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**University of Southampton**

Faculty of Arts & Humanities

**Philosophy**

**The Three Existence Spheres as Portrayed by Kierkegaard: A Challenge to the Tiered  
Interpretation**

by

**Carla Wiggs**

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2020



# University of Southampton

## Abstract

Faculty of Arts & Humanities

Philosophy

### Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The Three Existence Spheres as Portrayed by Kierkegaard: A Challenge to the Tiered Interpretation

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In Søren Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works, readers are presented with the illustration of three 'spheres of existence': an aesthetic sphere of existence; an ethical sphere; and a religious sphere. As it stands, the most common and dominant interpretation of Kierkegaard's existence spheres is generally the following: the aesthetic sphere is portrayed as the lowest sphere of existence; the religious is the highest (the true goal or *telos* of human existence); with the ethical acting as a kind of 'transitory' stage between the two (an improvement on the aesthetic, but ultimately still falling short). Those that advance these views will also typically argue that it was Kierkegaard's intention to depict the existence spheres in this way, in order to push readers towards the religious sphere (and conversely, away from the aesthetic sphere). The aim of my thesis is to challenge this interpretation often found within the secondary literature – an interpretation which I label as the 'tiered interpretation' (TI), due to the hierachal structure which it assumes.

The challenge which I present to the tiered interpretations has three core aspects.

Firstly, I explore the literary devices which Kierkegaard employed when discussing the existence spheres, and the nature of his pseudonymity. I demonstrate how the very devices which Kierkegaard deployed to discuss the existence spheres, and the motivations behind their deployment, are fundamentally in conflict with the views that TI advances.

Secondly, I present and defend a more positive interpretation of the aesthetic sphere – this will be a core part of the challenge which I present to TI. The main argument I espouse is that the aesthetic sphere can be understood as a sophisticated response to a nihilistic crisis, a crisis of values. In other words, the aesthetic can be understood as the attempt to turn life into a work of art, and to provide life with meaning, value, and a narrative through doing so – becoming the 'artist' of one's own life in such a way is able to help define and give meaning to the individual's

life once they no longer believe in God or an objective moral code. Thus, I argue that there is something of existential value to be found within Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthetic existence sphere – a truth which the secondary literature largely neglects, and in the case of TI, actively denies.

The third part of my challenge to TI further dismantles the 'hierarchy' of the existence spheres by considering the overlap which exists between Kierkegaard's depiction of the aesthetic sphere and his depiction of the religious sphere. Through doing this, I build upon my argument concerning Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthetic existence sphere, and explore Kierkegaard's messages in relation to themes such as honesty and authenticity in connection with genuine religiosity/faith.

Overall, my aim with the thesis is to show that TI depicts Kierkegaard's presentation of the existence spheres as much too simplistic and linear; existential matters cannot be approached in such a defined, and structural manner, and Kierkegaard's portrayal of the existence spheres shows exactly that – it demonstrates just how tricky and personal existential decisions can be, and there are a number of messages to take away from his pseudonymous works.

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## Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: CARLA WIGGS

Title of thesis: The Three Existence Spheres as Portrayed by Kierkegaard: A Challenge to the Tiered Interpretation

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission

Signature: ..... Date: 07/03/21



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## Definitions and Abbreviations

### Abbreviations of Kierkegaard's Works

*AUC:* *Attack Upon "Christendom",* trans W. Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946.

*CUP:* *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* trans D. Swenson. London: Oxford University Press, 1944.

*E/O:* *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life,* trans A. Hannay, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Penguin Books, 2004.

*FT:* *Fear and Trembling,* trans A. Hannay, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Penguin Books, 2003.

*PV:* *The Point of View,* trans & ed E. Hong & H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

*SoLW:* *Stages on Life's Way: Studies by Various Persons,* trans & ed E. Hong & H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

*SUD:* *The Sickness Unto Death,* trans A. Hannay. London: Penguin Books – Great Ideas, 2008.

*TPA:* *The Present Age: On the Death of Rebellion,* trans A. Dru. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2010.



# Introduction Tiered Interpretations of Kierkegaard's Existence Spheres, & Thesis Methodology

## Section 1 The presentation of Kierkegaard's existence spheres in the secondary literature: The 'Tiered Interpretations'

In Søren Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works, readers are presented with the illustration of three 'spheres of existence': an aesthetic sphere of existence; an ethical sphere; and a religious sphere. 'Spheres of existence' loosely refers to something like 'ways of life', or perhaps 'an existential commitment to a set of values' (e.g. an ethical set of values) over another set (e.g. an aesthetic set of values). Exactly what an existence sphere is, and what each of these so-called sets of values are (i.e. how each sphere is to be defined), however, will of course be explored in depth within the main body of the thesis. Essentially, what appears to be being dealt with here though, are questions such as: 'how ought I live my life?', and 'what is it to make an existential choice?'.

With regards to the three existence spheres and Kierkegaard's portrayal of them within his works, my thesis seeks to present a challenge to the dominant interpretations currently found within the secondary literature – doing so will be the core focus of this thesis. The dominant interpretations I identify here are what I will refer to as 'tiered interpretations' (henceforth, TI); I refer to these interpretations as such given their hierachal structure, which I will now briefly outline.

Proponents of TI argue that the aesthetic sphere is portrayed as the lowest sphere of existence, the religious the highest (the true goal or *telos* of human existence), with the ethical acting as a kind of 'transitory' stage between the two (an improvement on the aesthetic, but ultimately still falling short). Those that advance these views will also typically argue that it was Kierkegaard's intention to depict the existence spheres in this way, in order to push readers towards the religious sphere (and conversely, away from the aesthetic sphere – more on this later). Of course, this is a very basic overview of such interpretations, so what I will do next, is cite some evidence from the secondary literature which displays the above components, and identify some of the core features that TI often tends to possess in connection with this hierachal portrayal.

Often, we find that the kind of *language* used to discuss Kierkegaard's existence spheres reflects the hierachal structure which I associate with TI in the literature; for instance, the idea of the existence spheres being skin to 'stages', or steps on a 'journey'. This language is suggestive of there being a starting point, and a final destination or end goal (in this case, the 'goal' of human existence). A couple of the most notable scholars to use this specific and suggestive type of

language are Rudd (*Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical* 2005), and Taylor (*Journeys to Selfhood* 1980). Both writers hold the view that, for Kierkegaard, the aesthetic life is ultimately unsustainable and doomed to despair (largely due to the aesthete's self-fragmentation), and that meaning and value can only truly be found through a religious existence. Furthermore, they maintain that this is what Kierkegaard intended to portray to his readers; this is the message he intended to convey in other words, and to fail to grasp this message is to fail to grasp the core purpose of Kierkegaard's existential works.

For Rudd in particular, this is because the aesthetic sphere lacks the commitments that are necessary to give one's life a narrative, and consequently a meaning – it lacks a unifying telos. The ethicist, however, does make commitments and has goals, (he engages himself in a 'project' as Rudd says), and therefore his life has a narrative structure and meaning. According to Rudd, however, Kierkegaard portrays the ethical as limited given that it doesn't offer the individual any single overriding goal or telos. What is needed then, is a further progression to the religious sphere – it is only when the individual has reached the religious that their true telos has been achieved, and they can find purpose in their life.

Alternatively, to use Taylor's terminology, the spiritual 'journey to selfhood' has been completed once one has progressed to the religious sphere of existence. He claims that on the individual's 'travels' to the religious (this presumably being the final destination), (and presumably with the starting point as aestheticism), we see 'the pilgrim's progress from sin to salvation, despair to faith, sickness to health, death to life, darkness to light, corruption to purity, dissipation to integration, ignorance to knowledge, spiritlessness to spirit' (Taylor 1980: 6). So, there are sharp distinctions made here; the overwhelmingly negative terminology being associated with the aesthetic, and the positive always associated with the religious existence.

Similar ideas are also reflected in the following extract, taken from the secondary literature:

'(T)he man who is still imprisoned in the aesthetic stage must be exhorted to despair; only then will he be able to escape from the limitations of his selfish attitude and move on to a higher plane of existence. Yet this new phase cannot be achieved by mere thought, but only by active choice and inner decision' (Grimsley 1973: 36-7).

Again, we see negative language being used to describe the aesthetic existence here – perhaps most strikingly, it is referred to as a kind of 'imprisonment', which appears to suggest some kind of constraint (perhaps of one's own making). Yet, at the same time, the extract from Grimsley also seems to imply that there might be some passive acceptance of the aesthetic life, in comparison to the ethical and the religious, which conversely require 'active choice and inner decision' – the

use of the terminology used to describe these other existence spheres implies that conversely, the aesthetic life is not a choice that has been made, but rather a way of life that one just 'falls into'. As with Rudd and Taylor, there is also the idea that the aesthetic is a 'lower' or more 'basic' form of existence clearly reflected here, alongside the idea that the other two existence spheres are 'higher' planes or stages of existence, and have involved the individual making a conscious commitment. In a similar vein to Grimsley, Marino claims that:

'(F)or Kierkegaard, there is no sitting on the fence between selves. If you have not chosen, you are an esthete, but if you really are facing the choice, you have already chosen to choose' (Marino 2001:116).

So, again, there is the idea presented here that the aesthetic isn't really a choice at all; it is more of an acceptance of the way that things naturally are, and in some ways these authors seem to imply that readers are prompted to make a 'choice' and to 'move up to higher planes' (perhaps also explaining Grimsley's use of the term 'imprisonment' in relation to the esthete). To not do so, on such views, is often deemed irrational and self-destructive. Similarly, Berry refers to the aesthetic stage as 'a mode of existing which is properly called a "stage", both because all human beings begin in it, and because there is development beyond it' (Berry 1995: 202). So, much like Taylor, Berry here seems to be advocating the view that the aesthetic 'stage' as she refers to it, is merely a beginning, a 'starting point', the 'development' that she refers to here being achieved through the ethical and religious spheres. Much like Grimsley also, she implies that the aesthetic stage is a form of life prior to an existential decision or conscious choice – it is a kind of 'pre-reflective' state on such views.<sup>1</sup>

Common to many of these interpretations found within the secondary literature it seems, is a notion of progression and maturation, which in turn, appears to be connected to ideas about 'selfhood' and narrative. According to these interpretations, Kierkegaard's esthete lacks these qualities; he is immature, childish, possesses no sense of 'self', and has no coherent overall narrative – he requires development (as Berry, Grimsley, and Marino all make clear, he has not chosen or committed to an existential decision; he stands 'before' this choice). Furthermore, he has no obvious way of giving his suffering meaning. The religious individual – the 'knight of faith' – on the other hand, possesses all of these things; he has reached the telos of human existence, he has a strong sense of 'self' and a cohesive narrative (presumably, one which is defined by his relationship to God, and his faith), and it is one which also allows him to make sense of his earthly

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<sup>1</sup> In Chapter One, I will discuss the notion of a 'pre-reflective' individual who is yet to make a decisive existential commitment – but as I will show in Chapter Three, this is not the aesthetic individual.

suffering. The ethicist, on these views, also seems to possess a selfhood and a narrative (at least, to a degree), given his commitment to certain 'life projects' and the active aim of developing a 'self'; but he has not achieved the true goal of existence. To quote Rudd, 'selfhood is realized by making commitments and developing the relevant virtues. These commitments are made first to social relationships, but then, impelled by our need for an absolute *telos*, to God' (Rudd 2005: 150) – so, the ethical is limited on such views, and can only take one so far. It is a step in the right direction on these views, but it is not enough in the grand scheme of things, and one ought to make the transition to the religious in the end.

Common to most of the views also seems to be the assumption that the existence spheres are presented by Kierkegaard as being mutually exclusive of one another. This also ties in with the promotion of the hierachal structure which is characteristic of TI: each sphere is a 'distinct' stage, which ultimately cannot share or overlap with another of the spheres in any significant or meaningful way. Such an idea is also brought out by the contrasting language used to describe each sphere; for instance, as with Taylor's (above) use of contrasting terminology to describe the 'progression' from an aesthetic existence to a religious one. This idea of the existence spheres being mutually exclusive is also one which I will challenge in my thesis. It will not be at the forefront of my investigation; but I believe that an assumption that (for example) ethical considerations are not compatible with a primarily aesthetic existence is a mistake (and also not fully reflective of Kierkegaard's portrayal), which can only lead to a misunderstanding of the existence spheres as a whole. I will thus seek to make such criticisms where appropriate in my work.

As noted, the interpretations which I have outlined here are paradigmatic of those which I take issue with in my thesis. The intricacies of these views will be examined in greater depth within the core chapters of the thesis, as doing so will be essential to my analysis of the three spheres of existence themselves. Accounts which possess the above features I will take to endorse the TI view of Kierkegaard's existence spheres. (It must be noted that the above list is not exhaustive; further evidence of TI can be found in other secondary works, and such examples will also be cited within the main body of the thesis.)

At the heart of my thesis then, will be existential concerns about selfhood, narrative, and value; I am approaching these themes through a Kierkegaardian lens, but such themes are nonetheless central here, as they are in all of our lives. My aim here is not to deny that such things were of central importance to Kierkegaard, and that these themes have vital significance to his portrayal of the existence spheres – I believe that they are in fact of crucial importance to his illustration of the three existence spheres. Rather, my aim is to deny that that the themes of selfhood and

narrative are linked to the existence spheres in the ways that TI proposes that they are; that is, I wish to show that the relationship between selfhood and the existence spheres is not a matter of linear or hierachal progression. Exactly how I plan to do this will be outlined in the following section (section 2 of the 'Introduction').

These themes and concerns are also particularly relevant in an increasingly secular society, hence, a considerable aspect of my project will focus on the aesthetic existence as a response to 'the death of god' and objective values; part of the aim is to show how atheist readers in modern day, as well as religious individuals, can take something useful (and indeed, perhaps of vital importance) from Kierkegaard's illustration of the existence spheres. Kierkegaard is often depicted as an almost exclusively religious philosopher in the literature; and of course, whilst I do not deny that this is an essential part of his production, I think that to reduce Kierkegaard to merely a religious philosopher/thinker is to overlook the great variety of themes within his works, and to underestimate the significance of his existential works.<sup>2</sup> What I hope to show with this project, is that there is something of significance which all modern-day readers can – and in fact, should – take from Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard's works in many ways can assist readers through a 'crisis of values', in which individuals seek to find meaning outside of the traditional religious realm.

Furthermore, I also hope to show that in general, TI depicts Kierkegaard's presentation of the existence spheres as much too simplistic and linear. Existential matters cannot be approached in such a defined, and structural manner, and Kierkegaard's portrayal of the existence spheres shows exactly that – it demonstrates just how tricky and personal existential decisions can be. As I have noted above, my account will also reveal that there is something of existential value to be found within Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthetic existence sphere – a truth which the secondary literature largely neglects, and in the case of TI, actively denies.

To clarify, I see myself to have two aims throughout the thesis (as reflected above): firstly, I want to show that TI is wrong as an interpretation of Kierkegaard, and the reasons for this; and, secondly, I *also* will show that TI is unhelpful as a guide to life. Although the first of these aims is interpretative, whereas the second is more a systematic claim, I see these aims as interconnected ones, hence I will not be continually drawing the distinction between these two things as I go

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<sup>2</sup> By 'existential works', I am here referring to the works in which we receive detailed portrayals of the existence spheres, (which, as we will see shortly, tend also to be Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works). Of course, many – (if not all) – of Kierkegaard's works can reasonably be argued to have existential dimensions or messages; however, I am mostly concerned with those works which depict the existence spheres as the main focus.

throughout the thesis – rather, this dual-purpose is something which I wish to note from the outset, to indicate that I intend to show that TI is unhelpful in both respects.

