonders whether he could find the certainty sufficient for his passion even if the certainty that satisfied the most hair-splitting lawyer and an objective person could be found? Yet the woman in love and the man concerned for his honour would surely make every effort to let go of this passion, finding comfort in the eternal, which is more blessed than the most legitimate birth and love's own blessedness, whether or not she be loved. But concern for an eternal blessedness cannot be given up, for in that regard he has nothing eternal in which to find consolation, and still he has to base his eternal happiness on something historical, knowledge of which is, at its maximum, an approximation.

Comment. Compare with this the *Crumbs'* chapters 3, 4, and 5 *passim*. – The objective interpretation of Christianity is responsible for the error, and for misleading those who are led to believe, that by learning to know objectively what Christianity is (as a researcher, a scholar learns it, by way of investigation, information, being taught), one becomes a Christian (who bases his blessedness on this historical knowledge). The difficulty itself is left out, or one assumes, as at bottom the Bible theory and the Church theory assume,²⁴⁶ that we are all what in a way are called Christians. And now, subsequently (for at the time when we became Christians it was not necessary), we are to know objectively what Christianity really is (presumably in order to stop being Christians, which one became so handily that there was no need even to know what Christianity is – that is, to stop being Christians and become researchers). The difficulty (and note that it is essentially the same in every generation, so that now and in 1700, etc., it is just as difficult to become a Christian as in the first generation, and as in

²⁴⁶ See Part One.

every generation in which Christianity was first introduced into a country) consists in subjectively aspiring to historical knowledge in the interest of one's own eternal blessedness; and anyone who does not possess this highest subjective passion is not a Christian; for, as was said somewhere earlier, an objective Christian is precisely a pagan.

It can be said in the case of religiousness A: let the 6,000 years of history be true; let them not be true: it matters neither one way nor the other in respect of his blessedness to one who exists, for he rests ultimately in the consciousness of eternity.

Objectively, it is no more difficult to find out what Christianity is than what Mohammedanism is, or any other historical religion, except to the extent that Christianity is not a simple historical fact. The difficulty is to become a Christian, because every Christian is such only by being nailed to the paradox of having based his eternal happiness on the relation to something historical. To transform Christianity speculatively into an eternal history, the god-in-time into an eternal god-becoming, etc., is simply evasion and to play with words. Once again: the difficulty is that I cannot ascertain anything historical in such a way that I (who objectively can be very well satisfied with information) can subjectively base an eternal happiness on it, not another person's but my own – that is to say, that I can think it. If I do that, I break with all thinking and should not then be so foolish as to want to understand later; since, if I am to understand, then all I can come to understand, before or afterwards, is that it goes against all thinking.

§ 3

The dialectical contradiction that what is historical here is not something plainly historical but formed of what can be historical only against its nature, accordingly on the strength of the absurd

The historical is that the god, the eternal, has come about at a definite moment in time as a particular human being. The special feature of the historical in this case, that it is not something plainly historical but something that can have become historical only against its own nature, has ushered speculation into a delightful illusion. A historical fact of this kind, eternal-historical, as they say, one can easily understand, indeed even understand it eternally. Thanks for that last step up,²⁴⁷ it has the odd

²⁴⁷ *Climax*: rhetorical figure, 'one above the one before'.

trait of going backwards; for understanding it eternally is precisely the easier course, as long as one is not embarrassed by its being a misunderstanding. If the contradiction is to base an eternal happiness on the relation to something historical, then this contradiction is not resolved by the historical in question itself forming a contradiction, if one still holds to the view that it is historical; and if this view is not held to, then indeed the eternal has not become historical; and even if one did not hold to the view that it is historical, the final step up will be ridiculous in any case, since if it is to be made, it will have to be made in reverse.

An eternal-historical something is a play on words and is to transform the historical into myth, even if in the same § one contests the mythical endeavour. Instead of noticing that there are two dialectical contradictions, first, basing one's eternal happiness on the relation to something historical and, then, the fact that the way in which this historical something is put together is contrary to all thinking, one drops the first and attenuates the second. A human being is potentially eternal and becomes conscious of this in time: this is the contradiction within immanence. But that something that is by nature eternal comes about in time, is born, grows up, and dies, is a breach with all thinking. If, however, the eternal's coming about in time is to be an eternal coming about, then religiousness B is done away with, 'all theology is anthropology',²⁴⁸ Christianity is transformed from an existence-communication into an ingenious metaphysical doctrine addressed to professors, religiousness A decked out with an aesthetic-metaphysical ornamentation that, in terms of categories, matters neither one way nor the other.

Compare this with the *Crumbs*, chapters 4 and 5, where stress is laid on the distinctive paradox-historical dialectic. The reason for also cancelling the difference between the disciple at first and at second hand is that, in relation to the paradox and the absurd, we are all equally close. Cf. in the present work, second section, chapter 2.

Comment. This is the paradox-religious sphere, the sphere of faith. It can all be believed – against the understanding. If anyone imagines that he understands it, he may be sure that he misunderstands it. Someone who understands it directly (as against understanding that it cannot be understood) will confuse Christianity with one or another pagan analogy (which analogy is delusional to factual

²⁴⁸ A reference to L. Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christentums* (*The Essence of Christianity*).

reality), or with the possibility underlying all the illusory analogies drawn from paganism (which, lacking God's essential invisibility as a higher dialectical middle term, are deluded by aesthetically direct recognizability; cf. second section, appendix to chapter 2). Or he will confuse Christianity with something which has indeed entered into the heart of man, i.e., into the heart of humanity, confuse it with the idea of human nature and forget the qualitative difference that accentuates the absolutely different point of departure: what comes from God, and what comes from man. Instead of using the analogy to define the paradox by its means (the novelty of Christianity is not direct novelty, and for that very reason it is the paradoxical novelty; see above), he will do the opposite, revoking the paradox with the aid of the analogy, which however is only delusion's analogy, and using it is therefore the revocation of the analogy, not of the paradox. In misunderstanding, he will understand Christianity as a possibility and forget that what is possible in the fantasy-medium of possibility, possible in illusion, or possible in the fantastic medium of pure thinking (and this scene-shift into the medium of possibility is what underlies all speculative talk of the eternal god-becoming) must become, in the medium of actuality, the absolute paradox. In misunderstanding, he will forget that understanding applies to that whose possibility is higher than its actuality, whereas here, quite to the contrary, actuality is the highest, the paradoxical; for, as a plan, Christianity is not hard to understand; the difficulty and the paradox are that it is actual. Hence it was shown in section 2, chapter 3, that faith is a sphere entirely to itself which, paradoxically from the aesthetic and metaphysical spheres, accentuates actuality, existence, and paradoxically from the ethical, accentuates another's actuality, not one's own. The reason why the category of the religious poet is questionable in respect of the paradox-religious is that, from the aesthetical viewpoint, possibility is higher than actuality, and the poetic rests precisely in the ideality of imaginative intuition. That is why one not infrequently sees hymns which, though touching and childlike and poetic, and with a tinge of fantasy verging in category terms on the fantastic, are not Christian, but lovely when seen in those terms from a poetic viewpoint – azure blue and the ding-dong of bells – do far more to promote the mythical view than any free-thinker, for the free-thinker declares Christianity to be a myth, while the naïve orthodox poet detests this and affirms the historical actuality of Christianity – in fanciful verse. Someone who understands the paradox (in the

sense of understanding it directly) will, in his misunderstanding, forget that what he at one time grasped in the decisive passion of faith as the absolute paradox (not as the relative paradox, for the appropriation would in that case not be faith), that is, as what was absolutely not his own thoughts, can never come to be his thoughts (in a direct sense) without transforming faith into an illusion, which then means that, at a later point, he comes to realize that he was deluded in believing absolutely that the thoughts were his own. In faith, however, he can very well continue to preserve his relation to the absolute paradox. But within the sphere of faith, that moment²⁴⁹ at which he understands the paradox (in the direct sense) can never arrive; for if that happens the whole sphere of faith drops out as a misunderstanding. Actuality, i.e., the fact that this or that has actually occurred, is the object of faith and yet is surely not any human being's or humankind's own thoughts, for thought is at most possibility, while possibility as understanding is precisely the understanding by which the step backwards is taken in which faith comes to an end. Someone who understands the paradox will, in his misunderstanding, forget that Christianity is the absolute paradox (just as its novelty is the paradoxical novelty) precisely because it destroys a possibility (the analogy of paganism, an eternal god-becoming) as an illusion and turns it into actuality, and just this is the paradox – not the strange, the unusual in a direct (aesthetic) sense, but the apparently familiar and yet absolutely strange, which, just by being actuality, turns the apparent into a deception. Someone who understands the paradox will forget that through this understanding (as a possibility) he has gone back to the old and lost touch with Christianity. In the fantasy-medium of possibility, God can very well be fused with man in imagination, but that this should occur in actuality with an individual human being is precisely the paradox.

Yet, to confuse things and go further by going backwards, or to pronounce judgment and to bellow in Christianity's defence when, in all this noise and pomposity, one is oneself using the categories of misunderstanding, is easier than to keep to a strict dialectical diet, and usually better rewarded if one counts it a reward (and not a troubling *nota bene*) to acquire adherents, if one counts it a reward (and not a troubling *nota bene*) to have satisfied the demands of the times.

²⁴⁹ Danish 'Moment', not 'instant' (*Oieblik*).

Appendix to B

The retroactive effect of the dialectical element on the pathos in sharpening pathos and the moments²⁵⁰ simultaneously present in this pathos

The religiousness that has nothing dialectical in second place, that is, religiousness A, which is the individual's own pathetic transformation of existence (not the paradoxical transformation of existence by faith through the relation to something historical) has to do with the purely human, in such a way that every human being, viewed essentially, must be assumed to have a share in this blessedness and finally becomes blessed. The difference between the religious person and someone who does not transform his existence religiously becomes a humorous difference: that while the religious person devotes his whole life to becoming conscious of the relation to an eternal happiness and the other is not concerned about that (note that the religious man has the satisfaction within himself and, turned inwards, is not busily occupied with senseless complaints that others easily come by what he aspires to only with difficulty and the greatest possible exertion), they both come equally far from an eternal viewpoint. In this lies the sympathetic humour, and the earnest lies in the fact that the religious person does not let himself be put out by comparing himself with others. In religiousness A, then, there is the constant possibility of calling existence back into eternity behind.

Religiousness B is isolating, singling out, is polemical. Only on this condition do I become blessed, and just as I bind myself to it absolutely, so I exclude everyone else. This is particularism's stimulus in the general pathos. Every Christian has pathos as in religiousness A, and then this pathos of singling out. This singling out gives the Christian a certain resemblance to the person made happy by being favoured, and if this is understood selfishly by a Christian, we have the desperate²⁵¹ presumption of predestination. The person made happy by good fortune cannot essentially sympathize with others who are not or who cannot be so favoured. So either the happy person must remain ignorant that the others are there, or become unhappy himself in being aware of this. Having his eternal happiness based on something historical makes suffering the mark of the Christian's happiness or good fortune, just as the

²⁵⁰ As previous note. ²⁵¹ 'Fortvivlede'.

religious category of God's elect is as paradoxically opposed as could be to being a favourite of fortune,²⁵² the elect not being the unhappy person but not straightforwardly the happy one either – no, this is so hard to understand that for any but the elect it must be enough to drive one to despair. Which is why that conception of being the elect that wants aesthetically to be, for instance, in the position of an apostle is so disgusting. The blessedness bound to a historical condition excludes all who are outside the condition, and of these countless are excluded by no fault of their own but by the accidental circumstance that Christianity has not yet been proclaimed to them.

