Kierkegaard

Construction of the Aesthetic

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Theory and History of Literature, Volume 61

University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis
Chapter 2
Constitution of Inwardness

"Scripture"

Kierkegaard stipulates that the truth and untruth of thought be determined solely by reference to the thinker's existence. That this requirement, however, constitutes no epistemological a priori is made evident by the fundamental intention of Kierkegaard's own philosophy. For it aims not at the determination of subjectivity but of ontology, and subjectivity appears not as the content of ontology but as its stage. In "A First and Last Declaration," the principal investigation into pseudonymity and candor, Kierkegaard states that the meaning of the pseudonyms—which indeed guarantee the radical subjectivity of "communication"—does not lie "in making any new proposal, any unheard-of discovery, or in forming a new party, or wanting to go further, but, precisely on the contrary, consists in wanting to have no importance, in wanting (at a distance which is the remoteness of double reflection) to read solo the original text of the individual, human existence-relationship, the old text, well known, handed down from the fathers—to read it through once more, if possible in a more heartfelt way." The archaic image of scripture, in which human existence is supposedly recorded, expresses more than the merely existing person. Kierkegaard's countless metaphors derived from the image of scripture refer to the writer of scripture; but this writer is also the reader of scripture, indeed including his own. The coquetishness of "A First and Last Declaration" hides yet does not ultimately destroy its earnestness: "From the beginning I perceived very clearly and do still perceive that my personal reality is an embarrassment which the pseudonyms with pathetic self-assertion might wish to be rid of, the sooner the better, or to have reduced to the least possible significance, and yet again with ironic courtesy might wish to have in their company as a repellent contrast." In the theology of the Instant the image of scripture is finally torn away from the subject: "The New Testament therefore, regarded as a guide for Christians, becomes ... a historical curiosity, pretty much like a guidebook to a particular country when everything in that country has been totally changed. Such a guidebook no longer serves the serious purpose of being useful to travelers in that country, but at the most it is worth reading for amusement. While one is making the journey easily by railway, one reads in the guidebook, 'Here is Woolf's Gullet where one plunges 70,000 fathoms down under the earth'; while one sits and smokes one's cigar in the snug cafe, one reads in the guidebook, 'Here a band of robbers has its stronghold, from which it issues to assault the travelers and maltreat them.'" The passage polemizes not so much against the "text," against the guidebook itself, as against its historical deterioration. This is what makes the text a cipher. Implicit in Kierkegaard's metaphor of scripture is: the unalterable givenness of the text itself as well as its unreadableness as that of a "cryptogram" composed of "cipher" whose origin is historical. —The invariable givenness of the text is founded on his theology. God's unchangeableness and that of truth is a theme of the religious discourses. Hence in the Training, where "edifying" and philosophical contents interweave, one reads: "Now this 'something higher' may be something very various; but if it is to be truly capable of drawing the person towards it, and at every instant, it must not itself be subject to 'variableness or the shadow of turning,' but must have passed triumphantly through every change and become transfigured like the transfigured life of a dead man." As for the creator, so for the created: "Whatever one generation learns from another, no generation learns the essentially human from a previous one."—The invariable meaning of the invariable text is, however, in Kierkegaard, incomprehensible: the fullness of divine truth is hidden from the creature. Kierkegaard speaks of this in parables comparable to those perfected by his student of a much later generation, Kafka: "If one were to offer me ten dollars I would not undertake to explain the riddle of existence. And why should I? If life is a riddle, in the end the author of the riddle will doubtless explain it. I have not invented the temporal life, but I have noticed that in the periodicals which make a custom of printing riddles, the solution is generally offered in the next number. To be sure, it does happen that some old maid or pensioner is mentioned with honor as having solved the riddle, i.e. has known the solution a day in advance—that difference is certainly not very considerable." Kierkegaard is more closely allied with the opinion of such a "humorist" than he would like to admit in the Postscript. The same goes for the "moralist" of the second volume of Either/Or: "The man who lives ethically may do exactly the same things as the man who lives aesthetically, so that for a time this may create a deception, but finally there comes an instant
when it is evident that he who lives ethically has a limit which the other does not recognize. This is the only way in which the ethical can become manifest; according to its positive meaning it remains hidden in the deepest layer of the soul." Paradoxically, the absolutely hidden is communicated by the cipher. It is, as is all allegory according to Benjamin, not merely a sign but expression.8 The cipher no more belongs to ontological archetypes than it could be reduced to immanently human determinations. It is rather a middle realm that presents itself in the "affects," which Kierkegaard treated under the heading of psychology, particularly in *The Concept of Anxiety* and *The Sickness unto Death*. Haecker is right to separate sharply Kierkegaard's psychology from traditional scientific psychology. Yet it is also not to be equated—as Haecker in his early work still thought possible9—with current phenomenological philosophy. For phenomenological attempts to constitute ontology directly, on the basis of the autonomous ratio. Kierkegaard's psychology, however, is aware that ontology is blocked by the ratio. It attempts only to gain the reflections of ontology in the affects. This psychology depends on theology; it is not a self-sufficient anthropology. In *The Concept of Anxiety* Kierkegaard does not simply use the relation of anxiety and sin to imply that the affects are ciphers of a positive-theological object; he expressly defines them as such: "The mood of psychology is that of a discovering anxiety, and in its anxiety psychology portrays sin, while it worries and torments itself over the portrayal that it itself develops."10 In *The Sickness unto Death*, despair is likewise a cipher of damnation: "By the aid of conscience things are so arranged that the judicial report follows at once upon every fault, and that the guilty one himself must write it. But it is written in sympathetic hues and therefore only becomes thoroughly clear when in eternity it is held up to the light, while eternity holds audit over the consciences."11—Obstructed ontology and cipher, however, are not simply conditions of the natural individual. They are not even adequately accounted for as a prehistorical result of the Fall. History engraved the fissure between the unreadable cipher and truth. What William asserts of the "exception," and therefore of Kierkegaard's person, contains at the same time fragments of Kierkegaard's conception of the history of spirit: "For in the face of the desolation into which he has ventured and where there is more to lose than merely one's life, every person, who is still a humanly responsive person, recoils. He is quit with everything fundamental to human existence and thus these fundamentals, which should have been his support through life, have become for him hostile powers."12 The fissure stands not only between individual and text. If in his theology the two do not confront each other directly, but reciprocally refer to one another, decay necessarily attacks the text itself. Whereas according to every undiminished theological doctrine the signifying and the signified are unified in the symbolic word, in Kierkegaard the "meaning" separates from the cipher in the text. The affects, as ciphers, draw the fullness of immanence into themselves; the "meaning" remains frozen as an abstract desideratum: "I do it in the interest of its idea, its meaning; for I cannot live exclusive of the idea; I cannot endure that my life should have no meaning at all. The nothing that I do does after all give a little meaning to it."13 For Kierkegaard, meaning was not always estranged from man, but became so historically: "The individuals of the contemporary generation are fearful of existence, because it is God-forsaken; only in great masses do they dare to live, and they cluster together en masse in order to feel that they amount to something."14 Hence the retrograde direction of his philosophy: "In one word the direction of my writings is, 'Back!' And although it is all done without 'authority,' there is, nevertheless, something in the accent which recalls a policeman when he faces a riot and says, 'Back!'"15 Kierkegaard's psychology of emotion wants to use the eternally, authentically human to conjure up historically lost meaning.

### Objectless Inwardness

What Kierkegaard describes as "being quit with everything fundamental to human existence" was called, in the philosophical language of his age, the alienation of subject and object. Any critical interpretation of Kierkegaard must take this alienation as its starting point. Not that such interpretation would want to conceive the structure of existence as one of "subject" and "object" within the framework of an ontological "project." The categories of subject and object themselves originate historically. But it is precisely in these categories that interpretation is able to secure Kierkegaard's historical figure, a figure that dissolves into general anthropological considerations when the question becomes that of a "project of existence." If subject and object are historical concepts, they constitute at the same time the concrete conditions of Kierkegaard's description of human existence. This description conceals an antinomy in his thought that becomes evident in the subject/object relation, to which his "being quit" may be traced. This is an antinomy in the conception of the relation to ontological "meaning." Kierkegaard conceives of such meaning, contradictorily, as radically devolved upon the "I," as purely immanent to the subject and, at the same time, as renounced and unreachable transcendence. For Kierkegaard the bearer of all reality. In his youth he accepted Fichte's criticism of Kant, and although he scarcely ever again formulated the problems that are the legacy of the history of idealism from its origins to Hegel, there is still no doubt that the dissertation expresses what is silently presupposed by all "existential communication": "Indeed, the more the ego became absorbed in scrutinizing the ego in the Critical philosophy, the more emaciated the ego became, until it ended by becoming a spector, as immortal as the husband of Aurora. The ego was like the crow, which, deceived by the fox's praise of its person, lost the cheese. Thought had gone astray in that reflection continually reflected upon
reflection, and every step forward naturally led further and further away from all content. Here it became apparent, and it will ever be so, that when one begins to speculate it is essential to be pointed in the right direction. It failed to notice that what it sought for was in the search itself, and since it refused to look for it there, it was not in all eternity to be found. Philosophy was like a man who has his spectacles on but goes on searching for them; he searches for what is right in front of his nose, but he never looks there and so never finds them. Now that which is external to experience, that which collided with the experiencing subject like a solid body, after which each recoiled from the force of the impact which is external to experience, that which collided with the experiencing subject (as a certain school in the middle ages believed the visible emblems in the Eucharist were present in order to tempt the believer); this externality, this thing in itself was what constituted the weakness in Kant's system. It even became a problem whether the ego itself was not a thing in itself. This problem was raised and resolved by Fichte. He removed the difficulty connected with this 'in-itself' by placing it within thought, that is, he rendered the ego infinite as $1 = 1$. The producing ego is the same as the produced ego; $1 = 1$ is the abstract identity. With this he infinitely emancipated thought. A phrase from the Unscientific Postscript corresponds to this thesis where Fichte is played off romantically against Hegel at the same time that the relocation of all 'meaning' in pure subjectivity is affirmed: 'Instead of conceding the contentment of idealism, but in such a manner as to dismiss as a temptation the entire problem of a reality in the sense of a thing-in-itself eluding thought, which like other temptations cannot be vanquished by giving way to it; instead of putting an end to Kant's misleading reflection which brings reality into connection with thought; instead of relegating reality to the ethical—Hegel scored a veritable advance; for he became fantastic and vanquished idealistic scepticism by means of pure thought, which is merely an hypothesis, and even if it does not so declare itself, a fantastic hypothesis.' Here, however, the countervailing tendency is already apparent. The question of the thing-in-itself is no longer answered in the affirmative with the postulate of identity and absolute subjectivity; instead it is repulsed as 'temptation' and held in abeyance. For the absolute 'I,' the reality of the thing-in-itself must become problematical along with the reality of the 'meaning' that is indeed to be situated in the spontaneity of the 'I.' This insight can also be traced to the dissertation: 'But this infinity of thought in Fichte is like every other Fichtian infinity (his ethical infinity is incessant striving for striving's own sake, his aesthetic infinity is perpetual production for production's own sake, God's infinity is continual development for development's own sake), that is, a negative infinity, an infinity without finitude; an infinity void of all content. Hence when Fichte rendered the ego infinite he asserted an idealism in relation to which all actuality became pale, an acosmism in relation to which his idealism became actuality, notwithstanding the fact that it was docetism. With Fichte thought was rendered infinite, and subjectivity became infinite absolute negativity, infinite tension and longing. Fichte thereby acquired a significance for knowing. His Theory of Science rendered knowledge infinite. But that which he rendered infinite was the negative, hence in place of truth he acquired certainty, not positive but negative infinity in the infinite identity of the ego with itself. Instead of positive endeavor, i.e. happiness, he obtained negative endeavor, i.e. an ought.' Absolute subjectivity is denied 'meaning' along with happiness. The idealist who conceived of 'relegating reality to the ethical,' that is, to subjectivity, is at the same time the archenemy of any assertion of the identity of the external and the internal. The pathos of his philosophy is directed against this assertion from the very first sentence of his pseudonymous works: 'Dear Reader: I wonder if you may not sometimes have felt inclined to doubt a little the correctness of the familiar philosophic maxim that the external is the internal, and the internal the external. Perhaps you have cherished in your heart a secret which you felt in all its joy or pain was too precious for you to share with another. . . . Perhaps neither of these presuppositions applies to you and your life, and yet you are not a stranger to this doubt; it flits across your mind now and then like a passing shadow.' Every line of Kierkegaard's work makes this presupposition. —The contradictory elements in Kierkegaard's formulation of meaning, subject, and object are not simply disparate. They are interwoven with one another. Their figure is callow inwardness. In the Sickness unto Death, inwardness is deduced as the substantiality of the subject directly from its disproportionateness to the outer world: "Well, there is no 'corresponding' external mark, for in fact an outward expression corresponding to close reserve is a contradiction in terms; for if it is corresponding, it is then of course revealing. On the contrary," here—in the moment of despair—"outwardness is the entirely indifferent factor in this case where introversion, or what one might call inwardness with a jammed lock, is so much the predominant factor." Where Fichte's idealism springs and develops out of the center of subjective spontaneity, in Kierkegaard the 'I' is thrown back onto itself by the superior power of otherness. He is not a philosopher of identity; nor does he recognize any positive being that transcends consciousness. The world of things is for him neither part of the subject nor independent of it. Rather, this world is omitted. It supplies the subject with the mere "occasion" for the deed, with mere resistance to the act of faith. In itself, this world remains random and totally indeterminate. Participation in "meaning" is not one of its potentials. In Kierkegaard there is so little of a subject/object in the Hegelian sense as there are objects; there is only an isolated subjectivity, surrounded by a dark otherness. Indeed, only by crossing over this abyss would subjectivity be able to participate in "meaning," that otherwise denies itself to subjectivity's solitude. In the effort to achieve a transcendental ontology, inwardness takes up the "struggle with itself," on which Kierkegaard the "psychologist" reports. Yet no psychology is required to explain this struggle; not even the supposition—in which
Schremf, Przywara, and Vetter agree—of sexual inversion, whether characterizing the work or the person. Mourning can be shown, pragmatically, to be Kierkegaard's central affect in the foundational nexus of his philosophy. Whereas the psychological factors under which Kierkegaard's philosophy developed are scarcely to be denied, his character expresses a historical constellation. From a historicophilosopical perspective, Kierkegaard, the psychologically solitary, is least solitary. He himself vouches for a situation of which he never tires of asseverating that he has lost reality. Even the extreme of solipsism falls within the boundaries of his philosophical landscape: "This that inners in the individual is the only reality that does not become a mere possibility through being known, and which can be known only through being thought; for it is the individual's own reality."21 In the image of the concrete individual, subjectivity rescues only the rubble of the existent. Subjectivity, in the form of objectless inwardsness, mourns in its painful affects for the world of things as for "meaning."

Immanent Dialectic

Kierkegaard bestows the term "dialectics" on the movement that subjectivity completes both out of itself and in itself to regain "meaning." This cannot be conceived as a subject/object dialectic since material objectivity nowhere becomes commensurable with inwardsness. This dialectic transpires between subjectivity and its "meaning," which the dialectic contains without being merged with it, and which does not merge with the immanence of "inwardsness." The affinity between this dialectic and the mystical dialectic does not escape Kierkegaard. He uses the "moralist" William—who in the overall plan of the oeuvre represents the figure that does justice to reality—to carry out the critique of mysticism; this undoubtfully serves at the same time to free Kierkegaard from any suspicion of mysticism. True, like the "moralist" who has perfected inwardsness, the mystic "has chosen himself absolutely."22 But, whereas for the "ethical character" prayer becomes "more deliberate,"23 for the mystic prayer takes on an "erotic character" as an "intrusiveness in his relation to God."24 The mystic impatiently disdains "the reality of existence to which God has assigned him,"25 and commits "a deceit against the world."26 Through the negation of reality, however, the content of mystical faith itself becomes dubious: "The mystic is never consistent. If he has no respect for reality in general it is not obvious why he does not regard with equal distrust that moment in reality when, as he believes, he was affected by the higher experience. That too is indeed a moment of reality!"27 This thought could easily enough turn against Kierkegaard himself. But his arguments do not crystallize. The mystic is judged not according to the measure of a reality that he fails, but according to the measure of his own inwardsness: "The failing of the mystic is that by his choice he does not become concrete for himself, nor for God either; he chooses himself abstractly and therefore lacks transparency."28 Transparency, however, is itself exclusively determined inwardly: by repentance.29 Ethical concretion therefore remains as abstract as the mystical act, as the mere "choice of choice." This choosing constitutes the schema of all of Kierkegaard's dialectics. Bound to no positive ontic content, transforming all being into an "occasion" for its own activity, Kierkegaard's dialectic exempts itself form material definition. It is immanent and in its immanence infinite. Indeed he hopes to protect the dialectic from the bad infinity of the simply unlimited: "When a mystification, a dialectical reduplication, is used in the service of a serious purpose, it will be so used as merely to obviate a misunderstanding, or an over-hasty understanding, whereas all the while the true explanation is at hand and ready to be found by him who honestly seeks it."30 Or in the act of "choice": "The self that one chooses in so far as one chooses oneself, is assumed to be in existence prior to the choice; and likewise, one can only choose the beloved that is indeed already the beloved. To choose the beloved can only mean her acceptance."31 Yet the origin of this immanent dialectic presents itself at the same time as functional: "Am I just suffering from an excess, morbid reflectiveness? I can give evidence that this is not the case. For there is a leading thought in this whole matter that is as clear to me as day, namely to do everything to work her loose and to keep my soul upon the apex of the wish."32 Maintaining the self at the apex of the wish is nothing other than dialectical movement within the enigmatic-unreal figure that Kierkegaard's philosophy of immanence confers upon this movement. This is the proper place for the question that Theodor Haeccker poses in his important treatise on Kierkegaard's concept of truth. He reproaches Kierkegaard for a subjective dynamic that, beyond its own tension, assumes no autonomous being given to man. Kierkegaard's "terrible error" is "that the starting point and ultimately everything is 'how.' For the individual commences with the 'what,' in a still weak, and just as distant 'how' the enduring, the dogmatic 'what' of faith, the supernatural seed, the content, that can only be just that, which alone corresponds to the supernatural faith of the person and which no human passion, however intense, can gain by coercion."33 Kierkegaard is—Haeccker continues—a "philosopher of becoming ... a spiritualist, that is, one who according to expectation and nature would be a philosopher of being."34 However pointedly this takes issue with the basic organization of the philosophy, it does not do justice to the historical depth of its foundation. Kierkegaard did not, in neo-Kantian fashion, reconceive being as pure becoming. Being is supposed to inherit in becoming as its content, one that is of course concealed from the individual. Concealed being, enciphered "meaning," produces dialectical movement, not blind subjective coercion. (This raises Kierkegaard above romantic efforts of reconstruction that claim to be able to recreate ontology whole, phenomenologically.) He prefers to let consciousness circle about in the self's own dark labyrinth and communicating passageways, without beginning or
aim, hopelessly expecting hope to flair up at the end of the most distant tunnel as the distant light of escape, rather than deluding himself with the _fata morgana_ of static ontology in which the premises of an autonomous ratio are left unfulfilled. This explains the preponderance of becoming over being in spite of the ontological question of origin. — The qualitative multiplicity of the being of ideas is transposed into the unity of immanent becoming. Croce's thesis that Hegel 'only recognized contradictions and denied validity to differences'\(^{35}\) also holds good for Kierkegaard. The objectless dialectic subsumes all qualitative determinations under the formal category of 'negation.' According to Kierkegaard's philosophy, dialectic is to be conceived as the _movement of individual human consciousness_ through contradictions. Its 'intellectualized,' essentially rational structure does not in truth conflict with its content. Geismar, drawing on Hirsch, has shown that Kierkegaard's 'intellectualism' in the dialectical centerpiece, the doctrine of Christian paradox, is of a part "with the energy with which Kierkegaard wants to isolate Christ's revelation from that of any other religiosity."\(^{36}\) The same evidence can be used to philosophically deduce the 'intellectualism' from the condition of objectless inwardness, to which the theology of sacrifice itself belongs. Where the intuition of things is repudiated as temptation, thought holds the field and its monologue articulates itself exclusively through contradictions that thought itself produces. Reality finds expression only in the internally contradictory temporal course of the monologue, that is, as history. Kierkegaard conceives the choice of choice itself as historical, and its historicity is to guard against mysticism: "For man's eternal dignity consists in the fact that he can have a history, the divine element in him consists in the fact that he himself, if he will, can impart to this history continuity."\(^{37}\) — The doctrine of a 'real dialectic,' which contemporary Protestantism reads out of Kierkegaard and opposes to the idealist dialectic, remains unconvincing. Kierkegaard did not "overcome" Hegel's system of identity; Hegel is inverted, interiorized, and Kierkegaard comes closest to reality where he holds to Hegel's historical dialectic. Indeed, Kierkegaard himself conceives the dialectic exclusively according to the schema of internality. But in this schema he is continually confronted by history as it in truth is.