## Section 2      Aims & proposed methodology of the project/ how I will go about dismantling TI

Now that I have given the reader an idea of what the focus of my project is, and what TI accounts typically claim, I will briefly outline how I aim to present my challenge to such views.

There are three core aspects to the challenge which I will pose to such views within my thesis.

The first of these relates to the literary devices which were employed by Kierkegaard when depicting these existence spheres to his readers. Kierkegaard's authorship can in many ways be regarded as unique, especially when we consider it alongside more traditional philosophical treatises. His authorship can be divided into two 'sets' or 'categories', as follows: the pseudonymous works, which were signed and published under the names of pseudonymous authors or fictitious editors, as opposed to Kierkegaard's own name; and the non-pseudonymous works which were signed and published under the name of 'Søren Kierkegaard'. An extensive list of these works and the publication dates can be seen below:<sup>3</sup>

Table 1 Kierkegaard's Publications

Pseudonymous Works	Signed Works
<i>Either/Or</i> 1843	<i>Two Upbuilding Discourses</i> 1843
<i>Repetition</i> 1843	<i>Three Upbuilding Discourses</i> 1843
<i>Fear &amp; Trembling</i> 1843	<i>Four Upbuilding Discourses</i> 1843
<i>Philosophical Fragments</i> 1844	<i>Two Upbuilding Discourses</i> 1844
<i>The Concept of Anxiety</i> 1844	<i>Three Upbuilding Discourses</i> 1844
<i>Prefaces</i> 1844	<i>Four Upbuilding Discourses</i> 1844
<i>Stages on Life's Way</i> 1845	<i>Three Upbuilding Discourses on Imagined Occasions</i> 1845
<i>Concluding Unscientific Postscript</i> 1846	

<sup>3</sup> It ought to be noted that Kierkegaard also kept a journal throughout most of his adult life; some commentators see fit that the *Journals and Papers* belong to a separate third category, but it seems just as plausible that they belong in the second category above, amongst Kierkegaard's other signed works.

<i>The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress</i> 1848	<i>Two Ages: A Literary Review</i> 1846
<i>Two Ethical-Religious Essays</i> 1849	<i>Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits</i> 1847
<i>The Sickness Unto Death</i> 1849	<i>Works of Love</i> 1847
<i>Practice in Christianity</i> 1850	<i>Christian Discourses</i> 1848
	<i>The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air</i> 1849
	<i>Three Discourses in Communion</i> 1849
	<i>An Upbuilding Discourse</i> 1850
	<i>Two Discourses at Communion</i> 1851
	<i>For Self-Examination</i> 1851
	Articles in <i>The Fatherland</i> 1854-5
	<i>The Moment</i> 1855
	"The Changelessness of God" 1855
	<i>The Point of View for My Work as an Author</i> <b>(Posthumous 1859)</b>
	<i>Judge for Yourself! (Posthumous 1876)</i>

We can see from the publications listed above quite how prolific a writer Kierkegaard was, particularly considering that he only lived to the age of 42. It is the pseudonymous category of Kierkegaard's works which is generally of more interest to me in the thesis, given that the three existence spheres are primarily depicted within these works. I will also be highlighting those works within this category which are particularly relevant, explaining the reason for their relevance to my project where necessary.<sup>4</sup>

An examination of the method of communication Kierkegaard used is crucial to my project; in order to understand Kierkegaard's existence spheres, it is essential to consider the method employed when it came to the task of depicting them within the literature. Therefore, it is with an

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<sup>4</sup> This is not to deny the importance of the non-pseudonymous works, as the two 'categories' found within Kierkegaard's authorship arguably do not stand in isolation, and influence each other in many subtle and complex ways (see Ferreira 2009: 7). However, the pseudonymous works are to be my primary focus given that this is where we encounter the existence spheres. Select non-pseudonymous works will be considered in the later chapters of the thesis, where they will become more relevant to the discussion.

examination of Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms that I shall begin my thesis.<sup>5</sup> Chapters One and Two will be focused on a consideration of the purpose behind Kierkegaard's chosen literary devices (Chapter One), and a potential problem with approaching works such as these, and particularly, how my own account can deal with these problems (Chapter Two).

I will be using my arguments in these early chapters to raise some criticisms to TI, by demonstrating how the very devices which Kierkegaard deployed to discuss the existence spheres, and the motivations behind their deployment, are fundamentally in conflict with the views that TI advances. I will also draw upon Kierkegaard's critique of 'objectivity' and the tendency towards abstraction from existential matters when making this case, exploring why such criticisms are relevant to the literary devices that he employs to depict the existence spheres.

It is also within these two initial chapters that I will define what my own approach to Kierkegaard's complex oeuvre will be, and how it can withstand problems which will inevitably be encountered when attempting to understand Kierkegaard's authorial intentions. In Chapter Two, I propose that an analogy with Wittgensteinian 'family resemblances' can be used to define an ideal method of approaching Kierkegaard's production; my aim is that this method will be applied explicitly and repeatedly throughout the thesis.

The second 'prong' to the challenge I will present to TI comes in Chapter Three of the thesis, where I examine Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthetic sphere of existence. In that chapter, I give a more positive interpretation of the aesthetic sphere than is often done in the secondary literature, responding to some of these views as I do so. The main argument that I will espouse here is that the aesthetic sphere can be understood as a sophisticated response to a nihilistic crisis, a crisis of values. In other words, the aesthetic (in some of its forms)<sup>6</sup> can be understood as the attempt to turn life into a work of art, and to provide life with meaning, value, and a narrative through doing so – becoming the 'artist' of one's own life in such a way is able to help define and give meaning to the individual's life once they no longer believe in God or an objective moral code. I will also examine relevant themes such as: melancholy; solitude; and a search for objects of interest, with reference to 19<sup>th</sup> Century Romanticism – contrasting this to the more popular view that Kierkegaard's aesthete is essentially a hedonist seeking pleasure above all else.

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<sup>5</sup> Here, then, I am in agreement with Nussbaum that literary form is not separable from philosophical content, and that the literary form or style used within philosophical works itself makes a statement, rather than serving a purely instrumental role (Nussbaum 1992: 3; Nussbaum 1992: 7).

<sup>6</sup> In Chapter Three, I will identify the different strands of 'aestheticism' presented in Kierkegaard's works, and argue that the above argument is only true for one of these 'strands'.

The argument that I advance in Chapter Three challenges common views found within TI on the following grounds: the aesthetic life requires much skill and careful thought, and is a conscious choice (contra TI exponents who argue that the aesthetic is a more primitive, childlike state, a merely arbitrary 'choice' which individuals 'wander' into).<sup>7</sup> More fundamentally perhaps, I will show that the aesthetic life is not incoherent (as some – although not all – proponents of TI argue it to be); but rather, is able to offer individuals meaningful ways of providing life with narrative, and a means of developing a coherent sense of selfhood. This will be a central part of my thesis, as – as we saw above – a key part of TI is the notion that the aesthetic sphere is merely a 'starting point', from which the individual must 'move on', or 'escape from', and mature.

My third and final argument against TI will attempt to further dismantle the 'hierarchy' of the existence spheres which can be associated with TI by considering the overlap which exists between Kierkegaard's depiction of the aesthetic sphere and his depiction of the religious sphere. I will begin doing so in Chapter Four, by drawing out some of this overlap. Both Chapters Four and Five are focused primarily on Kierkegaard's depiction of the religious sphere of existence and the theme of 'faith' found within his works; but, given that I am also considering the similarities between the portrayal of this sphere and the aesthetic sphere, I will also build upon themes from the previous chapter (i.e. those connected to the aesthetic existence sphere).

In the first of these two chapters, I will focus on the notion of 'trial', discussing the significance of such a notion to the depiction of both the aesthetic and the religious. The reason for choosing this particular similarity, as well as the fact that (as I will show) it is a strong connection between the two, is that there are many smaller areas of overlap within this larger theme. Putting the ideas in context of a 'trial' allows me to explore such features in the context of this larger theme.

Specifically, throughout Chapter Four, I will be exploring the idea that the aesthetic and the religious can best be thought of as psychological trials; I explain what is meant by this, considering the context in which an individual might be said to succeed at such a trial (and conversely, what a failure might look like in each case), as well as what the success of such a trial can provide individuals with (i.e. what the reward of enduring such a trial might be). I will additionally, towards the end of that chapter, explore the notion that both an aesthetic trial and a religious trial are fundamentally solitary trials, contrasting this with the key tenet of the ethical life – communication.

In Chapter Five, I begin to explore the importance of this overlap, and what reasons Kierkegaard may have had for mirroring key aspects of the religious in the aesthetic. In this final chapter, I will

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<sup>7</sup> As opposed to making a conscious commitment to this type of existence.

also consider some of Kierkegaard's key aims within the non-pseudonymous works, showing how the claims made in these works support my interpretation, and reveal something fundamental about Kierkegaard's existential concerns. My aim is to show that Kierkegaard's concern about the state of Christianity and faith during his time do not in fact support the claim that he intended to push *all* of his readers towards the religious existence. In the chapter, I will demonstrate what I believe to be his true aim regarding Christianity and faith, and whether we might reasonably see the other existence spheres as alternatives to a religious existence. Thus, here I seek to challenge subscribers to TI who see Kierkegaard's ultimate aim as one of pushing (all) readers towards a religious existence. As I noted earlier, this may speak to the modern-day reader who no longer finds belief in God plausible, or at the core of their existence and narrative, and wants to seek other viable routes for finding meaning and value in their life.

The conclusion to the thesis will reiterate the key points from the core chapters, distinguishing my project from the other interpretations which currently exist in the secondary literature on the matter. There, I will also briefly address some concerns which a respondent to my thesis (or the defender of TI) might have regarding the claims made here; that is, I will anticipate, and briefly respond to, some of the outstanding objections that my critic might have. In doing so, I will re-establish the boundaries and aims of my project.

# **Chapter One The purpose of Kierkegaard's pseudonymity: A therapeutic literary strategy**

## **Introduction**

As noted in the 'Introduction' to the thesis, before I begin my analysis of the existence spheres themselves, I shall dedicate the first two chapters of my thesis to an exploration of the way in which the existence spheres are presented to Kierkegaard's readers. In other words, I will examine Kierkegaard's method of communication with regards to the depiction of his existence spheres.

In this chapter, I want to focus exclusively on Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship (given that this is where we encounter the existence spheres themselves). More specifically, I will focus on the motivation or purpose behind Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship. My central claim in this chapter, is that there are two purposes motivating Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms, both of which can be thought of as 'therapeutic'. I shall argue that both purposes share the ultimate goal of getting the reader to approach the question of how they ought to live, with the appropriate awareness of self as a subjective individual who must make a choice for themselves. Alongside these purposes, I also identify two corresponding 'target audiences' of Kierkegaard's; these two 'target audiences' (and the corresponding purposes) will have separate sections of the chapter dedicated to them, as they are distinct from one another (although, as I shall explore, similar in some key regards).

I will begin by discussing the element of authorial distance which appears to be critical to Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works (section 1.1), as I believe that this underpins both purposes of the pseudonymity explored here, and is essential to their success.

Following this, in section 1.2, I will explore the first 'purpose' of Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms: by employing the novelistic strategies which I discuss in section 1.1, Kierkegaard allows the reader to enter into the works and engage with the pseudonyms in a way that encourages the reader's self-examination and self-assessment. This is where we come across Kierkegaard's first purpose and correspondingly, his first 'target audience': the 'pre-reflective' individuals who are yet to make a serious commitment to any of the three spheres of existence, and who fail to take existential questions seriously. Throughout this section, I will elaborate on my claim that Kierkegaard had a therapeutic intention here, drawing on a 'therapist-patient'/'author-reader'

analogy. I also explore why Kierkegaard's method of communication is more likely to yield success than an alternative method.

Section 1.3 will tackle the second purpose which I believe Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms was intended to serve: the aid to the removal of 'illusions of objectivity'. My claim here is that another of Kierkegaard's so-called 'targets' were those individuals who sought a 'neutral perspective' when seeking answers to existential questions, thus ignoring the importance of subjectivity and individuality to such questions. As we will discover, a main target here is 'modern philosophy' itself (largely inspired by Hegelian thought), and its readers/subscribers to this philosophy. In this section, as before, it is essential to explain why Kierkegaard's method is more likely to yield success at removing this illusion than an alternative method, and again, I will discuss what it is about this method that I think makes it 'therapeutic'.

Towards the end of section 1.3, I will elaborate on what I think demarcates the two purposes and corresponding target audiences that I discuss in this chapter. Throughout sections 1.2 and 1.3, I will also be raising some initial challenges to TI, explaining how I think Kierkegaard's very method of communicating with regards to the existence spheres contradicts the basic claims of TI accounts.

## **1.1 Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms as a means to ensuring authorial distance from the reader**

I begin my discussion of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship by turning attention to a quote from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*<sup>8</sup>, where we find the following explanation of the pseudonymity:

'What is written is indeed therefore mine, but only so far as I have put the life-view of the creating, poetically actualized individuality into his mouth in audible lines, for my relation is even more remote than that of a poet, who creates characters and yet in the preface is himself the author. For I am impersonally, or personally, in the second person,

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that although the work *CUP* belongs to the category of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works, 'A First and Last Declaration', (the concluding section of *CUP*, in which we find the following explanations of pseudonymity), is in fact signed by Kierkegaard himself. 'A First and Last Declaration' falls outside the 'main body' of the text as it were – everything that comes before it is credited to the pseudonym 'Johannes Climacus'. The problems concerning the pseudonymous/non-pseudonymous divide in the authorship are to be discussed in Chapter Two; but for now, I will take it that this feature has a \*certain\* amount of credibility when it comes to attributing views to Kierkegaard himself.

a souffleur who has poetically produced the authors, whose prefaces in turn are their production, yes, as are their names. So in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by myself. I have no opinion about them except as third party, no knowledge of their meaning except as reader, not the remotest private relation to them, that being impossible in a doubly reflected communication' (*CUP* 527-5).

Here, we are given the explanation that the editors of the pseudonymous works are fictional characters invented by Kierkegaard, and that the 'Prefaces' of said works are the productions of these fictitious characters (as opposed to Kierkegaard himself) – or at least, this is how Kierkegaard wants his readers to think of them.

More importantly, this explanation of Kierkegaard's pseudonymity also strongly suggests that there is a *purpose* behind the pseudonymity, as opposed to it simply being a stylistic feature of his writing – in other words, it is something that he *intended* to serve a purpose, and this is something which he perceived as critical to his illustration of the existence spheres.