The sharpened pathos, more closely defined, is:

(a) *Sin-consciousness*.^{ccc} This consciousness is the expression of the paradoxical transformation of existence. Sin is the new existence-medium. 'To exist' ordinarily means simply that, through having come about, the individual is there and on the way to being.²⁵³ Now it means that having come about, he has become a sinner. Usually, 'existing' is not a more closely defining predicate but the form of all the more closely defining predicates; one does not become something by coming about, but now, coming about is becoming a sinner. In the totality of guilt-consciousness, existence asserts itself as strongly as it can within immanence. But sin-consciousness is the break; by coming about, the individual becomes another, or the moment he is to come about, he becomes another by coming about, for otherwise the category of sin is placed inside immanence. From eternity, the individual is not a sinner; when the being who is planned for eternity, who comes about at birth, becomes a sinner at birth or is born a sinner, then it is existence that wraps itself around him in such a way that every communication²⁵⁴ of immanence by way of recollection through going back is cut off, and the predicate 'sinner', which first appears, but also immediately, at the moment of coming about, acquires such an overwhelming power that the coming about makes him another. This is the consequence of the god's appearance in time, which prevents the individual from relating

^{ccc} Compare what was said about guilt-consciousness under A § 3. Cf. also second section, chapter 2.

²⁵² 'Pamphilus', see p. 359 n. 85.

²⁵³ 'At være blevet til er til og i Vorden'.

²⁵⁴ Danish 'Communication', not 'Meddelelse'; see the translator's introduction.

backwards to the eternal, since he is now, in a forward direction, coming to be eternal in time through the relation to the god in time.

The individual is, accordingly, unable to acquire sin-consciousness by himself, as he can guilt-consciousness; for in guilt-consciousness the subject's self-identity is preserved and guilt-consciousness is a change of subject within the subject. Sin-consciousness, however, is a change of the subject himself, which shows that, outside the individual, there must be the power that makes clear to him that in coming about he has become another than he was, has become a sinner. This power is the god in time. (Compare the *Crumbs*, chapter 1, on the instant.)

In sin-consciousness the individual becomes conscious of himself in his difference from the universally human, which on its own becomes conscious only of what it is to exist *qua* human being. For since the relation to that historical circumstance (the god in time) is the condition for sin-consciousness, there can have been no sin-consciousness in all that time when the historical circumstance had not been. On the other hand, through the believer in the consciousness of sin becoming conscious of the sin of the whole race, another isolating appears. The believer extends sin-consciousness to the whole race and has no knowledge at the same time of the whole race being saved, seeing that the salvation of the single individual depends on his being brought into relation to that historical circumstance, which, just because it is historical, cannot be everywhere at once but uses time to become known to human beings, during which time one generation after the other dies. In religiousness A there is sympathy with all human beings, because this religiousness relates to the eternal, as every human being essentially assumes he can, and because the eternal is everywhere, so that no time is involved in waiting, or in sending, for what is prevented, by being historical, from being everywhere at once, and about which countless generations through no fault of their own could remain unaware of its having been.

To have one's existence in this determinant is sharpened pathos, both because it cannot be thought and because it is isolating. For sin is no teaching or doctrine for thinkers, since then it all comes to nothing; it is an existence-category and one that precisely cannot be thought.

(b) *The possibility of offence* or the autopathic²⁵⁵ collision. In religiousness A offence is not possible, for even the most decisive qualification is within

²⁵⁵ A medical term signifying dependence on the nature or structure of the diseased organism.

immanence. But the paradox, which requires faith against the understanding, brings out the offence straight away, whether more closely defined as the offence that suffers or as the offence that mocks the paradox as foolishness. Thus, as soon as the person who has had the passion of faith loses it, he is *eo ipso* offended.

But this again is the sharpened pathos: constantly having a possibility that, if realized, is a fall just as deeper as faith is higher than all the religiousness of immanence. In our time Christianity has become so naturalized, and so accommodated to the world, that nobody dreams of the offence. Yes, well, that is quite as it should be, for one is not offended by a trifle, which is what Christianity is on the point of becoming. Otherwise, true enough, it is the only power able truly to arouse offence, and the narrow gate to the hard road of faith is the offence,²⁵⁶ and the fearful resistance to the beginning of faith is the offence, and if things go as they should in becoming a Christian, then the offence must take its percentage in every generation, as it did in the first. Christianity is the only power able truly to arouse offence; for hysterical and sentimental fits of offence at this or that can simply be dismissed and explained by a lack of ethical earnest, panderingly busying itself with complaints about the whole world instead of itself. For the believer, the offence is at the beginning, and the possibility of it is the perpetual fear and trembling in his existing.

(c) *The pain of sympathy*, because the believer, unlike the one who is religious A, does not have a latent sympathy, or is able to sympathize, with every human being *qua* human being but essentially only with Christians. Someone who with the passion of all his soul bases his blessedness on one condition, which is a relation to something historical, naturally cannot at the same time regard this condition as tomfoolery. Such a thing is only possible for a modern dogmatician, who has no difficulty doing the latter since he lacks pathos for the former. For the believer, it is a matter of there being no eternal happiness outside this condition, and for him it is a matter, or can become a matter, of having to hate father and mother. For is it not tantamount to hating them if he has his eternal happiness bound to a condition he knows they do not accept? And is that not a terrible sharpening of pathos with regard to an eternal happiness? And suppose

²⁵⁶ Matthew 7:13–14.

that this father or this mother or this loved one was dead without having their blessedness based on this condition! Or if they were still living but he could not win them over! He may want to do everything for them to the last, fulfil all the duties of a faithful son and a faithful lover with the greatest enthusiasm – in this way Christianity does not enjoin hating – and yet, if this condition separates them, separates them for ever, is this not as if he hated them?

The world has had such experience. Nowadays it does not have it, we are indeed all Christians. But what, I wonder, have we all become, and what has Christianity become, by our in this way becoming Christians without further ado?

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The present work has made it difficult to become a Christian, so difficult that the number of Christians among the cultivated in Christendom may not be very large – may not, because this is not something I can know. Whether my doing this is Christian, I do not decide. But going further than Christianity and fumbling in definitions once familiar to pagans, going further and then, in terms of proficiency in existing, falling far short of competing with pagans, that at least is not Christian. Nor is the difficulty made (in the experiment, for the book has no τέλος) in order for it to be hard for lay people to become Christians. For one thing, everyone can become a Christian; and for another, it is assumed here that everyone who says he is a Christian and has done the highest, actually is a Christian and indeed done the highest, unless in pushing himself importantly forward he prompts one, purely psychologically and to learn something for oneself, to look more closely into the matter. Woe to him who would judge hearts. But when a whole generation seems, though in various ways, to want to join *en masse* in going further, and when a whole generation aspires to objectivity, though this be understood in various ways, as the highest, whereby one ceases to be a Christian, if that is indeed what one was, surely this can prompt an individual into becoming aware of the difficulties. What it must not prompt in him, on the other hand, is the new confusion: becoming important to anyone else, to say nothing of the generation, by having the difficulties presented, for then he too begins to become objective.

In times when one decided to become a Christian in the maturity of adulthood, perhaps being knocked about and tested in life, perhaps with

the pain of having had to sever the most tender ties with parents and family, with the beloved, one doubtless felt no urge to go further, because one understood the effort it took every day to keep oneself in this passion, understood what terrors one's life held. But in our day, when one is made to look like a real Christian already as a week-old infant, with Christ transformed from a sign of offence into a friend of small children in the way of Uncle Frantz, Godmand,¹ or a charity-school teacher, one does indeed think that, as an adult, one should do something and so must go further. The trouble is that people go further not actually by becoming Christians but only by regressing through speculation and the world-historical to lower and partly fanciful conceptions of existence. Because we are used to being, and being called, Christians as a matter of course, the anomalous situation has arisen that life-views far lower than Christianity have been introduced into Christianity and found more pleasing (to the Christians); naturally, since Christianity is the hardest, and they are then praised as loftier inventions which go beyond plain and simple Christianity.

It would undoubtedly be better, a sign of life, if instead of holding on to the name disinterestedly, a fair number of people bluntly admitted to themselves that they could wish Christianity had never entered the world, or that they themselves had never become Christians. But then let the admission be made without scorn and mockery and anger, for of what use are they? One may just as well have respect for something that one cannot force oneself into. Christ himself says that he took pleasure in the young man who could not make up his mind to give away all his possessions to the poor,² and even though the young man did not become a Christian, Christ still took pleasure in him. Better candour, therefore, than indecision. Christianity is a wonderful life-view to die in, the only true comfort, and the moment of death is Christianity's situation. That could be why even the disinterested are unwilling to give it up; for just in the way that one puts something into a burial society so as to be able to defray costs when the time comes, so one keeps Christianity on the side until the last: one is a Christian, yet becomes one only at the moment of death.

There may have been someone who, with an honest look at himself, had to admit that he wished he had never been brought up in Christianity

¹ Main characters in two German books for the young, both translated into Danish.

² Mark 10:17-22.

rather than indifferently push it away. Better candour than indecision. But let the admission be made without anger, without defiance, with a calm respect for the power that may have upset him in his life, as he sees it, for the power that might indeed have helped to put him on course, but which has not helped him. If there chanced to be a father, even the most tender and loving of fathers, who just as he wanted to do what was best for his child, did the worst, the worst that may have upset the child's whole life, is the son then, for that reason, to drown his piety in the oblivion of indifference, or change it to anger, if he should remember the circumstances? Yes, let shabby souls who are able to love God and people only when everything goes their way, let them, in irascibility, hate and defy: a faithful son loves unchanged, and it is always the mark of a mediocre person that, if convinced that someone who made them unhappy did so intending it to be for their own good, he can be parted from him in anger and bitterness. A strict upbringing in Christianity may have in this way made a person's life too hard without helping him in return. He may secretly harbour a wish, like those inhabitants who begged Christ to leave their neighbourhood because they were terrified of him.³ But the son whom the father made unhappy, if he is big-hearted, will continue loving the father. And if he suffers from the consequences, he may sometimes be able in despondency to sigh, If only it had never happened to me. But he will never give in to despair. He will toil against the suffering by toiling through it. And as he works, so will his sorrow be allayed. Soon he will feel sorrier for his father than for himself. He will forget his own pain in deep and sympathetic sorrow over how hard it would be for the father if he were to understand. Then he will strive more and more mightily. His salvation will be important to him for his own sake, and almost more precious now for his father's sake – then he will work, no doubt he will succeed. And if he does succeed, he will just about lose his mind in enthusiastic rejoicing, for what father has done so much for his son, and what son can be so indebted to the father! The same with Christianity: even if it has made him unhappy, he does not for that reason give it up; for it never occurs to him that Christianity should have come into the world to do people harm; for him it remains something constantly to be venerated. He does not let go of it, and even if in despondency he sighs, If only I had never been brought up in this doctrine, he does not let go of it.