### Philosophy of History

As an opponent of Hegel's doctrine of objective spirit, Kierkegaard developed no philosophy of history. He wanted to use the category of the "person" and the person's inner history to exclude external history from the context of his thought. But the inner history of the person is bound anthropologically to external history through the unity of the "race": "At every moment, the individual is both himself and the race. This is the individual's perfection viewed as a state. It is also a contradiction. A contradiction, however, is always the expression of a task; a
excluded from history because uniqueness is contrary to the ahistorical, general determination of the race; contrary, that is, to the determination of the individual by the natural quality of the possibility of history. Indeed, Kierkegaard attempts to rescue the content of real historical uniqueness through the categories of the leap and the beginning. He speaks impressively of the "secret of the first." Precisely as the "leap," however, the appearance of the first is abstractly set apart from historical continuity; it becomes a mere means for the inauguration of a new "sphere," for which category the historical moment, the specific content of the emerging first, remains entirely insignificant. Its historical force continues to resound only in the act of "achieving" a new sphere. Hereditary sin itself, however, is bled of its historical substance: "That sin was not in the world before Adam's first sin is, in relation to sin itself, something entirely accidental and irrelevant. It is of no significance at all and cannot justify making Adam's sin greater or the first sin of every other man lesser." In Kierkegaard's doctrine of hereditary sin, history is nothing else than the formal schema according to which the intrasubjective dialectic is to reverse into the dialectic of the "absolute." It establishes the borders against mere subjectivity, leaving, however, the historical fact in dark contingency. — On the other hand, real history prevails in his philosophy. Even the objectless "I" and its immanent history are bound to historical objectivity. Kierkegaard makes this plain with regard to language. For language is materially and qualitatively dependent on the objective historical dialectic and at the same time, according to Kierkegaard's doctrine, ontologically predetermined. He attests to the doctrine's ambivalence. Language is said to be ontological in The Concept of Anxiety: "If one were to say further that the issue then becomes a question of how the first man learned to speak, I would answer that this is very true, but also that the question lies beyond the scope of the present . . . psychologically pathbreaking . . . investigation. However, this must not be understood in the manner of modern philosophy as though my reply were evasive, suggesting that I could answer the question in another place. But this much is certain, that it will not do to represent man himself as the inventor of language." In contrast, the Stages teaches the rudiments of a nominalistic theory of language that separates thoughts and words and surrenders language to the "accidental," in any case to the intrahistorical: "People generally believe that what makes a presentation of thought unpopular are the many technical terms of scientific phraseology. That however is an entirely extrinsic sort of unpopularity, which scientific speakers have in common with sea-captains, for example, who also are unpopular because they speak a jargon, and by no means because they speak profusely. Therefore time and again the phraseology of a philosophy may penetrate even to the common man, proving that its unpopularity was only extrinsic. No, it is the thought and not the expression that makes a formulation essentially unpopular. A 'systematic' handicraftsman may be unpopular, but he is not intrinsically unpopular, because he does not attach much thought to the exceedingly strange things he says . . . Socrates, on the other hand, was the most unpopular man in Greece, precisely because he said the same thing as the simplest man, but attached infinite thought to it." The paradox of the interpretation of language as at once historical and extrahistorical has, however, as its consequence that the concept of sin, whose content for Kierkegaard varies only quantitatively in history while it is qualitatively assumed as prior to everything historical, is also determined qualitatively and historically through language. For the "innocence" of every later generation, which according to his theory enters the sphere of sin exclusively through the "qualitative leap," has at its disposal in language a concept of sin that the generations have bequeathed to language. Kierkegaard is able to escape from this dilemma only through the powerless, psychologistic assertion that this later innocence, when it speaks of sin, in truth has no idea of what is actually meant by it: "Nevertheless, his anxiety is not anxiety about sin, for the distinction between good and evil does not exist prior to the developing actuality of freedom. This distinction, to the degree that it exists, for example in language which even guiltlessness hears and speaks, is only a foreboding presentiment that through the history of the race may signify a more or a less." Accordingly, intrahistorical persons would be situated at a level of consciousness that they do not find themselves in, even as children. Against Kierkegaard's intention, innocence and sin would constitute a continuum of various levels of consciousness without a "qualitative leap," and the genesis of language would be psychologically relativized. These aporia may have obliged Kierkegaard to let the paradox of language and history stand. Even in the positive-theological Training, concrete historical language is for him at the same time the seal of truth: "Believe me it is highly important that a man's speech be accurate and true, for so then will his thought be." Precisely here Kierkegaard shows reverence for the historical scars on the creaturely body of language, the foreign words, for the sake of their function in history: "Life is—to use a foreign word (partly because it so exactly characterizes the situation, and partly because it so promptly and definitely reminds everyone of what one should remember)—it is an 'Examen' [examination]."— If language is the form of the communication of pure subjectivity and at the same time paradoxically presents itself as historically objective, objectless inwardness is reached in language by the external dialectic. In spite of the thesis of the abstractness and contingency of the world of things, inwardness is not altogether able to escape from it: they collide in "expression" and in its historical figure. Inwardness attempts to still the external world that crowds in on it by anathematizing history. Thus originates Kierkegaard's struggle against history, prompted empirically by the events of 1848. — "Internal history is the only true history; but true history contends with that which is the life principle of history, i.e., with time. But when true history, that is, the individual, contends with time, then the temporal and therefore every little moment of it acquires its immense reality." In this sentence, written in 1843,
historical heteronomy still appears as a matter of indifference, worthy of neglect. Later, however, the image of history becomes that of radical evil, whose power he admits insofar as he rages against it: "Oh, that there were someone (like the heathen who burnt the libraries of Alexandria) able to get these eighteen centuries out of the way—if no one can do that, then Christianity is abolished. Oh, that there were someone capable of making it clear to these many orators who prove the truth of Christianity by the 1,800 years—that there were someone who could make it clear to them (terrible as it is) that they are betraying, denying, abolishing Christianity—if no one can do that, then Christianity is abolished." From the annihilation of historical reality by the absolute self, the motive of "contemporaneity" emerges in which contemporary dialectical theology imagines it possesses the key to reality: "For in relation to the absolute there is only one tense: the present. For him who is not contemporary with the absolute—for him it has no existence." The external world is lost in the face of "inner history"; but inner history can only transpire simultaneously as a "relation to the absolute." For its time has no binding unity of measure; it is exclusively the immanent form of the dialectical movement, unreal in the face of the "absolute."

Thus history vanishes. The early Kierkegaard attempted to justify this epistemologically in one of the essays of "aesthete A," who invariably represents Kierkegaard's own doctrine. The doctrine is Platonizing, in contrast to the larger dialectical intention of the work, and therefore at the same time problematically expressed: "Should anyone feel called upon to say that the tragic always remains the tragic, I should in a sense have no objection to make, in so far as every historical evolution always remains within the range of the concept. On the hypothesis that his statement has meaning, and that the repetition of the word tragic is not to be regarded as constituting an empty meaningless parenthesis, then the meaning must be this, that the content of a concept does not dethrone the concept but enriches it. On the other hand, it can scarcely have escaped the attention of any observer... that there is an essential difference between ancient tragedy and modern tragedy. If, in turn, one were to emphasize this difference absolutely, and by its aid, first stealthily, then perhaps forcibly, to separate the concepts of the ancient and modern tragic, his procedure would be no less absurd than that of the man who denied any essential difference; for he would thereby be cutting off the branch he sits on and would only prove that what he wanted to separate belongs together." If here history is still mastered by the "range of the concept" in which, according to the Hegelian model, a historical dialectic transpires, history later evades the plan and appears simply as a threat to inwardness. The horror in the face of every specifically historical content is finally concretized as a negative philosophy of history. Such a negative philosophy of history is found, in defiance of "simultaneity," in the Instant, and is notably reminiscent of neo-Platonic, gnostic doctrine: "In a totally opposite sense history is a process. The idea is introduced—and with that it enters into the process of

history. But unfortunately this does not (as one ludicrously assumes) result in the purification of the idea, which never is purer than in its primary form. No, it results, with steadily increasing momentum, in garbling the idea, in making it hackneyed, trite, in wearing it out, in introducing the impure ingredients which originally were not present (the very opposite of filtering), until at last, by the enthusiastic cooperation and mutual approbation of a series of successive generations the point is reached where the idea is entirely extinguished and the opposite of the idea has become what they now call the idea, and this they maintain has been accomplished by the historical process in which the idea has been purified and refined." Kierkegaard thereby takes up in his final polemic the transcendentalistic of a golden age. Already in Either/Or, William claims: "Our age reminds one vividly of the dissolution of the Greek city-state: everything goes on as usual, and yet there is no longer anyone who believes in it. The invisible spiritual bond which gives it validity no longer exists, and so the whole age is at once comic and tragic—tragic because it is perishing, comic because it goes on."

This borders on insight into the historical origin of objectless inwardness: "Men have perceived that it avails nothing to be ever so distinguished an individual man, since no difference avails anything. A new difference has consequently been hit upon: the difference of being born in the nineteenth century." All that would be needed is the sequacious insight that in fact "no difference avails anything" for his own concept of absolute inwardness to appear in front of his own eyes as a romantic island where the individual undertakes to shelter his "meaning" from the historical flood. But it is at this point that Kierkegaard's thought breaks off, and he supposes himself protected on the island from the flood. The following sentence is perfectly characteristic: "It is not to be denied that the whole tendency of the age often makes such a marriage"—one "that has been rescued from reflection and its shipwreck"—"a dolorous necessity. As for this 'necessity,' however, it must be remembered that every generation, and each individual in the generation, begins life anew to a certain extent, and that for each one severally there is a possibility of escaping this maelstrom." The flood of history is similar to the devastating maelstrom; in it, however, the person asserts himself as free. Only at particular instants do person and history come into contact. At these moments of contact, however, the historical dimension shrivels. The concept of "situation," Kierkegaard's own present isolated from historical contingency, corresponds to the concept of "simultaneity," the revelation that has already occurred. It is true that the concept of "situation" contains historical, real elements in itself. These elements, however, are isolated and subordinated to the individual. "Situation," for Kierkegaard, is not—as is objective history for Hegel—graspable through the construction of the concept, but only by the spontaneous decisiveness of the autonomous individual. To put it in the language of Idealism, in "situation" Kierkegaard pursues the indifferetration of subject and object. He is able to do without it so long as inwardness—lacking
Therefore the "situation" is not directly intuited; rather it is produced in advance by its concept; according to the schema in which he presents the movement of inwardness and which at the same time largely corresponds—in the category of reflection—to the Hegelian philosophy of history: "For in fact the people he addresses are already Christians. But if it is Christians he is addressing, what can be the sense of getting them to become Christians? If, on the contrary, they are not Christians, in his opinion, although they call themselves such, the very fact that they call themselves Christians shows that here we have to do with a situation that demands reflection, and with that the tactics must be entirely reversed."57

The situation that "translates everything into terms of reflection"58 is itself at the same time conceived as a "sphere of reflection." Situation thereby proves itself to be subjective-objective indifferentiation: on the basis of its objective-historical derivation, it gives cause for reflection and at the same time roots itself in the element of subjective reflectedness that, according to Kierkegaard, "has transcended all immediacy." In Kierkegaard's "situation," historical actuality appears as reflection. Indeed, it appears re-reflected, literally thrown back. The harder subjectivity rebounds back into itself from the heterogeneous, indeterminate, or simply mean world, the more clearly the external world expresses itself, mediatedly, in subjectivity. The course of this process is the same as that of Kierkegaard's own development. Only when its immanent dialectic is repelled by external reality—where it is still tolerated as aesthetic immediacy and as the "middle reality" of the ethical—does reality enter into the dialectic and the dialectic plastically reproduce the contours of the external world. The polemical character, which characterizes all of Kierkegaard's statements on the "situation," originates not from the pathos of a "prophetic attack" occasionally arrogated by his tone. On the offensive, his philosophy responds to the painful intrusion of reality into the objectless interior, marked by the recessive movement of the self. This accounts for Kierkegaard's political opinions; however consistently they fail to grasp the circumstances, they are more deeply formed by them than the blatantly reactionary, provincial, and individualistic thesis (particularly in the Diaries) would ever lead one to imagine. This ultimately becomes evident. For the later Kierkegaard, situation is "what subsists." In the Training and For Self-Examination, the subsistent is still spoken of with a timidity that would happily give unto Caesar what is his, because in truth a Caesar no more exists for it than does property. In the final essays, however, the concept of the "subsistent" obtains its true force insofar as it absorbs the actual social condition: "Might there in these shrewd times be found even a youth who does not easily understand that, if the state got the notion, for example, of wanting to introduce the religion that the moon is made out of a green cheese, and to that end were to arrange for 1000 jobs for a man with family, steadily promoted, the consequence would be—if only the state held to its purpose—that after a few generations a statistician would be able to affirm that this religion (the moon is made out of a green cheese) is the prevailing religion in the land?"59 For Kierkegaard, the relation of church and state stands in the foreground. Yet his attack takes him far enough to allow him to see through the socioeconomic bases of this relation: "Of course it will cost money, for without money one gets nothing in this world, not even a certificate of eternal blessedness in the other world; no, without money one gets nothing in this world."60 This sort of comment, whose applicability could easily enough spring from the bearers of religion to religion itself, can be found in Georg Buechner. The economic motive of society is formulated with perfect clarity in the antithesis: "By seeing the glorious ones, the witnesses to the truth, venture everything for Christianity, one is led to the conclusion: Christianity must be truth. By considering the priest one is led to the conclusion: Christianity is hardly the truth, but profit is the truth."61 — For Kierkegaard, the external world becomes effectively real only in its depravity. It is therefore in the "situation" that his dialectic makes its way out of a closed immanence. The situation confronts immanence with the depraved present as its own origin; in protest, the situation is forced toward "reflection." Kierkegaard gladly played off left-Hegelian materialist authors, such as Boerne and Feuerbach, against an empty idealist philosophy of identity—against a church he thought less knowledgeable of the essence of Christianity than precisely Feuerbach;62 behind his ironic-dialectical intention, a secret affluence may be hidden. There is enough materialist explosive present in the Instant, and the either/or of inwardness must, once shaken by the impact of the subsistent, reverse as fundamentally into its antithesis as Kierkegaard asserts the thesis. The efficient cause, however, hidden in the "subsistent," which the "situation" reveals, is none other than the knowledge of the reification of social life, the alienation of the individual from a world that comes into focus as a mere commodity. This clarifies Kierkegaard's formulation of the relation of subject and object. In his philosophy the knowing subject can no more reach its objective correlates than, in a society dominated by exchange-value, things are "immediately" accessible to the person. Kierkegaard recognized the distress of incipient high-capitalism. He opposed its privations in the name of a lost immediacy that he sheltered in subjectivity. He analyzed neither the necessity and legitimacy of reification nor the possibility of its correction. But he did nevertheless—even if he was more foreign to the social order than any other idealistic thinker—note the relation of reification and the commodity form in a metaphor that need only be taken literally to correspond with Marxist theories. According to the Training (1850): "To reflect means, in one sense of the
word, to come quite close to something which one would look at, whereas in another sense it implies an attitude of remoteness, of infinite remoteness so far as the personality is concerned. When a painting is pointed out to one and he is asked to regard it, or when in a shop one looks at a piece of cloth, for example, he steps up quite close to the object, in the latter instance he even takes it in his hands and feels it, in short, he gets as close to the object as possible. But in another sense, by this very movement he goes quite out of himself, gets away from himself, forgets himself, and there is nothing to remind him that it is he that is looking at the picture or the cloth, and not the picture or the cloth that is looking at him. That is to say, by reflection I enter into the object (I become subjective), but I go out of or away from myself (I cease to be subjective). Christianity, however, brings rescue from the extremity of reification: "For Christian truth, if I may say so, has itself eyes to see with, yea, is all eye." Truth does not have the character of a thing. It is the divine glance, which falls like the intellectus archetypus on alienated things and releases them from their enchantment. Along with the things, human relations and humanity itself are enchanted: "Some reflections! You can perceive that in the speaker: his glance is drawn back into the eye, he resembles not so much a man as one of those figures carved in stone that has no eyes. . . . So it is that the 'I,' who was the speaker, dropped out; the speaker is not an 'I,' he is the thing at issue, the reflection. And as the 'I' failed, so also the 'thou' was done away with, thou the hearer, the fact that thou who sittest there art the person to whom the discourse is addressed. Indeed, it has almost gone so far that to talk in this personal fashion to other people is regarded as 'getting personal.' By 'getting personal' one understands unseemly and rude behavior—and so it will not do for the speaker, 'I,' to talk personally, and to persons, the hearer, 'thou.' Inwardness takes hold of the reified person and breaks its own spell: "When the castle door of inwardness has long been shut and is finally opened, it does not move noiselessly like an apartment door which swings on hinges." Admittedly, this door opens only for the instant. For "in the external world, everything belongs to the possessor. It is subject to the law of indifference"—of reification—"and the spirit of the ring obeys the one who has the ring, whether he is an Aladdin or a Nouredden, and he who has the wealth of the world has it regardless of how he got it. It is different in the world of the spirit." Thus shallow idealism consolves itself over the "situation"; it comfortably divides up its objects into internal and external, spirit and nature, freedom and necessity.