Furthermore, this purpose appears more likely to be a reader-centric, as opposed to an author-centric purpose. It seems highly unlikely that Kierkegaard used pseudonyms as a way of protecting his true identity, given that it wasn't long after the publication of Kierkegaard's first pseudonymous work (*Either/Or*) in 1843 that most people in Copenhagen knew, or were at least suspicious, that Kierkegaard was the true author of the work. Moreover, in 1846, when *CUP* was published, Kierkegaard confirmed these suspicions by formally acknowledging himself as the author of all the pseudonymous works before this one. Despite this revelation, however, he maintained the following desire, which he states in the very same work: 'if it should occur to anyone to want to quote a particular passage from the books it is my wish, my prayer, that he will do me the kindness of citing the respective pseudonymous author's name, not mine' (*CUP* 552). So, it seems that protecting his identity was not Kierkegaard's primary aim in writing pseudonymously, for if this were his main motivation he would surely cease to desire that readers still respect the pseudonymity of the book after he himself had confirmed suspicions that he was in fact the true author of the works in question. Seemingly, this is not something which he desires – (at least, if we are to trust the above statement).

As well as writing pseudonymously, Kierkegaard also at times adds more layers within the works by introducing further pseudonymous authors, fictitious editors, or characters who are intended to embody the different existence spheres, into the mix. This reinforces Kierkegaard's apparent attempt to withdraw from the reader.

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The works *Either/Or* and *Stages on Life's Way* are prominent examples of this literary technique in action. In the case of the former, the supposed editor of the book is someone named 'Victor Eremita' (Latin for 'victorious hermit'). In the 'Preface', Eremita describes to readers how he came to discover a set of papers which will in fact make up the main content of the book; the papers, he claims, were discovered within a recently purchased writing desk, (thus, according to him, he comes across these papers by chance). This anecdote from Eremita concerning the discovery of these papers within the desk is note-worthy, as it gives the book the feel of a novel right from the beginning. As we will see in due course, this novelistic set-up is a central feature of Kierkegaard's depiction of the existence spheres, and one which is essential to their portrayal.

These papers, Eremita tells us, can quite easily be divided into two sets: those that display an aesthetic way of life, and those that display an ethical way of life (these sets of papers make up 'Volume I' and 'Volume II' of the book respectively). These two sets of papers are also both ascribed pseudonymous authors: the ethicist, we are told, is an individual who goes by the title 'Judge William', but given that the aesthete doesn't reveal his true name at any point within his papers, Eremita suggests that we refer to the aesthete as 'A', and the ethicist, Judge William, as 'B'. For the remainder of the thesis, I will adopt this, and use the following names interchangeably: 'A', also to be referred to simply as 'the aesthete'; and 'B', also known as 'Judge William', 'the Judge', or simply 'the ethicist'.

Importantly, Eremita also claims that he has no opinion regarding which of these two ways of life ultimately 'wins out', claiming instead that the papers are 'without an ending', and the importance is only that the two views 'confront each other' (*E/O* 36). So, not only does Kierkegaard seemingly want to distance himself from the views and opinions expressed here, we even see Victor Eremita – his pseudonymous editor – refusing his opinion, thereby creating an even greater illusion of authorial distance.

The purpose of this set-up, I want to suggest, is for readers to enter imaginatively into the ways of life of each character ('A' and 'B'), thereby supposedly gaining a first-hand experience of the benefits that may be reaped from either one of the ways of life, and the ways in which they fall short. Widening the gulf between the true author of the work (Kierkegaard, in this instance) and the reader allows for this to happen more effectively. More will be said about this purpose in due course, but first, let us take a look at the format of the second of the works mentioned previously.

*Stages on Life's Way* has a similar set up. First, a character named 'Hilarius Bookbinder' (the 'joyful' or 'merry' bookbinder) introduces himself as the discoverer and binder of the contents which will make up the main content of this work, (he, also, provides readers with a story about

how he came to discover the papers in question, which is somewhat similar to Eremita's story).<sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup> Following Hilarius' 'Introduction', is a section entitled 'In Vino Veritas: A Recollection' (In Wine Truth: A Recollection), which is 'related' by a character whom readers of Kierkegaard have not yet been acquainted with – 'William Afham' ('Afham' meaning 'by himself'). The focus of this section is the retelling of a discussion concerning the topic of 'love', which took place at a banquet, several of the attendees of whom readers of Kierkegaard are already familiar with (for instance, Johannes the Seducer and Victor Eremita of *E/O* are both present, as is Constantin Constantius of *Repetition*).<sup>11</sup> The author of the second section of the book is apparently the same character as the author of the second section of *E/O*, 'A Married Man' (also known as 'B' or 'Judge William'). The title of this section is 'Some Reflections on Marriage in Answer to Objections'. A religious character named 'Frater Taciturnus' ('brother who remains silent') is the author of the third section of *SoLW*, entitled 'Guilty? /Not Guilty?: A Story of Suffering. An Imaginary Psychological Construction'. This section of the book also contains 'Quidam's Diary' ('Quidam' being Latin for 'someone'), which Taciturnus claims he retrieved from the bottom of a lake, bound in a watertight container. This reminds us again of the set-up from *E/O*, but this time in more than one way: in 'Volume I' (comprised of the aesthete's papers), we are also presented with a diary, which is given a further pseudonymous author ('A' of the papers that come before the diary claims that he is not the author of the diary entries) – Johannes the Seducer.<sup>12</sup> Not only do the two works share this 'diary' feature in common, but the telling of how Taciturnus comes to discover the diary also reminds us of how Eremita, the editor of *E/O*, tells us of how he comes to discover the papers of the aesthete and the letters of Judge William; both sets of papers are seemingly stumbled upon by chance, and merely edited or compiled by Victor Eremita and Hilarius Bookbinder respectively. Again, these additional features provide a novelistic structure to the work, (in contrast to a more traditional philosophical treatise).

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<sup>9</sup> Note also, that he is different to Eremita, as Eremita is supposedly an editor, but Hilarius doesn't even want to go this far – he thus places a bigger distance between himself and the content of the book than Eremita does with *E/O*. Hilarius claims merely to be the 'discover' and 'binder' of the book's contents, so he seems to have even less of a role in the book's production than does Eremita in the production of *E/O*.

<sup>10</sup> Again, the fact that Hilarius provides a story about how he discovered the papers in question is important, as, like with Eremita's anecdote in *E/O*, readers are immediately made to feel as if they are reading a novel, as opposed to a philosophical treatise.

<sup>11</sup> There have been suggestions, however, that this is not as such a 're-telling' of the banquet, as the banquet itself didn't actually take place, but is merely something that Afham invented: he himself says, 'I sometimes feel as though I had not experienced it, but had poetically invented it (...) I know very well that I shall not soon forget that banquet in which I participated without being a participant'. (*SoLW* 1988: 15; see also Mackey 1971: 18). This is in keeping with the theme of recollection, which is crucial within the aesthete's life.

<sup>12</sup> There is dispute over whether 'A' of 'Volume I' of *E/O* is in fact the same person as Johannes the Seducer – in other words, the author of the Seducer's Diary that we find at the end of 'Volume I'. However, for the time being, I will take 'A's' claim that he is not the author of the diary at face value, given that it has no significant effect on the other claims that I wish to make at this stage.

In these works, it would appear that what Kierkegaard is attempting to do is to place as much distance between himself as the 'true author' of the work in question, and the reader of this work, as he possibly can. This he does not just by communicating through a pseudonym, but by adding further pseudonyms into the mix (such as the pseudonymous characters mentioned above), thereby distancing himself even further from the opinions expressed in the work and the reader of these works. In *CUP*, we find confirmation that this is indeed what Kierkegaard was up to:

'*Either-Or*, whose very title is suggestive, exhibits the existential relationship between the aesthetic and the ethical in existing individualities. This is for me the book's direct polemic against speculative philosophy, which is indifferent to the existential. The fact that there is no result and no finite decision, is an indirect expression for the truth as inwardness, and thus perhaps as a polemic against the truth as knowledge. (...) The fact that there is no author is a means of keeping the reader at a distance' (*CUP* 226).

It is important to note that Kierkegaard is also eager to state that he is at an equal distance from all of his creations, and the views expressed by them within the pseudonymous works. The following extract – (part of which I have already cited previously) – bears repeating here:

'(...)in the pseudonymous works there is not a single word which is mine, I have no opinion about these works except as a third person, no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader (...) Just as far as I am from being the Seducer or the Judge in *Either-Or*, just so far as I am from being the editor Victor Eremita, precisely as far (...) I am just as far from being Johannes *de silentio* in *Fear and Trembling* as I am being the Knight of Faith he depicts, precisely as far; and again just as far from being the author of the Preface' (*CUP* 551).

He continues to list all the other pseudonyms encountered in his vast production, and in the same fashion depicted above, he claims to be equally distant from all of them. Of course, Kierkegaard's bold statement that he has 'no opinion' on the works except as a 'reader' can reasonably be doubted, but what is important here is that it's clear how we *ought* to regard his relationship to the pseudonymous works, (or, at the very least, that this is how he *intended* for the works to be approached). Namely, we ought not to make the mistake of conflating Kierkegaard's own views with those expressed by the pseudonyms, and moreover, that this applies equally to all of the pseudonyms.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> We may, however, cast doubt upon this statement with regards to one particular pseudonym – namely, Johannes Climacus, the pseudonymous editor of both *CUP* and *Philosophical Crumbs*. What is interesting

Mackey's distinction between personae and persons is particularly relevant here: 'the pseudonyms are not mouthpieces through which Kierkegaard hopes to get a hearing for his views, but fictive personalities whose lives are poetically observed and reported' (Mackey 1971: 249-50). This distinction is crucial, as it helps us to avoid the mistake of confusing the opinions of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms with Kierkegaard's own opinion, and in accordance with the extract above, it is also true to Kierkegaard's wishes and intentions. Given this, it is evident that Kierkegaard was doing more than just communicating via a pseudonym – the use of pseudonyms is a literary device, a pedagogical method of communication, aimed at getting the reader to do something for herself.

An inevitable effect of asking readers to think of his relationship to the pseudonymous works in this way, and using novelistic structures such as those found within *E/O* and *SoLW*, is the granting of a certain amount of autonomy to readers. By stepping back from the views expressed in the works, Kierkegaard leaves room for a more active role on the part of the reader, and a sense of freedom when it comes to a consideration of what to make of the pseudonyms and the ways of life that they are intended to portray. I am inclined (at least to an extent) to agree with Berthold when he argues that removal of the author's authority here, (which is done via the use of these multiple layers of pseudonymity), can essentially be recognised as the removal of an obstacle to the reader's independence. That is, Kierkegaard has intentionally become unreliable, fantastic, and mythological (again, due to the multiplicity of voices present within his authorship), and as a consequence, the reader is encouraged to replace a reliance on the author with a self-reliance (Berthold 2011: 111).<sup>14</sup> Again, the reader is required to do something, as opposed to just passively accepting directions from the author.

As Nussbaum notes, in a similar vein, novels tend to be more open-ended than traditional philosophical treatises, (although, she adds, they are not so open-ended that they give no shape at all to the reader's thought processes). She elaborates on this benefit of the novelistic structure,

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about these works, is that both bear Kierkegaard's own name upon the title page as responsible for the work's publication. In addition, the appendix of *CUP* is also signed with Kierkegaard's name. Given that this is done for none of Kierkegaard's other pseudonyms, it seems reasonable to suggest that he shares a particular affinity with Climacus. That is, although we ought not to simply conflate the claims of Climacus with Kierkegaard in a straightforward manner, there is sufficient reason to treat the claims of Climacus as more closely aligned with Kierkegaard's own opinions than that of any of the other pseudonyms.

<sup>14</sup> In Chapter Two, I will advance my own approach to Kierkegaard's tricky authorship, and promote the notion that we ought to avoid a view which sees Kierkegaard's production as ultimately too fragmented to have genuine philosophical significance, and which sees Kierkegaard himself as an 'unreliable author'. In some ways, Berthold risks coming close to such a view with the language used here; hence why I note that I agree with the statement only to *some degree*. As we will see, I think that to a large extent, the reader is free (but not *completely* self-reliant) – exactly what I mean by this will be explored later in this chapter. Berthold's view will also be explored in a little more detail in the next chapter.

adding that, '(B)y showing the mystery and indeterminacy of "our actual adventure," they characterize life more richly and truly – indeed, more precisely – than an example lacking those features ever could; and they engender in the reader a type of ethical work more appropriate for life' (Nussbaum, 1992: 47). Considering these features of the novel which Nussbaum points out, we can begin to see more clearly why Kierkegaard may have chosen these novelistic structures for the works in which he portrays the existence spheres, particularly if it is indeed true that Kierkegaard believed it more important that the reader decide for herself what to make of the existence spheres than that she see matters in the same way that he did. Using this kind of novelistic technique, whilst being open-ended enough to allow the reader to choose, still allows Kierkegaard to 'characterize life more richly and truly' to borrow Nussbaum's explanation (see above; Nussbaum 1992: 47) – that is, he is able to convey the appropriate level of detail required for the reader to make this all-important choice. In the pseudonymous works, Kierkegaard is able to show what issues could arise if an individual pushes say, the aesthetic sphere of existence, to its limits and tests its boundaries, yet he is still able to leave it up to the reader what they ultimately make of this way of life, and whether it is one worth pursuing. He is doing more than just merely *describing* what the aesthetic life looks like, or would be like – he is setting up a scenario in which the reader is able to enter (via her imagination) into the novel.

In the next section, I will turn to an exploration of the first purpose of this reader autonomy, suggesting that this element of autonomy is needed in order for the reader to engage in the process of self-reflection – this process of self-reflection, in turn, is necessary in order to achieve the appropriate consideration of the existence spheres.

## **1.2 Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms as a means to encouraging self-examination in 'pre-reflective' readers**

In this section, I approach the first 'purpose' which I want to argue was behind Kierkegaard's pseudonymity, and correspondingly, the first target audience I think he had in mind. I have divided this second section into three smaller sub-sections: the first of which will build upon the discussion from section 1.1, beginning to consider why Kierkegaard used the 'novelistic strategy' that he did; the second sub-section will argue that this strategy was employed primarily with a therapeutic aim in mind; and the third and final sub-section here will identify the recipient of this 'therapy' (namely, Kierkegaard's target audience).

### 1.2.1 The use of pseudonyms as a 'novelistic strategy'

In this section, in many ways I will merely be further detailing the literary devices that Kierkegaard employs via the use of pseudonyms (as outlined in the previous section). However, here, I will additionally begin to explain what the effects of employing such devices are, and how I think such devices impact the reader. Such an investigation is required before I outline my analogy with a therapeutic process.

So, I will now return to my discussion of the pseudonymous 'layers' and structures found within works such as *SoLW* and *E/O*. Arguably, the purpose of these novelistic structures of the pseudonymous works (outlined in the previous section) and 'fictive personalities' (Mackey's terminology; Mackey 1971: 50) is for the views to appeal inwardly, almost as if the views portrayed are actually the reader's own views (see Mooney 1991: 6). Instead of just being told what constitutes (for instance) the aesthete's life, and then subsequently provided with an opinion by the author on what to make of this way of life, readers are instead invited to enter into the aesthete's life, as if it were their own. As noted in the previous section, this process is not a passive process. Through 'entering into' 'A's life, readers seemingly get to experience first-hand the issues that the aesthete faces, seeing how any proposed solutions to these issues will play out for him.

Through this exercise, an individual may notice certain similarities that they share with the aesthete, subsequently judging whether they deem these to be good features about the aesthete, and therefore about themselves. For instance, we may be able to see certain aspects of our personalities or thought-processes reflected in the aesthete or the ethicist of *E/O*. Making judgements first on these characters and then applying them to oneself, may allow readers to identify inconsistencies or problems that are relevant to themselves also, and as a recognition of this, make the necessary changes to one's life or one's self.