³ Mark 5:17.

And despondency turns into sadness, that it must after all be quite hard for Christianity that such a thing could happen – but he does not let go of it. In the end, Christianity must make it up to him. Yes, in the end, it is not little by little but much less and yet infinitely much more. But only sloppy people let go of what at one time made an absolute impression on them, and only sorry souls despicably exploit their own suffering to make the wretched profit from being able to upset others, of becoming self-important in that most villainous of all presumption: wanting to bar others from finding comfort because one has not found it oneself. If, in our time, there is anyone whom Christianity has upset, which I do not doubt, and as can be shown to be a fact, one thing can be demanded of him – that he keep quiet, because from the ethical point of view his talk is a case of robbery and even worse in its consequence, for it ends in both of them, robber and victim, having nothing.

No more than Christianity entered the world in man's childhood, but in the fullness of time,⁴ is it suited in its decisive form to all ages of life. There are times in a life that demand what Christianity seemingly wants to omit altogether, something that at a certain age looks like the absolute, although later in life the same person sees the vanity of it. Christianity cannot be poured into a child, because it is the case always that every human being grasps only that for which he has use, and the child has no decisive use for Christianity. As the entry of Christianity into the world indicates through what went before, the law is constantly this: *No one begins by being a Christian; each becomes that in the fullness of time – if one does become that.* A strict Christian upbringing in Christianity's decisive categories is a very hazardous undertaking, for Christianity makes men whose strength is in their weakness, but if a child is cowed into Christianity in all its earnest form, generally it makes for a most unhappy youngster. The rare exception is a stroke of luck.

The Christianity that is lectured to a child, or rather which the child pieces together for itself when not pushed forcibly into the decisive Christian categories, is not properly Christianity but idyllic mythology. It is the idea of childlikeness to the second power, and the relation is sometimes turned around, so that it is rather the parents who learn from the child than the child from the parents, that the child's lovable misunderstanding of what is essentially Christian transfigures father love and

⁴ Galatians 4:4.

mother love into a piety that is nevertheless not properly Christianity. There is no shortage of examples of people who previously were not religiously moved, but now becoming so through the child. However, this piety is not the religiousness that should essentially be the adult's, and the religiousness of the parents should no more find its decisive expression in this piety than the mother herself is nourished by the milk that nature provides for the child. Father-love and mother-love cling so tightly to the child, embrace it so tenderly, that the piety discovers, as it were of itself, what after all is taught: that there must be a God who looks after little children. But if this mood is the whole of the parents' religiousness, then they lack proper religiousness and are comforted only by a sadness that indirectly is in sympathy with being a child. Lovely and lovable as are this parental piety and the child's eagerness to learn, and the ease of understanding this blessedness, it is not really Christianity. It is Christianity in the medium of fantasy perception;⁵ it is a Christianity from which the terror has been removed: one leads the *innocent* child to God or Christ. Is this really Christianity, the point of which is precisely that it is the sinner who has recourse to the paradox? It is beautiful and touching and as it should be, that at the sight of a child an older person feels his guilt and grasps wistfully at the child's innocence, but this mood is not decisively Christian. The sentimental view of the child's innocence forgets that Christianity recognizes no such thing in the fallen kind,⁶ and that the qualitative dialectic defines sin-consciousness as closer at hand than all innocence. The rigorous Christian conception of the child as sinner cannot privilege the period of childhood, because sin-consciousness is something the child lacks and is therefore a sinner unconscious of sin.

But there is a Bible passage to appeal to, and sometimes it is understood, perhaps unconsciously, as containing the deepest satire on all Christianity, and as depicting it as the most disconsolate view of life, since it makes it indescribably easy for a child to enter into the kingdom of heaven but impossible for an adult, the consequence being that the best and only proper thing to wish for would be to have the child dead, the sooner the better.

It is in the nineteenth chapter of Matthew, where Christ says, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these

⁵ 'Phantasie-Anskuelsens Medium'.

⁶ 'Kjøn', humankind, or family (here of Adam's descendants).

that the kingdom of heaven belongs.⁷ The whole chapter speaks of the difficulty of entering the kingdom of heaven, and the expressions are as emphatic as can be. Verse 12: 'There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.' Verse 24: 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of God.' The disciples became so terrified that they say (verse 25): 'Then who can be saved?' And after Christ has replied to this, there is mention again in verse 29 of the reward for those who have left house and brothers or sisters or father and mother or wife or children or fields for the sake of Christ's name – all of them terrible expressions of the collisions in which a Christian can be tested. Consequently, the entrance to the kingdom of heaven is made as difficult as possible, so difficult that even teleological suspensions of the ethical are mentioned. In the same chapter the little incident is now quite briefly recounted where small children were brought to Christ and he spoke those words – yet, note this, in between there is a little intermediate clause and intermediate event: the disciples rebuked the children or, more correctly, rebuked those who carried the children (see Mark 10:13). If Christ's words on being a child are to be understood in a straightforward manner, then the confusion arises that whereas for adults entering the kingdom of heaven is made as difficult as possible, for a child the only difficulty is the mother carrying it to Christ and the child being carried there – and then we can quickly reach the despairing climax: best to die as a child. But in Matthew the meaning is not difficult. Christ addresses the words to the disciples who had rebuked the children, and the disciples were after all not small children. In Matthew 18:2⁸ it is told that Jesus called a child and placed him among the disciples and then said: Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. He does not engage further with the child, but uses the child against the disciples. If, however, the meaning were supposed to be straightforwardly about the delight of being a little child, a proper little angel (and Christianity seems not to have a partiality even for angels, pertaining as it does to sinners) – then it is cruel to say these words in the presence of the Apostles, who were in what would then be the sorry case of being grown men. With this one explanation, the whole of Christianity is explained away. Why, one wonders, should Christ want disciples who

⁷ Matthew 19:14. ⁸ In fact Matthew 18:2–3.

were adults before they became disciples? Why did he not say: Go out and baptize small children?

If it is distressing to see a presuming speculation wanting to understand everything, then it is always just as distressing that under the cloak of orthodoxy anyone should make Christianity into moonlight and charity-school sentimentality. But to say to adult men – just at the moment when they may be being too personal with Christ and would demand finite profit from the close relationship, or at least stress the close relationship in a worldly way – that ‘of such’^a (namely, little children) is the kingdom of heaven, with the help of a paradox putting just a little distance between himself and the disciples; yes, that is a dark saying, for humanly speaking it is after all possible to castrate oneself and leave father and children and wife, but to become a little child when one has become an adult is to protect oneself with the distance of the paradox against all importunity. The Apostles rebuke the small children; but Christ does not return the rebuke. He does not even reprimand the Apostles; he turns to the small children but speaks to the Apostles. And just as with that look that he gave to Peter,⁹ so this turning to the children is to be understood as addressing the Apostles, the judgment on them, and in the nineteenth chapter of Matthew, which otherwise also deals with the difficulty of entering the kingdom of heaven, this is its strongest expression. The paradoxical aspect lies in making the child the paradigm. This is a paradox *partly* because, humanly speaking, a child cannot be a paradigm, since it is immediate and explains nothing (which is why a genius cannot be a paradigm either, the sad side of the distinction of genius), not even in relation to other children, for every child is only immediately itself, and *partly* because it is made a paradigm for an adult who in the humility of guilt-consciousness is to resemble the humility of innocence.

But enough about that. An infantile view of Christianity like this only makes it laughable. If this matter of being a child has to be understood literally, then preaching Christianity to adults is nonsense. Yet this is how

^a τοιοῦτοι; the very word is enough to show that Christ is not talking about the children, or to the children directly, but to the disciples. Literally, a child is not τοιοῦτος; that word implies a comparison, which presupposes a difference. So this says nothing about children directly, not that a little child (literally) has free admission; it says that only someone who is like a child can enter the kingdom of heaven. But just as for the adult it is the most impossible thing of all to become a little child (literally), so for a little child it is the most impossible thing of all to be *like* a child, just because it is a child.

⁹ Luke 22:61.

orthodox gladiators defend Christianity. But then if anyone wants something to laugh at, there can hardly be a richer resource than the way in which these days Christianity is defended and attacked. An orthodox thunders against the egoism of free-thinkers 'who do not want to enter God's kingdom as little children but want to be something'. Here the category is correct, but now he is to add weight to his discourse and appeals to that Bible passage about being, literally, a little child. Can one blame the free-thinker for assuming his reverence to be, literally, a little mad? The difficult discourse on which the orthodox began has become rubbish, because for a little child it is not at all difficult, and for an adult it is impossible. Being something and wanting to be something is, in a way, precisely the condition (the negative condition) for entering the kingdom of heaven as a little child – if it is to be difficult – otherwise it is no wonder that at forty years old one stays outside. So mock Christianity as the free-thinker may, no one makes it more ridiculous than the orthodox. Psychologically, this misunderstanding goes together with the comfortable assurance with which people have managed to identify being a Christian with being a human, together with the light-minded and heavy-hearted fear of decision, which keeps on pushing and pushing aside, and therefore manages to have becoming a Christian pushed so far back as to be decided before one knows anything about it. Such extreme stress is laid on the sacrament of baptism that one quite forgets Nicodemus's objection and the answer he received,¹⁰ because hyperorthodoxically one lets a little child actually become a Christian by being baptized.

Childlike Christianity, lovable in a little child, is in an adult the childish orthodoxy which, made eternally happy in the realm of fantasy, has managed to find room for Christ's name. Such an orthodoxy confuses everything. If it notices that the price of the category of faith has begun to drop, and that everyone wants to go further and let faith be something for stupid people, then it will set about forcing up the price. What happens? Faith becomes something quite extraordinary and rare, 'not for just everyone' – in short, faith becomes a differential property of genius. In that case, through this single stipulation, the whole of Christianity is revoked – by an orthodox. It is very proper of this orthodox to want to press up the price, but the value differential confuses everything, because

¹⁰ See John 3:1–21, where Jesus answers the Pharisee's objection that one cannot be born again.

the differential of genius is not difficult for the genius but impossible for others. Faith is quite properly made the hardest of all, but qualitatively-dialectically, i.e., equally hard for all. It is the ethical qualification in faith that helps here, because this quite simply prohibits the one believer from being inquisitive and comparative; it bans all comparison between man and man, and so it becomes equally hard for all.