**Intérieur**

The fitting name of the "situation," as the powerless-momentary indifferentiation of subject and object, is not the castle, with which Kierkegaard romantically compares inwardness. Nor need the name be established sociologically by mere "coordination" with Kierkegaard; rather, it is pragmatically implicit in his work. And, indeed, it is to be found in the imagery of the apartment interior, which, while it discloses itself only to interpretation, demands interpretation by its striking independence. It is the bourgeois intérieur of the nineteenth century, before which all talk of subject, object, indiff erentiation, and situation pales to an abstract metaphor, even though for Kierkegaard the image of the intérieur itself serves only as a metaphor for the nexus of his fundamental concepts. The relation is reversed as soon as interpretation gives up the compulsion of identity that is exerted even by Kierkegaard’s idea of situation, which indeed exclusively occurs as the actual site of inward decisiveness. Philosophically schooled authors have not yet given any attention to Kierkegaard’s intérieur. Only Monrad’s innocuous biography betrays—in a single passage—knowledge of the true state of affairs: "How his fantasy developed, aided by the arts of disguise and imagery, during promenades in the parlor, how it ran wild!—In the parlor! Everywhere one looks in Kierkegaard, one finds something undeniably shut-in, and out of his prodigious oeuvre there comes to us the smell of the hothouse." From Kierkegaard’s youthful writings Geismar quotes the description of those "promenades in the parlor" that importantly illuminate the work of the isolated individual. There the report is of a "Johannes Climacus" (the pseudonym with which Kierkegaard later cloaked his own position): "When Johannes on occasion asked for permission to go out, he was most often denied; as an alternative, the father occasionally offered his hand for a walk up and down the hall. At first sight this was a meager ersatz, and yet... something totally out of the ordinary was hidden in it. The suggestion would be accepted, and it would be left entirely up to Johannes where they would go. Then they went out the front door to a nearby garden house, or to the beach, just as Johannes desired; for the father was capable of everything. As they now went up and down the hall, the father pointed everything they saw; they greeted others passing by, cars noisily crossed their way, drowning out the father’s voice; the cakes in the bakery window were more inviting than ever." Thus the flaneur promenades in his room; the world only appears to him reflected by pure inwardness. Images of interiors are at the center of the early Kierkegaard’s philosophical constructions. These images are indeed produced by the philosophy, by the stratum of the subject-object relation in the work; but they point beyond this stratum by the strength of the things that they record. Just as in the metaphorical intérieur the intentions of Kierkegaard’s philosophy intertwine, so the intérieur is also the real space that sets free the categories of the philosophy. The central motive of reflection belongs to the intérieur. The "seducer" begins a note: "Why can you not be quiet and well behaved? You have done nothing the entire morning except to shake my awning, pull at my window mirror, play with the bell-ropes from the third story, rattle the windowpanes, in short, in every possible way tried to get my attention!"
gaard may have introduced the "window mirror" as a "symbol" for the 
reflected seducer with intentional casualness. But it defines an image in which —
against Kierkegaard's intention — social and historical material is sedimented. 
The window mirror is a characteristic furnishing of the spacious nineteenth-cen-
tury apartment; that such an apartment is under discussion is evident from the 
mention of the "bell-rope from the third story" that must be occupied by another 
family for him to have a separate bell-rope. The function of the window mirror is 
to project the endless row of apartment buildings into the isolated bourgeois 
living room; by the mirror, the living room dominates the reflected row at the 
time that is delimited by it — just as in Kierkegaard's philosophy the "sit-
suation" is subordinated to subjectivity and yet is defined by it. In their time, 
the nineteenth century, window mirrors were commonly called "spies" — which is 
how Kierkegaard refers to himself in his final self-account: "I am, that is, like a 
spy in a higher service, in the service of the idea and as such must keep watch 
on the intellectual and the religious and spy out how 'existence' matches up 
with knowledge and 'Christendom' with Christianity."

He who looks into the 
window mirror, however, is the private person, solitary, inactive, and separated 
from the economic process of production. The window mirror testifies to object-
lessness — it casts into the apartment only the semblance of things — and isolated 
privacy. Mirror and mourning hence belong together. It is thus that Kierkegaard 
himself used the metaphor of the mirror in the Stages: "There was once a father 
and a son. A son is like a mirror in which the father beholds himself, and for the 
son the father too is like a mirror in which he beholds himself as he will someday 
be. However, they rarely regarded one another in this way, for their daily inter-
course was characterized by the cheerfulness of gay and lively conversation. It 

happened only a few times that the father came to a stop, stood before the son 
with a sorrowful countenance, looked at him steadily and said: 'Poor child, you 
live in silent despair.'" "Melancholy appears in the symbol of the mirror, in the 
archaic and the modern, as the imprisonment of mere spirit in itself. This impris-
onment is, however, at the same time imprisonment in a natural relation; in the 
ambiguous bond between father and son. The image of the intérieur therefore 
draws all of Kierkegaard's philosophy into its perspective, because in this image 
the doctrine's elements of ancient and unchanging nature present themselves 
directly as the elements of the historical constellation that governs the image. 
Thus the key to Kierkegaard's entire oeuvre may indeed be sought in a passage 
from the "Diary of a Seducer": "Environment and setting still have a great 
influence upon one; there is something about them which stamps itself firmly and 
deeply in memory, or rather upon the whole soul, and which is therefore never 
forgotten. However old I may become, it will always be impossible for me to 
think of Cordelia amid surroundings different from this little room. When I come 
to visit her, the maid admits me to the hall; Cordelia herself comes in from 
her room, and, just as I open the door to enter the living room, she opens her door, so 
that our eyes meet exactly in the doorway. The living room is small, comfortable, 
little more than a cabinet. Although I have now seen it from many different view-
points, the one dearest to me is the view from the sofa. She sits there by my side; 
in front of us stands a round tea table, over which is draped a rich tablecloth. On 
the table stands a lamp shaped like a flower, which shoots up vigorously to bear 
its crown, over which a delicately cut paper shade hangs down so lightly that it is 
never still. The form of the lamp reminds one of oriental lands, the movement of 
the shade of the mild oriental breezes. The floor is concealed by a carpet woven 
from a certain kind of osier, which immediately betrays its foreign origin. For the 
moment I let the lamp become the keynote of my landscape. I am sitting there 
with her outstretched on the ground, under this wonderful flower. At other times 
I let the osier rug evoke ideas about a ship, about an officer's cabin — we sail out 
into the middle of the great ocean. When we sit at a distance from the window, we 
gaze directly into heaven's vast horizon..." Cordelia's environment must have 
no foreground, but only the infinite boldness of far horizons. She must not be of 
the earth, but ethereal, not walking but flying, not forward and back, but ever-
lastingly forward... In this description Kierkegaard's philosophical intention 
counters, without any effort on his part, objective, historical contents in those 
of the intérieur. The "illustration" takes on a life of its own that ignites in the 
text of his thoughts, and consumes the text with its images. The text was con-
cerned with a vague-erotic "mood," which is only deciphered in the outline of 
the illustration; and concerned as well with the category of the infinite that, 
through contrast, binds the dialectic of the seducer to the intimacy of the personal-
private. But the force of the material goes beyond the intention of the meta-
phor. The intérieur is accentuated in contrast to the horizon, not just as the finite 
in contrast to the supposedly erotic-aesthetic infinitude, but rather as an 
objectless interior vis-à-vis space. Space does not enter the intérieur; it is only its 
boundary. The intérieur is polemically posited on the boundary of space as the 
sole determinate being; it is polemically the equivalent of Kierkegaard's "sub-
jective thinker." Just as external history is "reflected" in internal history, in the 
intérieur space is semblance. Kierkegaard no more discerned the element of sem-
blance in all merely reflected and reflecting intrasubjective reality, than he sees 
through the semblance of the spatial in the image of the intérieur. But here he is 
exposed by the material. It is not by accident that he readily compares inwardness 
with a fortress.) Under the sign of the fortress as that of the primordial past, and 
under the sign of the intérieur as that of the incalculably distant, which are 
stamped upon the present and the nearest, semblance gains its power. The con-
tents of the intérieur are mere decoration, alienated from the purposes they rep-
resent, deprived of their own use-value, engendered solely by the isolated apart-
ment that is created in the first place by their juxtaposition. The "lamp shaped 
like a flower"; the dream orient, fit together out of a cut paper lampshade hung 
over its crown and a rug made of osier; the room an officer's cabin, full of pre-
cious decorations greedily collected across the seas—the complete *fata morgana* of decadent ornaments receives its meaning not from the material of which they are made, but from the *intérieur* that unifies the imposture of things in the form of a still life. Here, in the image, lost objects are conjured. The self is overwhelmed in its own domain by commodities and their historical essence. Their illusory quality is historically-economically produced by the alienation of thing from use-value. But in the *intérieur* things do not remain alien. It draws meaning out of them. Foreignness transforms itself from alienated things into expression; mute things speak as “symbols.” The ordering of things in the apartment is called arrangement. Historically illusory objects are arranged in it as the semblance of unchangeable nature. In the *intérieur* archaic images unfold: the image of the flower as that of organic life; the image of the orient as specifically the homeland of yearning; the image of the sea as that of eternity itself. For the semblance to which the historical hour condemns things is eternal. God-abandoned creation presents itself marked by the ambiguity of semblance until it is rescued by the actuality of judgment. The semblance of the eternity of creation in the image of the *intérieur* is the eternity of the transcendence of all semblance. —This alone gives the doctrine of “situation” as indifferenciation its concrete meaning. Indifferentiation is not simply, as it is conceived in Kierkegaard’s philosophy, that of the subjective and objective, but of the historical and the natural. The *intérieur* is the incarnate imago of Kierkegaard’s philosophical “point”: everything truly external has shrunk to the point. The same spacelessness can be recognized in the structure of his philosophy: it is not developed successively, but in a complete simultaneity of all moments in a single point, that of “existence.”

This explains the peculiar difficulty for every presentation of Kierkegaard that must arduously analyze the spatial and temporal instant of his thought into the extensive and sequential. Kierkegaard intimates this himself in the ironic afterword to the *Stages*: “enthralled by the one thought I have not budged from the spot.” The world, however, cannot spread itself out in the point, but can appear only as an optical illusion, as through a peephole. In semblance, however, the historical world presents itself as nature. —That in Kierkegaard the “situation” —i.e., of Christianity —and the “modern” apartment belong together is evident in a passage of the preparative, polemical work *For Self-Examination*: “No, just as in a well-appointed house one is not obliged to go downstairs to fetch water, but by pressure already has it on the upper floors merely by turning the tap, so too is with the real Christian orator, who, just because Christianity is his life, has eloquence, and precisely the right eloquence, close at hand.”

A metaphor of technical life as the temporal present stands in for the eternal preparedness of the Christian condition, and in the apartment eternity and history merge. In the most noteworthy fashion the images of demonic, nature-bound defiance in *The Sickness unto Death* are derived from mechanics, even though the sickness is supposed to be that of the creature and not of the historical individual. They devour the historical motive of reification with an archaic motive that is summoned up out of it: “No, this puffing and the onrush which succeeds it is really not the thing that has to be considered, but rather the even momentum with which the locomotive proceeds and which occasions the puffing. And so it is with sin.” Elsewhere Kierkegaard combines sorcery and machine, unintentionally revealing the demonic character of subjective-autonomous existence more through the image than through the thought: “The least inconsistency is a prodigious loss, for with that a man . . . [and] existence which is under the rubric of spirit . . . in fact loses consistency; that same instant the spell is perhaps broken, the mysterious power which bound all powers in harmony is enfeebled, the spring loses its tension, the whole machinery is a chaos where the forces fight in rebellion against one another, to the injury of the self, and therein there is no accord with oneself, no momentum, no impetus. The prodigious machine which in consistency was so compliant with its iron strength, so pliable with all its power, is in disorder.” He goes even further with the “secret of the first,” the most obscure image of the mechanics of his day: “As one who ascends in a balloon rises by casting weights from him, so does the despairing man sink by casting from him the good.”

The final metaphor of the train irradiates like a flare in a thoroughly magical metaphysics such as Kierkegaard otherwise disdained: “The case of the guilty man who journeys through life to eternity is like that of the murderer who with the speed of the railway train fled from the place where he perpetrated his crime. Alas, just under the railway coach where he sat ran the electric telegraph with its signal and the order for his apprehension at the next station. When he reached the station and alighted from the coach he was arrested. In a way he had himself brought the denunciation with him.”

Thus Kierkegaard himself turns over the key to all civilizational metaphors: in the assumption of the actuality of judgment, the semblance of sudden historical figures is at once destroyed and fulfilled. They revolve around the bourgeois apartment as the locus of their historical fulfillment and as their powerful cipher. Thus is to be understood the most memorable passage that Kierkegaard dedicated to the *intérieur* from the multiply important *Repetition*: “One climbs the stairs to the first floor in a gas-illuminated building, opens a little door, and stands in the entry. To the left is a glass door leading to a room. One continues directly ahead into an anteroom. Beyond are two entirely identical rooms, identically furnished, as if one were the reflection of the other. The farther room is tastefully illuminated. A candelabra stands on a writing table; a gracefully designed armchair upholstered in red velvet stands before the desk. The nearer room is not illuminated. Here the pale light of the moon blends with the strong light from the inner room. One takes a seat by the window and looks out on the great square, sees the shadows of passersby hurrying along the walls; everything is transformed into theatrical decoration. (A dream world glimmers in the background of the soul. . . . Having smoked a cigar, one retires to the further room and begins to work.—It is past
midnight. One extinguishes the candles and lights a little night candle. Unmingled, the light of the moon is victorious. A single shadow appears even blacker; the echo of a single footstep takes a long time to disappear. The cloudless arch of heaven has a sad and pensive look as if the end of the world had already come and heaven, unperturbed, were occupied with itself. The idea of judgment, as otherworldly as the moonlit scenery beyond the intérieur and mere inwardsness, softly echoes in the image of the apocalypse. Gas lighting and red plush armchair are the historical traces in the image; with the false comfort of singing flares, with their diffuse light, with the cheap imitation of crimson, they are at the same time the refuge of semblance. The gaslight flees from the moon back into itself, just as does Cordelia’s room from the open horizon, and suffers the street only as a reflection, “a dream world glimmers in the background of the soul.” The duplication of the room is unfathomable, seeming to be a reflection, without being so: like these rooms, all semblance perhaps resembles itself, so long as it itself, obedient to nature, persists as semblance. With the word “decoration” the image of the apartment calls itself by name, as if it wanted to awaken. But in the intérieur melancholy dreams on: “as if the end of the world had already come,” it begins and remains in the apartment. Later Kierkegaard once again brought together illumination and melancholy—which, being objective, he could not comprehend: “Silence! Silence! Silence is not a definite something, for it does not consist simply in not speaking. No, silence is like the subdued light in the cozy room, like friendliness in the humble chamber”—in the intérieur as the prototypical cell of abandoned inwardsness. Even the solace of this light is semblance, “more beneficial than the subdued light of evening to weak eyes.” Out of the half-light of such melancholy emerge the contours of “domesticity,” which for Kierkegaard constitutes the arena of existence. It therefore constitutes the contours of his doctrine of existence itself. Inwardsness and melancholy, the semblance of nature and the actuality of judgment; his ideal of concrete individual human life and his dream of a hell that the despairing inhabits for his lifetime exactly like a house — the models of all of his concepts are sworn to a silent tableau in the deceptive light of crepuscular rooms in which escape is the issue if one wants to separate what is true in them from what is deceptive. In the intérieur the historical dialectic and the eternal power of nature pose their peculiar puzzle.

It must be solved by philosophical criticism, which seeks the real origin of his idealistic inwardsness in the historical, as in the prehistorical.