The effect here is much the same as reading a novel; the reader sometimes finds that there are particular characters within novels who they closely identify with, and the judgements of that particular character which follow may also reflect back onto the reader in a personal, meaningful way.

This is particularly evident in *E/O*. In 'Volume I' of the book, we are presented with a personal diary and letters (of 'Johannes the Seducer'), as well as a 'Diapsalmata' in which we gain an insight into the aesthete's thought-process and day-to-day moods. This really allows the reader to get inside the psyche of the aesthete, in a way that may not be possible – (or as successful at least) – if an alternative method of communication had been used in place of this novelistic set-up. Whilst

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the ethicist of *E/O* arguably tells us less about his personal life than the aesthete – (although we are given some details about his marriage, and we know of his career as a Judge) – the fact that his thought-process is presented to us in a letter-format still adds a personal touch, and allows us to enter into the mind of an ethicist of that sort, and see what the ethical life is like from the 'inside' as it were. For instance, Judge Williams writes:

'To be on the safe side, I will occasionally allude to my wife and my relationship with her, not because I would make so bold as to present our marriage as the exemplary norm, but partly because poetic portrayals plucked out of thin air have, through their generality no particular power to convince, and partly because it is important for me to show how it is possible to preserve the aesthetic even in everyday circumstances (...)'  
(*E/O* 386).

So, although the Judge is in the business of advancing arguments in favour of the ethical life, he still does this *from his point of view*. In other words, the fact that he will allude to his own marriage, (his own personal life, that is), adds a personal dimension to his letters, and marks him out as a specific and identifiable character, as opposed to some abstract entity. That is, there is someone who the reader may be able to relate to. These contextual features and details, as we will see, are crucial to Kierkegaard's presentation of the existence spheres.

One initial explanation for why Kierkegaard writes in this way is that it encourages reflection and self-examination on the reader's part. It seems intuitive that by doing things this way, it may be easier for the reader to notice problems or flaws within themselves (as well as positive features) by perceiving them in a mirror image. Recall the comparison to the reader of a novel: by seeing certain qualities of their (the readers) own reflected in a character, it may be easier to make judgements on the characters and then apply these to themselves.

Also, as Mooney explains, 'when the inevitable instabilities emerge, the underlying critique is experienced as a *self*-critique, rather than a presumptuous judgemental attack. And the corresponding motivation to seek some sort of resolution (...) is experienced as a *self*-motivation' (Mooney 1991: 6). It can often prove difficult to get an individual to realise that there is a problem in the first place, before we can realistically expect them to deal with the problem. As Mooney's explanation shows, the reader of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works believes that *they are the one* to discover their problem(s). As a result of this so-called discovery, or 'self-critique', they are much more likely to accept the presence of a problem, and subsequently move on to treat it in the appropriate manner. By believing that someone else has pointed out a problem or flaw, the critique may be perceived as judgemental and malicious, thereby resulting in a defensive stance

from the individual under scrutiny. Alternatively, the individual that the critique applies to may not even recognise that the critique is aimed at them, and as a result, miss the point completely.

For instance, the Judge of 'Volume II' of *E/O* aims his criticism at the aesthete of 'Volume I', but if a reader were to perceive this criticism as relevant to themselves, they may still believe that this realisation has taken place as some kind of self-critique. That is, by using a method of indirect communication – and by witnessing someone else's judgement of a certain way of life/personality – the reader is surely less likely to feel as though a personal attack is being made. In his very first letter, (addressed: 'My Friend!'), Judge William writes:

'If this inquiry came to any other person's eyes but your own, it would strike them as exceedingly strange and pointless; if it were a married man he might exclaim with the *bonhomie* of the paterfamilias, 'Yes, marriage, that's life's aesthetic.' If it were a young man he might rather vaguely and unreflectingly chime in, 'Yes, love, you are life's aesthetic.' But neither of them would be able to grasp why it should occur to me to want to save the aesthetic reputation of marriage' (*E/O* 383).<sup>15</sup>

By beginning like this – that is, by stating that the letters are intended for the aesthete of 'Volume I' only – the reader is able to let their guard down so-to-speak. The criticisms that the Judge makes may of course be relevant to the reader too, but the reader is not likely to perceive these criticisms as a direct, personal attack, given this set-up. As noted before, the reader is able to see the criticism or downfalls of each way of life via the depiction of these 'characters' first, and then reflect on how these might carry over to their own life. Thus, the reader is allowed to feel as if they have reached the identification of a problem on their own, even if in reality this has only happened due to a prompt from the author (i.e. Kierkegaard in this instance). That is, a certain 'prompt' is being given to the reader – although they will not recognise it as such (due to the method of communication employed here) – and, as a result, they may begin the process of turning a critical eye to their own lives. The hope is that the reader will consider the criticisms raised by the Judge to the aesthete, and feel the weight of these criticisms if there are similarities between themselves and the one who is being criticised (in this case, the aesthete).

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<sup>15</sup> I use an example from the ethicist here, as it is not as straightforward with regards to the aesthetic and religious sphere. The ethicist is of course in the business of persuading others that the ethical way of life is the best way to live, the way in which one *ought* to live. However, the other two existence spheres do not share this same quality. Hence, their portrayal is done in a slightly different way. This does not mean, however, that it was Kierkegaard's purpose to persuade readers of anything.

### 1.2.2 The therapy analogy

I now want to show to what extent I think that the techniques discussed so far can be seen to share a likeness with the therapeutic process, whilst distinguishing my own account from TI with regards to this aspect of Kierkegaard's portrayal.

At its most basic level, the therapy analogy can be drawn in the following way: a therapist who prompts self-reflection in their patient is analogous to the author, i.e. Kierkegaard, who prompts a similar reaction in the reader; and the reader is akin to the patient, as both – if treatment is successful – will begin to examine their lives and consider the various solutions that are available to them. The therapist is able to lay out potential solutions or options for their patient, whilst highlighting the potential benefits and short-comings of each; and similarly, Kierkegaard presents the three existence spheres (i.e. existential options), whilst depicting potential limitations and dangers of each. Throughout this section, I will highlight the collaborative aspect involved here, and demonstrate how Kierkegaard, like the therapist, is able to guide his reader through a therapeutic process in which the patient is facilitated to eventually find their own solution.

The initial 'prompting' technique of the therapist is very important to the overall success of the therapy here – both to the actual therapist and to Kierkegaard, I will argue. Returning to Mooney's explanation from the previous section (see Mooney 1991: 6), it is very important that the reader feels as if what they are experiencing is a 'self-critique' (as opposed to a criticism from another person) – and, the same seems to be true in the case of the therapy patient. In both instances, it seems that a non-confrontational, and an indirect method of communication (i.e. a prompt), will be much more likely to yield success. A direct, confrontational, method must be avoided in such therapeutic processes; a direct confrontation seems highly likely to result in a defensive stance from the person on the receiving end – hence, (at least in part), the need for an indirect method. Not only is this a more indirect, and less confrontational method then, it is also a more collaborative one; although the therapist/author guides the patient/reader, and provides the information that is essential to making a well-informed choice, the patient is allowed to reach conclusions on their own and ultimately find their own solution.

In this collaborative process then, the reader of Kierkegaard's works (analogous to the patient) must be willing to cooperate in this process. Both reader and patient must subject themselves to self-scrutiny (after the initial prompt from the therapist/author, and with their continued guidance), in order to face up to their problems, and to get to the stage where they can begin to survey their options, and eventually make a choice. The novelistic strategy that Kierkegaard employs in works such as *E/O* and *SoLW* make it easier for the reader ('patient') to indulge this self-reflection, for the reasons outlined above, and the indirect, non-confrontational method used

is more likely to result in the patient's/reader's cooperation.<sup>16</sup> Namely, the reader is able to make judgements first upon Kierkegaard's pseudonyms (such as the aesthete – 'A' – and the ethicist – 'B', or 'Judge William'), and then apply these judgements and concerns to their own lives. Thus, although this process is guided by the author, there is still an element of self-discovery for the reader.

The patient here (and this carries over to Kierkegaard's reader) plays a very active process in the so-called therapy. As we saw in the previous section, this level of autonomy and activeness on the part of the reader is central to Kierkegaard's overall method. So, once again, we can see that although the therapist acts as a facilitator, the therapy is still very much patient-directed; the same, I think, is the case with Kierkegaard's portrayal of the existence spheres. The reader is guided to make an informed choice, as is the therapy patient. The reader might have misconceptions about the aesthetic, the ethical, and/or the religious life, and what each entails; hence, part of what Kierkegaard is doing is showing what each of these spheres is, and what a commitment to each might require of an individual. (Throughout the later chapters, we will see what some of these misconceptions might be, and how Kierkegaard attempts to dispel them.) Yet the reader still has the freedom to make a choice for herself – in the end, she (the reader) must be the one to survey the choices, and to make a decision (using, of course, the information that she has garnered from the therapeutic process, and considering whether she possesses what might be required of her should she commit to a particular way of life). Again, this highlights the collaborative aspect of the therapy analogy, which seems to be central to the success of therapy, and in this case, Kierkegaard's therapeutic strategy.

At this point, I think it is worth highlighting the way in which the account I have presented here (and will continue to advance throughout the thesis) differs from TI. The therapy analogy still seems, (to an extent), to work for TI accounts; however, the vital difference between my own account and TI accounts, is that TI goes further in a key regard, and argues that Kierkegaard always had the aim of revealing the religious life as the solution. So, if we are to apply a therapy analogy to TI's understanding of Kierkegaard's existence spheres, it must be deemed a more 'hands-on' approach to therapy, in the sense that the therapist/author, from the outset, has a more specific end-goal in mind. If the reader does not, in the end, see that the religious life is the solution, then according to TI, this must surely mean that the therapeutic process has failed – on such accounts, to arrive at any other solution (i.e. the aesthetic or the ethical) is to have

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<sup>16</sup> Of course, the reader may still fail to engage in this process of self-reflection which is being called for, but my claim here is that Kierkegaard's method is more likely to gain success than other available methods, not that it will always be successful in engaging readers in the desired way.

misunderstood Kierkegaard, and to have failed to grasp the message contained in his works. On my own account, however, the 'goal' of the therapeutic process is to get the reader to a point where they are well-informed to make their own choice about the existence spheres; as noted above, this involves getting the reader to self-reflect, and also to illustrate what commitment to existential decisions might entail.

As I explore Kierkegaard's existence spheres themselves in later chapters (particularly Chapters Three and Four), I will be picking up upon the ways in which I think the therapy analogy becomes relevant to their depictions in the primary literature.

### 1.2.3 Kierkegaard's first 'target audience': The pre-reflective readers

With the above in mind, I now think that the first of Kierkegaard's 'target audiences' can be revealed as those individuals who he perceived as in need of undergoing this type of self-examination. I will call these individuals 'pre-reflective' individuals.

Individuals who are at a 'pre-reflective' stage are individuals who have not yet given proper thought to the way that they live their lives and simply 'go with the flow', or follow the crowd, doing as their peers do, as opposed to critically examining themselves and their lives. In a way, such individuals might be said to exist outside of the existence spheres, as arguably they are yet to make a serious commitment to any of the spheres, and any of the values connected with these existence spheres. They might have some pre-existing misconceptions about the existence spheres perhaps, but this category of reader on the whole, still seems to mainly include those that haven't given much (or certainly not *enough*) thought to existential matters.

Rudd also identifies a type of 'pre-reflective' individual in Kierkegaard's oeuvre, and refers to these individuals as those that participate in 'crowd life'. This is the first of five stages that Rudd identifies in Kierkegaard's works, each stage being an improvement on the next (Rudd 2005: 24). Of course, whilst I agree with Rudd that the 'crowd man' or 'pre-reflective individual' is an individual which can be identified in Kierkegaard's oeuvre, as I have already made clear, I am not claiming (in the way that Rudd is) that there is a hierachal structure of existential options which follows from this way of living. My claim is simply that these individuals lack the commitment to any of the existence spheres portrayed by Kierkegaard.<sup>17</sup> The 'pre-reflective' individual will have a

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<sup>17</sup> These pre-reflective individuals are also sometimes referred to as belonging to Kierkegaard's 'lower aesthetic' stage. This is distinct from the aesthetic sphere of existence which I will be defending later in the thesis; this lower aesthetic stage of the 'crowd man' or pre-reflective individual is much less sophisticated and complex than Kierkegaard's *E/O* aesthete.

*preference* or inclination one way or another; it is simply the case that they have not yet given the existential options (i.e. the existence spheres) enough serious thought – the ‘prompt’ from Kierkegaard (the ‘therapist’) must instigate this reflective process.

Although this target of Kierkegaard’s is evident for the reasons above (i.e. because of the work he does to prompt readers to turn a critical eye to their lives, and to consider the importance of existential questions), it is also a target which is more explicitly drawn out in works such as *The Present Age*. In *TPA*, (a work belonging to Kierkegaard’s non-pseudonymous category), Kierkegaard contrasts the ‘present age’ to the ‘revolutionary age’, claiming that in his age (the present age), ‘nothing really happens’ (*TPA* 4); everyone is so concerned with the opinions of others and ‘blending in’, that there are virtually no individuals, and no action is produced. In other words, no one has the courage to be an individual anymore, or to prioritize one set of values over another – everything is on par (consequently, nothing in the end really has any value). Therefore, we need to acknowledge ourselves as individuals with particular and unique needs and preferences before we can properly contemplate the existence spheres. One must first break free from the crowd, and acknowledge oneself as an individual with preferences and particular values, before one can properly commit oneself to one way of life in favour of another.

As argued in the previous section, Kierkegaard’s role as author, or ‘therapist’ on my account, is to prompt this pre-reflective individual into the process of self-reflection and subsequently a process of self-assessment, whilst highlighting the limitations and potential dangers of each existence sphere (so that the individual may make an informed decision). By encouraging these pre-reflective individuals to engage in these processes, such individuals are better equipped to make an informed decision over how they ought to live their life, and also to acknowledge the importance and the gravity of these existential matters. As noted in the previous section (section 2.2), this is the main way in which I think the ‘therapy analogy’ can be applied to Kierkegaard’s illustrations of the spheres of existence. Engaging the reader in a process of self-reflection is essential with regards to this first purpose, and in relation to this first target audience. What to do after this self-examination has taken place however, is the reader’s responsibility – only the individual readers themselves can make the existential decision to choose one of the existence spheres over the others. Kierkegaard’s use of pseudonyms with regards to this first purpose is ‘therapeutic’ in the sense that he guides the reader to this process of self-reflection, and presents the existential options that are on offer, in a way that acknowledges the potential short-comings of each.

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## 1.3 Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms as an aid to the removal of an illusion

This section will address what I perceive to be the second therapeutic purpose or 'target' of Kierkegaard's pseudonymity. These two elements are more closely entwined than the first purpose and target audience I believe. Accordingly, this section will take a slightly different approach to the way in which I discuss these two elements. The first sub-section will discuss the second 'purpose' of Kierkegaard's pseudonymity and the second 'target audience' simultaneously. The second sub-section that I have here will explain *how* Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms helps to tackle this second purpose (and target audience).

### 1.3.1 Kierkegaard's second 'target audience': The Hegelians & the 'illusion of objectivity'

It is well-known that Kierkegaard believed modern philosophy, and consequently also its readers (it seems likely), to be suffering from an illusion. This is an illusion which must be removed before the suffering individual can even begin the process of self-reflection which I discussed in the previous section.