An infantile orthodoxy of this kind has also managed to have attention brought to bear on Christ being swaddled at birth in rags and laid in a manger, in short, the humiliation of his coming in the humble form of a servant,¹¹ and believes this to be the paradox, as against coming in glory. Confusion. The paradox is primarily that God, the eternal, has entered time as a particular human being. Whether this particular human being is a servant or an emperor is neither here nor there. It is no more adequate for God to be a king than to be a beggar; it is no greater degradation for God to be a beggar than to be an emperor. One recognizes the childlike straight away; simply because the child has no developed conception, or actual conception, of God (but only an inwardness of imagination), so it cannot become aware of the absolute paradox, but has a touching understanding of the humour of it: that the mightiest of all, the Almighty (yet with no decisive definition in thought and therefore only a romantic difference from something on the same level, being king and emperor) was at his birth laid in a manger and swaddled in rags. If, however, infantile orthodoxy insists on this humiliation as the paradox, it shows *eo ipso*¹² that it is unaware of the paradox. What help then is all this defending! If it is taken for granted that God's becoming a particular human being is easy to understand, the difficulty lies first in what comes next – that he becomes a lowly and despised human being: then Christianity is *summa summarum*¹³ humour. Humour diverts attention a little from the first, the category of God, and lays stress now on this: that the greatest, the most powerful one, who is greater than all kings and emperors, became the lowliest of all. But 'the greatest, the most powerful one, who is greater than all kings and emperors' is a very vague definition, it is imagination and not a specification of quality such as being God. In all, it is remarkable how orthodoxy, when in a pickle, uses imagination – and then produces the greatest effect. But as I have said, the greatest, the

¹¹ Luke 2:7; Philippians 2:7–8. ¹² Latin: by that very fact, by the same token.

¹³ Latin: in sum.

most powerful one, who is greater than all kings and emperors, is for that reason not God. If one wants to talk of God then let one say, God. That is the quality. If the priest wants to talk of eternity then let him say, eternity. And yet at times, when he really wants to say something, he says: Unto all eternal eternities, world without end. But if Christianity is humour, then everything is confused; it ends with my becoming the best of Christians, because regarded as a humorist I am not bad, but bad enough to regard this as being as humorous as can be compared with being a Christian, which I am not.

An infantile orthodoxy misleadingly stresses Christ's suffering. In the most unreal categories not at all suited to commanding human understanding's silence since, on the contrary, the understanding will readily perceive it to be gibberish, the fearfulness of suffering is accentuated, Christ's delicate body that suffers so immensely. Or it is stressed, quantitatively and comparatively, that he who was so holy, the purest and most innocent of us all, had to suffer. The paradox is that Christ entered the world *in order to suffer*. If this is taken away, a whole levy of analogies carry the impregnable fortress of the paradox. That the innocent person may suffer in the world (heroes of the intellect, art, martyrs for the truth, the silent martyrs of womanhood, etc.) is not at all absolutely paradoxical but humorous. But the martyrs' destiny, when they came into the world, was not to suffer; their destiny was one thing and the other, and it was to accomplish it that they had to suffer, endure suffering, face death; but the suffering is not the *τέλος*. Religiousness comprehends suffering, defines it teleologically for the sufferer, but suffering is not the *τέλος*. Therefore, the suffering of the believer is no more an analogy to that of Christ than is the suffering of the ordinary martyr. Indeed, what distinguishes the absolute paradox is that every analogy is a fraud. It might look more like an analogy that one supposed, in accordance with a fantastical life-view (the transmigration of souls), that someone who had once been in the world came into it again *in order to suffer*. But belonging as it does to a fantastic life-view, the analogy is *eo ipso* a fallacy and, apart from that, the *in order to* of the suffering is quite the opposite; someone who is guilty comes into the world again *in order to* suffer his punishment. It is as though a fate hung over the infantile orthodoxy. It is often well-meaning but, lacking orientation, it is led often to exaggerate.

So when an orthodox is heard going on about childhood faith, what one learns from the child, the woman's heart, etc., this may just be someone of a rather humorous nature (as a humorist I must, however, protest against

any kinship with him, since he puts the emphasis in the wrong place) who has got Christianity mixed up in the childlike (in a literal sense) and now yearns for childhood, and the special mark of whose yearning is therefore that it hankers for the loving tenderness of the loving mother. It could also be a fraudulent fellow trying to avoid the horrors when, as an adult, truly becoming a child is taken in earnest, not just putting the traits of the child and the adult humorously together. For this much is certain, that if a little child (in a literal sense) is to provide the definition of what Christianity is, this latter will be devoid of terror; it is not that fact which was an offence to Jews and foolishness to the Greeks.¹⁴

When told about Christianity, and not maltreated in a figurative sense, the child appropriates all that is gentle, childlike, endearing, and heavenly. It will live together with the little child Jesus and with the angels and the three wise men; it sees the star in the dark night, it journeys on the long road, and now it is in the stable, wonder upon wonder, and always sees heaven open;¹⁵ the child yearns with all the inwardness of imagination for these pictures – now, let us then not forget the ginger snaps and all the other splendid things that come out on this occasion. Above all, let us not be old rascals lying about childhood, affecting its exaggerated enthusiasm, and cheating childhood of its reality.¹⁶ He would truly have to be a good-for-nothing who failed to find childlikeness touching and charming and blessed; nor would we want to suspect the humorist of failing to appreciate the reality of childhood, he the unhappy-happy lover of memories. Yet surely, on the other hand, it is a blind guide who wants in any way whatever to say that this is the decisive conception of Christianity, which became an offence to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. Christ becomes the god-child or, for the slightly older child, the friendly figure with the mild countenance (the mythical commensurability), not the paradox in whom no one could detect anything (in a literal sense), not even John the Baptist (cf. John 1:31, 33), not even the disciples before they were made aware (John 1:36, 42), something Isaiah had prophesied (53:2, 3, 4, especially 4). The child's grasp of Christ is essentially that of an imaginative intuition,¹⁷ and the notion of an intuition in imagination is commensurability, and commensurability is essentially

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:23. ¹⁵ John 1:51; Acts 7:56.

¹⁶ A play on 'lyve' (tell lies), 'tillyve' (affect), and 'fralyve' (cheat out of).

¹⁷ 'Phantasic-Anskuelsen'.

paganism, whether it be power, glory, beauty besides, or part of a little humorous contradiction that is still not an actual cover but an easily-seen-through incognito. Commensurability is direct recognizability. The form of the servant is the incognito, but the gentle countenance is direct recognizability.

Here, as everywhere, there is kind of orthodoxy that when it wants to put on a real show at big festivals and on important occasions, *bona fide*¹⁸ helps itself to a little paganism – and then it succeeds best of all. A priest may in general keep more or less to the strict and proper orthodox categories, but what happens? – one Sunday he has to make a special effort. To show how vividly Christ stands there before him, he will offer us a glimpse into his own soul. That's as it should be. Christ is the object of faith, but faith itself is anything but an intuition of the imagination and such an intuition is precisely not something higher than faith. But now it comes: the mild countenance, the friendly figure, sorrowful gaze, etc. There is nothing comic about someone teaching paganism instead of Christianity, but there is indeed something comic when, on the great festive occasion, an orthodox pulls out all the stops, makes a mistake and without noticing pulls out the pagan stop. If the organist played a waltz on a daily basis he would no doubt lose his job; but if on the great festive occasions, and in view of the accompanying trumpets, an organist who otherwise performed hymns with all correctitude were to play a waltz – properly to celebrate the day – this would indeed be comic. And yet one finds something of this sentimental and tender paganism among the orthodox, not on a daily basis but precisely on the great feast days when they really open their hearts; and usually one finds it again in the latter part of the discourse. Being directly recognizable is paganism; all solemn assurances that it is indeed Christ and that he is the true God, are of no use once it ends up all the same in direct recognizability. A mythological figure is directly recognizable. If one confronts the orthodox with this objection he becomes furious and snaps: Yes, but Christ is indeed the true God and therefore not some figure of myth ... you can tell from his mild countenance. But then if you can see it on him he is *eo ipso* a mythological figure. It is easy to see that there is still room for faith; for take away the recognizability and faith is in its proper place. What makes faith recognizable is exactly the crucifixion of understanding and of imaginative

¹⁸ Latin: in good faith.

intuition that cannot procure direct recognizability. But it is easier to slink off from the horror and into a little paganism, which is itself made unrecognizable by the curious context, namely, its serving as the last and loftiest explanation in an address which may have begun in quite correct orthodox categories. If in a moment of confidence an orthodox were to confide to one that, really, he did not have faith, well, there is nothing to laugh at there. But when in blissful rhapsody, almost surprising himself with his lofty rhetoric, an orthodox opens himself to one completely in confidence and is unlucky enough to mistake the direction so that he *ascends* from the higher to the lower, then it is rather hard not to smile.

So the time of childhood (in a literal sense) is not the true age for becoming a Christian; on the contrary, it is the more advanced age. The time for deciding whether or not a person will be one is the age of maturity. The religiousness of childhood is the universal, abstract, and yet heartfelt imaginative basis of all later religiousness, becoming a Christian is a decision that belongs to a much later age. The child's receptivity is so entirely without decision that one can, as the saying goes, make a child believe anything. Of course, the adult bears responsibility for what he lets himself make the child believe, but this much is certain and true. Nor can the fact that the child is baptized make it older in understanding or mature it for decisions. A Jewish child, a pagan child, brought up from the start by tender Christian foster-parents, who treat it as lovingly as parents treat their own child, will appropriate the same Christianity as the baptized child.

If, on the other hand, a child is not allowed, as it should be, to play with the most holy; if in its existing it is forced into what decisively defines Christianity, such a child will come to suffer a great deal. An upbringing like that will either plunge immediacy into despondency and anxiety or inflame desire and desire's anxiety on a scale unknown even in paganism.

It is beautiful and lovable, and the opposite is inexcusable, that Christian parents, who as caring of the child as they are in other matters, thus suckle it also with childlike ideas of the religious. As frequently said above, infant baptism is in every way excusable as the anticipation of possibility, as hindering the dreadful laceration of the parents' having their eternal happiness linked to something, yet the children not to the same. Only a stupid, sentimental and boorish misunderstanding, not so much of infant baptism as of childhood, is to be objected to, but then

sectarian externality is just as objectionable, since the decision best belongs to inwardness. It is a violation of the child, however well intentioned, to coerce its existence into the decisive Christian categories, but it is an immense stupidity to say that childhood (in the literal sense) is the decisive time for becoming a Christian. Just as fraudulent attempts have been made to effect a direct transition from eudaemonism to the ethical through prudence, so too is it a fraudulent innovation to identify being a Christian as closely as possible with being a human and to want to have someone believe that they became this decisively in childhood. And the extent to which this urge and inclination to push being a Christian back into childhood becomes common will itself be evidence that Christianity is on the way out; for what the attempt amounts to is a desire to transform being a Christian into a beautiful memory, instead of being a Christian being what a human being most decisively becomes. There is a desire to deck out childhood's lovable innocence fantastically with the further feature that this innocence is what it is to be Christian, and thus have sadness replace decision. For it is in its honest and un-cheating reflection in a purely human way on what it is to be a child (in the literal sense) that the sadness of legitimate humour consists, and it is forever certain and true that this cannot be repeated. Childhood, when gone, becomes just a memory. But humour (in its truth) does not involve itself in the decisively Christian category of becoming a Christian, and it does not identify becoming a Christian with being a child in the literal sense; for in that case being a Christian becomes in just the same sense a memory. At this point it will be quite apparent how wrong it is to make humour the highest within Christianity, since humour or the humorist, provided he is within Christianity, doesn't involve himself in the decisive Christian category of becoming a Christian. Humour is always revocation (of existence into the eternal by recollection behind, adulthood's of childhood, etc., see above), the backward perspective. Christianity is the direction forwards, to becoming a Christian, and becoming that by continuing to be it. Without standing still, no humour, for the humorist always has plenty of time, seeing that he has the plenitude of eternal time behind him. Christianity has no room for sadness: salvation or perdition, salvation lies ahead, perdition behind for everyone who turns around, whatever it is he sees. When she looked back, Lot's wife turned to stone, because she saw the abomination of desolation; but looking back in a Christian sense, even to gaze at the delightful, enchanting landscape of childhood, is perdition.