Chapter 3
Explication of Inwardness

Sociology

A sociology of inwardsness would be necessary to historically explain the image of the intérieur. The idea of such a sociology is only apparently paradoxical. Inwardsness presents itself as the restriction of human existence to a private sphere free from the power of reification. Yet as a private sphere it itself belongs, if only polemically, to the social structure. — With ironic modesty and some arrogance, Kierkegaard occasionally lays claim to the title of a man of private means: “An insignificant thinker, an intellectual with a private income, a speculative melancholic, occupying like a poverty-stricken lodger a garret at the top of a vast building, sits there in his little refuge, held captive in what seemed to him difficult thoughts.” Kierkegaard disclosed something of the character of the social relation between the outer world and the privately supported thinker: “A truly great ethical personality would seek to realize his life in the following manner: He would strive to develop himself with the utmost exertion of his powers; in so doing he would perhaps produce great effects in the external world. But this would not seriously engage his attention, for he would know that the external result is not in his power, and hence that it has no significance for him, either pro or contra.” But how would the moral person have to conduct himself if the outer world were indeed in his power or if he could gain control of this power? Does not Kierkegaard recognize the external as distinct from the internal and as material of ethical conduct; would not, in that case, morality itself be dependent on the historical condition of this material as its proper object? By denying the social...
question, Kierkegaard falls to the mercy of his own historical situation, that of the rentier in the first half of the nineteenth century. Within commodious limits the rentier is economically independent, more so than the owner of the same amount of productive capital in the age of high-capitalism in which a comparable amount of wealth lost all independence as a result of the concentration of finance capital and the division of stock in public corporations. Yet the limits of this economic position are evident: excluded from economic production, the rentier does not accumulate capital, or in any case incomparably less than an industrialist with a similar estate; nor is he able to exploit economically the intellectual labor of isolated "literary work," as he mentions in the First and Last Declaration: "the honorarium has, to say the least, been rather Socratic." He stands in opposition to the progress of economic competition that made his type almost extinct. Only an agrarian, economically underdeveloped country could initially guarantee him security and make possible his particular style of life. According to Geismar, a rentier, economically underdeveloped country could initially guarantee him security and make possible his particular style of life. According to Geismar, Kierkegaard spurned—on the basis of religious scruple—any interest-bearing investment of his small estate and instead consumed it in installments. Neither the rentier nor its counterpart, the "philistine"—which Kierkegaard constantly criticized—are to be understood in the sense of the modern antithesis of industrial and petty-bourgeoisie. Not dependent on borrowed capital, not required to sell his labor power, the rentier maintains an "open view." His knowledge goes beyond the pure immediacy of his "milieu," in which the "philistine" is immured; the necessities of his own social position do not block an overview of the whole and the "essential"; hence the vain self-irony of the tone with which he refers to himself as a simple pensioner, whereas it is precisely his economic position as rentier that guarantees a totality to which classical German idealism laid claim with less ceremony. What today appears as Kierkegaard's petty-bourgeois characteristics correspond to his exclusion from economic production, the "accidents" to which he is indeed ultimately subject. One such characteristic is the powerless hatred of reification in which only the powerful capitalist—"in the words of Karl Marx—feels "at ease and strengthened" for he understands "self-estrangement" as his own power," and in it possesses "the semblance of a human existence," a semblance that alienation grants only conditionally to the rentier. Even cautious interpretation that does not derive philosophical contents directly from the economic circumstance of the philosopher must take as confirmation of Kierkegaard's "external powerlessness" that he sustained major losses in the market fluctuations of 1848 and thought he had fallen into such difficult straits as to be obliged to look for employment. The influence of his effort to obtain a position through Mynster on his later relation to the bishop is certainly not to be judged as any less important than his piousness toward the "confessor of his father." It would have been impossible during Mynster's life to attack him as a representative of a hypocritical ministry when he himself had tried to use him to gain a paid seminarial position in the established church. As a rule, philo-

sophical criticism may hardly deduce its arguments from economic circumstances, yet they are not to be overlooked in the case of Kierkegaard's claim of the identity of truth and person. Whatever the mediation of private existence and theoretical thought, the philosophy itself cannot disclaim the characteristic features of the rentier. The lack of any developed concept of praxis, in contrast to idealistic philosophy since Kant and Fichte; the polemical-retrospective attitude toward an overwhelming capitalist external world is, in terms of its impulse, private. The external world, which at least gives the person some prerogative, is for this very reason condemned in general as the "external world," and not as a specifically capitalist world. The economic context becomes apparent when objectless inwardness must understand itself in social existence: in Kierkegaard's ethics.—His moral rigorism derives from the absolute claim of the isolated person. He criticizes all eudaemonism as heteronomous for the objectless self: "He who says that he wants to enjoy life always posits a condition which either lies outside the individual or is in the individual in such a way that it is not posited by the individual himself." The material contents of the autonomous ethic of the absolute person, however, give evidence of its dependency on bourgeois society. The concrete self is for Kierkegaard identical with the bourgeois self: "This self is not merely a personal self but a social, a bourgeois self." For this reason the self posits precisely those "distinctions" that the universality of the moral law should have excluded. The basis of these distinctions is class consciousness. Blacks and female: the rentier falls outside the limits of Kierkegaard's ethical universality; in the Stages he says of Othello: "a colored man, dear boon companions... cannot be supposed to represent esprit"; and he writes in a letter to Boesen, justly quoted by Schrempf: "The death of a female vocalist does not count for much." In Fear and Trembling he occasionally defends the crassest social immorality and irrationality with the naivete of a class perspective that refuses to comprehend socioeconomic interrelationships: "Once when the price of spices in Holland fell, the merchants had a few cargoes sunk in the sea in order to jack up the price. This was an excusable, perhaps even necessary, deception." Wherever the "moralist" happens to speak of those conflicts that can occur between inwardness (represented by marriage) and the material situation (poverty), he justifies inwardness with the cozy cynicism of the petty-bourgeois rentier: "When, for example, poverty is proposed as a difficulty with which marriage may have to contend, I would answer: Work—then all obstacles give way." Since we are now relying on our imaginations, you will perhaps take advantage of your poetic license and make answer: 'They couldn't get any work. The decline in business and in the shipping trade has left a great many people without bread.' Or you permit them to get a little work, but it is not sufficient. In my opinion, by wise economy they surely could have been able to make both ends meet." The logic of the argument bears witness against itself. And still it goes too far for Kierkegaard. While he recognizes the influence of business cycles
on the possibility of savings, he extracts the entire crisis as an "arbitrary invention of poetic license"11 from a period in which, at the same time that Either/Or was being written, the most terrible impoverishment of the English industrial proletariat was taking place. If the ethics of absolute inwardness cannot always defend its puritanical demands unrelentingly enough, it in this case makes it easy for itself: "Luther says somewhere in one of his sermons where he is talking of poverty and want: 'One has never heard of a Christian man dying of hunger.' Therewith Luther has disposed of the matter and thinks, in my opinion correctly, that he has spoken about it with much unction and to the genuine edification of his hearers."12 The individual uncritically submits to church tradition. - Moral action, for Kierkegaard, exclusively concerns the "neighbor." He says of the intended effect of his defense of marriage: "Through her [the wife] I am a man, for only a married man is a genuine man, every other title to honor is as nothing compared to this which in reality is the assumption underlying all titles. Through her I am a father; every other dignity is merely a human invention, an artifice, which is forgotten in a hundred years; through her I am head of the family, through her I am defender of the home, its breadwinner, the children's protector. - When one has so many dignities, one does not become an author for the sake of attaining a new dignity. I have not the least desire for a dignity I dare not lay claim to, but I write in order that he who is as happy as I am, if he reads this, may be reminded of his good fortune; that he who doubts, if he reads this, may be won over, if it were only a single individual, I am glad even of that."13 Because such an ethical address limits itself to the Christian "neighbor," it supposes itself immune to objective criticism; William "wishes that the man who might possibly profit by it may not be put out by deficiency in form, and refuses to tolerate any criticism. For a married man who writes on marriage is surely the last person to write for critical appreciation."14 The pathos of the entreaty, however, is unable fully to stave off criticism, For the concept of the "neighbor," the foundation of Kierkegaard's ethics, is a fiction. The concept is valid only in a society of direct human relations, from which Kierkegaard well knows that he is separated. Fleeing precisely from reification, he withdraws into "inwardness."15 In this arena, however, he acts as if that immediacy still existed in the external world, whose ersatz is inwardness itself. The possibility that a person, faultless in terms of private ethics, could act infamously in his objective social function, a function not reducible to inwardness, is a thought that Kierkegaard does not allow to occur. In fact neither this immediacy nor its semblance exist in the framework of common class interests; the rupture of immediacy is identical with that between the classes. Kierkegaard's ethics of concrete-meaningful life is therefore a poor and deceptive class moral. In theological terms: "And to honor every man, absolutely every man, is the truth, and this is what it is to fear God and love one's 'neighbor.' But from an ethico-religious point of view, to recognize the 'crowd'" - which for Kierkegaard, as a product of reification, is the opposition of the concrete "neighbor" - "as the court of 'truth' is to deny God, and it certainly cannot mean to love the 'neighbor.' And the 'neighbor' is the absolutely true expression for human equality. If everyone were in truth to love his neighbor as himself, complete human equality would be attained."15 This equality is not achieved when human relations are so preformed by the domination of exchange-value, the division and commodity form of labor that one "neighbor" can no more respond spontaneously to the other for more than an instant than the individual's kindness suffices to do him any good, let alone have an effect on the social structure. Thus Kierkegaard's ethics is contentless. - This ethics originates in his concept of freedom. Such a concept does not remain, as does the Kantian concept, in the realm of the intelligible, surrendering the empirical realm to necessity. It establishes itself in the empirical, and the empirical world is tolerated only insofar as it is the arena of freedom. Society contracts to the circumference of free "neighbors," while precisely its necessities are shunted aside as "accidental" from the gates of philosophy. Freedom determines the self, which Kierkegaard conceives exclusively in its freedom, just as it determines society. If the material necessities of society are denied in the name of freedom, the necessities and reality of the instincts vanish from the self according to the same scheme, Kierkegaard's absolute self is mere spirit. The individual is not the sensuously developed person, and no property is accorded him beyond the bare necessities. Inwardness does not consist in its fullness but is ruled over by an ascetic spiritualism.

**The Spiritual Body**

The thesis of spiritualism receives an extreme formulation in the *Philosophical Fragments*. The relation of truth and untruth is equated with that of being and nonbeing (Kierkegaard writes of the "disciple," the sinful man who is to be awakened by Christ: "'In so far as he was in error, and now receives the truth and with it the condition for understanding it, a change takes place within him like the change from non-being to being.'"16 The exclusively spiritual "rebirth" that he sees in this, that one "receives the truth and with it the condition for understanding it," is compared to natural birth as the transition from nonbeing to being. Thus birth itself is spiritualized: "When one who has experienced birth thinks of himself as born, he conceives this transition from non-being to being. The same principle must also hold in the case of re-birth."17 True, Kierkegaard himself fleetingly raises the objection of spiritualism: "Or is the difficulty increased by the fact that the non-being which precedes the re-birth" - that is, the natural being that is here specifically at issue qua nonbeing — "contains more being than the non-being that preceded the first birth?"18 But this objection is casuistically overruled. The spiritualistic thesis of the *Philosophical Fragments* is maintained
through the entire oeuvre. Like the natural self, "the crowd" is for Kierkegaard "the untruth." Without exception, living people appear as allegories of truth and untruth. This alone makes the artistic failure comprehensible. The bodily substratum of intuition is canceled by philosophy and endured only insofar as it presents truth and untruth. It is illuminating that genuine aesthetic achievements fall to Kierkegaard only where he presented the bewilderment of pure spirit; where, that is, spiritualism no longer interferes with poetic form because (as in the novella "A Possibility" in the Stages) spiritualism becomes the object of form. Everything sexual is excluded from the psychology of the erotic; even in his synopsis of others, the sexual is prudishly avoided. If spiritualism reigns over instinct, it so completely prevails in the philosophical dialectic that, even in The Sickness unto Death, it is not construed as a dialectic of spirit and nature; instead spirit itself has split into freedom and the demonic. This, to be sure, indicates the crucial reversal. If the body appears only under the sign of the "meaning" of the truth and untruth of spirit, spirit in return remains bound to the body as its expression, bound as to the semblance of the intérieur. Nature, excluded by history from an objectless inwardsness, nevertheless prevails in it, and the historical spiritualism builds for itself a natural-philosophical organology.

The images of pure spirit that Kierkegaard comes up with are consistently images of the human body. My soul is so heavy that thought can no more sustain it, no wingbeat lift it up into the ether; so says the melancholic in Either/Or, the most spiritual of Kierkegaard's many masks. Bodiless spirit for him becomes a burden that drags him into despair. The ancient somatic doctrine of humours strangely returns in idealistic spiritualism. It perfectly complements Kierkegaard's psychology of emotions. Where every emotion, stripped of any right of its own, is a cipher of the disguised truth that "appears" in it, it must itself be an apparition and as such paradoxically perceptible. If the functions of the eye and ear are differentiated not so much by their function in the three-dimensional world as in the spiritual inner world, so, on the other hand, the inner world itself is at the same time divided up according to images of the natural organs. Here I will break off this reflection. It perhaps does not satisfy you, your greedy eye devours it without being satisfied by it, but that is because the eye is the sense which is most insatiable, especially when you one does not hunger but suffers from a lust of the eye which cannot be satisfied with seeing. Accordingly, the eye is the organ of aesthetic "immediacy" and semblance; it alone sketches the images of things for inwardsness. In this the usual distinction of an "inner" and an "outer" sense, temporal and spatial forms of intuition, perhaps plays a role. Ultimately, however, it may have remained hidden from Kierkegaard—who took the music of Don Giovanni as the most perfect expression of "sensual genius"—that the visual as well as the auditory faculty imbue sensual qualities. Nevertheless, for him the ear is the direct instrument of inwardsness itself, a physical representative of the strictly bodiless. At the beginning of Either/Or, one of the most emphasized passages reads: "For just as the voice is the revelation of an inwardsness incommensurable with the outer, so the ear is the instrument by which this inwardsness is apprehended, hearing the sense by which it is appropriated." This is by no means an exclusive attribute of the mask of aesthete Aρ. The idea of the dialectical necessity of God's distance is maintained even in The Sickness unto Death: "So strangely constructed in an acoustic sense is the world of spirit, so strangely are the relationships of distance arranged."—Kierkegaard's spiritualism is above all enmity toward nature. Spirit posits itself as free and autonomous in opposition to nature because it considers nature demonic as much in external reality as in itself. In that, however, autonomous spirit appears corporeally, nature takes possession of it where it occurs most historically—in objectless interiority. Spirit's natural content must be investigated if in Kierkegaard the being of subjectivity itself is to be explicated. The natural content of mere spirit, "historical" in itself, may be called mythical.

### Mythical Content

In his dissertation Kierkegaard introduces the concept of the mythical both as the counterconcept to historical movement and in unity with it. What he says there in regard to the Platonic myths leads to the mythical content of his own thought, which his natural philosophy conceals. —His discourse on "The Mythical in the earlier Platonic Dialogues" assumes a "disparity between the dialectical and the mythical," said to be apparent between the conceptual and pictorial form of presentation in Plato. Kierkegaard sets as his task the deduction of the necessity of this divergence from the object and its unity. For the mythical, according to Kierkegaard, is not a free creation of the author. It "has a much deeper significance, a fact which becomes evident when one observes that the mythical in Plato has a history." This is not only a history in the development of Plato's work but a history in itself. Even in the early dialogues it "is present in connection with . . . its opposite, the abstract"—that is, the conceptual—"dialectic." If Stallbaum and F. C. Bauer establish a relation between the Platonic myths and "folk-consciousness" or "underscore the significance of tradition in the mythical," they have indeed caught a glimpse of the historical in myth, but only tangentially, without comprehending the common origin of dialectical and mythical modes of presentation. In contrast, Kierkegaard formulates the idea of an "inner history of the mythical." This idea tends toward the historical figure of the mythical in his own work; the form of complete immanence, whose image turns out to be the intérieur. He recognizes the unity of the dialectical and the mythical in Plato as an image; whereas the mythical "in the earlier dialogues appears in opposition to the dialectical, inasmuch as the mythical is only heard or, more correctly, seen when the dialectical is silent, in the later dia-
logues it exhibits a more amiable relation to the dialectical, that is, Plato has become master of it, which is to say, the mythical becomes image.30 Produced in the immanence of thought and according to its own "inner history," the "mythical" is at the same time visibly embodied as an image, just as the dialectic of Kierkegaard's spiritualism requires the embodied organic image. The production of this unity is at once natural and organic; in it the characteristics of historical facticity and ontological truth are jointly destroyed: "The mythical representation of the existence of the soul after death is not brought into relation either with a historical reflection, namely, whether it is indeed the case that Aeacus, Minos, and Rhadamantus sit in judgment, or with a philosophic reflection, namely, whether it is true. If one may characterize the dialectic corresponding to the mythical as longing and desire, as a glance that gazes upon the idea so as to desire it, then the mythical is the fruitful embrace of the Idea."31 In spite of Kierkegaard's intention, the discussion of "longing and desire" and "fruitful embrace" does not, as a detachable metaphor, demonstrate the productivity of pure spirit. To the contrary, spirituality itself is named "mythical" and the productivity of spirit natural. This is shown by a sentence whose pragmatic elements bring Kierkegaard's philosophy closer to self-consciousness than anywhere else: "One may arrive at a similar consideration of the mythical by beginning with the image. When in an age of reflection one sees the image protrude ever so slightly and unobserved into a reflective representation, and, like an antediluvian fossil, suggest another species of existence washed away by doubt, one will perhaps be amazed that the image could ever have played such an important role."32 Kierkegaard weds the "amazement" with what follows. And yet this amazement announces the deepest insight into the relation of dialectic, myth, and image. For it is not as the continuously living and present that nature prevails in the dialectic. Dialectic comes to a stop in the image and cites the mythical in the historically most recent as the distant past: nature as proto-history. For this reason the images, which like those of the intérieur bring dialectic and myth to the point of indissociation, are truly "antediluvian fossils." They may be called dialectical images, to use Benjamin's expression, whose compelling definition of "allegory" also holds true for Kierkegaard's allegorical intention as a configuration of historical dialectic and mythical nature. According to this definition "in allegory the observer is confronted with the facies hippocratiea of history, a petrified primordial landscape."33—In Kierkegaard nature is mythical as proto-history, cited in the image and concept of his historical moment. It is thus that he overtly employed the expression in the single passage, after the dissertation, in which it is still accentuated; in the interpretation of Mozart's Figaro. There he calls the page boy a "mythical figure."34 The historical costume of the page is at the same time the disguise of an ambiguously natural creature; the undefined and puzzling depth of this disguise is closely allied with that of pure spirit, whose mythical constitution cannot be denied: "Although desire in this stage is not qual-
ified as desire, although this intimating desire, so far as its object is concerned, is entirely undefined, still it has the characteristic of being infinitely deep.... It does not yet indicate a relation to the object but remains an infinite, vague longing. In harmony with the earlier description given here, we shall find it very significant that the page's part is so arranged musically that it always lies within the range of a female voice. In this contradiction, the contradictory of every stage is indicated: the desire is so indefinite, its object so minimally distinguished, that the object of desire rests androgynously within the desire, just as in plant life the male and female parts are both present in one blossom. Desire and the desired are joined in this unity, in which both parts are of a neuter gender."35 In the androgynous costume the element of semblance is present that characterizes everything in the intérieur. It is this element that Kierkegaard, in his dissertation, perceived in the Platonic myths and described with words clearly reminiscent of the intimating, obscure desire of the page boy: "As soon as consciousness appears, however, it becomes evident that these mirages—the myths—were not the Idea. If, after consciousness is awoken, the imagination again desires to return to these dreams, the mythical exhibits itself in a new form, that is, as image. . . . The mythical may well contain traditional elements, for the traditional is the lullaby as it were comprising one element of the dream."36 Yet it is most authentically mythical not in that instant—as Kierkegaard spiritualistically supposes—"where the spirit steals away, and no one knows from whence it came nor whither it goes,"37 but when the appearing image startles up what has been from the caverns of prehistory. Since, however, in the mythical image of the page "desire rests androgynously within the desire," the image also remains immanently spiritual. Immanent spirituality itself is mythical. As mythical, spirituality becomes incarnate. Thus the drastic metaphor of the seducer: "I will be your poet! I will not be a poet for others; I eat my own verse and that sustains me. Show yourself! I want to compose you."38 Thus the artist, pure spirit, is mythically raised up among the stars in the image of Saturn who eats his children. In Kierkegaard's philosophy/pure spirit therefore goes over into the ghostly, its primordial archetype. Of a "modern-tragic" figure—presumably Regine—it is said: "Her life does not unfold like that of the Greek Antigone; the direction of her development is inward, not outward; the scene is not external but internal; it is a ghastly scene. . . ."39 And the unendingly reflected seducer enters without a trace, as a phantom: "In the same way as one might say of him that his way through life left no trace (for his feet were so formed that they took their footprints with them, which is how I best picture to myself his infinite self-reflection), in that same sense one might say that his art of seduction demanded no victim."40 Where Kierkegaard recognizes the mythical character of mere spirit, he calls it demonic. This is above all true in The Concept of Anxiety. Here the immigration of mythical nature into spiritual inwardness is interpreted historically: "It is of no use to make an ogre out of the demonic, at which one first shudders but afterwards
ignores, since, after all, it is several hundred years since it was found in the world. Such an assumption is a great stupidity, but it probably has never been as widespread as in our times, except that nowadays it manifests itself especially in the spiritual spheres. The demonic, defined as "the enclosing reserve and the unfreely disclosed," originates in the delusion in which autonomous spirit imagines itself absolute: "The demonic does not close itself up with something, but it closes itself up within itself, and in this lies what is profound about existence, precisely that unfreedom makes itself a prisoner." As mythic, the demonic shatters subjectivity and becomes ontological untruth in opposition to the ontological truth of God: "The devil's despair is the most intense despair, for the devil is sheer spirit, and therefore absolute consciousness and transparency; in the devil there is no obscurity that might serve as a mitigating excuse, his despair is therefore absolute defiance." All this could just as well be said of objectless inwardness as it is said of the depraved, eschatological of the purely demonic. For only that language can lead beyond the demonic that is debarred from an inwardness that does not know a priori "whether other human beings" in the world "exist," "Enclosing reserve is precisely muteness. Language, the word, is precisely what saves, what saves the individual from the empty abstraction of enclosing reserve. Let x signify the demonic, the relation of freedom to it something outside x. The law for the manifestation of the demonic is that against its will it "comes out with it." For language does indeed imply communication with the external world, which is expressly excluded, as contingent, from inwardness. Certainly, Kierkegaard rejects any equivalence of the demonic and mythical-natural; he warns against "forgetting that unfreedom"—which he conceives as the demonic—"is a phenomenon of freedom and thus cannot be explained by naturalistic categories." He attributes the mythical interpretation of the demonic to "aesthetic-metaphysical" thought; "the notion will then come under the rubrics of misfortune, fate, etc. and can then be viewed as analogous to being mentally deranged at birth." But he is only able to separate the ideas of the demonic and fate, immemorially kindred concepts, by means of the vehement protestation of a theology for which the demonic is "free" because it takes the primordial Fall itself for an act of freedom and which escapes entanglement in fate through the "leap." However, the theological protestation does not suffice other than through sheer assertion to separate the demonic from nature—inwardness from the "mythical." —The character of the mythical in conceptual form is thus attributed to Kierkegaard's absolute inwardness as to all forms of idealism of absolute spirit. In radical idealism, the mythical-historical image of the intérieur becomes evident through philosophical self-consciousness. Hence the crude discussion of Hegel's mythology of history has a more profound justification than it imagines, though not because reality is metaphysically recast, but on the basis of the mythical content itself. "At this point Hegel's philosophy is driven inexorably into the arms of mythology." This is certainly true of the philosophies of Baader and Schelling. They did not simply absorb mythical "elements" as "material" into the philosophical structure. Rather, the origin of the structure is mythical: the tyranny of spirit, of the created that enthrones itself as creator and sinks so much deeper into nature the higher that spirit imagines itself towering above it. In the final products of the idealist spirit, the mythical content simply breaks through the cells of the systematically developed concept, where philosophical criticism has banished it, and takes possession of the old images. Along with the stability of the system, however, it destroys itself: pure spirit, called by its name, loses its power. Kierkegaard stands alongside the late idealists at this moment of historical reversal. As in their case, the crisis of the autarchic spirit is consummated as the emancipation of the mythical content. But this reversal does not lead Kierkegaard into mythical metaphysics and "positive" philosophy. The mythical content remains embedded in the immanent dialectic and is expelled by him only with the obliteration of subjectivity itself.