To help me explain the illusion that Kierkegaard has in mind – and the one that I will be discussing for the remainder of the chapter – I will begin by looking at Gardiner's use of the term 'illusions of objectivity'<sup>18</sup> – these illusions, Gardiner believes, were Kierkegaard's main target of the authorship.<sup>19</sup> He defines these so-called 'illusions of objectivity' as follows:

'A tendency to sometimes smother the vital core of subjective experience beneath layers of historical commentary and pseudo-scientific generalisation and (...) a proneness to discuss ideas from an abstract theoretical viewpoint that (takes) no account of their significance for the particular outlooks and commitments of flesh-and-blood human beings' (Gardiner 2002: 2).

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<sup>18</sup> There are, in fact, several illusions which Kierkegaard believed plagued the philosophy of his time, some of which I will note later in the thesis. These so-called 'illusions of objectivity', however, are particularly relevant to the current discussion on Kierkegaard's chosen method of communication, hence it is these which I will be focusing on for the meantime.

<sup>19</sup> Whilst I do not agree with Gardiner that this was Kierkegaard's *main* target of the authorship, I do believe that it was an important target (amongst others), and that it is critical to any discussion of Kierkegaard's portrayal of the existence spheres.

Given Kierkegaard's main concern in the pseudonymous works with the question of how one ought to live one's life, and the focus on the individual, the importance of subjectivity is crucial to bear in mind when one contemplates answering this question. This importance is something which Kierkegaard wants to reaffirm – (thus, it is also a feature of Kierkegaard's philosophy which I wish to highlight in the thesis). Gardiner therefore picks up on the tendency (of modern philosophy) to 'smother' this core of subjectivity in relation to existential matters as a key concern of Kierkegaard's throughout his authorship – the aim being to 'recover' this 'vital core of subjective experience'.

At this point, it is worth noting that by 'objectivity' (i.e. of the kind that Kierkegaard wanted to attack), I mean a type of truth or viewpoint which is indifferent to the existence of any particular individual (see Piety 2010: 193). That is, when Kierkegaard claims that 'truth is subjectivity', he did not mean that *all truths are subjective truths* (i.e. he is not subjectivist); he is seemingly referring only to a particular kind of truth, namely truths that are fundamentally connected to the existence of an individual (Piety 2010: 201) – these are the types of truths which must be subjective. For instance, the following statement can be seen as evidence that this is the case:

'The way of objective reflection makes the subject accidental, and thereby transforms existence into something indifferent, something vanishing. Away from the subject the objective way of reflection leads to the objective truth, and while the subject and his subjectivity become indifferent, the truth also becomes indifferent, and this indifference is precisely its objective validity; for all interest, like all decisiveness, is rooted in subjectivity. The way of objective reflection leads to abstract thought, to mathematics, to historical knowledge of different kinds; and it always leads away from the subject, whose existence or non-existence, and from the objective point of view quite rightly, becomes indifferent' (CUP 173).

So, we see here the acknowledgement that some objective viewpoints on truth are both necessary and useful – most evidently in the discipline of mathematics. However, issues arise when *existential* questions are approached from this angle; Kierkegaard saw it as a mistake to attempt to answer existential questions by taking an objective stance, or a 'theoretical abstract viewpoint' as Gardiner describes it. This is an idea which we find expressed multiple times in CUP: we see it, for instance, in the accusation that the modern speculative philosopher has 'forgotten, in a sort of world-historical absent-mindedness, what it means to be a human being' (CUP 109). As noted earlier, context is all-important for Kierkegaard, and so failure to acknowledge the 'significance (of) particular outlooks and commitments' (Gardiner's terminology) leads to a huge error when it comes to talking about existential matters – in Kierkegaard's own words, it is to

forget what it means to be a human being. To commit this error, then, is to have fallen prey to the 'illusions of objectivity'.

This 'error' or 'illusion' was one which had been largely inspired by Hegel and his followers – a primary target of Kierkegaard's throughout his production, as Hegelianism was the most 'popular' school of thought or philosophy during Kierkegaard's lifetime.

Hegel was, in part, responding to a worry which he had about the 'excessive subjectivity' which had pervaded German philosophy during his time. Because of this worry, Hegel wanted to bring philosophy closer to a '*Wissenschaft*' – systematic, objective, knowledge. Heiss notes that, alongside this desire, is also the desire to 'unite the whole of Western thought into one, unified, yet at the same time many-branched system. It is this whole – and not the particulars of it – which is the truth for Hegel' (Heiss 1975: 5). Truth, for Hegel, is part of a systematic process; but he is not so interested in the single truths which make up this process – or the whole – rather, he is concerned with the whole itself, 'the movement of thought in its dynamic continuum' (see Heiss 1975: 52).

So, Hegel was in part responding to a concern which he had about the way in which philosophy was heading, attempting to bring it closer to a scientific form of enquiry ('*Wissenschaft*' – as noted above, this means systematic, objective knowledge, thus this German term encompasses more than what is meant by the English word 'science'). However, for Kierkegaard, Hegel had taken this too far in the other direction by attempting to organise all of philosophy into a 'System' through which all contradictions could be 'mediated' away. According to Taylor, 'through the synthetic activity of reason, Hegelianism attempts to integrate the oppositions of finite experience within a self-enclosed system. Truth, it is argued, presupposes such an all-encompassing rational totality' (Taylor 1980: 66). In this process, the particulars (single truths) of finite experience are ignored, or dissolved away, in order to focus on the 'whole'.

Hegel essentially, then, tries to remove the choice option by 'integrating (...) oppositions (...) within a self-enclosed system' (see above; Taylor's terminology). On his account, you can have both A and B (where these represent natural opposites); one need not choose *either A or B*, as A and B are ultimately (in the end) the same – according to the Hegelian system there is no real or significant opposition between the two. A and B here are merely what Taylor refers to above as the 'particulars', which in the grand scheme of the 'whole' (the self-enclosed system that Taylor refers to) can be collapsed into one and the same thing – thus, essentially being ignored. One of Kierkegaard's problems with this, is that he wants the reader to make *a choice – either A or B*. Simply mediating between the two, and never making a final decision will achieve nothing – particularly when it comes to existential decisions. As I have argued in the previous section, I do

not claim that Kierkegaard has a motive for guiding the reader to choose one over the other (e.g. A over B, or vice versa); rather, my claim is that Kierkegaard (by way of his indirect communication) urges the reader to make *a* choice for herself – to present the choices, to get the reader thinking about some of the limitations of each sphere, and/or the problems that might be encountered in committing to a particular existence sphere.

I will now turn to look at a passage taken from the 'ecstatic lecture' found in 'Volume I' of *E/O*, which acts as a representation of the criticisms of Hegel which have just been discussed – that is, this particular section of the book shows what applying Hegel's process of mediation to existential choices would look like. I think it is worth quoting this at some length here:

'If you marry, you will regret it; if you do not marry, you will also regret it; if you marry or if you do not marry, you will regret both; whether you marry or do not marry, you will regret both. Laugh at the world's follies, you will regret it; weep over them, you will also regret it; if you laugh at the world's follies or you weep over them, you will regret both; whether you laugh at the world's follies or you weep over them, you will regret both (...) If you hang yourself, you will regret it; if you do not hang yourself, you will regret it; if you hang yourself or you do not hang yourself, you will regret both; whether you hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will regret both. This, gentleman, is the sum of all practical wisdom (...) the eternity lies not behind either/or but ahead of it. So their eternity will also be in a painful succession of moments in time, since they will have the double regret to live on. My practical wisdom is easy to understand, for I have only one principle, which is not even my starting point. One must distinguish between the successive dialectic in either/or and the eternal dialectic touched on here. In saying that I cannot start out from my principle, the opposite of this is not a starting-out from it, but the simply negative expression of my principle, the expression for its grasping itself as in opposition to a starting-out or a not starting-out from it. I do not start out from my principle, for if I were to do so, I would regret it. If I were not to start out from it, I would also regret it' (*E/O* 54-5).

This extract perfectly demonstrates then, how ludicrous it would look to continually mediate between two opposites. Kierkegaard's mockery of this process here highlights precisely the need to make a choice: in real-life, I cannot hover forever between a choice of marrying or not marrying – there is not really a way to resolve these oppositions, without committing to one or the other. Furthermore, if one were to live their life according to such a principle, life would come to a standstill in a way; if one never makes a choice of one thing over another, then nothing would

ever get done, or start in the first place – even committing to indecision involves making a decision.

Given that the title of the book itself is *Either/Or*, this also seems highly suggestive of a need to make a decision – i.e. to choose either A or B. So, we can begin to see here how the therapy analogy comes into play once more: the reader needs to recognise what the existential choices are, and the fact that one must eventually choose between them – Hegelian philosophy had distorted this, by blurring the lines between the existential choices, reducing the real opposition between choice A and choice B, and the need to choose one over the other. In the next section, I will explore in more depth the full extent of the issues caused by the sorts of illusion which this Hegelian philosophy gives rise to, and how Kierkegaard's therapeutic approach to existential philosophy aims to tackle this; but for now, it is worth drawing attention once more to the fact that Kierkegaard seems to be showing the reader what choices are available, and what the limitations of such choices are, so that the reader may make an informed decision regarding options A and B. The individual can still take the time to make a choice, and to consider their options in depth, but at some point, this process must come to an end, and a decision must be made.

Before moving on, it is also worth noting that on Hegel's account, philosophy is the *highest* discipline, therefore there are no questions concerning religion, faith, or other existential matters that philosophy (on the Hegelian conception) or the 'System' cannot answer for. The result of reducing everything down to fit the 'System' in this way is a disengagement with existential questions, and a disregard for particulars and individualities – an abstraction. Everything is made 'easy' by the Hegelian 'System' in a sense, as oppositions can simply be mediated away – there are no problems which it cannot answer for, and real decisions need not be made. Again, the key problem with this is that when it comes to existential matters, the Hegelian attempts to evade the responsibility of choosing and committing to either A or B. The particulars associated with choosing option A or choosing option B do not matter in the grand scheme of things for the Hegelian – what matters is the system as a whole, and the way in which both A and B can be incorporated into this system. As noted previously, at the forefront of Kierkegaard's portrayal of the existence spheres seems to be a demand for the reader to choose one or the other: A or B. Furthermore, a consideration of the particulars of each of these (A and B) is required, in order for one to be able to make an informed decision; in order for an individual to decide whether, for instance, the ethical life is for them, they must be aware of what such a commitment could require of them, and take into consideration whether they, as an individual, could handle such requirements.

As I will show in section 1.3.2, the way in which one approaches these existential options is highly important to Kierkegaard.

### 1.3.2 The removal of the illusion: A therapeutic process

Given the target outlined in section 1.3.1, I believe it can be seen more fully why Kierkegaard distances himself from traditional philosophical methods or devices, opting for a literary technique instead. In this section, I will draw out the therapeutic aspect of this technique.

A particular concern for Kierkegaard is the following: he must be wary not to fall prey to the very thing that he wants to attack/criticise. Therefore, there is a need to step away from traditional philosophical methods which involve a method of direct communication and a confrontation of one's ideas, and even more of a need to step away from the all-encompassing 'finality' of the Hegelian 'System'. By using the method of layering pseudonym upon pseudonym, Kierkegaard draws attention to the complexity of the matter at hand and the importance of subjectivity (in this Kierkegaardian sense) when making such choices. Although a choice must nonetheless be made – but there will be many factors to take into account. Moreover, one cannot simply provide a formula for answering existential questions, or a 'step-by-step recipe' for how to live; hence Kierkegaard's method of indirect communication – you cannot simply *tell* someone how to live.

Note also, the popularity of Hegelianism at the time of Kierkegaard's production; given the popularity of Hegelian thought in Kierkegaard's Copenhagen, it is likely that many of Kierkegaard's readers would have been Hegelians, particularly those with a prior interest in philosophy and philosophical questions. Therefore, it is probable that many of Kierkegaard's readers were under a kind of Hegelian 'illusion', believing that truth could be incorporated into an all-encompassing 'System'. (Hence, also why Kierkegaard placed such importance on getting rid of this illusion – it has a huge impact on the way that philosophical questions are approached, and it was very widespread at the time, making it particularly pervasive).

The following explanation from Lippitt will also be useful with regards to further illuminating Kierkegaard's choice of method when approaching the removal of such an illusion:

'Kierkegaard thinks that people exist in various states of confusion or 'illusion' (and) such illusions can only be 'dispelled' by bringing people round to recognise from their own inner experience, their perhaps unconscious reasons for adopting a particular view of the world and way of living. This in turn can be done by entering imaginatively into their

point of view, showing empathy with the emotional foundations on which it rests' (Lippitt 2003: 8).

One of the key ideas I think it is worth picking up from this explanation is the idea of *empathy*, which relates to how we are to get someone to realise that there is a problem. Kierkegaard himself says that when attempting to dispel such illusions, one must start 'by taking others' delusions at face value' (PV 54). In other words, if we want to help someone in this way (to dispel an illusion), we must first know what we are dealing with, empathising with the position that the person under illusion finds themselves in, as opposed to merely attacking the ideas that the illusion has inspired. By doing this, an understanding of the roots of the problem or 'illusion' can be gained, thereby leading to a better idea about how to go about treating the problem, or in this case, dispelling the 'illusion'. It is only once this empathy has been achieved, that one will have more success in a treatment of the problem – that is, in removing the illusion. This again reminds us of the therapeutic aspect of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings, which I discussed in section 1.2. It is essential that the therapist (and this maps over to Kierkegaard as the true author in this instance) has empathy with their patient, and 'prompts', as opposed to *confronts*. In both cases, there must be a wider understanding of the bigger picture, and the causes of such a problem, before a treatment of the problem can be attempted. This is perhaps even more important in this instance, as an illusion must first be removed – (this was not the case with the first target audience that I discussed).

Furthermore, the removal of an illusion must be done in a very specific way according to Kierkegaard: 'an illusion can never be removed directly, and basically only indirectly...one who is under an illusion must be approached from behind' (PV43). Because those held captive to an illusion hold incoherent beliefs, as opposed to just false ones, it would be extremely difficult to combat these illusions with arguments. This is why a direct method of communication is unlikely to prove successful, hence Kierkegaard's claim that 'one who is under an illusion must be approached from behind' – again, highlighting the therapeutic aspect that is present here, and the complexity of the process (specifically with regards to this second purpose).

The relevant distinction is also made between an individual who is ignorant and an individual who is deluded:

'one who is ignorant must be given knowledge...and one who is under a delusion that must first be taken away...direct communication presupposes that the recipient's ability to receive is entirely in order, but here this is simply not the case – indeed, here a delusion is an obstacle' (PV 53-4).

This, once again, highlights the key reason that a method of direct communication is likely to be unsuccessful; because the individual in question is not lacking any knowledge (they are not ignorant, but deluded), it is no use providing them with any more information or knowledge than that which they already possess. Likewise, it is no use attempting to combat the illusion with arguments, as again, this would presuppose that the individual's ability to receive such arguments is in order. Hence Kierkegaard's use of an indirect method of communication – the 'approach from behind' to use his own terminology – in attempt to remove the illusion.