If one makes a single concession to speculation about starting with pure being, then everything is lost and the confusion impossible to put a halt to, since it has to be stopped within pure being. If a single concession is made to infantile orthodoxy regarding the age of childhood's specific advantage with respect to becoming a Christian, then everything is confused.

But now that Bible passage: after all it's in the Bible! I have already made myself fool enough in the foregoing by also involving myself in the pusillanimous and timid biblical interpretation. I shall try no further. If an infantile orthodoxy has cast a comic light on Christianity, so too has the kind of biblical interpretation that in its timid subservience, without knowing, reverses the relation and is less concerned to understand the Bible than to be understood by it; less concerned to understand the Bible passage than to have a Bible passage to appeal to – a contradiction, just as if someone in business were to ask for advice (this is of course a relation of dependence) but asks for it in a way that requires this or that answer, and does everything to have his consultant answer in just this way. Submission to the consultant's authority becomes a cunning way of taking advantage of the authority. But is that consulting? Is it deferring to what is called the divine authority of the Bible? Indeed, it is a cowardly attempt by never acting on one's own behalf to push away all responsibility – just as if one was not at all responsible for the way one finds support in a Bible passage. It is psychologically quite remarkable how clever, how ingenious, how sophisticated, how persevering certain people can be in their erudite research just to have a Bible passage to appeal to. But they seem totally oblivious to the fact that just this is to make a fool of God, treating him like a poor wretch who has been foolish enough to put something in writing and must now put up with what the lawyers are to make of it. This is how a smart child behaves towards a strict father who has been unable to win the child's love. The child thinks something on these lines: If only I can get his permission, that's fine even if I have to use a little cunning. But a relation like that is not a tender, close relation between father and son. Similarly, it is not a close relation between God and a human being when they are so distant from each other that there is room and use for all this worried and despondently submissive sophistry and speculation. One is most likely to find cases of such conduct among the really gifted whose enthusiasm is disproportionate to their intellects. While limited and busy people fancy they are being active all the time, the mark of a certain kind of intellectuals is exactly the virtuosity with which they know how to avoid acting. It is startling that Cromwell, who was certainly a practised reader of

the Bible, had the quibbler's ability to find passages from the Bible on his side, or at least to have a *vox dei* in a *vox populi*,¹⁹ a voice that said it was something that happened, a turn of fate, that he became Protector of England, and not an action of his own, for hadn't the people chosen him? Rare as it is to come across a genuine hypocrite, so too with someone genuinely lacking a conscience. But a quibbling conscience is not rare, whether in the agonizing self-contradiction of having simultaneously to explain away a responsibility and remain unconscious of doing so, or in a morbid streak in someone who may have the best intentions, a morbidity bound up with great suffering and that makes the unfortunate's breathing more constricted and painful than that of the most burdened conscience, if it can come to breathe out in honesty.

An infantile orthodoxy, a pusillanimous Bible interpretation, a foolish and un-Christian defence of Christianity, a bad conscience on the part of the defenders concerning their own relation to it, these are among the contributory causes of the passionate and demented attacks upon Christianity in our time. There must be no bargaining, no wanting to change Christianity; neither must there be any overdoing things by putting restraint in the wrong place; just take care that it remains what it was, an offence to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks, and not some foolish something or other that offends neither Greeks nor Jews, but which they smile at and to defend which only aggravates them.

But very little is heard on the work of inwardness in becoming and continuing to be a Christian. And yet it was exactly this that had especially to be experienced and with experience developed, once Christianity is introduced into a land, and into the Christian lands where individual Christians are not to go out into the world as missionaries to spread Christianity. It was different in the early period. The apostles became Christians as adults, having therefore spent a part of their lives in other categories (consequently Scripture cannot say anything about all the collisions that can arise through being brought up in Christianity from childhood). They became Christians through a miracle^b (here there is no analogy to ordinary people), or at least so quickly

^b In the foregoing it has often been said that an apostle's existence is paradox-dialectical. I shall now show how. The apostle's direct relation to God is paradox-dialectical because a direct relation is lower (the middle term is the religiousness of immanence, religiousness A) than the indirect relation of the congregation, since the indirect relation is between spirit and spirit and the direct relation is aesthetic – and yet the direct relation is higher. Thus the apostle's relation is not

¹⁹ Latin: voice of God ... voice of the people.

that no more detailed explanation is given. They then turn their attention outwards through converting others, but here again there is a lack of analogy to a poor individual human being, whose only task is to exist as a Christian. If one is unaware of the work of inwardness, then the urge to go further is easy to explain. One lives in Christendom; one is a Christian – anyway just like the others. Since Christianity has lasted for so many centuries and has permeated all relationships, it is easy to become a Christian. One does not have a missionary's task. So, well, the task is now to go further and speculate about Christianity. But to speculate about Christianity is not the work of inwardness. Consequently, one disdains the daily tasks, practising faith, keeping oneself in its paradoxical passion and overcoming illusions. The matter is turned around and it is forgotten that as understanding and culture and refinement increase, sustaining the passion of faith becomes more and more difficult. Yes, if Christianity were a subtle doctrine (in a literal sense), refinement would directly help, but in connection with an existence-communication that accentuates existing paradoxically, refinement helps only in one way, by making the difficulties greater. The refined have thus only a somewhat ironic advantage over the simple-minded with regard to becoming and continuing to be Christians: the advantage that it is more difficult. But here again people have forgotten the qualitative dialectic and have wanted, comparatively and quantitatively, to form a direct transition from refinement to Christianity. The work of inwardness will therefore become greater with the years, and give the Christian who is not a missionary plenty to do, not in speculating but in continuing to be a Christian. It has not become easier in the nineteenth century than in the first age to become a Christian. On the contrary, it has become more difficult, especially for the refined, and year by year it will become more difficult. The preponderance of understanding in the refined, the objective orientation, will all the time cause resistance to becoming a Christian, and the resistance is this sin of the

straightforwardly higher than that of the congregation, as a talkative priest leads a yawning congregation to believe, whereby the whole matter regresses to the aesthetic. – The apostle's *direct* relation to other people is paradox-dialectical, in that the apostle's life is turned outwards, occupied with spreading Christianity in realms and lands, for this relation is lower than the lay person's indirect relation to others due to his essentially having to do with himself. The direct relation is an aesthetic relation (outwardly oriented), to that extent lower, and yet exceptionally for the apostle it is higher – this is what is paradoxically dialectical. It is not straightforwardly higher, because then we have all the world-historical hassle of one and each. The paradox is precisely that the direct relation is higher for an apostle, as is not the case for others.

understanding, namely half measures. If Christianity once changed the face of the world by conquering the crude passions of immediacy and by ennobling the commonwealths, it will find in refinement a resistance just as dangerous. Yet if the struggle is to be waged here, naturally it must be waged within the sharpest definitions of reflection. The absolute paradox will no doubt assert itself for, in respect of the absolute, more understanding comes no further than less understanding; on the contrary, they come equally far, the excellently gifted slowly, the simple-minded swiftly.

Then let others praise refinement directly – well, yes, praise be to it, but I would rather praise it because it makes it so difficult to become a Christian. For I am a friend of difficulties, especially of such as possess the humorous quality that after the greatest exertions the most refined person has come no further than is possible for the most simple-minded.

After all, the most simple-minded human being is able to become a Christian and continue being such; but partly because he lacks understanding on any great scale, and partly because the simple-minded person's condition in life turns his attention outwards, he is exempted from the laboriousness with which the refined person preserves his faith, struggling even more strenuously as his refinement increases. Since the highest is to become, and to continue to be, a Christian, the task cannot be to reflect on Christianity but only, by means of reflection, to intensify the pathos with which one continues to be a Christian.

That is what this whole book has been about; the first part dealt with the objective interpretation of becoming or being a Christian, the latter part with the subjective.

Objectively what it is to become or to be a Christian is defined in the following way:

(1) A Christian is one who accepts Christianity's teaching. But if the 'what' of this teaching is to decide ultimately whether one is a Christian, attention is turned instantly outwards in order to find out, down to the last detail, what Christianity's doctrine is, because this 'what' is to decide not what Christianity is but whether I am a Christian.

At that same instant begins the learned, anxious, timid contradiction of approximation. The approximation can go on as long as you please, and because of it the decision by which the individual becomes a Christian finally sinks into total oblivion.

This default has been remedied by the prior assumption that everyone in Christendom is a Christian; all of us are of the kind that people call Christians. Under this assumption the objective theories fare better. We are all Christians. The Bible theory is now to examine with all due objectivity what Christianity is (yet we are Christians, and what is objective is assumed to make us into Christians, that is, the objective knowledge that we who already are Christians are now for the first time properly to acquire – since, if we are not Christians, the path we have taken here will never lead us to become such). The Church theory assumes that we are Christians, but now we have to be assured in a purely objective way what Christianity is, in order to protect ourselves against the Turk and the Russian and the Roman yoke, and valiantly carry the fight of Christianity by making our age throw as it were a bridge over to the matchless future that can already be glimpsed. This is sheer aesthetics. Christianity is an existence-communication. The task is to become a Christian and to continue being one, and the most dangerous of all illusions is to be so certain of being a Christian that one has to defend the whole of Christendom against the Turk – instead of protecting one's own faith against the illusion about the Turk.

(2) No, it is said, not every acceptance of Christian teaching makes one a Christian; what it especially depends on is appropriation, that one appropriates this doctrine and holds it fast in a quite different way from any other, that one will live and die in it, risk one's life for it, etc.

This looks as if it could be something. However, 'quite different' is a rather mediocre category, and the whole formula, which attempts to define being Christian rather more subjectively, is neither one thing nor the other, and although it does in a way avoid the difficulty with the distraction and deceit of approximation, it lacks categorial definition. The pathos of approximation here in question is that of immediacy; one can just as well say that an enthusiastic lover relates in this way to his loving: he holds fast to it and appropriates it in a way 'quite different' from anything else, he is ready to live and die in it; he will risk everything for it. So far there is no difference between a lover and a Christian regarding inwardness, and one must again resort to the 'what', which is the doctrine, and so we are brought back under (1) again.

It is, that is to say, a matter of defining the pathos of appropriation itself, so that it cannot be confused with any other pathos. The more

subjective interpretation is right in insisting that it is appropriation that decides the matter, but it is wrong in its definition of appropriation, which contains no specification of how it differs from any other immediate pathos.