Dialectical Conjuration

Only the category of the mythical serves to clarify the relation of objectless inwardness to blocked ontology that, as truth, is the concern of Kierkegaard's thought. Through conjuration a mythically self-enclosed subjectivity undertakes to rescue "fundamental human relations" and their meaning, ontology. Even the seducer admits, in a mythical image, to being a sorcerer: "But you do not suspect what it is I rule over as a kingdom. It is over stormy moods. Like Aeolus ..." And conjuration is no more limited to the "aesthetic sphere" than to the poetizing metaphor. Inwardness itself conjures. "Thus in the ethical view of life, it is the task of the individual to strip himself of the qualification of interiority and to express this in something external." Thus for inwardness the external is a magical apparatus that quotes a hidden content as "expression." But the conjured content, however inward, is not inwardness itself. "The paradox of faith is that there is an interiority that is incommensurable with exteriority; an interiority that is not identical, please note, with the first but is a new interiority." This second interiority, however, with which Kierkegaard's dialectic is altogether concerned, is conjured truth. —Kierkegaard does not conceptually clarify the intention of conjuration. Its demonic character would imperil the truth claim of dialectical inwardness. But this intention becomes evident in the form of his language, and more so in the diffuseness of the aesthetic writings than in their conjuring metaphors. This diffuseness has often been noted; scarcely, however, has its relation to the philosophical content been explained. His well-known reference to the "vastness of affliction," the bad infinity of the monologue and the dialectic of pain, does not suffice. Even its explanation as Socratic love of speech supplies only his intention, not its origin; the same is true of his aversion to con-
cise formulation in the system, to which the "Expression of Gratitude to Less-
ing" gives negative proof by its praise: "This stylistic equanimity, which develops a simile in minutest detail, as if the literary expression had a value in itself, as if peace and safety reigned; and that although perhaps the printer’s devil and world-history, indeed all mankind stood waiting for him to have it finished."53 All this cannot illuminate why a philosophy that—unlike Hegel’s, or for that matter Lessing’s—dispenses with all realien, and that is obliged to develop its determinations altogether out of the mere "point" of the person, still requires the most extensive spatial extension in the form of its presentation. The law of this form is repetition; the repetition of conjuring formulas. The changeless and hidden truth is invoked as the invariable with invariable phrases out of powerlessness to posit its content positively or to deduce it progressively, but also out of the hope that truth might spring forth if the correct number of conjurations is fulfilled. The formulaic brevity of the particular corresponds precisely to the mythical repetition of the whole, just as the densely compressed and oracular propositions of The Concept of Anxiety and the founding passages of existential philosophy in the first sections of The Sickness unto Death correspond to the endless paraphrases of the ‘Passion Narrative’ and the Unscientific Postscript. Ontology, however, conjured by a mythical, autonomous will obeys only the entreaty in the form of a phantasmagoria. Fate, fortune, and misfortune are the mythical constellations of a dialectical voyage whose course is ambiguous because "on the sea of possibilities" of the mere self, "the compass itself is dialectical."

Kierkegaard’s dialectic must be termed ambiguous in the more exact sense. For as the movement of an isolated individual consciousness, whose own origins are mythical and even in its turbulence remains within the proximity of the mythical, it has two meanings. They are to be distinguished according to the form of appearance that the mythical content takes on in them. On one hand, Kierkegaard conceives of mere nature, of mythical semblance, as a peril to the individual, who, as a sinful creature, is part of it, yet in freedom exalts himself above it. Here dialectic is a process of spiritualization or, in Kierkegaard’s language, "a making transparent," that the self undertakes by the force of its own free spirit. This dialectic transpires between nature and spirit, mythical content and consciousness, as qualitatively different, strictly contrary powers; it should lay bare the entryway to reconciliation, for mythical semblance collapses in the face of spiritual splendor. The dialectic predominates throughout Kierkegaard’s explicit doctrine according to which the true self, the "freedom" of the individual, emerges from the perceived unreality of self asserting nature. But this dialectic offers only the frontal view of a second and deeper concept of dialectic that, without having been theoretically developed in the philosophy, may be objectively demonstrated in it. This concept is that of a dialectic in the mythical fundament of nature itself. It necessarily becomes the center of an interpretation that would critically expose the mythical character of what appears on stage supranaturally in Kierkegaard as spirit and freedom, i.e., objectless inwardness. In the Fragments, Kierkegaard himself cast into doubt the supranatural essence of "spirit" through the theological doctrine of the absolute transcendence of God, a doctrine that shatters every claim of the individual’s spiritual freedom: "Still less will he be able in his own strength to bring God anew over to his side."55 In that case, however, the individual is not divided into the natural and the supranatural, which struggle between themselves; rather, his natural being is dialectical in itself, and what contributes in the individual to his rescue is equally attributable to his nature as to what will ruin him. Kierkegaard’s effort to separate nature and the demonic from each other refers to the model of the dialectic of nature, an effort that obviously cannot be brought into the foreground of the predominating spiritualism. This effort is more evident in the imagery that describes the same process of becoming transparent, which consciousness is to achieve over a resisting nature, as a natural process: "My being was transparency, like the deep thought of the sea, like the self-satisfied silence of the night, like the soulilozing stillness of midday."56 While Kierkegaard spiritualistically risks the sentence "that every individual who is born is being born and becoming part of the race, a lost individual,"57 he raises, in opposition to this thought, the possibility of rescue in the dialectic of nature with the question of The Sickness unto Death: "How far complete clarity about oneself, that one is in despair, may be united with being in despair, that is, if this clarity of knowledge and self-knowledge might not avail precisely to tear a man out of his despair, to make him so terrified about himself that he would cease to be in despair,"58 The clarity of the desponent, who as spirit becomes demonically entangled in his own nature, is, however, a clarity that the mythical dialectic itself produces. In the captivity of total immanence mythical ambiguous nature is divided since it does not endure inerly, but moves dialectically, and its movement holds of nature in the depths from which it originates in order to pull it up to safety

Melancholy

Kierkegaard’s psychology of emotions portrays this movement as that of melancholy. It belongs to the intérieur to which "mood," the constellation of the factual content, binds it. Just as in the intérieur the historical image presents itself as mythical, here mere nature— the melancholic temperament—presents itself as historical. Therefore it presents itself as dialectical and as the "possibility" of reconciliation. The inner history of melancholy, just like that of subjectivity altogether, is conceived by Kierkegaard without any regard for external history. "My concern is egoistic or sympathetic melancholy. People have now been talking long enough about the frivolity of this age; I believe it is now high time to talk a little about its melancholy, and I hope that by this everything will be better clar-
ified. Or is not melancholy the ailment of our age? Is it not this that resounds even in its frivolous laughter? Is it not melancholy that had deprived us of courage to command, of courage to obey, of power to act, of the confidence necessary to hope?" 59 As an "ailment of the age," melancholy is not accidental; rather, inwardness becomes melancholic through the specific struggle with historical realien, which Kierkegaard's elaborate metaphor adequately outlines: "But the strange ideas of my melancholy I do not give up; for these humours (as a third party would perhaps sympathetically name them) lead me to the eternal certainty of the infinite."

In my loneliness therefore these ideas are dear to me, even though they terrify me; they have the utmost importance for me and teach me, instead of congratulating myself for rendering mankind blissfully peerless discoveries in the religious field, instead of this they teach me to my own abasement to discover as it were, and with endless contentment to be satisfied with the very simplest things. . . . Why is it indeed that in remote places where half a mile separates the little huts there is more godly fear than in the noisy town, that sailors have more godly fear than the inhabitants of the market town—why indeed unless on the heath, on the turbulent sea, one experiences something, and experience it in such a way that there is no escape? When at night the tempest rages and the hungry cry of the wolf howls ominously, when in peril upon the sea a man has saved himself upon a plank, that is to say, must be rescued by a straw from certain destruction: when one can save the bother of screaming because there is no human ear to hear it—then one learns to possess one's soul in patience, relying upon something else besides night watchmen and the police, the fire department and the coast guard. In the great cities both men and buildings are crowded too close together. If one is to receive a primitive impression, there must either be an event, or one must have another way, as I have in my melancholy. 60

The two ways mentioned by Kierkegaard intersect in his psychology of melancholy and constitute a crossroads, which according to ancient beliefs was the spot most propitious for conjugation. The intention of the metaphor is ontological: the "primitive impression" of that which "the original scripture of human existence" leaves behind in the individual's experience. In the refined world of the metropolis, whose inhabitants qua police and night watchmen, "functionaries" of order, are themselves things and caricatures, the truth content of scripture has been historically lost because the objectivity of the social forms no longer permits the "primitive impression." Only the primordial nature of the ship, the hut dwellers, beyond reification, with the sea and field still hold up to the individual the "original scripture." In the refined world itself, however, by its history, mythical nature is driven back into the inwardness of the individual. Inwardness is the historical prison of primordial human nature. The emotion of the trapped is melancholy. In melancholy truth presents itself, and the movement of melancholy is one toward the deliverance of lost "meaning." 61 A truly dialectical motion. For if truth presents itself in melancholy, it indeed presents itself to pure inwardness exclusively as semblance. Truth is, in the pure imagination of inwardness, comparable to the pleasure of the melancholic: "The essence of pleasure does not lie in pleasure itself, but in the accompanying consciousness." 62 As imagination, melancholy is related to insanity: in the novella A Possibility, melancholy, bewitched, becomes insanity. At the center of the novella is a magical intérieur: "This is what one saw in the street; but whosoever entered his room might marvel still more. One frequently gets an entirely different impression of a person seeing him in his home and in his chamber than when one sees him elsewhere. And this is not only true of magicians, alchemists and astrologers . . . mythic figures . . . like Dapsul von Zabelthau, who on the street looks like other people, but seated in his observatory has a high peaked cap on his head, a mantle of gray callimanco, a long white beard, and talks with a disguised voice so that his own daughter cannot recognize him but takes him for a bugaboo." 63 The insanity of the bookkeeper, who essays magically through recollection to conjure up out of his distant past the "possibility" that a child of his own exists, is such an intérieur. In the conjuration, however, contingent reality and inwardness are severed: "The outward pallor is, as it were, the parting salutation of the inner excitement; and imagination and thought hasten after the fugitive emotion to where it conceals itself in its secret hiding place." 64 This palpit light is that of semblance as it draws the isolated melancholic to his mythical origin, Thus Kierkegaard combines the isolation of inward, pure nature and semblance in the metaphor of the echo: "If you stand face to face with nothingness, your soul may be calm, yea, attuned to sadness, by the sound of the echo of your sadness reverberating back to you. To hear an echo one must face emptiness." 65 And the inutility quality of melancholy does not remain merely metaphorical in his work. The theory itself testifies to this quality: "Thus it is in the nature of melancholy to be deceitful." 66 As semblance, however, mythical melancholy is not depraved but dialectical in itself. "Providence" is concealed in it. Providence "endows an individual with uncommon powers of dealing with reality. But then, says providence, 'lest he occasion too much harm I have confined this power in melancholy and thereby hide it from him.'—just as 'truth' itself, according to Kierkegaard, is hidden from inwardness. 'What he is capable of he shall never learn to know; but I want to make use of him. He shall not be humbled by any reality, to that extent he is treated with more partiality than other men, but in himself he shall feel shattered such as has no other man. Then and only then shall he understand me, but then he shall also be certain that it is I he understands.' 66 Thus truth subordinates itself to melancholic semblance through semblance's own dialectic. In its semblance melancholy is dialectically, the image of another. Precisely this is the origin of the allegorical character of Kierkegaard's melancholy. In the face of melancholy, nature becomes allegorical: "Who, unless it were a madman, has ever beheld a young girl without a certain sense of sadness, without being most poignantly reminded by her sweetness of the fragil-
ity of earthly life.” 67 So asks William, reminiscing perhaps on Matthias Claudius's allegory of death and the maiden. The image of the maiden in her youth signifies precisely transience. Melancholy itself, however, is the historical spirit in its natural depth and therefore, in the images of its corporeity, it is the central allegory. Like Hermes, who led the dead with his stave, “melancholy must have led” him who is imprisoned in inwardsness “through the previous stages.”68 And melancholy’s saturnine lineage is cited in the discussion: “What is sickness? Melancholy. Where is the seat of this sickness? In the power of imagination: and it feeds on possibility.”69 If in the absolute break between inner and outer that is sealed only in the physical depth of emotion the fault lines of Kierkegaard’s philosophy are reminiscent of Descartes, the allegorical intention fully testifies to an objective affinity to the Baroque. This allegorical intention could better establish the similarities between Kierkegaard and Pascal than a philosophical attitude that hopes to be able to eavesdrop through the centuries on conversations between Augustin, the Jansenist Catholic and the idealist Protestant, the lonely believer.