To gain a further understanding of the specific method required when removing an illusion, an extract from Mooney will be useful. He says:

'The aim is to expose radical and widespread misunderstanding. But it may be ineffective to launch a broad frontal attack on the public at large (...) An indirect method focused on the *individual* may be less liable to backfire. The use of pseudonyms is a pedagogical strategy. It works first by drawing readers one by one into a life-view. The view is meant to appeal inwardly as if in fact it could be one's *own*. Having then established a sympathetic bond with the reader the pseudonym can then expose, from *within* that intimate relationship, its limitations and inadequacies' (Mooney 1991: 6).

There are two key points which I think can be drawn from Mooney's statement here: firstly, the focus needs to be on the individual/a subjective dimension needs to be taken into account; and secondly, there needs to be a 'sympathetic bond' in place before the illusion can be removed (this was similar to Lippitt's requirement of empathy). Both points help to further illuminate the therapy analogy which I think relates to this second purpose.

I will begin by considering the importance of the individual that Mooney mentions in the extract above. He is not the only one to notice this feature, as Mackey also notes that such a personalised approach is vital to Kierkegaard's communication; he argues that Kierkegaard's philosophical discourse is able to address a particular 'someone' in a particular context (namely an *individual*), as opposed to just a pure rational 'anyone'. This is demonstrated by his method in which the reader imaginatively 're-lives' (for instance) the aesthete's life, and the subsequent demand to meet it with a personal response, which as Mackey claims, boils down to either an existential 'reduplication' or an equally existential refusal of (for instance) the aesthetic life (Mackey 1971: xii). So, as Mooney and Mackey note, an understanding of the individual's situation (and thereby, the very recognition of there being an individual, as opposed to just 'anyone') is necessary to Kierkegaard's therapeutic approach. (Likewise for Gardiner, who identified Kierkegaard's need to go back to the 'vital core of subjective experience' (see extract at beginning section 1.3.1; Gardiner 2002: 2)). Such a tailored and personal approach – as in the case of a real therapeutic

process – is much more likely to yield success than attempting to apply a ‘one-fits-all’ blanket argument, (which will inevitably disregard important particulars).

Turning to address the second point that Mooney identifies – the sympathetic bond – we will see that this also supports the therapy analogy. It seems like the sympathetic bond that is required before one can undertake the task of removing an illusion is much like the sympathetic bond and the trust that the therapist must first build up with their patient before a treatment can be attempted. Only once this sort of relationship is in place, can one begin the process of attempting to remove the illusion. The therapist must first understand the situation that the patient finds themselves in, before the problem can be resolved. Taking a judgemental stance on the situation will usually only inspire self-defence or denial; this is arguably the case for the reader who is suffering from ‘illusions of objectivity’. If one wishes to correct this, one must first understand exactly what these illusions are, and how they take a hold of individuals – hence, Kierkegaard’s interest in, and awareness of, Hegelian philosophy.

Recalling Mooney’s explanation again, another crucial feature to draw out – and a feature which links both feature one and two above – is that part of the purpose of using pseudonyms such as the aesthete and the Judge in *E/O*, is for the views to ‘appeal inwardly’, almost as if they were one’s own. That is, there seems to be a necessity that the reader sees and almost ‘experiences’ things from within each perspective (for instance, by entering into ‘A’’s way of life, and then entering into ‘B’’s way of life).<sup>20</sup> In addition to the reasons already provided here, I also want to suggest that there may be a further reason for Kierkegaard writing in this particular way (i.e. for the novelistic structures we find in works such as *E/O* and *SoLW*): namely, to show that – contra the Hegelians, and the so-called ‘modern philosophers’ – there is no such thing as a ‘neutral perspective’ to which one can appeal in existential debates. I have already hinted at what such a perspective might encompass, but I will now take a more detailed look at exactly what this perspective is, and why it is ultimately impossible.

By ‘neutral perspective’ I essentially mean an entirely neutral standpoint from which one can objectively observe and judge the various ways of life presented, having as yet adopted none of them – to borrow a phrase from Mackey, such a perspective would seemingly involve viewing reality ‘from the perspective of angels’ (Mackey 1971: 266). Or, to refer back to the Gardiner quote from section 1.3.1, the perceived ‘necessity’ in philosophy for such a perspective can perhaps arise from the tendency to ‘smother the vital core of subjective experience’, and the

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<sup>20</sup> This is essentially what we are invited to do in the work *Either/Or*.

failure to account for the 'particular outlooks and commitments' of individuals (see Gardiner 2002: 2). In other words, it is an abstraction.

It follows, therefore, that the 'neutral perspective' in principle would fall outside of any of the spheres of existence that Kierkegaard presents, having the privilege of viewing the three spheres from a neutral, objective standpoint. This viewpoint is one which is entirely disengaged, and attempts to abstract from all particulars.

This is clearly different from being a 'pre-reflective' individual; pre-reflective individuals simply haven't given a lot of thought to existential matters, but this does not mean that they can occupy this objective perspective. The neutral perspective entails that one has no prior biases, preferences, or particulars – this will not be true of the pre-reflective individuals. Note that is also why Kierkegaard has a problem with it; the neutral perspective is almost 'inhuman' in a way, as it is one which is completely stripped of any prior preferences, opinions, or other contextual features.

The idea that a neutral perspective is possible to take when searching for the answers to existential questions is an idea which the 'illusions of objectivity' I discussed earlier may lead to. Recall that part of what the 'illusions of objectivity' involved was 'a proneness to discuss ideas from an abstract, theoretical viewpoint' (see Gardiner 2002: 2); this appears to be exactly what the attempt to take a 'neutral perspective' on existential questions is trying to get at – that is, it is the attempt to approach these sorts of questions from an abstract theoretical viewpoint. The so-called illusions of objectivity require that one completely abstracts from any particulars, thus it seems possible that if one subscribes to this, then one will believe it possible – desirable even – to take a 'neutral perspective', a disengaged stance to existential questions.

According to Kierkegaard, however, such a view is impossible, and as noted earlier, his attack on the Hegelians is (at least in part) motivated by these concerns. He claims, (albeit through the voice of another pseudonym – Johannes Climacus):<sup>21</sup>

'Modern philosophy has tried everything in the effort to help the individual to transcend himself objectively, which is a *wholly impossibly feat*; existence exercises its restraining influence, and if philosophers nowadays had not become mere scribblers in the service of a fantastic thinking and its preoccupation, they would long ago have perceived that

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<sup>21</sup> As noted earlier however, Climacus does seem to share a special affinity with Kierkegaard which doesn't appear to be the case for the pseudonyms.

suicide was the only tolerable practical interpretation of its striving' (CUP 176; emphasis not in original).

And in a similar vein, he claims the following:

'My principle thought was that in our age, because of the great increase of knowledge, we have forgotten what it means to *exist*, and what *inwardness* signifies (...)' (CUP 223)<sup>22</sup>.

The idea of the modern philosopher attempting to objectively 'transcend' themselves is important here (CUP 176); in reality we are individuals located within a specific context, and not a vacuum as 'objectively transcending oneself' seems to require. We cannot abstract from all particulars, nor should we want to when approaching questions concerning our existence and life choices. In principle, transcending oneself objectively might be possible, but in reality, 'existence exercises its restraining influence'; this is crucial because it shows that, for Kierkegaard, the key to having any sort of understanding about our existence and ourselves is not to think of our existence as some 'abstract idea', but to remember the conditions of our existence – i.e. context. As Furtak notes, 'Our point of view has been shaped by so many random and accidental features of our situation that we wish we could exchange it for a transparent, non-distorting lens', which gives rise to the desire to transcend our finite condition and to escape the restrictions of humanity (at least, this is the picture which we seem to be presented with in CUP) (Furtak 2010: 96). In other words, there is a strong desire in philosophy (particularly when approaching existential questions) to eliminate as many elements of bias and preference as possible – this is the attempt, as Furtak puts it, to view things through a 'non-distorting lens'.

According to Furtak, this desire to escape the restraints of humanity, and shed these 'random and accidental features of our situation', is what Kierkegaard believed had led to a dishonest approach to philosophy, and the mistake of believing that we are 'pure knowers' (Furtak 2010: 96). In other words, the 'illusions of objectivity' had led modern philosophers to adopt the approach to existential questions which they had; this approach, in Kierkegaard's eyes was a 'dishonest' one, in which philosophical questions – existential ones, especially – had become impersonal, due to an attempt to impose objectivity on them (see Furtak 2010: 99). Again, it is the Hegelians in particular, which Kierkegaard had in mind here.

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<sup>22</sup> Again, this also suggests that what is called for is not more knowledge, but a different way of looking at things – a 'reorientation' in a sense; we need to approach existential questions from a different angle if any understanding is to be had here.

Furthermore, by attempting to strip away any particulars and abstract from one's context or situation, it seems that the Hegelian or 'modern philosopher' is guilty of attempting to start from nothing, hence believing that one can (and ought) to adopt a 'neutral perspective' on existential matters seems to imply that we can start from nothing. However, arguably, nothing can be justified independently of taking any 'first' principles for granted, as it were; the mistake lies in thinking that unless such a justification can be provided, we therefore don't know what to believe or how to behave. Therefore, it is necessary not only to appear as gentle in one's approach of dispelling the illusion, but to speak to an individual, the reader, from within their own perspective if one can reasonably hope to be successful in their persuasion of showing how one ought to live their life.

We see such a tactic employed by the Judge in 'Volume II' of *E/O*; the Judge clearly acknowledges that an attempt to appeal to the aesthete of 'Volume I' to change his ways upon ethical grounds alone will fall upon deaf ears. This is due to the fact that the aesthete is not concerned with ethical considerations in the sense that the Judge is *primarily* concerned with them.<sup>23</sup> Instead, the Judge attempts to appeal to the aesthete on aesthetic grounds; in 'Volume II' of the book, Judge William attempts to show how marriage (which is assumed to belong to an ethical realm<sup>24</sup>) is in fact compatible with the aesthetic way of life. So the Judge is here operating upon the belief that the aesthetic can be incorporated into the ethical, thus retaining an element of the aesthetic *within* the ethical – the aesthetic doesn't have to be abolished in order to live ethically.<sup>25</sup>

This attempt from the Judge is important because it shows (amongst other things) that what Kierkegaard is trying to do is show that it is a mistake to think there can be a 'neutral ground' which one can occupy or appeal to, because by setting the Judge up like this, to address the aesthete and to put the argument in his (the aesthete's) own terms, he shows the need to speak to an individual, or a reader, from within their own perspective if there is to be any hope of successful communication. The result of this successful communication will be an examination of

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<sup>23</sup> Whilst there may be room for some overlapping of the spheres on Kierkegaard's view, the point here is simply that ethical considerations are not the aesthete's primary motivator in making decisions in the same way that it is for the ethicist, namely, Judge William.

<sup>24</sup> It is important to note at this point that the 'ethical' sphere of existence that Kierkegaard portrays in the pseudonymous works is of the 'traditional' kind; an unquestioning conception of the ethical, as opposed to one which is conscious of rival moral alternatives, and the embodiment of ideals such as promise-keeping, truth-telling, benevolence, as well as the ideals of marriage. Thus, the use of the word 'ethical' is here used in a much narrower sense than what we take it to mean in modern ethics.

<sup>25</sup> Note that if the Judge is indeed correct that an element of the aesthetic can be preserved within the ethical, then the two ways of life or 'spheres of existence' (the aesthetic and the ethical, that is) are not mutually incompatible as some writers would appear to suggest (I'm thinking primarily here of writers such as Alasdair MacIntyre).

the self, thus maximising the chances of the change in life-style that the ethicist believes to be necessary to the aesthete's self/life.<sup>26</sup>

The needs here are similar to those of the first 'target' audience; the end goal is to get both groups of individuals to approach the question of how to live with the appropriate seriousness, and in light of the proper self-assessment required for such a task – and with both, there is a therapeutic aspect to the way this is done. However, it ought to be noted that the pre-reflective individuals (i.e. the first of Kierkegaard's target audiences) are nonetheless distinct from the individuals referred to in this section (i.e. those that subscribe to 'illusions of objectivity', and see a 'neutral perspective' as desirable) – hence my reason for devoting separate sections of the chapter to the two 'purposes' or 'target audiences'.

The 'pre-reflective' reader may be suffering from the illusion of thinking, for instance, that they don't need to examine their life – thus, the task here in Kierkegaard's eyes, is to get the pre-reflective reader first to recognise that they are unthinking and uncritical (and that this is a mistake), and secondly to orientate them towards the question of how to live, having undergone the proper self-reflection that is necessary for such a task.

The individual that subscribes to the 'illusions of objectivity' discussed here is different to this however, as this is an individual – (likely either the modern philosopher which Kierkegaard referred to in *CUP*, or its readers) – *has* given consideration to the question of how to live. The mistake that they are making is in the way in which they go about answering this question; such individuals attempt to contemplate the question from a 'neutral perspective' (and believe that doing so is desirable), which as we saw, is what Kierkegaard believed to involve forgetting one's conditions of humanity and the restraints of existence. Thus, what these individuals are in need of is to be re-orientated towards existential questions, and freed from the illusion that it is necessary to take a 'neutral perspective' when answering such questions.

In several significant ways, I think that TI can be seen as guilty of endorsing the above: if Kierkegaard is out to show 'neutral perspectives' and pure objectivity as illusions or mere

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<sup>26</sup> Ultimately, I believe that the Judge's attempt to persuade the reader of his letters (supposedly the aesthete of 'Volume I', but arguably we can include ourselves as readers of the work *E/O* in this bracket) that his way of life is necessarily better than the aesthete's will fail. I say this because I think that the Judge misses the crucial point that the aesthete does in fact attempt to provide his life with meaning and does have a way of developing a coherent self. Exactly how the aesthete does this is something I will be exploring in greater depth later in the thesis. Whilst I hold this belief that the Judge's attempt will be unsuccessful, this is due to the fact that I believe there to be a misunderstanding of what constitutes the aesthete's life from the Judge's point of view. This does not change the fact that if there is any success to be had in persuading an individual of a matter, there is no 'neutral perspective' which can be appealed to in such cases, and the strongest appeal will be that which takes the position of the recipient into account.

'philosopher's fantasies', then clear-cut, hierachal interpretations (namely, TI) seem in tension with this aim. Arguably, proponents of the TI are suggesting that there can be an objective viewpoint taken when answering the question of how one ought to live their life, because on these accounts, Kierkegaard intended to show the religious life as the goal of human existence, and by contrast, the aesthetic life as a 'doomed' existence of misery and meaninglessness. It is worth noting here that what I am *not* suggesting is that, on Kierkegaard's picture, there can be no objective answer to how *I* ought to live my life – that is, that there might be a best way for *me* to live. This is not the sense of 'objectivity' which Kierkegaard attacks in the literature. This distinct claim regarding what might be best for me as an individual, however, is not the same as the claim that there is just one right answer (which is the same) for all individuals – and this seems to be a claim that TI wants to make.