Nor is this distinction made if one defines appropriation as faith but gives faith straight away headway and puts it on course towards understanding, so that faith becomes a provisional function whereby one holds on to something that is then to be an object for understanding, a provisional function with which poor people and stupid people have to be content while *privat-docents* and good minds go further. The mark of being a Christian (faith) is the appropriation, but in such a way that it does not differ specifically from other intellectual appropriation in which a preliminary assumption functions provisionally in relation to understanding. Faith here does not become specific to the relation to Christianity, and again it will be the 'what' of faith that decides whether or not one is a Christian. But then the matter is once more brought back under (1).

The fact is that the appropriation by which a Christian is a Christian must be specific enough for it not to be confused with anything else.

(3) Becoming and being a Christian are defined neither objectively by the 'what' of the doctrine, nor subjectively by the appropriation, not by that which has gone on *in* the individual, but by what has gone on *with* the individual: that the individual is baptized. If one adds to baptism acceptance of the creed, nothing decisive is thereby gained, but the definition will waver between accentuating the 'what' (the path of approximation) and vague talk of acceptance, and acceptance and appropriation, etc., without specific determination.

If being baptized is to be what determines it, attention will instantly turn outwards, to deliberations as to whether I have actually been baptized. Then begins the approximation regarding a historical fact.

If, on the other hand, someone says that he did indeed receive the Spirit in baptism, and knows from its witness with his spirit that he has been baptized,²⁰ the inference is inverted: he argues from the witness of the Spirit within him to the fact that he was baptized, not from the fact of being baptized to possession of the Spirit. But if this is how the inference is to be made, the mark of the Christian is quite rightly not

²⁰ Romans 8:15–16.

baptism, but inwardness, and so once again inwardness and appropriation need to be specified in a way that distinguishes the witness of the spirit from all other (more generally defined) spiritual activity in a human being.

It is curious, moreover, how orthodoxy, which has made baptism in particular decisive, keeps on complaining that there are so few Christians among the baptized, that with the exception of a small immortal flock almost all are dim-witted and baptized pagans, which seems to indicate that baptism cannot be the decisive factor in becoming a Christian, not even according to what follows in the view of those who first insist on it as being decisive in respect of becoming a Christian.

Being a Christian is subjectively defined in this way:

The decision rests in the subject; the appropriation is the paradoxical inwardness that differs specifically from all other inwardness. Being a Christian is defined not by the 'what' of Christianity but by the 'how' of the Christian. This 'how' can go with only one thing, the absolute paradox. There is therefore no vague talk of being a Christian meaning to accept, and accepting, and accepting quite differently, to appropriate, to believe, to appropriate in faith quite differently (purely rhetorical and fictitious definitions); but *having faith* is specified as distinct from all other appropriation and inwardness. Faith is the objective uncertainty with the repulsion of the absurd, held fast in the passion of inwardness, which precisely is the relation of inwardness raised to the highest power. This formula fits only the one who has faith, no one else, not a lover, or an enthusiast, not a thinker, but solely the one who has faith, who relates to the absolute paradox.

Faith therefore cannot be some provisional function. Someone who would know his faith from the vantage-point of a higher knowledge as an annulled moment has *eo ipso* ceased to believe. Faith *must not be content* with incomprehensibility; for it is precisely the relation to, or the repulsion from the incomprehensible, the absurd, that is the expression of the passion of faith.

This definition of what it is to be a Christian prevents the learned or anxious deliberation of approximation from tempting the individual to go astray, so that he becomes learned instead of becoming a Christian, and in most cases half-learned instead of becoming a Christian; for the decision rests in subjectivity. But inwardness has again found its specific mark whereby it differs from all other inwardness, and is not dispatched with

the talkative category 'quite differently', since at the moment of passion that fits the case of every passion.

Psychologically, it is usually a sure sign that a person is beginning to give up the passion when he wants to treat its object objectively. Passion and reflection usually exclude each other. Becoming objective in this way is always a step backwards, for a person's perdition is in passion but so also his elevation. If the dialectical and reflection are not exploited to intensify passion, to become objective is to regress; and even the person who loses himself through passion has not lost as much as the person who lost passion, for the former has possibility.

This is how people have wanted to be objective with regard to Christianity in our time: the passion with which each person is a Christian has become too small for one, and by becoming objective we all have prospects of becoming ... *privat-docents*.

But this state of affairs has in turn made the dispute in Christendom so comic, since in so many ways the dispute consists merely in changing weapons, and because the dispute over Christianity is waged in Christendom by Christians, or between Christians who, by being objective and going further, were all on the point of giving up being Christians. At the time when the Danish Government transferred the English 3 per cent loan from Wilson to Rothschild,²¹ there was a great hullabaloo in the newspapers. A general meeting was held of people who, not in possession of the bonds, had borrowed one in order as bond-bearers to take part in the meeting. They discussed whether the government's decision should be protested by refusing to accept the new bonds. The general meeting consisted of people who did not own bonds, and who therefore would hardly find themselves in the precarious position of the government's proposing that they accept the new bonds. Being a Christian is on the way to losing the interest of passion, yet people fight *pro* and *contra*.²² One argues from one's own case: If this is not Christianity then I am no Christian, which surely I nevertheless am; and the situation has been turned around so that what interests one about Christianity is being able to decide what Christianity is, not what Christianity is in order to be able to be a Christian. The name 'Christian' is used as those people used the borrowed

²¹ In 1825 the Danish state took out a loan with an English banking house that went bankrupt, whereupon the loan was transferred to another with accompanying uncertainty as to its conditions.

²² Latin: for and against.

bonds – in order to take part in the general meeting where the fate of the Christians is decided by Christians who, for their own sakes, do not care about being Christians. For whose sake then is all this being done?

Just because people in our day, and in the Christendom of our day, do not appear to be sufficiently aware of the dialectic of taking to heart,²³ or of the fact that the ‘how’ of the individual is just as precise an expression of what he has and more decisive than the ‘what’ to which he appeals – just because of that there crop up the strangest and, if one is in the right humour and has the time for it, the most laughable confusions, demonstrably more comic even than the confusions of paganism, because in those there was less at stake, and because the contradictions were not wound up so high. But if friendship is to be maintained, one good turn deserves another, and one shall continue to be an optimist. The person who in experimenting in the domain of passion shuts himself off from all the bright and smiling prospects of becoming a *privat-docent*, and from what that brings in, ought at least to have a little humoristic compensation, because he takes so much to heart what others, aiming at something much higher, regard as a bagatelle: the little humoristic compensation that his passion sharpens his sense of the comical. He who, although a friend of humanity, exposes himself to being despised as an egoist, since he does not concern himself objectively with Christianity for the sake of others, ought as a friend of laughter to receive a little compensation. It really does not do to bear the shame of being an egoist and have no profit of it – for then one is not an egoist.

An orthodox protects Christianity with the most frightful passion; with the sweat of his brow and the most concerned demeanour he protests that he accepts Christianity pure and unadulterated, he will live and die in it – and he forgets that an acceptance like that is a much too general expression for relating to Christianity. He does everything in the name of Jesus, and uses Christ’s name on every occasion as a sure sign that he is a Christian, and has been called to put up a fight in defence of Christendom in our time – and he has no inkling of the little ironic secret that a person, merely by describing the ‘how’ of his inwardness, can show indirectly that he is a Christian without mentioning Christ’s name.^c

^c With regard to loving (to illustrate the same thing again) it is not the case in this way that someone merely by defining his ‘how’ indicates what or whom it is he loves. All lovers have the ‘how’ of love in common, and the particular person must then supply the name of the beloved. But with regard

²³ ‘Inderliggjørelsens Dialektik’.

A man converts on New Year's Eve, at precisely six o'clock, and is all set to go. Fantastically decked out with the fact of his reawakening he must now run around and proclaim Christianity – in a Christian land. Well, of course, even though we are all baptized anyone may need to become a Christian in another sense. But there is this difference, that there is no lack of information in a Christian land. Something else is lacking, and this something is such that the one human being cannot directly impart it to the other. It is in categories of fantasy that a reborn wants to work for Christianity, and yet he demonstrates, the more busily he propagates and propagates, that he himself is not a Christian. For to be a Christian is something so thoroughly reflected that it does not allow of the aesthetic dialectic that permits one person teleologically to be for another what he is not for himself.

On the other hand, a scoffer attacks Christianity and at the same time expounds it so reliably that it is a pleasure to read him, and anyone at a loss for a clear presentation may just as well go to him.²⁴

All ironic observation depends on paying constant attention to the 'how', whereas the honourable gentleman with whom the ironist has the honour to converse is attentive only to the 'what'. A man protests loudly and solemnly: This is my opinion. However, he does not confine himself to delivering this brief formula verbatim, he explains himself further, he ventures to vary the expressions. Yes, for this matter of varying is not as easy as one thinks. More than one student would have got *laudabilis*²⁵ in composition if he had refrained from varying his expressions, and a great many people have that talent that Socrates so much admired in Polos: they never say the same – about the same.²⁶ The ironist, then, is on the alert; he is not of course on the look-out for what is printed in large type, or for what is betrayed by the speaker's diction as a formula (the honourable gentleman's 'what'); he is on the look-out for a little subordinate

to having faith (*sensu strictissimo* [Latin: in the strictest sense]), this 'how' fits only one object. If anybody says, 'Yes, but one can then learn the "how" of faith, too, by rote and recite it', the answer must be: It cannot be done; for anyone who states it directly contradicts himself, because the content of the assertion must be constantly being reduplicated in the form, and the isolation in the definition must reduplicate itself in the form.

²⁴ A reference to L. Feuerbach, as corroborated by Hans Bröchner in his recollections. See B. H. Kirmmse (ed.), *Encounters with Kierkegaard* (Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 233.

²⁵ Latin: praiseworthy. An examination grade.

²⁶ See p. 239 n. 142. In Plato's *Gorgias*, Polos is a representative of spirit (*θυμός*) in the sense in which one can be 'spirited'.

clause which has escaped the gentleman's grand attention, a beckoning little predicate, etc., and now sees to his amazement, and glad of the variation (*in variatione voluptas*), that the gentleman *does not have* that opinion, not because he is a hypocrite, God forbid!, that is too serious a matter for an ironist, but because the good man has concentrated on bawling it out instead of possessing it within him. The honourable gentleman may for that matter be right in asserting that he has that opinion, seeing that he makes himself believe it with all his might and main; he may do everything for it in the role of itinerant gossip; he may risk his life for it, in very confused times he may even go so far as to lose his life for this opinion^d – and now I know damned well that the man must have had that opinion; and yet there may have been a contemporary who was an ironist and who, even in the hour of the unfortunate honourable gentleman's execution, cannot resist laughing, because he knows from the circumstantial evidence he has gathered that the man has never been clear in his own mind. Laughable it is, nor does it dishearten one about life that such things can happen; for the god saves that person from error who with quiet introspection and, honest before God, is concerned for himself. The god leads him, be he ever so simple-minded, in the suffering of inwardness to the truth. But meddlesomeness and noise are the mark of error, the sign of an abnormal condition, like wind in the stomach, and this stumbling by chance on getting executed in a turbulent turn of events is not the sort of suffering that is essentially that of inwardness.