Baroque

Kierkegaard occasionally refers to himself as “the Baroque thinker,”70 obviously playing on a comment made about him by one of his contemporaries, without realizing how much in fact his pragmatic impulses correspond to those of the literary Baroque. With the literary Baroque, he shares the condition of closed immanence71 no less than the allegorical conjuration of lost ontological contents. Like flotsam on an island, scraps of long forgotten figures of Baroque drama—known to him in the original only through Shakespeare, to the degree that he is counted among the Baroque—are washed up on his philosophical landscape. The constituent elements of Baroque drama, which Benjamin exposed through its idea in the Origin of the German Play of Lamentation, appear fully assembled in the cave of his philosophy. The tyrant makes his appearance as a mythical-historical person: now called Nero,72 now Periander,73 now Nebuchadnezer;74 the last named being a fully remote allegorical motive of the melancholic person as beast, a figure found in the works of the Baroque German dramatist Hunold.75 Kierkegaard himself identified with the dialectical counterimage of the tyrant, the martyr, whose concept so thoroughly rules his later theology that in his final polemic Martensen, with justice, accused Kierkegaard of simply equating the “witness of truth” with the “martyr.” Baroque intriguers are to be found not only in the tales of seduction, but also in the separation of Quidam from his love with whom he, like Hamlet, plays the part of the fool. The dialectic of melancholy leads to a complex casuistry of and apology for intrigue in the presentations of the “indirect method” in the Unscientific Postscript and The Point of View for

My Work as an Author. As in the Baroque, melancholy and disguise are inseparable: “This proportion—the equally great magnitude of melancholy and the art of disguise—indicates that I was relegated to myself and to a relation with God”;76 and at the same time the isolation of objectless inwardsness shows signs of the Baroque isolation of the creature in worldly immanence. Kierkegaard’s philosophy is even invested with the dreaded insignia of the Baroque spirit: pomposity and cruelty. Allegorical images are amassed: “Every woman has her share: the merry smile, the roguish glance, the wistful eye, the pensive head, the exuberant spirits, the quiet sadness, the deep foreboding, brooding melancholy”—and the center point of the imagery—“the earthly homesickness; the inexplicable emotions”77 thus it continues on with ever fresh variations. Baroque cruelty characterizes Kierkegaard in the “Diapsalmata” of the magician Vigilius and the oven of Phalaris; in the presentation of the schizophrenic Periander; but also in the character of the “Passion Narrative,” whose name does not actually cite the Passion; here melancholy, as the self’s spiritual body, is harrowingly divided up into its affective impulses as though they were its limbs. The only other arena besides the intérieur that is acceptable to Kierkegaard’s philosophy (the streets of the flaneur are unrecognizably foreshortened in the mirror) is the Baroque graveyard. “Everyone is asleep; the only dead rise at this hour from the grave revived. But I, I am not dead, and so I cannot be revived; and if I were dead, I could not be revived for indeed I have never lived.”78 Or again, exactly like the opening scene of a Baroque drama, copied—perhaps intentionally—right down to the details of its diction: “A Leper’s Soliloquy. The scene is among the graves at dawn, Simon Lebrous is sitting on a tombstone, he has fallen asleep, he wakes and cries out: Simon! Yes! Simon! Yes, who is calling?... Where are you, Simon?... Here. With whom are you speaking?... With you, Simon! You faithful! You plague! You loathsome thing! Out of my way! Fly! To your home, the tomb!... Why am I the only one who is unable to speak thusly to myself?”79 All of these characteristics, barely appraised in their continuity, surround the image of the melancholic, the dead, and the mourning. The evidence of literary influence does not lead far. Kierkegaard certainly knew nothing of Lohenstein and Gryphius, and whether even Calderon was known to him seems questionable since, given the affinity of intentions in his—indeed Baroque—pleasure in cultured citations, he would doubtlessly have made mention of him. Kierkegaard, furthermore, accepted the conventional argument against allegory, as is evident in a critical excursus on the text of the “Magic Flute”: “The speeches, for which either Schikaneder or the Danish translator is responsible, are in general so crazy and stupid that it is almost inconceivable how Mozart has brought as much out of them as he has. To let Papageno say of himself, ‘I am a child of Nature,’ and so in that very moment make himself a liar, may be regarded as an example instar omnium.”80 But Papageno, whom Kierkegaard called—as he did the page boy—mythical, is an alle-
and the incriminated sentence is not so much an individual's inept expression as it is the interpretative caption under the image of a feather-cloaked bird catcher, which has endured to the present in the "entrance aria" of operettas. Kierkegaard never reflected theoretically on the profundity of allegory. Its power is to be assessed as all the greater in an oeuvre whose most hidden impulses consistently demonstrate the same intention that the oeuvre would have to condemn according to the categories of the idealist aesthetics that it proclaims in its manifest doctrine. This power must inhabit the very center of Kierkegaard's philosophy. If his philosophy, unintentionally and without any substantial knowledge of the appropriate literature, produces not only allegorical forms of meaning but allegorical material contents right down to the choice of personal names, then this may demonstrate that fundamental connections between historically emerging philosophies are not established by "mental structures" and categories, but by pragmatic elements that serve prototypically as the fundaments of the conceptual expressions and once again burst forth as soon as the objective constellation of the thought draws them near, whether or not the thought corresponds with the philosophical intention. According to its cultural-historical genesis, Kierkegaard's Baroque is anachronistic; yet it is historically consistent according to the law of mythical inwardness, whose labyrinth the "solitary person" traverses; an inwardness that is inseparable from its historical-natural imagery. Through melancholy, inwardness conjures the semblance of truth to the point that melancholy itself becomes transparent as semblance; to the point, that is, that melancholy is wiped out and at the same time rescued; melancholy conjures images, and these stand ready for it in history as enigmatic figures. It is not by accident that these images are all attributable to the region of a long past aesthetic figurativeness. It is, however, toward this topography that all of the disparate definitions that Kierkegaard conceives under the name of the aesthetic are directed.

Paradoxies of the Aesthetic

"Carking care is my feudal castle. It is built like an eagle's nest upon the peak of a mountain lost in the clouds. No one can take it by storm. From this abode I dart down into the world of reality to seize my prey; but I do not remain down there, I bear my quarry aloft to my stronghold. My booty is images that I weave into the tapestries of my palace. There I live like one of the dead. I immerse everything I have experienced in a baptism of forgetfulness, consecrating it to an eternal remembrance. Everything temporal and contingent is cast-off and forgotten. Then I sit, an old man, grey-haired and thoughtful, and explain picture after picture in a voice as soft as a whisper; and at my side a child sits and listens, although he long knows everything that I have to say." While this definition of the aesthetic, itself pictorial and certainly the most precise that Kierkegaard gave, attempts to derive the mythical pictorial content of his philosophy from an aesthetic worldview, it would be better to seek the origin of what he calls aesthetic in the mythical substrate itself. Inwardness indeed conjures up the images, but it is not simply identical with it, and nothing divulges the mythical character of its absolute spirituality more precisely than the pictorial character of its "booty." What Kierkegaard critically recognized in the modern reinterpretation of the idea of the tragic holds good for his own concept of aesthetic inwardness: "It is certainly a misunderstanding of the tragic, when our age strives to transubstantiate the whole tragic destiny into individuality and subjectivity." It is precisely in this fashion that Kierkegaard's doctrine of subjective aesthetic comportment misunderstands its mythical content. The tragic, as an aesthetic category, is defined—according to Kierkegaard's own insight—by fate and establishes the counterimage to every subjective dynamic. This is, however, precisely the case with the objects encompassed by Kierkegaard's concept of the aesthetic. For this reason, aesthetic behavior is more legitimately defined by him as that of the viewer than it is located in his "ethical" view of the aesthetic: "And now for you own life. Has that its teleology in itself? Whether a man is justified in leading the life of mere spectator I will not decide. But let us assume that the significance of your life is to contemplate others, then after all you would not have your teleology in yourself. Only when every particular man is an element and at the same time the whole can he be regarded with a view to his beauty; but when he is regarded thus he is regarded ethically, and if he is regarded ethically, he is regarded in terms of his freedom." For to objectless inwardness, as to a "spectator," truth appears as a strange and enigmatic drama even when he tries to assure himself of it through introspection. The fissure that separates truth from inwardness, to which truth appears as mere semblance, defines the shape of truth itself. Hence the friable ambiguity of the term "aesthetic" in Kierkegaard; hence the discontinuity of the aesthetic itself, which he recognizes from the perspective of the "ethical": "For about that you could not enlighten him, precisely because you yourself are enmeshed in the aesthetic; only he can explain the aesthetic who stands on a higher level and lives ethically. . . . The reason why the man who lives aesthetically can give no satisfactory explanation of his life, is that he constantly lives in the moment, and therefore has only a relative, limited consciousness. . . . The intellectual gifts of the aesthete are enslaved; transparency is lacking to them. . . . You are constantly only in the moment, and therefore your life dissolves into arbitrary particular occurrence, and it is impossible for you to explain it." With the historical break between inner and outer, with the collapse of "totality," the mythical essence of the aesthetic image expresses itself at the same time as discontinuity. The aesthetic region is ambiguous and no more knows the sharp distinction of the individual than the nexus of the whole. Faithless, the aesthetic has fallen to the mercy of nature, and drags in whom ever.
it encounters: "Of all the branches of knowledge, aesthetics is the most faithless. Anyone who has really loved it becomes in one sense unhappy, but he who has never loved it is and remains a pecus [dumb brute]." This defines the peculiar danger of the "poet" in the Moment. "Precisely for this reason is the poet, from a spiritual perspective, the most dangerous, because man loves the poet above all, because he is the most dangerous. For it is an ordinary accomplishment of illness to desire most vehemently, to love most of all, precisely that which is injurious to the sick man. But, spiritually understood, man in his natural condition is sick, he is in error, self-deluded, and therefore desires most of all to be deceived, so that he may be permitted not only to remain in error but to find himself thoroughly comfortable in his self-deceit." The poet as the merely natural man: it is as such that absolute spirituality perceives its own mythical origin. The paradox is clearly evident in Kierkegaard's outline of the aesthetic: "the aesthetic" is indeed the sphere of mere immediacy; yet it should be dialectical in itself and lead to precisely that decisiveness that is denied only to aesthetic life: "The aesthetic is that in a man whereby he immediately is the man he is; the ethical is that whereby a man becomes what he becomes. . . . If, then, he has the aesthetic seriousness you talk about so often and a little worldly wisdom, he will easily see that all cannot possibly thrive equally; hence he will choose, and what determines his choice is a more or less, which is a relative difference." Kierkegaard occasionally claimed the dialectic that originates here as the schema of his entire authorial project: "The movement from the 'poet' to religious existence is fundamentally the movement of my whole activity as an author, understood in its totality. One may compare The Works of Love, with regard to the use which again is made of 'the poet' as terminus a quo for Christian religious existence. The movement away from the philosophical, the systematic, to the simple, i.e., the existential, is essentially the same movement as from the poet to religious existence, only in different terms." As a dialectical "stage," therefore, the concept of the aesthetic is pushed into definitive opposition to "existence." The objective images and the subjective modes of behavior, whose mythical illosioriness is exposed by the plan of his own philosophy, are, for Kierkegaard, aesthetic. In his philosophy, however, this insight into the mythical origin does not apply to the form of objective inwardsness itself. Thus, although the spell of the "aesthetic" in Kierkegaard indeed covers the ruins of the immediate external world, which is jettisoned from inwardsness as contingent; and, although this spell covers as well the ruins of a transsubjective "meaning," which he fends off as a romantic, metaphorical fraud; it does not extend to the movements of the illusory internality that are unhesitatingly appealed to, even in the Passion Narrative, as movements toward positive religiosity. This exposes the central antinomy in Kierkegaard's concept of the aesthetic. Where his philosophy, in the self-consciousness of its mythical semblance, encounters "aesthetic" characteristics, it comes closest to reality: to the reality of its own condition of objectless inwardness as well as that of the estrangement of things in regard to itself. Kierkegaard nowhere saw social reality in sharper outline than in an "aesthetic" diapsalm that he measured not according to the objects that it indicates but according to a "deportment" and therefore, spurning it, ranged it among the fragments of semblance, even though it originates not so much from an indecisive consciousness as it portrays the semblance of the situation itself: "In the last analysis, what is the significance of life? Mankind is divided into two great classes: one works for a living, the other does not need to. But working in order to live cannot be the significance of life. For it would be a contradiction to say that the production of the conditions of life somehow answers the question of the significance of what is conditioned. The lives of the other class have no other significance than that they consume the conditions of subsistence. And to say that the significance of life is death, seems again a contradiction." When his philosophy—in the name of existence—takes objectless inwardsness and mythical conjuration as substantial reality, it capitulates to the semblance that it rejects in the depths of oblivion. Simplicity, which illuminates thought from the remoteness of the images like the star of reconciliation, burns in the abyss of inwardsness as an all-consuming fire. It is to be sought out and named in this abyss, if the hope that it radiates is not to be forfeited by knowledge.
solved by the fulfilling gesture of the girl who holds true to nature till the end. In sacrificial renunciation, however, the merman becomes "demonic": he falls silent. His silence binds him to mere nature. Thus Kierkegaard himself understood it: "We shall now give the merman a human consciousness and let his being a merman signify a human preexistence, in consequence of which his life was entrapped. There is nothing to hinder his becoming a hero, for the step he now takes is reconciling. He is saved by Agnes; the seducer is crushed, he has submitted to the power of innocence, he can never seduce again. But immediately, two forces struggle over him: repentance, Agnes and repentance. If repentance alone gets him, then he is hidden; if Agnes and repentance get him, then he is disclosed."56 In scarcely another passage is Kierkegaard's idealism of objectless inwardness more self-evidently mythical than here where he holds up to himself the image of reconciliation. Objectless inwardness must silently endure, like the refractory natural demon. The sole organ of reconciliation, however, is the word. "Meanwhile, there is no doubt that the merman can speak";57 this speech, as "the disclosed," would draw him out of mythology, to which he is banned by his silence—the archaic silence of his unmediated natural existence as well as the dialectical silence of "repentance" shut within itself and sacrificially annihilating itself without ever finding the reconciling word. The "merman" is truly the "preexistence" of Kierkegaardian inwardness; in silence its dialectical sacrifice reveals itself as archaic. This confirms his idealism as the historical figure of the mythical. Where, however, nature—free of resignation—perseveres as desirous instinct and eloquent consciousness, it is able to survive, whereas in sacrifice nature succumbs to itself; nature, which truly cannot be driven out with a pitchfork and returns until genius is reconciled with it.

Chapter 7
Construction of the Aesthetic

Crisis of Melancholy

"Just as man—by nature—desires what is able to sustain and revive the lust of life, so does he who is to live for the eternal need constantly a dose of pessimism, so that he should not dote upon this wretched world, but rather learn loathing and weariness of and disgust at its foolishness and lies."

What is stylized so punitively in The Instant that it seems to be an old-fashioned quotation from a sermon of repentance nevertheless contains the richest dialectic in the form of a summary thesis, and betrays it dialectically. In Kierkegaard's philosophy passion and sacrifice originate in melancholy as their natural source in order to extinguish nature itself in melancholy as in the spiritual body. Yet nature is not dissolved in the passion of its annihilation; melancholy accompanies Kierkegaard as a "mediating" element through all stages, before sacrificing itself in the point. For this reason melancholy is still to be found in his later writings, where one would think it would be overcome by a polemical-paradoxical Christianity. Melancholy, fragmented, has nonetheless survived the ruin that, as a whole, it earlier visited upon its own totality. What remains, however, is divided like the despair that with the sudden shock of the sickness unto death breaks through the foundation of subjectivity, polarizing itself objectively into judgment and grace. Mythical self-assertion through melancholy is anathematized: "Aye, let the storm break forth in still greater violence, making an end of life, and of the world, and of this brief speech, which has at least the advantage over all things else, that it is soon ended? Let that wild vortex, which is the inmost principle of the world, although
this escapes the attention of men, who eat and drink and marry and increase in heedless preoccupation—let it break forth, I say, and in pent-up resentment sweep away the mountains and the nations and the achievements of culture and the cunning inventions of mankind, let it break forth with the last terrible shriek which more surely than the trump of doom proclaims the destruction of everything; let it move, and moving whirl along this naked cliff on which we stand, as lightly as thistledown before the breath of our nostrils!”

Thus melancholy is concentrated in the image of catastrophe as the extreme limit of its potential. "Herein consists also the significance of his melancholy. Its nature is the concentration of possibility," and "the most perfect mockery of the world would have to become earnestness" in the presence of this image. Sacrifice is powerless in this situation; rather, melancholy breaks down before the reality of judgment: "It appears to me that there is something infinitely disconsolating in such an isolation, and I cannot help thinking how dreadful it is when a man awakes to another life on the Day of Judgment and again stands there quite alone."

The demonic possibility, however, is that of total, defiant self-assertion. Shattered melancholy means something quite different. Its ruins are the ciphers on which Kierkegaard reflects, and hope is integral to the absurdity of its desire. The order of the spheres is inverted. There where Kierkegaard supposes only the discontinuity and contingency of total melancholy, the natural impulse, even if denied fulfillment, clings to the names of its objects; in his philosophy hope nowhere insists more stubbornly than in the aesthetic "Diapsalmata," whose fragmenna-ness, according to Kierkegaard's hierarchy of spheres, results from the incapacity of the aesthetic to achieve continuity. Thus in a melancholy reminiscence on a child named Louis: "How true human nature is to itself. With what native genius does not a little child often show us a living image of the adult world. Today I really enjoyed watching little Louis. He sat in his little chair; he looked about him with obvious pleasure. The nurse Mary went through the room. 'Mary,' he cried. 'yes, little Louis,' she answered with her usual friendliness, and came to him. He tipped his head a little to one side, fastened his immense eyes upon her with a certain gleam of mischief in them, and thereupon said quite phlegmatically, 'Not this Mary, another Mary.' What do we older folks do? We cry out to the whole world, and when it comes smiling to meet us, then we say: 'Not this Mary.'"