In the case of TI, the hierachal structure that is espoused (and seen as being espoused by Kierkegaard himself in his pseudonymous works) is supposedly the case for *everyone*; these interpretations argue that Kierkegaard had intended to show that all individuals ought to be aiming for the religious sphere of existence (and anything less falls short of the 'goal' of human existence). Therefore, such accounts do not take into account the particulars and differences that exist both within individuals and their contexts – these are key factors which Kierkegaard saw as relevant to existential matters, and this is also evident in his employed method of communication. Again, this is partly what Gardiner seemed to mean when he said that the issue that Kierkegaard takes with the so-called 'illusions of objectivity' is that such abstract theorizing fails to take into account 'the significance of particular outlooks and the commitments of flesh-and-blood human beings' (Gardiner 2002: 2). Additionally, one is reminded of Kierkegaard's concern with Hegelian philosophy, and the desire to abstract from finite, individual experiences, overlooking particulars in order to focus on 'the whole', or the 'System'. TI appears worryingly close to a type of systematic approach to existential options, which ignores particulars in favour of a final, overall outcome (i.e. the religious existence sphere).

It seems highly unlikely that this was something that Kierkegaard wanted to show, given that it was his aim to highlight these differences and peculiarities that exist amongst individuals. It seems much more likely that Kierkegaard was attempting to highlight the complexity of the existence spheres and show the various values within each, as well as the downfalls. The mistake is to think that there exists a 'neutral perspective' which one can appeal to, or an 'objective' answer to the question of how one ought to live their life. As seen thus-far in this chapter, it seems clear that Kierkegaard intended to shift the focus back onto the subjective and particular elements of existential concerns, reminding us that context is all-important to existential matters. This I

believe will become clearer still once I begin my examination of the depiction of the existence spheres within Kierkegaard's works.

## Conclusion

I hope to have shown that Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms within his authorship can best be thought of as having a therapeutic purpose, which is two-fold.

Firstly, I have identified Kierkegaard's pseudonymity as a means to prompting self-reflection in the pre-reflective reader.

Secondly, I have identified Kierkegaard's pseudonymity as an aid to the removal of the so-called illusions of objectivity, which Kierkegaard believed modern philosophy (and by extension – its readers) to be suffering from.

Underpinning both of these purposes, and vital to Kierkegaard's success here, I argued was the element of authorial distance which is to be observed within the pseudonymous works – this of course, is due to Kierkegaard's pseudonymity, but also added to via the use of further pseudonyms and fictitious characters who are intended to embody the various existence spheres. This element of authorial distance is also crucial to the therapeutic nature of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms.

The 'intended result' of this so-called therapy, I argued, is to get the reader to properly approach the question of how they ought to live. With regards to the first purpose, this was a slightly easier task, as the pre-reflective reader needs only to be prompted into a process of self-reflection and self-examination – this reader is merely someone who has not yet given adequate thought to the question of how to live, and perhaps also lacks the appropriate information about the options that are available to them. On the other hand, the second purpose is more complex, and in many ways, a trickier task; because the person under an 'illusion of objectivity' is captive to an illusion, the illusion must first be removed, *before* they can be re-orientated towards the question of how to live, and begin their process of self-examination in the appropriate way. What underlies both of these purposes is the fact that it is vital that a choice is made.

To reiterate, the aim of the 'therapy' which I have discussed here is not that readers come to the inevitable conclusion that the religious way of life is unconditionally the highest sphere of existence, and therefore the best way to live. Rather, the aim is that readers re-consider the way in which they ought to approach the question of how one ought to live their life, taking into

account all the subtle complexities and tensions that exist with each of the existence spheres, and consequently making an informed decision on the matter. Furthermore, this is not to dispute that there may be a 'right' or 'best' way *for me* to live.

Ferreira rightly notes that the authorship that we are faced with is one in which 'there is much ambiguity, many unresolved questions, no pat answers, and no "results" we can easily summarize – a bit like life' (Ferreira 2009: 2). This matches the description which Climacus gives of 'results', which he refers to as 'nothing but junk, with which we should not bother one another' (CUP 242). This, as I have shown throughout the chapter, stands at odds with what TI essentially does: these accounts present readers with the overall 'result' that the religious sphere is, without question, the best way of living for all of Kierkegaard's readers. I believe that one of TI's most crucial errors is the failure to show the sensitivity that is required for examining the sheer complexity of Kierkegaard's portrayal of the existence spheres, noting his repeated emphasis on the importance of subjectivity and individuality that is crucial within existential decisions. Later in the thesis, I hope to demonstrate how such interpretations are also guilty of overlooking the complexity of the existence spheres themselves, in addition to overlooking the complexity and subtlety of Kierkegaard's method – (as I will argue in Chapter Three, this is particularly true of the aesthetic sphere).

In the next chapter, I will consider a possible tension between the view of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship that I have advanced here, and some of Kierkegaard's own claims which he made towards the end of his life with regards to the purpose of the pseudonymous works. However, in response to this problem, I will propose my own solution – a solution which acknowledges the complexity that Ferreira nods to in the above statement – and maintain the core claims that I have made here.



## **Chapter Two   Issues pertaining to Kierkegaard's pseudonymity, & a proposed methodology for approaching Kierkegaard's production**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I focus on some of the issues connected to Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship and its purpose. In particular, I examine the claims which Kierkegaard himself made about the purpose of his authorship in *The Point of View*. There are two reasons for focusing upon this work: firstly, the claims which Kierkegaard makes here about the purpose of his authorship completely contradict what he has said elsewhere (chiefly in *CUP*); and secondly, there is much debate within the secondary literature over whether *PV* ought to be accepted as a blueprint for reading Kierkegaard's production (this is in part due to the fact that it is inconsistent with the earlier claims of *CUP*).

It is also crucial for me to address these problems at this stage, given that if indeed it is true that *PV* ought to be accepted as a reliable guide to Kierkegaard's intentions, and for reading the rest of his works, then it would appear that my challenge to *TI* is doomed to failure. Additionally, much of what I claimed in Chapter One would appear contradicted. This is due to the fact that, as we will see, the main claim Kierkegaard makes in this work is that the purpose of his authorship had been a religious one all along, and that this is how his authorship ought to be viewed. Of course, if we are to accept this claim as it is presented here, then my aim of showing that Kierkegaard did not intend to push his readers towards the religious sphere is confounded. However, as I hope to show in this chapter, there are many reasons for regarding *PV* as an unreliable guide to Kierkegaard's authorship, and for treating the claims found within this work with suspicion. Furthermore, I also hope to show in the second section of this chapter that Kierkegaard himself may have fallen prey to the mistake of attempting to identify one singular theme within his production in a reductive way, failing to account for the complexity of his own works. In light of this, I intend to propose an alternative guide for interpreting Kierkegaard's authorship: an analogy using the Wittgensteinian notion of 'family resemblances' to explain the various overlapping themes which are to be observed within Kierkegaard's total production, and within the existence spheres themselves. Towards the end of the chapter I will begin to elaborate on what some of these overlapping themes are.

## 2.1 Does *The Point of View* provide us with a blueprint for reading Kierkegaard's production?

### 2.1.1 Kierkegaard as a mere reader of his own works

I begin by returning to look at what Kierkegaard has to say about his own authorship in *CUP*. (This was done briefly in the previous chapter, but I think it is worth recalling some of the claims there for the purposes of my discussion in this chapter.)

The work *CUP* is unique amongst the pseudonymous works: while the main body of text is ascribed to the pseudonym, (Johannes Climacus<sup>27</sup>), Kierkegaard's own name does appear on the title page of this work as responsible for its publication. So, in a way, this work may be thought to straddle the divide between the pseudonymous and non-pseudonymous categories of Kierkegaard's production. Furthermore, the first few extracts which I explore below do fall outside of the main body of text, and can be found in the final section of the book – 'A First and Last Declaration' – which is signed 'S. Kierkegaard'.

This so-called declaration begins with Kierkegaard formally acknowledging himself as the author of all the pseudonymous works before this one. Despite this acknowledgement, we find the following statement:

'One single word by me personally, in my own name, would be a case of assumptive self-forgetfulness that in this one word, from a dialectical point of view, would essentially incur the annihilation of the pseudonyms. In Either/Or I am as little the editor Victor Eremita as I am the Seducer or the Assessor, exactly as little. Eremita is a poetically actualized subjective thinker, as one comes across him again in 'In Vino Veritas'. In Fear and Trembling I am as little Johannes de silentio as I am the knight of faith that he depicts, exactly as little; and again, just as little the author of the preface to the book, which are the individualized lines of a poetically actualized subjective thinker. (...) (*CUP* 528).

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<sup>27</sup> This itself is significant, as *CUP* is not the only work supposedly edited by Johannes Climacus. The work *Philosophical Crumbs* (published in 1844) is also ascribed to the pseudonym 'Johannes Climacus', but interestingly the title page of this book also contains Kierkegaard's own name as the 'publisher' of this work. Because of this, it seems reasonable to suggest that Kierkegaard may share some affinity to this particular pseudonym, in a special way that he does not with his other pseudonyms.

Kierkegaard goes on to state that the same is the case for all of his pseudonyms – that is, that he is equally distant from each and every one. This contradicts the claim of certain scholars that Kierkegaard's voice is more 'present' in some pseudonyms than it is in others, (for instance, that the view of Judge William's is more closely aligned to Kierkegaard's own view than that of the aesthete in *E/O*).

In the last chapter, I discussed the intended effect of this authorial distance, claiming that the purpose is reader-centric as opposed to author-centric; i.e. to allow readers to enter imaginatively into the ways of life of each pseudonym, granting them autonomy to decide what to make of the pseudonyms and the ways of life displayed. I argued that the 'therapeutic' aim of this was to prompt the reader into a process of self-examination and subsequently make an existential decision; however, the aim was *not* to make that decision *for* the reader. Kierkegaard's claim that he is equally distant from all of his pseudonyms supports this interpretation, as this would allow the readers to enter imaginatively into the ways of life of each pseudonym, without any interference or influence from the author – readers are left alone to weigh up the opinions of the pseudonyms, and consequently form their own opinions. Kierkegaard's 'removal' of himself as the author makes it easier for this process to take place.

We also find the following explanation of pseudonymity in Kierkegaard's 'First and Last Declaration'. (The following extract has already been partially quoted in the previous chapter, but I think that it bears repeating at greater length here, as the claims found here are of vital importance to the exploration of Kierkegaard's relationship to his works that I am undertaking in this chapter.) He says:

'What is written is indeed therefore mine, but only so far as I have put the life-view of the creating, poetically actualized individuality into his mouth in audible lines, for my relation is even more remote than that of a poet, who creates characters and yet in the preface is himself the author. For I am impersonally, or personally, in the second person, as *souffleur* who has poetically produced the authors, whose prefaces in turn are their production, yes, as are their names. (CUP 527-8).

Here, Kierkegaard claims that he is even more 'external' to his own work than that of the poet, given that the poet is at least him/herself within the preface of his or her works, which Kierkegaard claims not to be the case with him. Rather, the prefaces of the pseudonymous works are works of the pseudonyms themselves – or at least, this is how Kierkegaard wants us to think of them. This is crucial, because again, we see Kierkegaard distancing himself both from views expressed by the pseudonyms in the prefaces of his works, and also consequently from the reader

Chapter Two issues pertaining to Kierkegaard's pseudonymity, & a proposed methodology for approaching Kierkegaard's production

of the works. (Again, this supports the claim that the purpose of this strategy was to grant the reader autonomy.)

Following on from the extract above, Kierkegaard goes onto claim:

'(I)n the pseudonymous works there is not a single word which is mine, I have no opinion about these works except as third person, no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader, not the remotest private relation to them, since such a thing is impossible in the case of a doubly reflected communication' (Ibid).

Kierkegaard is quite clear here that he has no opinion on the views expressed within the pseudonymous works, and whilst we may doubt whether this is true, it is clear that what Kierkegaard wishes is for any personal opinion that he might have *not to matter* in the eyes of the reader. By referring to himself as a mere 'reader' of his works, he implies that he himself has no more access than any of his other readers to the 'true' purpose or meaning of these works (or authority to make claims about this).

To call oneself only a 'reader', is in part, to deny authorial responsibility. This is interesting because we have already seen Kierkegaard accept authorial responsibility (at least in part), by claiming to be the true author of the pseudonymous works. So, he accepts responsibility for the publication of the works, but it seems that this is where he wants to stop – this is all he believes himself (or *wants himself*) to be held responsible for. If we are to respect Kierkegaard's wishes, we are to see him as responsible only for the *publication* of the pseudonymous works, but not as responsible for the 'production' of the pseudonymous works as such – that is, he is responsible for the actual publishing of the works, but not for the views and opinions recorded in the pseudonymous works; rather, the pseudonyms are to be credited with this.

In addition to the above statements from Kierkegaard, Climacus – (the pseudonymous author of CUP) – expresses similar sentiments within the main body of the work:

'I am glad that the pseudonyms themselves, presumably aware of the relation of indirect communication to truth as inwardness, have said nothing, nor misused a preface to take an official position on the production, as if an author were in a purely legal sense the best interpreter of his own words; as if it could help a reader that an author 'intended this and that' when the intention has not been realized; or as if it were certain that it had been realized because the author himself says so in the preface(...)' (CUP 211).

Climcus's claim here stands in obvious agreement with the claims made by Kierkegaard himself in 'The First and Last Declaration'. Here, we see Climacus claiming to be proud that none of the pseudonyms have misused a preface in attempt to take an 'official position on the production'. Furthermore, he claims that the reader ought not to be instructed by the author upon how to read a work, simply because the author has commented upon how to do so in the preface. So, again, we see confirmation of the view that the author does not have, or ought not to have, a special privilege in instructing readers upon how to read the works, or how to interpret the authorship. This matches the claims which Kierkegaard makes in 'The First and Last Declaration', where he claims to be merely a 'reader' of his works – denying the privilege of knowing the 'true purpose' of the authorship, or of instructing readers upon how to read the works. Therefore, we see a kind of agreement between Kierkegaard and his pseudonym within this work in relation to the question of how much authority Kierkegaard (as the author) has over the purpose of his authorship.

So far, these claims which Kierkegaard makes about the purpose of the authorship and his relation to the opinions expressed in the pseudonymous works are consistent with my interpretation. In the previous chapter, I claimed that a key purpose of Kierkegaard's pseudonymity was to engage readers, to prompt them into a process of self-examination, thereby ultimately allowing them to reach an informed decision on which of the ways of life portrayed will be best for them to pursue. Indeed, one of my overall aims of the thesis is to highlight the importance of subjectivity and reader-autonomy to making existential decisions on Kierkegaard's account. The claims of *CUP* appear to support this, given that they seem to suggest the author has little privilege on the purpose of the authorship, and little control over what the readers make of the pseudonyms. (On the other hand, if proponents of *TI* are correct that Kierkegaard is manipulating the reader's thought-process in a specific way, and guiding them towards the religious, then it seems as if these proponents must also believe that Kierkegaard is present and authoritative as an author throughout – even if this is hidden from the reader.)

As we will see, however, claims made within *PV* directly contradict all that has been said by both Kierkegaard himself in 'The First and Last Declaration' and Climacus here, thus also causing problems for my own interpretation. In this work, Kierkegaard will do precisely what Climacus proudly claimed that the pseudonymous authors do not do – i.e. 'misused a preface' in order to

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take 'an official position on the production'. In the next section, I will explore exactly how he does this.<sup>28</sup>

### 2.1.2 Kierkegaard's privilege as an author

In *PV* – a work published posthumously in 1859, under Kierkegaard's own name – we see Kierkegaard taking an official stance on his total literary production, providing readers with a definitive guide on how to read the works within it. Here, I explore the claims made within *PV* that stand directly in conflict with those explored in the section prior to this (i.e. the claims found within *CUP*). Other claims made in *PV*, or about its publication (for instance, comments made by Kierkegaard in his *Journals*) will be left until section 2.1.5 – for now I will only be discussing the core claims that contradict those that I have already evidenced within *CUP*.