It is said that in England a man was attacked on the highway by a robber who had made himself unrecognizable by wearing a big wig. He rushes at the traveller, seizes him by the throat and shouts: Your purse! He gets the purse, which he keeps, but throws away the wig. A poor man comes down the same road, puts on the wig and arrives at the next town where the traveller had already raised the alarm. He is recognized, arrested and is recognized by the traveller, who swears that he is the man. By chance, the robber is present in the courtroom, sees the misunderstanding, and addresses the judge: 'It seems to me that the traveller has more regard for the wig than for the man,' and he asks to be allowed to make an experiment. He puts on the wig, seizes the traveller by the throat, crying: Your purse! – and the traveller recognizes the robber and offers to swear

^d In turbulent times when the government has to defend its existence with the death penalty, it would not be unthinkable for a man to be executed for an opinion that he no doubt had in a juridical and civil sense but hardly in an intellectual sense.

to it – the only trouble being that he has already taken an oath. So, too, it is, in one way or another, with everyone who has a ‘what’ and is not attentive to the ‘how’: he swears, he takes an oath, he runs errands, he risks life and blood, he is executed – all for the wig.

If my memory does not altogether fail me, I have told this story once before in this book. Still, I wish to end the whole book with it. I do not believe anyone can truthfully accuse me of having varied it in such a way that it has not remained the same.

Appendix

Understanding with the reader

The undersigned, Johannes Climacus, who has written this work, does not make himself out to be a Christian; for he is completely preoccupied with how difficult it must be to become one; but still less is he one who, having been a Christian, ceases to be that by going further. He is a humorist. Content with the conditions of the moment, hoping that something higher may be granted him, he feels himself singularly fortunate, things having come to this pass, to be born precisely in this speculative, theocentric century. Yes, ours is an age of speculators and great men with matchless discoveries; and yet I believe that none of these honourable gentlemen is as well off as a privately practising humorist in all his quietude, whether on his own he beats his breast or roars with laughter. He can therefore very well be an author, if only he takes care that it is only for his own enjoyment, that he keeps to himself, does not get caught up in the crowd, perish in the importance of the age, be assigned to the pump like an inquisitive spectator at a fire, or merely be embarrassed by the thought that he might stand in the way of any of the various distinguished gentlemen who are and shall be and must be, and insist on being, important.

In the seclusion of the experiment, the whole book is about myself, solely about me. 'I, Joh. Cl., now thirty years old, born in Copenhagen, a plain, ordinary human like most, have heard tell of a highest good in prospect, which is called an eternal happiness, and that Christianity wants to bestow it on one on condition of adhering to it. Now I ask, how do I become a Christian?' (cf. the Intro.). I ask solely for my own sake, yes,

certainly, or rather, I *have* asked about it, for that indeed is the content of the work. So let no one go to the trouble of saying that the book is entirely superfluous and quite irrelevant to the times, unless he must absolutely say something, because in that case it is the to-be-desired judgment already pronounced by its author. He understands very well how banal it is in our times, should anyone come to know about it, to write such a book. Therefore just as soon as one ... but what am I saying? Vain heart! how you carry me away. No, no, it is not good to be led into temptation. Otherwise, I would say, Just as soon as someone might inform me of where and to whom one applies for permission, as a single human being, to dare write or set oneself up as an author in the name of humanity, the century, our age, the public, the many, the majority, or what must be regarded as an even more rare favour, as a single human being to dare write against the public in the name of the many, against the majority in the name of another majority on the same thing, to dare write in 'the name of the many' even when acknowledging oneself to be in the minority; and also to have at one time, as a single human being, the polemical resilience to be in the minority and yet have favour in the eyes of the world by being in the majority – if anyone could inform me of the expenses involved in the granting of such an application, since even if not paid in money they could still be exorbitant, but then, assuming the costs do not exceed my means, I might well find it impossible to resist the temptation to write, as soon as possible, an exceedingly important book that speaks in the name of millions and millions and billions. Until that time no one, in consistency with his point of view, can reproach the book, and from mine the reproach is another, for being superfluous if he cannot explain what is being asked.

The book then is superfluous; so let no one take the trouble to appeal to it; for anyone who thus appeals to it has *eo ipso* misunderstood it. To be an authority is much too burdensome an existence for a humorist, who regards it precisely as one of life's comforts that there are great men of this kind, able and willing to be authorities and whose opinions one has the benefit of accepting without further ado, unless one is fool enough to pull these great men down, for in that there is no profit. Above all, may heaven preserve the book and me from any appreciative vehemence, that a loud-mouthed party-man should quote it appreciatively and enrol me in the register. If it escapes him that an experimental humorist can be of no help to a party, then the latter is able all the more to see his unfitness for

something he should seek to avoid. I possess none of the properties of a party-man, for I have no opinion except this, that it must be the most difficult thing of all to become a Christian, which opinion is no opinion and has none of the properties that usually characterize an 'opinion'. It does not flatter me, since I do not make myself out to be a Christian; it does not affront the Christian, since he cannot object if I regard what he has done, and is doing, as the most difficult thing of all; it does not affront the attacker of Christianity, since his triumph becomes all the greater, seeing that he goes further – further than the most difficult thing of all. I am consistent in wanting no proof from actuality that I do actually have an opinion (an adherent, a hurrah, public execution, etc.), because I have no opinion, and do not wish to have one, am content and happy with that. As in Catholic books, especially from former times, one finds at the back a note informing the reader that everything is to be understood conformably with the doctrine of the holy universal mother Church, so too what I write contains an additional notice to the effect that everything is to be understood in such a way that it is revoked, that the book has not only a conclusion but a revocation into the bargain. More one cannot ask. Forwards or backwards.

To write and give out a book when one not even has a publisher who could get into a financial fix if it does not sell, is indeed an innocent pastime and amusement, a permissible private enterprise in a well-ordered state that tolerates luxury, and where everyone is allowed to spend his time and his money as he wishes, whether it be in building houses, buying horses, going to the theatre, or writing superfluous books and having them printed. But if it can be looked at in this way, then may it not rather be again judged one of life's innocent and permissible private joys, which disturbs neither the laws of Sunday observance nor any other precept of duty and propriety, to imagine a reader with whom one from time to time becomes involved in the book, if one does not, be it noted, in the remotest way make attempts at or a show of obliging a single actual person to *be* the reader. 'Only the positive is an encroachment upon another man's personal freedom' (cf. Preface); the negative is the courtesy that not even here can be said to cost money, since only the publication does that, and even if one were impolite enough to want to palm the book off on people, it would still not be said that anybody bought it. In a well-ordered state it is permissible, after all, to be in love in private,

and the more profoundly private the love, so much the more permissible. On the other hand, it is not permissible for a man to accost all girls and assure each that she is the one he really loves. And anyone who has an actual beloved is prohibited by faithfulness and propriety from being on the heels of one who is imaginary, however privately. But anyone who has none – yes, well, he is free to do it, and the author who has no actual reader is free to have a fancied one; he is even free to admit it, because there is of course no one that he offends. Praise be to the well-ordered state; enviable happiness to anyone who knows how to treasure it! How can anyone be so busy wanting to reform the state and have the form of government changed! Of all forms, the monarchical is the best, more than any other it favours and protects the private person's quiet conceits and innocent follies. Only democracy, the most tyrannical form of government, obliges everyone to take a positive part, of which the societies and general assemblies of our time can often remind us. Is it tyranny, one person wanting to rule and then letting the rest of us be free? No, but it is tyranny that all want to rule, and into the bargain oblige everybody to take part in the government, even the person who most earnestly begs to be spared a part in the governing.

Now, for an author to have an imaginary reader as a secret fiction and purely private enjoyment is of no concern to a third party. Let this be said as a civic apologia and defence for what stands in need of no defence, since in its secrecy it is screened from attack: the innocent and permissible, yet perhaps nevertheless disdained and unappreciated, enjoyment of having an imaginary reader, an infinite pleasure, the purest expression of freedom of thought, precisely because it renounces freedom of speech. In praise and honour of such a reader, I feel incapable of speaking as he deserves. Anyone who has had to do with him certainly will not deny that he is absolutely the most agreeable of all readers. He understands one at once and piece by piece; he has the patience not to skip over subordinate clauses or to rush from the woof of the episode to the warp of the table of contents; he can hold out as long as the author; he can understand that understanding is revocation; the understanding with him as the only reader is indeed precisely the book's revocation; he can understand that to write a book and revoke it is something else than not writing it; that to write a book which does not claim importance for anyone is something else than leaving it unwritten, and although he always falls in with one and

never makes opposition, a person can nevertheless have more respect for him than for the noisy contradictions of an entire lecture hall; but then he can also speak with him in complete confidence.

My dear reader! If I say it myself, I am anything but a devil of a fellow at philosophy, called to create a new trend. I am a poor, particular, existing human being with sound natural capacities, not without a certain dialectical dexterity, nor entirely devoid of study. But I have been tried in life's *casibus*¹ and appeal confidently to my sufferings, not in an apostolic sense as a matter of honour, for they have all too often been punishments I have deserved, but still I appeal to them as my teachers, and with more pathos than when Stygotius boasted of all the universities in which he had studied and held disputations.² I boast of a certain honesty that forbids me to repeat like a parrot what I cannot understand, and that bids me what regarding Hegel has long caused me pain in my desertion, to give up appealing to him except in particular parts, which is the same as having to give up one's claim to the recognition one gains by having connections, while I remain what I myself admit is infinitely little, a vanishing, unrecognizable atom, as is every particular human being; and of an honesty that in turn comforts and arms me with an uncommon sense of the comic and a certain talent for ridiculing what is ridiculous; for, strangely enough, what is not ridiculous I cannot make ridiculous – that presumably requires other talents. As I understand myself, I am developed by my own thinking, educated by reading, oriented within myself by existing, to such an extent that I am in a position to be an apprentice, a learner, which is itself a task. I do not make myself out to be any more than fit to be able to begin learning in a higher sense.

If only the teacher were to be found among us! I am not speaking of the teacher of classical learning, for we do have such a person.³ If that was what I was to learn, I should be helped once I had acquired the necessary rudiments for starting to learn. I am not speaking of the teacher of the philosophy of history, in which I probably lack the rudiments, if only we had the teacher. I am not speaking of the teacher in the difficult art of the religious address, because such a distinguished teacher we already have; and I know that I have tried my best to profit from this serious

¹ Latin: (grammatical) cases. ² A character in Holberg's comedy *Jacob von Thyboe* (1724).