Kierkegaard's commentary helplessly misses the point of his own narrative. It is not hopelessness in the autonomous, infinite wish, but hope in the finite that is described; a hope that is frustrated in the factual world, in the 'milieu,' by this girl and no other but which still, utopian and concretely, grasps in the name what is denied to it by the world of alienated objects. For this reason, the child does not appear as a banally ironic image of "the adult world" in the vain reduction of a melancholy retrospective. Rather, the impulse of his impatience is mournful; an impulse that, to be fulfilled, should not be sacrificed to reality through "decisiveness," but nourished dialectically. The motives of the

"Diapsalmata" may, in terms of literary history, have their origins in romanticism. Yet they are distinguished from the romantic just as much as by the distinctness of their definition as by the strict impossibility of their fulfillment, an impossibility whose figure defines the form of hope in Kierkegaard's work. Thus, in the name, even an observation that starts off fully romantic becomes true to the finite, but displaced wish: "The tremendous poetic vigor of folk literature expresses itself, among other ways, in the strength to desire. The desires of our age are in comparison with these both sinful and dull, since we desire what belongs to our neighbor. The characters in folk literature are very well aware that the neighbor as little possesses what they are seeking as they themselves do. And when they do indulge in sinful desire, it is so terrible as to cause men to tremble. This desire does not allow itself to be cheapened by the cool calculation of probabilities of sober reason. Don Juan still struts across the stage with his 1,003 mistresses. No one dares to smile, out of respect for the venerable tradition. If a poet were to venture the like in our age, he would be hooted off the stage." Kierkegaard has found the formula for what here exceeds the impulse to restore lost immediacy and fullness of life: "My soul has lost its potentiality. If I were to wish for anything, I should not wish for wealth and power, but for the passionate sense of the potential, for the eye which, ever young and ardent, ever sees the possible." Such "potentiality" is not so much a mirage of what has been lost as an unfulfilled, thin, prophetic, but nevertheless exact schema of what is to be. It is, however, the schema of that truth to which Kierkegaard's question of origin is directed; that enciphered and distorted truth that, while autonomous subjectivity cannot create it, melancholic subjectivity is indeed able to read it. In this figure melancholy brings home what existence destroyed. In contradiction to the superficial intention of systematic completeness, the "Diapsalmata" work toward the "original script of human existence." Nowhere are their metaphors more powerful than here: "I am as shrunken as a Hebrew shewa, weak and silent as a daghesh leyn; I feel like a letter printed backward in the line, and yet as un governable as a three-tailed Passha, as jealous for myself and my thoughts as a bank for its notes, and as generally introverted as any pronomen reflexivum. If only it were true of misfortunes and sorrows as it is of conscious good works that they who do them have their reward taken away—if this held true of sorrow, then were I the happiest of men: for I take all my troubles in advance, and yet they all remain behind." It is perhaps not by accident that the metaphor chooses Hebrew letters, the signs of a language that theologically makes the claim to being the true language. Theological truth, however—and here, beyond the paradoxical sacrifice, Kierkegaard's own ontological position presumably lies—is guaranteed precisely by its encipherment and distortedness; the "collapse" of fundamental human relations reveals itself as the history of truth itself. This is shown, totally against Kierkegaard's own intention and therefore all the more convincingly, in a passage of an essay on Marie Beaumarchais; script appears as a model of despair, only to
transform itself, gently, into a model of hope: “And thus she will pass her time until at last she has consumed the object of her grief which was not the cause of her grief, but the occasion through which she always sought an object for her grief. If a man possessed a letter which he knew, or believed, contained information bearing upon what he must regard as his life’s happiness, but the writing was pale and fine, almost illegible—then he would read it with restless anxiety and with all possible passion, in one moment getting one meaning, in the next another, depending on his belief that, having made out one word with certainty, he could interpret the rest thereby; but he would never arrive at anything except the same uncertainty with which he began. He would stare more and more anxiously, but the more he stared, the less he would see. His eyes would sometimes fill with tears; but the oftener this happened the less he would see. In the course of time, the writing would become fainter and more illegible, until at last the paper itself would crumble away, and nothing would be left to him except the tears in his eyes.”

Endless, useless reading should represent the empty infinity of the reflection of the “aesthetic” (in this case the immediately loving individual; reflection that, according to the doctrine of the system of spheres, can be broken only by “decisiveness.”) Yet no truer image of hope can be imagined than that of ciphers, readable as traces, dissolving in history, disappearing in front of overflowing eyes, indeed confirmed in lamentation. In these tears of despair the ciphers appear as incandescent figures, dialectically, as compassion, comfort, and hope. Dialectical melancholy does not mourn vanished happiness; it knows that it is unreachable. But it knows also of the promise that conjoins the unreachable, precisely in its origin, with the wish: “Never have I been happy; and yet it has always seemed as if happiness were in my train, as if glad genii danced about me, invisible to others but not to me, whose eyes gleamed with joy.”

Such hope rejects all mythical deception, all claim to having once existed, by this never: it is promised as unattainable; whereas, if it were directly asserted as reality, it would regress to the mythological and phantasmagorical, surrendering itself to the lost and past. For the true desire of melancholy is nourished on the idea of an eternal happiness without sacrifice, which it still could never adequately indicate as its object. Although the wish that follows this aim is unfulfillable and yet full of hope, it originates in its aim, and just as it circles around happiness, the wish circles, fulfilled, in happiness itself. Accordingly, in Kierkegaard homesickness for happiness answers the disguised utopian wish as the eschatological rescue of his gnosis: “The trick would be to feel homesick notwithstanding one is at home. Expertness in the use of illusion is requisite for this.” Here illusion is located in the unreachable figure of hope as in homesickness at home. As the desire for happiness, however, illusion has its content not in the infinite, but in a finiteness that, as a dividing wall, saves body and name better than the open horizon of thought in which they drift away. Thus in the psalm concerning the roast, pragmatism goes farther than Kierkegaard’s romantic irony gives it credit for: “One must be very naive to believe that it will do any good to cry out and shout in the world, as if that would change one’s fate. Better take things as they come, and make no fuss. When I was young and went into a restaurant, I would say to the waiter, ‘A good cut, a very good cut, from the loin, and not too fat.’ Perhaps the waiter did not even hear me, to say nothing of paying any attention to my request, and still less was it likely that my voice should reach the kitchen and influence the cook, and even if it did, there was perhaps not a good cut on the entire roast. Now I never shout any more.”

Happiness would taste like this precisely described piece of meat; the former is as unreachable in the hierarchy of significations as is the latter in a shabby restaurant. Reification is as inimical to happiness as the bad organization of the inn is to the roast, and it is promised just as certainly as the roast in its smell.

Passing Away of Existence

Nature and reconciliation communicate in melancholy: from it the “wish” arises dialectically, and its illusion is the reflection of hope. It is illusion because not happiness itself but only its images are given to the wish and in them the wish, which is nourished by them, is at the same time filled with longing because, according to Kierkegaard, the eye, the organ of the wish, “is most difficult to satisfy.” This insatiability is aesthetic. What crumbles into disparate, incommensurable definitions of the aesthetic in the face of the claim to power of his systematic idealism, what is irreducible to the spontaneous core of subjectivity, crystallizes however irregularly, yet coherently, under the gaze of melancholy. The sphere of the aesthetic, which Kierkegaard, employing the categories of his paradoxical system of existence, divides up into a traditional doctrine of art, the sensual immediacy of existence, the speculative deception of objective metaphysics, and the subjective how of communication—just to be able to discard it as discontinuous; this sphere, painfully furrowed by a subjectivity that leaves its traces behind in it without ever mastering it, receives its structure from images that are present for the wish, without having been produced by it, for the wish itself originates in them. This realm of images constitutes the absolute opposite of the traditional Platonic realm. It is not eternal, but historical-dialectical; it does not lie in perfect transcendence beyond nature, but dissolves darkly into nature; it is not imageless truth, but promises paradoxically unreachable truth in opposition to its semblance; it does not open itself to Eros, but shines forth in the moment of collapse—in the historical collapse of the mythical unity of unmediated existence; in the mythical dissociation of the historically existing individual.

The figures that assemble themselves at this point carry marks of a suffocating objectless inwardness. Kierkegaard leaves no doubt that the origin of their luminosity is putrefaction; they often remain behind as monuments of a withered and
alienated nature. But no matter how far behind, they are ahead of the living. Kierkegaard understood this better as a "psychologist" than as a systematizer of existence: "In every man there is a talent, understanding. And every man, the most knowing and the most limited, is in his knowing far ahead of what he is in his life, of what his life expresses." By this lead of knowledge over existence, the knowing subject participates in truth through semblance, a participation which imageless existence, in its empty depth, never achieves. For the trace of truth becomes accessible to the wish that perseveres in the face of the merely existent; if the existent were cast off as contingent, the existence of inwardness would not offer truth, for inwardness knows no truth beyond its own life. Before the trace of truth, however, mere existence passes away. What Kierkegaard says polemically of speculative reason, which usurps the intellectus archetypus, characterizes positively that "aesthetic" deportment that asserts itself in spite of his doctrine of existence: "But for the speculative philosopher the question of his personal eternal happiness cannot arise precisely because his task consists in getting more and more away from himself so as to become objective, thus vanishing from himself and becoming what might be called the contemplative energy of philosophy itself." Thus the autonomous self would have to "vanish" into truth, whose trace reaches the self by aesthetic semblance in the ephemeral images of which the self's mighty spontaneity is powerless. If the expansive self in its full dimension is lost in sacrifice, it survives in its transience by making itself small. It survives in its empty depth, never achieves. 

The same is true of the moralist: "They who carry the treasure of faith are likely to disappoint, for externally they have a striking resemblance to bourgeois philistinism, which infinite resignation, like faith, deeply disdains." Kierkegaard describes the believer, who resembles the philistine, not as one who lives the good life, immediately in his humble station, but as a fleeting, unimposing figure: "The instant I lay eyes on him, I set him apart at once; I jump back, clap my hands, and say half aloud, 'Good Lord, is this the man, is this really the one—he looks just like a tax collector!' But this is indeed the one. I move a little closer to him, watch his slightest movement to see if it reveals a bit of heterogeneous optical telegraphy from the infinite, a glance, a facial expression, a gesture, a dress, a smile that would betray the infinite in its heterogeneity with the finite. No! I examine his figure from top to toe to see if there may not be a crack through which the infinite would peak. No! He is solid all the way through." This is not a sacrificial figure, nor a bourgeois "moralist" of the everyday realm of obligation, marriage, and well-ordered activity. His origin is to be found rather in traditions: those of the wise man who is unrecognized and hidden from himself; in the saint whose mortal being disappears imperceptibly. The "telegraphy from the finite," a missive of judgment in The Sickness unto Death, is for him the secret communion of grace. It is his ability "to express the sublime absolutely in the pedestrian . . . the one and only marvel," and he performs it. The subjective astrology of the spheres is powerless; neither the freely choosing self nor its sacrifice in the paradox has any power over it. Settled in the discarded precipitate of the aesthetic—insignificant, cast off, but enduring—is that which the patheos of total subjectivity conjured in vain." Then I lay at your side and vanished from myself in the immensity of the sky above and forgot myself in your soothing murmur! You, my happier self, you fleeting life that lives in the brook running past my father's farm, where I lie stretched out as if my body were an abandoned hiking stick, but I am rescued and released in the plaintive purling!—Thus did I lie in my theater box. This speculative image of passing away and salvation is concealed, almost irresponsibly, behind the theory of farce found in Repetition, which it follows; a theory in which not only Kierkegaard's doctrine of art, but his entire systematics of the concept of existence disintegrates: "Every general aesthetic category runs aground on farce; nor does farce succeed in producing a uniformity of mood in the more cultured audience. Because its impact depends largely on self-activity and the viewer's improvisation, the particular individuality comes to assert himself in a very individual way and in his enjoyment is emancipated from all aesthetic obligations to admire, to laugh, to be moved, etc. in the traditional way. For a cultured person, seeing a farce is similar to playing the lottery; except that one does not have the annoyance of winning money. But that kind of uncertainty will not do for the general theater-going public, which therefore ignores farce or snobbishly disdains it, all the worse for itself. A proper theater public generally has a certain restricted eagerness; it wishes to be—or at least fancies that it is—ennobled and educated in the theater. It wishes to have had—or at least fancies that it has had—a rare artistic enjoyment; it wishes, as soon as it has read the poster, to be able to know in advance what is going to happen that evening. Such unanimity cannot be found at a farce, for the same farce can produce very different impressions, and, strangely enough, it may so happen that the one time it made the least impression it was performed best. . . . The otherwise so reassuring mutual respect between theater and audience is suspended. Seeing a farce can produce the most unpredictable mood, and therefore a person can never be sure whether he has conducted himself in the theater as a worthy member of society who has laughed and cried at the appropriate places. One cannot, as a conscientious spectator does, admire the fine character portrayal that a dramatic performance is supposed to have, for in a farce all of the characters are portrayed according to the abstract criterion "in general." Situation, action, the lines—everything is according to this criterion. Therefore one can just as well be made sad as ecstatic from laughter." The spontaneous intervention of the viewer in the work, which supposedly defines farce as a form, only apparently has its origin in the principle of autocratic subjectivism. For this intervention is directed against the unity of the aesthetic object, a unity that itself tes-
tifies to the unity of subjective synthesis. It is enacted against the unity of the aesthetic object in momentary impulses that remain as incommensurable one to the other as laughter and sadness vis-à-vis the farce: they are responses to the alternation of images—‘situations’—in which ‘in general’ the existence of the dramatis persona, as of the existing person, disappear. What Kierkegaard takes the license to say about the anarchy of farce could itself be dangerous to the hierarchy of spheres and challenges it, if only “aesthetically,” in the critique of the tragic: “Does the light-armed comedy hasten past the ethical to the unconcerned position of metaphysics? Does it want only to arouse laughter by making the contradiction manifest? And does tragedy on the other hand, heavy-armed as it is, remain mired in the ethical difficulty so that though the idea triumphs the hero is destroyed? placing the auditor in a rather discouraging position? For if he would like to be a hero, he must succumb without grace; and if he has no reason to fear for his life, since it is only heroes who must die, this is also bitter enough.”

The tragic is, however, in every instance the presentation of a sacrifice, and Kierkegaard’s critique of the hero’s fall did not need to become speechless at the sight of the victim. For this reason, he occasionally defends the “aesthetic” against the “religious” earnestness that indeed alone draws the conclusions from sacrificial paradoxicalness: “In practice there is nothing more ludicrous than to see religious categories employed with profound and stupid earnestness where one ought to employ aesthetic categories with humor and jest.”

The limitation of existential and religious “earnestness” makes room for those sympathies with materialist authors. This sympathy cannot be adequately explained by enmity toward Hegel or by the general structure of Kierkegaard’s “dialectical” thought, for they are opposed to the predominant intention of this dialectic and are only able to intervene in the fissures of existential doctrine: “Writers such as Boerne, Heine, Feuerbach, etc., have great interest for an experimenter. They are for the most part very thoroughly informed about the religious, i.e. they know definitely that they want to have nothing to do with it. This is a great advantage over the ‘systematic’ writers who, without knowing in what the religious properly consists, undertake to explain it, at one moment deferentially, at another superciliously, but always incompetently. An unhappy, a jealous lover can know about love as well as a happy one, and so too one who is offended at the religious can in his way know about the religious just as well as the believers. Therefore, since our age furnishes few examples of men who in a great sense are believers, one has reason to be glad that there are some right clever men who are scandalized at religion.”

They are scandalized on account of a wish that does not accommodate itself to sacrifice and rises in the collapse of existence, becoming luminous as it passes away: “If you have nothing else to say but that this is not to be endured, then you will have to look about for a better world.” Not the hubris of grandeur with which the ‘moralist’ so scornfully reproaches the “aesthete,” but rather the reverse of the hubris of greatness is his best attribute. It is the cell of a materialism whose vision is focused on “a better world”—not to forget in dreams the present world, but to change it by the strength of an image that indeed may be as a whole “portrayed according to the abstract criterion ‘in general’ whose contours are concretely and unequivocally filled in every particular dialectical element.

Images and Spheres

The quintessence of such images is Kierkegaard’s “aesthetic sphere.” Its unity is based on its contents and not on the manner of its subjective constitution. It is the region of dialectical semblance, in which truth is promised historically through the collapse of existence, whereas the “ethical” and “religious” spheres, on the contrary, remain those of subjective, sacrificial conjugation, forfeiting hope with the abnegation of semblance. At the end of In vino veritas, Kierkegaard gives a metaphor of the aesthetic sphere that captures this more precisely than any of William’s conceptual efforts because it grasps the realm of images itself in an image. After the banquet, “Constantine took leave of them as host, informing them that there were five carriages at their service, so that each might follow his own inclination, drive whither he would, alone, or, if he would in company, and with whomsoever he would.” And the passage continues with the following image: “Thus it is that a rocket by the force of powder rises as a single shot, stands for an instant still, collected as one entity, then disperses to all the winds.” This is none other than the idea of the aesthetic sphere, liberated from the subjective dialectic, eclipsing it entirely, passing in the eternity of the instant, as an illusory unity, dispersing the light of hope over those things to which it belongs, as does the rocket to the modern antiquity of pyrotechnics. Just how much the form of the aesthetic, as a historical-primordial form, is comparable to the form in which the innermost cell of Kierkegaard’s philosophy, the intérieur, today presents itself to an observer is irrefutably confirmed by the subsequent course of the earlier narrative: “The figures and the groups they formed made a fantastic impression upon me. For that the morning sun shines upon field and meadow and upon every creature which at night found rest and strength to arise jubilant with the sun—with this we have a sympathetic and wholesome understanding: but a nocturnal party beheld by morning illumination, in the midst of a smiling rustic environment, makes an almost uncanny impression. One begins to think of ghosts that are surprised by the dawn of day, of elves that cannot find the crevice through which they are accustomed to vanish because it is visible only in the dark, of unfortunates for whom the difference between day and night has become obliterated by the monotony of their suffering.” Kierkegaard’s image is more interesting than when it is seen in terms of the cheap antithesis of original innocence and corruption. Those gentlemen in dress-coats do not profane the
pure nature of morning: before its purity they are transformed into natural spirits by means of their costume—the most transient thing about them—whereby eternity itself shines through as the content of transience. The hope that inheres in the aesthetic is that of the transparency of decaying figures. Or, in the theological terms of Kierkegaard’s later presentation of ‘holy history’：“In a certain sense, it is true, glory shines through here as well.”29 For just as Kierkegaard’s verdict on the aesthetic sphere hardly matches with its contents, so its images are hardly restricted to the domain that his doctrine of existence has granted it. If the paradoxical remains at the mercy of nature, it does not extend over all mythical images; the final such image in front of which the paradoxical stops—the “N.B.” of the “Passion Narrative”—is the first auspicious image of aesthetic semblance. (Kierkegaard’s distinctly Baroque characteristic is to be recognized in the significance that his philosophy attributes to the phenomenon of the crucifixion of Christ: “Think then of a child, and give this child delight by showing it some of those pictures one buys on the stalls, which are so trivial artistically, but so dear to children. This one here on the snorting steed, with a tossing feather in his hat, with a lordly mien, riding at the head of the thousands upon thousands which you do not see, with hand outstretched to command, ‘Forward!’ forward over the summits of the mountains which you see in front of you, forward to victory—this is the Emperor, the one and only, Napoleon. And so now you tell the child a little about Napoleon.—This one here is dressed as a huntsman: he stands leaping upon his bow and gazes straight before him with glance so piercing, so self-confident, and yet so anxious. That is William Tell. You now relate to the child something about him, and about that extraordinary glance of his, explaining that with this same glance he has at once an eye for the beloved child, that he may not harm him, and for the apple, that he may not miss it. And thus you show the child many pictures, to the child’s unspeakable delight. Then you come to one which intentionally was laid among the others. It represents a man crucifed. The child will not at once nor quite directly understand this picture, and will ask what it means, why he hangs like that on a tree. So you explain to the child that this is a cross, and that to hang on it means to be crucified, and that in that land crucifixion was not only the most painful death penalty but was also an ignominious mode of execution employed only for the grossest malefactors.”30 Of all the images, only one—dialectically—endures: “For just as a reproach to the Jews there was written above his cross, ‘The King of the Jews,’ so this picture, which regularly is published every year as a reproach to the human race, is a remembrance which the race never can and never should be rid of; it never should be represented differently; and it will seem as if it were this generation which crucified him, as often as this generation for the first time shows this picture to the child of the new generation, explaining for the first time how things go in this world; and the child, the first time it hears this, will become anxious and sorrowful, for his parents, for the world, and for himself; and the other pictures—surely as the ballad relates”—the ballad of Agnes and the merman—“they must turn their faces away, the pictures being so different.”31 Accordingly, for Kierkegaard the original experience of Christianity remains bound to the image; in the image one generation gives the other the idea of Christ; his image—like his name—endures as an irreducibly mythical residue. But it endures dialectically: it is at the same time the overcoming of the demonic in nature; it is the ultimate image, as it is the ultimate sacrifice; before the image of Christ all other images must “avert their eyes.” His image goes beyond all art; it is “insignificant from the artistic point of view” and yet itself an image; thus it rescues the aesthetic even as the aesthetic is lost, and remaining paradoxical, opens the way to reconciliation. Therefore many of the metaphors of The Sickness unto Death, while never finding a place in the rigorous logic of existence, are akin to the major themes of the “Diapsalmata” and the “aesthetic sphere”: “It is (to describe it figuratively) as if an author were to make a slip of the pen, and that this clerical error became conscious of being such—perhaps it was no error but in a far higher sense was an essential constituent in the whole exposition—it is then as if this clerical error would revolt against the author, out of hatred for him were to forbid him to correct it, and were to say, ‘No, I will not be erased, I will stand as a witness against thee, that thou art a very poor writer.’”32 Just as the isolated and enciphered letter is not subordinated to the total, “existential” expression of the author, so in Kierkegaard’s theology enciphered images oppose the existential sacrifice and in the midst of its abstract annihilation grants the solace of their concretion. That which sets itself up against subjective idealism in the aesthetic sphere, the ontological character of a “text,” whose truth the individual means to secure as a mere sign; the depersonalization of the self from which a meaningful letter emancipates itself—this determines Kierkegaard’s theological stage in the doctrine of objective despair. The parenthetical possibility, however, that ultimately the “typographical error” itself would prove to be meaningful is the nonsensical caesura that brings hope into existence through its collapse. Existence, despair, and hope—it is with this rhythm, not the monotonous rhythm of the absolute “I” and total sacrifice, that Kierkegaard’s ontology must be measured, and it appears in the disparate images into which the abstract unity of existence is dialectically divided. In these images the “aesthetic” and the “religious” spheres go over into each other and not simply—as Kierkegaard supposes on systematic grounds—as an “exception” that has no part in life. It occurs rather in a depersonalization of the living in which life, while passing away, yet breathes and rests free of sacrifice. Its metaphor is sleep. Kierkegaard uses the image to characterize the two extreme spheres. It is found in the “aesthetic” “Diapsalmata”: “I divide my time as follows: half the time I sleep, the other half I dream. I never dream when I sleep, for that would be a pity, for sleeping is the highest accomplishment of genius.”33 In the Training in Christianity, however, it is said of the believer: “Blessed is he who is not offended but believes, who (like
a child who is taught to say these words as it falls asleep) says, 'I believe'... and then sleeps; yea, blessed is he, he is not dead, he sleepeth.'