³ Presumably the classical philologist J. N. Madvig (1804–86).

guidance. That I know, if not from the profit of appropriation, in case, disingenuously, I falsely ascribe anything to myself, or measure his importance by my accidental situation, then from the respect I have retained for his reverence.⁴ I am not speaking of the teacher in the fine art of poetry and its secrets of language and taste, for such an initiate we do have, that I know, and I hope I shall never forget either him or what I owe him.⁵ No, the teacher of whom I speak, and in a different way, ambiguously and doubtfully, is the teacher of the ambiguous art of thinking about existence while existing. Accordingly, if he existed, then, by heavens, I would guarantee that something came of it, if in print he were to undertake my instruction, and to that end go forward slowly, piece by piece, allowing me, as good instruction should, to put questions, and not leave anything before I had fully understood it. For I cannot assume that such a teacher should think he had nothing else to do than what a mediocre teacher of religion in the common school does: set a §-task for me to learn every day and recite the next day by rote.

But since no such teacher who offers just what I am looking for has as yet come to my notice (be this a joyful or a sorrowful sign), my effort is *eo ipso* without importance and for my own enjoyment alone, as indeed must be the case when a learner of existing, who for that reason cannot want to teach others (and far be it from me to entertain the vain and empty thought of wanting to be such a teacher), presents something that you can expect of a learner who essentially knows neither more nor less than what just about everyone knows, except that he knows something more definitely about it, and, on the other side, with regard to much that everyone knows or thinks he knows, definitely knows that he does not know it. Perhaps I should not be believed in this if I were to say it to anybody but you, my dear reader. For when in our times someone says, 'I know everything', he is believed; but a person who says, 'There is much I do not know' is suspected of a tendency to lie. You will recall that in a play by Scribe a man, experienced in casual love affairs, relates that he employs the following method when he is tired of a girl. He writes to her: 'I know everything' – and, he adds, this method has never failed yet.⁶ Nor do I believe that it has ever failed in our time for any speculator who

⁴ Bishop J. P. Mynster, who had published *Bemærkninger om den Kunst at prædike* (*Remarks on the Art of Preaching*) (1812).

⁵ Either the Danish poet and playwright Adam Oehlenschläger or Heiberg.

⁶ From A. E. Scribe's comedy *Une Chaîne* (*A Chain*). See p. 123 n. 18.

says, 'I know everything.' Ah, but those reprobate and lying people who say that there is much that they do not know get what is coming to them in this best of worlds,⁷ yes, well, best for all those who get the better of it by making a fool of it, by knowing everything, or by knowing nothing at all.

J. C.

⁷ That the created world must be the best of all possible worlds is stated by Leibniz (1646–1716) in his *Theodicy*.

A first and last declaration

As a matter of form, and for the sake of order, I hereby acknowledge, what it can hardly be of real interest to anyone to *know*, that I am, as people say, the author of *Either/Or* (Victor Eremita), Copenhagen, February 1843; *Fear and Trembling* (Johannes de silentio) 1843; *Repetition* (Constantin Constantius) 1843; *The Concept of Anxiety* (Vigilius Haufniensis) 1844; *Prefaces* (Nicolai Notabene) 1844; *Philosophical Crumbs* (Johannes Climacus) 1844; *Stages on Life's Way* (Hilarius Bogbinder: William Afham, the Assessor, Frater Taciturnus) 1845; *Concluding Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs* (Johannes Climacus) 1846; an article in *Fædrelandet*, No. 1168, 1843 (Victor Eremita); two articles in *Fædrelandet*, January 1846 (Frater Taciturnus).

My pseudonymity or polyonymity has had no *accidental* basis in my *person* (certainly not from fear of penalty under law, in respect of which I am unaware of having committed any offence, and, at the time of publication, the printer together with the censor *qua* public official have always been officially informed who the author was) but an *essential* basis in the *production* itself, which, for the sake of the lines and of the variety in the psychological distinctions in the individual characters, for poetic reasons required the lack of scruple in respect of good and evil, of broken hearts and high spirits, of despair and arrogance, of suffering and exultation, etc., the limits to which are set only ideally, in terms of psychological consistency, and which no factual person would, or can, dare to permit themselves within the bounds of moral conduct in actuality. What is written is indeed therefore mine, but only so far as I have put the life-view of the creating, poetically actualized individuality into his mouth in audible lines, for my relation is even more remote than that of a poet, who *creates* characters and yet in the preface is *himself* the *author*. For I am impersonally, or personally,

in the second person, a *souffleur*¹ who has poetically produced the *authors*, whose *prefaces* in turn are their production, yes, as are their *names*. So in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by myself. I have no opinion about them except as third party, no knowledge of their meaning except as reader, not the remotest private relation to them, that being impossible in a doubly reflected communication. One single word by me personally, in my own name, would be a case of assumptive self-forgetfulness that in this one word, from a dialectical point of view, would essentially incur the annihilation of the pseudonyms. In *Either/Or* I am as little the editor *Victor Eremita* as I am the Seducer or the Assessor, exactly as little. *Eremita* is a poetically actualized subjective thinker, as one comes across him again in 'In Vino Veritas'. In *Fear and Trembling* I am as little *Johannes de silentio* as I am the knight of faith that he depicts, exactly as little; and again, just as little the author of the preface to the book, which are the individualized lines of a poetically actualized subjective thinker. In the story of suffering (Guilty? / Not Guilty?) I am as little the *Quidam*² of the experiment as I am the experimenter, exactly as little, since the experimenter is a poetically actualized subjective thinker and the object of the experiment his own psychologically consistent creation. I am in this way the indifferent, i.e., it is indifferent what and how I am, just because it is also of absolutely no concern for this production whether it is also indifferent to me what and how I am in my innermost being. What, with regard to many an undertaking that is not dialectically reduplicated, may otherwise have its happy significance in beautiful accord with the eminent person's undertaking, in regard to the altogether indifferent foster-father of a perhaps not insignificant production would here have only a disturbing effect. A facsimile of my writing, my portrait, etc., could become an object of attention, just as whether I go around in a hat or a cap, only for those to whom the indifferent had become important – perhaps to compensate for the important having become indifferent. In a legal and a literary sense, the responsibility is mine,^a but, as is easy dialectically to understand, it is I who have *occasioned* the production to be heard in the world of actuality, which of course cannot get itself involved with poetically actualized authors, and therefore quite consistently, and with absolute right in legal and literary

^a My name as editor was promptly placed on the title page of *Crumbs* (1844) because the absolute significance of the subject demanded in actuality, as the expression of dutiful civility, that there be a named person responsible for taking upon himself what actuality might offer.

¹ 'Prompter'. ² Latin: a certain person, See p. 242 n. 152.

respects, looks to me. Legal and literary, because all poetic production would *eo ipso* be made impossible or meaningless and intolerable if the lines were to be (literally) the producer's own words.

My wish, my prayer, therefore, is that if it should occur to anyone to want to quote a particular remark from the books, he will do me the favour of citing the name of the respective pseudonymous author, not my own, i.e., of separating us in such a way that the remark belongs in the woman's sense to the pseudonym, the responsibility in a civil sense to me.³ From the beginning I have seen quite well, and still do, that my personal actuality is a constraint of which the pseudonyms might with pathos-filled self-assertion wish to be quit, the sooner the better, or have made as insignificant as possible, and yet might with ironic courtesy wish, again, to have in their company as the resistance that repels. For my relationship is that of combined secretary and, ironically enough, dialectically reduplicated author of the author or authors. Therefore, although no doubt everyone who has been in the least concerned about such things has up to now, before this declaration came, *as a matter of course* regarded me as the author of the pseudonymous books, the declaration will perhaps in the first instance give the odd impression that I, who after all must know best, am the only one who regards me only very doubtfully and equivocally as the author, because I am the author in a figurative sense, while on the other hand I am quite literally the author of, for example, the edifying discourses and of every word in them. The poetized author has his definite life-view and the lines that when understood in this way could possibly be meaningful, witty, arousing, might in the mouth of a definite factual particular man sound strange, ridiculous, disgusting. If anybody, unfamiliar with cultivated association with a distancing ideality, has in this way perverted the impression made on him by the pseudonymous books through a misconceived importunity upon my factual personality, if he has fooled himself, *actually* fooled himself, by being encumbered with my personal actuality, instead of having the doubly reflected, light ideality of a poetically actualized author to dance with, if he has with paralogistic importunity deceived himself by senselessly extracting my private particularity out of the evasive dialectical duplexity of the qualitative contrast – truly it is not my fault, I who for my part, precisely with propriety, and in the interest of the purity of the relationship, have done

³ At the time only males and at the same time property-owners had civil rights.

all that I could to prevent what an inquisitive portion of the reading public – God knows in whose interest – has from the very beginning done everything to achieve.

The opportunity seems to invite it, yes even almost to demand it, of one who is reluctant, and so I will take advantage of it to express myself openly and directly, not as author, for I am not that in the ordinary sense, but as someone who has contributed to having the pseudonyms become authors. First, I would give thanks to the Guidance that in so manifold ways has favoured my effort, favoured it without perhaps a single day's interruption of effort through four and a quarter years, and granted me far more than I ever expected, even though I may truly testify that I staked my life to the utmost, more than at least I myself had expected, even if to others what I achieved may seem a long-winded triviality. And so with heartfelt gratitude to Guidance, I do not find it unsettling that I cannot exactly be said to have achieved anything, or, what matters less, achieved anything in the outer world. I find it ironically appropriate, considering the character of the production and my equivocal authorship, that at least the honorarium has been rather Socratic.

Next, having craved indulgence and forgiveness, if it should strike anyone as unseemly that I speak in this way, something that he might again think it unseemly for me to omit doing, I would call to mind in the gratitude of remembrance my deceased father,⁴ the man to whom I owe most of all, also with respect to my work.

With this I take leave of the pseudonyms, with the felicitations of doubtfulness concerning their future fate, that, if favourable to them, it may be just as they might wish. I know them after all from intimate association; I know that they could neither expect nor want many readers – would that they happily find those few they desire.

Of my reader, if I dare speak of such, I would request the favour of a forgetful remembrance, in passing, a sign that it is of me that he is reminded because he remembers me as irrelevant to the books, as the relationship requires, just as the appreciation for it is sincerely offered here in the moment of leave-taking, when I also very sincerely thank everyone who has kept silent, and thank with profound veneration the signature Kts – that it has spoken.⁵

⁴ Kierkegaard had dedicated his signed works to his father, Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard (1756–1838).

⁵ Bishop Mynster's signature. See p. 220 n. 100.

In so far as the pseudonyms may have offended any respectable person in any way whatever, or indeed even any man I admire; so far as the pseudonyms have upset or put in question, in any way whatever, any actual good in the established order, there is no one more willing to make apology than I, who am in fact responsible for the use of the guided pen. What after a manner I know of the pseudonyms does not of course justify me in any assertion, but not in any doubt either, of their assent, since their importance (be that *actually* what it may) rests unconditionally not in making any new proposal, any unheard-of discovery, or in founding a new party, or wanting to go further, but just the opposite, in wanting to have no importance, in wanting again, at a remove that is the distance of double reflection, to read, solo, the original text of individual human existence-relationships, the old familiar text handed down from the fathers, if possible in a more inward way.

And pray no unseasoned hand⁶ meddles dialectically with this work but lets it stand as it now stands.

Copenhagen, February 1846

S. Kierkegaard

⁶ 'Halvbefaren', a deckhand with limited experience, ordinary as opposed to able-bodied seaman.

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