Such sleep is the dialectical double meaning of passio: "I must have my sleep to maintain passion in the long run." For in sleep passio obeys nature and yet receives the promise of blissful awakening.

Subjective "How" and Emnity toward Art

In the sleeper the spontaneity of the "I" comes to rest, without, however, being annihilated. If the aesthetic images that surround him are—as ontological semblance—located beyond subjective autonomy, Kierkegaard's theory of the subjective "how" and its correlate, the verdict on the "aesthetic sphere," lose their ultimate legitimation. For the knowledge of the subjective thinker, and all art, always remains—in Kierkegaard's view—"communication": "Objective thinking is... conscious only of itself, and is not in the strict sense of the word a form of communication at all, and certainly no artistic communication, in so far as artistry would always demand reflection on the recipient, and an awareness of the form of the communication in relation to the recipient's possible misunderstanding."

Communication, however, is bound to autonomy: to the autonomy of the person communicating who imposes a form on a certain "content" and to that of the fictional and abstract recipient whose interest in "understanding" determines the form. Communication vitiates the law inherent in the object itself. "The greater the artistry, the greater the inwardness..."—this may be the regulating principle of Kierkegaardian "communication," but it is not a law of art. However conciliatory such communication might appear in the service of human understanding, it yet belongs exclusively to the realm of abstract inwardness. Only alienated, mute contents can be adapted, dressed up, and "communicated" as "content" to suit a subjective will; only to the extent that they are not binding are they made so by individual existence. The "how" of communication remains a subjective surrogate for the compelling appearance that threatens to perish of its own abstractness. For this reason, Kierkegaard's doctrine of communication is paradoxically concerned with the idea of a "neighbor," whom his absolute subjectivity has long since lost track of. The doctrine must orient itself by this neighbor, contingent and unknown as he is, because in its complete abstraction it acquires no law of form from the concreteness of its contents. It tries powerlessly to conjure this law of form through the repetitions of "double reflection." Artworks are eloquent by means of their law of form in the uncompromising presentation of truth through their semblance. Kierkegaard's unmanifest "existential" communication remains a monologue precisely with regard to the "neighbor" that does not exist for it. His "subjective how" reflects distortedly the power of truth over the manner of its appearance, a manner that can never be separated arbitrarily from it as if it were a mere sign, for truth itself exists exclusively in the dialectic in which it "appears". The "how"—developed by Kierkegaard in opposition to the shallow dualism of form and content—gains its philosophical justification as the expression of objective laws in the manifestation of truth. Yet his doctrine qualifies this justification by consigning it to subjectivity which superadds truth to the matter at hand as something new; by dividing truth from the material in which it appears; by ascribing truth to existence and contingency to the material. However fruitful the linguistic-critical norms prove to be when applied to the material at hand—norms which Kierkegaard poses with the "subjective how" of a philosophy that threatens to succumb to scientism—the theoretical justification of these norms through pure subjectivity misses the point of philosophy and art. For this reason Kierkegaard anathematizes the "aesthetic sphere" and finally art altogether. This malediction has been less compellingly formulated by the existential philosophers than by the theologian who relies not on the concept of subjective decisiveness but on the obligation to be Christ's follower, harking back to the prohibition on graven images: "Only the 'follower' is the true Christian. The 'admirers' have in fact a pagan relationship to Christianity, and hence admiration gave rise to a new paganism in the midst of Christendom, namely, Christian art. I do not wish in any way to pass judgment upon any one, but I regard it as my duty to pronounce what I feel. Would it be possible for me, that is to say, could I bring myself to the point, or could I be prompted, to dip my brush, to lift my chisel, in order to depict Christ in color or to carve His figure? The fact that I am incapable of doing it, that I am not an artist, is here irrelevant, I merely ask whether it would be possible for me to do it if I had the capacity. And I answer, No, it would be for me an absolute impossibility. Indeed, even with this I do not express what I feel, for in such a degree would it be impossible for me that I cannot conceive how it has been possible to anyone. A person says, 'I cannot conceive of the calmness of the murderer who sits sharpening the knife with which he is about to kill another man.' And to me, too, this is inconceivable. But truly it is also inconceivable to me whence the artist derived his calm, or the calmness is inconceivable to me with which an artist has sat year in and year out industriously laboring to paint a portrait of Christ—without chancing to reflect whether Christ desired perhaps to have a portrait made by his master-brush, however idealized it might be. I cannot conceive how the artist preserved his calm, how it is that he did not notice Christ's displeasure and suddenly cast down brush and colors and all, as Judas did the thirty pieces of silver, casting them far, far away from him, because he suddenly understood that Christ required only 'followers', that he who here on earth lived in poverty and wretchedness, not having whereon to lay his head, and who lived thus not accidentally, because of the harshness of fate, desiring for himself different conditions, but of his own free choice, by virtue of an eternal resolve—that such as he hardly desired or desires that after his death a man
should throw away his time, perhaps his eternal blessedness, by painting him. I cannot conceive it, the brush would have fallen out of my hand the very second I was about to begin, and perhaps I might not have survived it." As a likeness of the living, art is sacrificed to the followers in death: "How a man is to fare in this world is something which the Gospel (in contrast with novels, romances, lies, and other amusements) does not amuse itself by considering. No, for the Gospel these seventy years are like an instant, and its talk hastens on to the decision of eternity." Yet the later Kierkegaard's antagonism toward art cannot simply be reduced to the category of sacrifice. For at the same time, as the final rejoinder of the dialectic of semblance, his antipathy for art expresses the longing for an imageless presence. Kierkegaard's material aesthetic itself indicates the theological concept of the symbol as the idea of an imageless self-presentation of truth. For this reason he entirely excludes from the verdict on art the children's storybook image of the crucifixion, which is as little subject to aesthetic extension; and therefore neither poetry nor art can represent the ideal husband.

At the end of fifteen years he has apparently got no further than he was at the beginning, yet he has lived in a high degree artistically. His possession has not been like dead property, but he has constantly been acquiring his possession. He has not fought with lions and ogres, but with the most dangerous enemy: time. But for him eternity does not come afterwards as in the case of the knight, but he has had eternity in time, has preserved eternity in time. He alone, therefore, has triumphed over time. For the knight, in contrast, has merely killed time, just as any man kills time when it has not reality for him; this, however, is no final victory. Thus the married man lives truly poetically and solves the great riddle: he lives in eternity and yet hearing the hall clock strike, and hearing it in such a way that the stroke of the hour does not shorten but prolongs his eternity—a wondrous paradoxe.. And now even if this is something which cannot be represented in art, we need not regret it. Let it be your comfort as it is mine that the highest and most beautiful things in life are not to be heard about, nor read about, nor seen, but, may only be lived. Conjugual love is therefore more aesthetic than romantic love precisely because it is so much more difficult to represent... If happiness itself, the focal point of wish and cipher of all images, knows no images, then Kierkegaard's doctrine of a "burden of hope" which imposes the doctrine's images, resplendent and fruitful, upon happiness, can be redeemed. Of course, in Kierkegaard the idea of such truth becomes confused with the simple iconoclasm of subjective abstraction and repudiates aesthetic semblance without pursuing the course of the dialectic to its end, a course which the transulence of semblance makes evident in semblance itself. Kierkegaard unicampially takes the images for finite goods that obstruct the infinite good of happiness. According to the doctrine found in the Postscript, "eternal happiness, as the absolute good, has the remarkable trait of being definable solely in terms of the mode of acquisition. Other goods, precisely because the mode of acquisition is accidental, or at any rate subject to a relative dialectic, must be defined in terms of the good itself." As little, however, as happiness may be defined by its "mode of acquisition," just so little may the "goods" be defined by "themselves" in their reified finitude, but only from the perspective in which they appear historically-dialectically to the wish as finite yet unattainable. Kierkegaard, however, takes the emptiness of the fully abstracted concept for imageless happiness itself. Therefore the dialectic of images that are at once more finite, unreachable, and transparently promising becomes for Kierkegaard a merely mythical deception; their dialectical structure becomes the ambiguity of the contingent: "What the philosophers say about reality is often as disappointing as a sign you see in a shop window, which reads: 'Pressing Done Here.' If you brought your clothes to be pressed, you would be fooled; for the sign is there only to be sold." This criticism neglects the best dialectical truth in philosophy as much as in art: the truth that presents itself in semblance. In fact, Kierkegaard nowhere better described the reconciling figure in which his own philosophy joins nature and history, than in a passage directed against Hegel that meant to destroy this figure as semblance, while yet its semblance, recognized and maintained, serves truth as its truest counterimage: "Some bend eternity into time for the imagination. Conceived in this way, eternity produces an enchanting effect. One does not know whether it is dream or actuality. As the beams of the moon glimmer in an illuminated forest or a hall, so the eternal peeps wistfully, dreamily, and rogishly into the moment."  

**Fantasy in the Fragment**

Here it is fantasy—repudiated by Kierkegaard—that conceives semblance as the instrument of an unbroken transition from the mythical-historical to reconciliation, whereas his doctrine exclusively recognizes the self and the leap. "In a speculative-fantastic sense we have a positive finality in the system, and in an aesthetic-fantastic sense we have one in the fifth act of the drama. But this sort of finality is valid only for fantastic beings." Yet as an opponent of fantasy Kierkegaard reveals the deepest insight into its essence, just as the organization of the "Diaspalmarta" legitimates itself as a work of exact fantasy.—"For the imagina-
ion is itself more perfect than the sufferings of reality, it is timelessly qualified, soaring above the sufferings of reality, it is capable of presenting perfection admirably; it possesses all the splendid colors for portraying it; but suffering, on the other hand, is something the imagination cannot represent, except in a rendering that represents it as already perfected, that is, softened, toned-down, fore-shortened. For the imaginary picture—this is the picture that the imagination presents and fixes—is after all, in a certain sense, unreality, it lacks the reality of time and duration and of the earthly life with its difficulties and sufferings. An actor clad in rags (even if in defiance of stage convention they were actual rags) is, as the mere deceit of an hour, a totally different thing from being clad in rags in the everyday life of reality. No, however great the effort of imagination to make this imaginary picture of reality, it cannot be accomplished.  

If indeed fantasy is unable to grasp concretely the ultimate image of despair—as in Poe's story "The Pit and the Pendulum" the most horrifying secret of the pit is not depicted—this incapacity is not a weakness but a strength. The element of reconciliation that makes its transient appearance in fantasy still suffices to dissolve despair, whereas existence irresistibly rushes into that very despair. The inability of fantasy to represent despair is its surety of hope. In fantasy nature surpasses itself: nature, the impulse of fantasy; nature, which—in fantasy—recognizes itself as nature, which through the minutest displacement by fantasy presents itself as rescued. Through displacement: for fantasy is not contemplation that leaves the existing as it is; contemplating, it enters unnoticed into the existing to complete its composition as an image. Kierkegaard recognized the model of its composition, far from any autonomous aesthetic "form," in the activity of a child cutting out pictures: "At times we see the more mature individuality who satiates himself on the strong food of actuality and is not really influenced by a well-executed painting. But he can be stirred by a Nuremberg print, a picture of the kind found on the market not long ago. There one sees a landscape depicting a perfect rural area in general. This abstraction cannot be artistically executed. Therefore the whole thing is achieved by contrast, namely, by an accidental concretion. And yet I ask everyone if from such a landscape he does not get the impression of a perfect rural area in general, and if this category has not stayed with him from childhood. In the days of childhood, we had such enormous categories that they now almost make us dizzy, we clipped out of a piece of paper a man and a woman who were man and woman in general in a more rigorous sense than Adam and Eve were." The "in general" of the Nuremberg print is similar to that of the farce, but is described by Kierkegaard more exactly, making it more amenable to interpretation than in the theory of the farce. It is not the abstractness and range of the concept, but the minute precision and concreteness of a model—in one variety it is familiar as a "pattern"—in which individual differences of existence disappear only to be resurrected, saved ontologically, as prototypical features of the completed figure. Like names, the pattern attaches contingency, as...
before—is authenticated; it is the basis of his doctrine of the ambivalence of anxiety, the sickness unto death, as a means of salvation. Unintentionally, his negative philosophy of history as the expression of mere “existence” reverses itself, and presents itself to the idealist’s lamenting gaze as a positive, eschatological philosophy of history.

Transcendence of Longing

The ontological “project” that criticism seeks to crystallize out of Kierkegaard’s philosophy—despite of Kierkegaard’s dominant intentions and those of the systematic structure—has nothing in common with the totality of his “religious” sphere, though at the most perhaps something with his “faith,” which he rebuts in Fear and Trembling: “a faith that faintly seeks its object on the most distant horizon.” This “most remote possibility of faith” is the law by which the depth of beauty is measured. This law is implicit in the single metaphor in which Kierkegaard gives concrete witness to the idea of reconciliation: the merman, a reconciled power of nature through his love of Agnes, is called: “beautiful as a guardian angel.” Every aesthetic form is directed toward truth and disappears in it. It is not by accident that Kierkegaard compared the course of music to a descent from on high: “If in the overture one comes down from these higher regions, then it may be asked where one lands best in the opera, or how does one get the opera to begin?” He compared, however, the transition of arrival with the “shock of awakening”—drawing on another opera, the “Magic Flute.” If, as Kierkegaard writes, “longing alone is not sufficient for salvation,” still the images of beauty devolve upon longing through which the course of deliverance, disappearing, must travel if it is ever to lead to landing and awakening. Longing is, accordingly, the dialectical substratum of a “doctrine of reconciliation” that Kierkegaard’s theology of sacrifice would like to emancipate from longing. Longing is not extinguished in the images, but survives in them just as it emanates from them. By the strength of the immanence of their content, the transcendence of longing is achieved. Their inconspicuousness is for the sake of the inconspicuous, and it wishes nourishment finally for those who are deprived. This is how the “aesthetic” and the “religious” coincide in poverty, as Kierkegaard teaches: “Do you think that it is almost a kind of childishness in me to persist in seeking this quality among the poor and the suffering? Or maybe you have degraded yourself by adopting the shocking division that assigns the aesthetic to the distinguished, the rich, the mighty, the highly educated, and at the most assigns religion to the poor? Well, it seems to me that the poor do not come out badly in this division. And do you not see that the poor in having the religious also have the aesthetic, and that the rich, in so far as they have not the religious, have not the aesthetic either?” For the “aesthetic” does not exist for the poor in aesthetic objects but in the concrete images of their desire; only in their fulfillment without sacrifice do these images open themselves up to the poor. For this reason, on one occasion, Kierkegaard makes poverty the guarantor of happiness: “What is the happiest existence? It is that of a young girl of sixteen years when she, pure and innocent, possesses nothing, not a chest of drawers or a pedestal, but has to make use of the lowest drawer of her mother’s escritoire to keep all her magnificence: the confirmation dress and a prayer-book.” In such sentences, whose simplicity is exposed to every ideological hazard, poverty and destitution call up comfort and reconciliation, as in this draft of Kierkegaard’s letter to his fiancee: “In my mournfulness I have had only one wish: to make her happy; right now, I am unable; now I go to her side and like a master of ceremonies I lead her triumphantly and say: make room for her, give the best spot for ‘our beloved, and dearest little Regina.’” The inconspicuous hope of this image tempers even the violent image of death: “What is death? Only a brief stop along the once traveled road.” The banality of reconciliation is sublime: “This is how it is in time. As for eternity, it is my hope that we shall be comprehensible to one another, and that there she will forgive me.” For the step from mourning to comfort is not the largest, but the smallest.