In *PV*, the following claims are found, and are sometimes cited as evidence that the purpose of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship, or indeed the whole of his authorship, was to push readers towards the religious sphere:<sup>29</sup>

'If it is assumed that a reader perfectly understands and judges the particular aesthetic work, he totally misunderstands me, since he does not understand it in the religious totality of my work as an author. If, however, it is assumed that someone who understands my work as an author in the religious totality perhaps does not understand a particular aesthetic work, then this misunderstanding is only incidental' (*PV* 6).

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<sup>28</sup> Note also, that Climacus himself does occasionally seem to be guilty of this also. For instance, he says the following: That subjectivity, inwardness, is truth was my thesis. I have now tried to show how the pseudonymous authors, as I see them, strive towards this principle, which at its maximum is Christianity' (*CUP* 233).

'The horror [of the religious] must be a new aspect of inwardness, whereby the individual returns on a higher plane to the point where revelation, which is the life of the ethical, becomes impossible once more but with the relations reversed. The ethical, previously helping revelation (while the aesthetic hindered it), is now what hinders it, and it is something else that helps the individual to a higher revelation beyond the ethical' (*CUP* 217).

These claims, much like the claims found in *PV* which I will next discuss, would appear at face value to support a TI. I do not wish to dedicate space to them here, however, as I see the claims of *PV* to hold more weight, given that this work was published under Kierkegaard's own name – whereas, although Kierkegaard's name did appear in *CUP*, this work is also attributed to the pseudonym Climacus. For this reason, I believe the claims of *PV* to be more damning to my account; therefore, they are the claims which I ought to prioritize dealing with here.

<sup>29</sup> Only some proponents appeal to this; there are, of course, other explanations motivating the fundamental claims of TI, as I will discuss throughout the thesis.

'to make aware of the religious, the essentially Christian, is the category for my whole work as an author regarded as a totality' (PV 12).

It seems that here Kierkegaard is providing a set of instructions for reading his whole production, by providing readers with the "correct" reading of his authorship (see Garff 2007: 552), which he claims is religious in its totality, and that the reader who fails to understand this fails to understand his authorship at all. It would appear, therefore, that Kierkegaard now wants to privilege one set of works (namely the non-pseudonymous works, which are mostly edifying in nature) over and above the pseudonymous category, (which he now refers to as 'aesthetic' works).<sup>30</sup> The pseudonymous ('aesthetic') works, given that their purpose or theme is not so obviously religious (at least not in a doctrinally orthodox way),<sup>31</sup> are referred to by Kierkegaard as 'a necessary process of elimination' (PV 86), and as he claims in the above extract, if a reader only understands this category of his authorship, they cannot really be said to have a proper understanding of the authorship at all. (More on Kierkegaard's 'categorization' of the works later).

Not only does it appear that Kierkegaard is giving privilege to his non-pseudonymous works, PV itself seems to have been awarded a special privilege by Kierkegaard as having the authority to declare the meaning of all the other works; as Garff writes, Kierkegaard intends this work to be 'the text of these (other) texts, a meta-text' (Garff 2007: 552). This work appears to definitively lay out instructions for reading all of the other works found in Kierkegaard's oeuvre – i.e. it appears to provide a blueprint for reading the rest of the works.

As Berthold identifies, the dilemma that lies at the heart of these remarks (those made in PV) is the following: 'in asserting his authority over the meaning of his authorship, Kierkegaard makes the ethics of his authorship impossible. Either we reject the authoritarianism of *The Point of View* or we reject the authorship that *The Point of View* is a point of view *about*' (Berthold 2011: 118). To clarify, either we can reject Kierkegaard's 'ethics of subjectivity' (see Berthold 2011: 110-1) (i.e. the importance of reader-autonomy which I discussed in Chapter One, and which the extracts here taken from *CUP* seem to encourage), or we must reject the claims of PV.<sup>32</sup> In the sections

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<sup>30</sup> More on this in section 2.1.5.

<sup>31</sup> Rather, the pseudonymous works which have strong religious themes and portray a religious way of life (such as *SUD* and *FT*), play with religious themes freely, and in an ambiguous way.

<sup>32</sup> Another potential option of course, is to take the same route as Strawser, and to conclude from the conflicting statements found within Kierkegaard's works that the ultimate character or purpose of Kierkegaard's authorship is ultimately 'undecidable' (Strawser 1996: 237-242). However, this is not really the route that I wish to take, and I think that more can be done to unpick the conflicting claims and take a more definitive viewpoint on how to understand the authorship of Kierkegaard.

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that follow, I will attempt to show why we ought to favour the latter here. Indeed, it is worth noting that this is also the conclusion which Berthold seems to reach:

'Is there religious unity to Kierkegaard's work? Kierkegaard says there is. But it is not up to him to say, at least if we accept the ethical framework that informed his authorship, where the author must be "forgotten". The author is without authority. It is up to the reader to say.' (Berthold 2011: 119)

Thus, Berthold concludes that we ought to give more weight to the method of communication which is to be observed within Kierkegaard's works, and the supporting claims made within *CUP*, than to the latter claims made in *PV*.

However, there are of course, many scholars who argue to the contrary. For instance, Roberts ("Rhetoric and Understanding: Authorship as Christian Mission" 2018), Evans (*Kierkegaard* 2009) and Phillips (*Philosophy's Cool Place* 1999) appear to take the claims of *PV* as an *authoritative* guide for reading Kierkegaard's production, with the consequence that they see the claims found there as support for the claim that Kierkegaard's only intention was to push readers towards Christianity.

Roberts understands Kierkegaard's whole authorship as essentially a 'Christian mission', in which Kierkegaard's task is to present the 'Christian message in such a way that it is taken up, grasped, and appropriated by those to whom the missionary is sent' (Roberts 2018: 41). The need for a method of indirect communication, on this account, is required because not only must the receivers of this message *believe* the content of the message, but they must also undergo a *transformation* in character (Roberts 2018: 42) – for such, a task, Roberts claims, the 'empathetic imaginative powers of the poet' are needed (Roberts 2018: 49).<sup>33</sup> Whilst I have agreed that a transformation of the reader's mind is required (see Chapter One), the difference between my interpretation and that of Roberts', is that Roberts has taken Kierkegaard's entire production to be centred around the communication of a Christian message to readers. That is, he sees Kierkegaard's purpose has one of edification. As I will further explore in section 2.2.2., I do not

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<sup>33</sup> It ought to be noted that Roberts does go into more detail with regards to why this particular method is necessary, explaining that: 'Rhetoric discourse (...) aims to change *attitudes*, judgements, and understanding about matters of value and practice. Edifying or upbuilding rhetorical discourse has the even more strenuous aim of bringing about deep and lasting change in the character of the reader or knower. And for Kierkegaard, as for the classical tradition in ethics, character, with the understanding that is essential to it, is intimately tied up with passions and emotions. His task, then, in writing for edification, is to inculcate in his reader, as far as it is possible through writing, deep dispositions of emotional understanding shaped by the conceptual framework of apostolic Christianity' (Roberts 2018: 49).

deny that *part* of Kierkegaard's aim was to edify and to make substantial claims about Christianity and the nature of faith.<sup>34</sup> However, I do not believe this to have been the *only* purpose of Kierkegaard's authorship. With regards to the 'pre-reflective' reader, I have argued, the main aim is merely to prompt processes of self-reflection and self-examination, in order to approach existential questions with the appropriate seriousness.

So, scholars who want to make claims along these lines, are able to disregard Kierkegaard's earlier claims in works such as *CUP* by arguing that – contra Berthold – Kierkegaard *does* have a privileged authority on his authorship as the author of the works in question. That is, for them, the explanations found within *PV* are able to dictate what is to be made of the rest of the authorship, (even if it stands in contradiction with the claims made in this particular work). Evidence found to the contrary within Kierkegaard's authorship, is simply part of a grander scheme on these accounts.

As noted, however, I believe that there is good evidence for not viewing *PV* as a blueprint for reading the whole of Kierkegaard's production. I will now turn to an exploration of this evidence, beginning with motivations which Kierkegaard may have had for making the claims which he did within *PV*, thus accounting for the apparent conflict between statements on the purpose of the authorship.

### 2.1.3 Kierkegaard's personal motivations

In this section, I draw upon the findings of Garff (*Kierkegaard* 2007) and Schönbaumsfeld (*A Confusion of the Spheres* 2010) in order to explain the controversial claims of *PV*, and the motivations which Kierkegaard may have had to have them published. The motives which I discuss here, can perhaps best be thought of as two-fold: firstly, Kierkegaard's desire to embark on a religious career as a rural pastor; and secondly, a desire to impose an overall unity on the works in order to present them as a coherent whole.

I begin this section, then, with what I believe to be the most obvious reason for Kierkegaard's change of opinion on the authorship: his desire to stop writing and to become a rural pastor. As Malantschuk notes, Kierkegaard was in many ways torn between these two options, meaning that his choice boiled down to either 'pastor' or 'poet' (Malantschuk 1968: 5). This tension is clear in the resulting inconsistency which is perceived between *CUP* and *PV*; although Kierkegaard never

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<sup>34</sup> This is evident in the pseudonymous, and well as the non-pseudonymous, works.

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stopped writing, thus he never chooses to fully commit to either 'poet' or 'pastor' in the end it seems, he did attempt to account for the totality of his production in a way that might reflect his desire to become a pastor.

Both Garff and Schönbaumsfeld argue that what Kierkegaard was doing in *PV* was taking charge of his own posthumous reputation, re-presenting material in a certain way in order to produce a unifying coherent whole. That is, he was re-arranging the various fragments of the authorship into some kind of cohesive whole in order to be understood a certain way by history – namely to be regarded as a doctrinally orthodox thinker/author (Garff 2007: 562; Schönbaumsfeld 2010: 65). Even if he could not fulfil his desire to become a pastor, it seems reasonable to accept that Kierkegaard may still have possessed the desire to be *perceived* in a certain way after his death. That is, he may have wanted his legacy to be a religious one, and this motivation may have been influenced by the desire that he had to pursue a religious career (which he had at the time of writing of *PV*).

As well as providing an explanation for Kierkegaard's claim that his authorship was religious from first to last (*PV* 6), this also explains why Kierkegaard says what he does about the pseudonymous works in *PV*. Given that Kierkegaard was considering a religious career, there would have been the need to account for the so-called 'aesthetic' works (i.e. those that are not obviously religious or edifying) in the right way, (particularly given that they make up a large portion of the authorship); to use Schönbaumsfeld's terminology, he would have needed to possess the right 'credentials' for a career of this type, thus he needed to account for the pseudonymous ('aesthetic') works in the appropriate manner (Schönbaumsfeld 2010: 65). He does so by describing the pseudonymous or 'poetic' works as a kind of emptying out, (an 'evacuation' to use his exact words – (*PV* 84)), a 'poetical catharsis' (*PV* 18), 'a necessary process of elimination' (*PV* 86). It is not entirely clear what he means by this, but what is clear is that Kierkegaard is asking us to think of the pseudonymous portion of his authorship as less important than the non-pseudonymous. He is in effect attempting to disown the pseudonymous works, or to at least put a substantial distance between himself and those works. If he is able to successfully do so, this allows him to give privilege to the non-pseudonymous, more obviously doctrinally orthodox works, and to claim that the messages found within these works are the ones which are more closely aligned to his own views than those found within the pseudonymous works.

There is also another motivation which both Garff and Schönbaumsfeld pick out (alongside the desire for a religious career): the desire to impose a design and retrospective unity upon his authorship. Although this desire is obviously linked to Kierkegaard's desire for a religious career

(because the whole of his authorship needed to be thought of as possessing religious motives in order to reflect the desire to become a rural pastor), it can also be thought of as a separate desire, which on its own could motivate one to view a particular authorship in a certain way, or to manipulate it in order to reflect this desire.

Regardless of their other desires and personal motivations, many writers seek to impose a unity on, or an overall aesthetic coherence underlying their works, because this itself is seen as something worth striving for. Having said this, not many writers themselves explicitly state what this 'unifier' is. It is usually another – a critic or scholar – who displays this obsession with finding unity in the collective works of an author. For instance, sometimes after an author's death, scholars will attempt to impose a kind of unity on all of the works by pointing to an overarching theme to be found in the works, or perhaps by discussing a 'progression' that has been made throughout the author's career. However, in this instance we see Kierkegaard *himself* attempting to account for the 'totality' of the authorship, and attempting to provide a set of instructions for reading his production. As explored already in this section, this desire – in Kierkegaard's case – may arise from the desire to be seen in a certain way, namely, to be regarded as a religious writer or thinker. (In many ways, this is of course exactly what TI does with regards to Kierkegaard's discussion of the existence spheres. My main point here, however, is that it is interesting that Kierkegaard himself makes a similar attempt to impose unity on his own works – this is much rarer than in the case of the scholar who does so with regards to another's works.)

Of course, as noted in the previous section, this completely goes against what was said in *CUP*; according to the Kierkegaard of this work, the Kierkegaard behind the claims of *PV* is abusing his role as author by telling readers what they ought to think of his works, and taking 'an official position on the production' (see *CUP* 252). According to the earlier claims, the author ought not, or perhaps even does not, have this type of authority.

#### **2.1.4 Points of view on the authorship or the point of view?**

I now want to suggest that aside from personal reasons motivating the work, there may be another reason to be cautious in our treatment of the claims made within *PV*: that we ought to regard these claims with suspicion, due to the *nature* of the authorship which we are faced with. Within this section I will elaborate on what I mean by this, paying particular attention to Mackey's work, *Points of View*. I will suggest that whilst Mackey brings some relevant concerns regarding Kierkegaard's complex authorship to the fore, his argument ultimately goes too far, making

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Kierkegaard's works appear fragmented and chaotic, and also failing to account for the distinction to be made between the pseudonymous and non-pseudonymous works.

To begin, I want to draw to attention the following statement of Mackey's in relation to ascribing authorial authority when faced with an authorship such as Kierkegaard's. I want to begin with this, as I believe that it accurately summarises the main concern that the scholar is likely to have when facing Kierkegaard' authorship, and when trying to make substantial claims about Kierkegaard's authorial intentions. He says:

'If a man writes three books, in the course of which he tries to develop a consistent point of view and signs them all "Immanuel Kant", our invincible tendency as readers is to regard them as the works of one man and to identify the author as a historical person called by that name: 1724-1804, professor of logic at Königsberg (...) etc. etc. (...) But if a man writes two dozen works, outlining half a dozen incompatible positions, ascribes most of them transparently fictive noms de plume, and signs the rest of them "Søren Kierkegaard"...the reader is (at least) put on guard' (Mackey 1986: 187-8).

Mackey points out something which is essential to bear in mind when discussing Kierkegaard's authorship: given that Kierkegaard wears so many 'masks', and takes on so many conflicting viewpoints and voices within the pseudonymous works (and then add in the 'non-pseudonymous' works), it becomes a tricky process to allow one of these 'voices' to have more authority than the others. The inscription 'S. Kierkegaard' upon the cover of a book seems no longer to have the authoritative force it may usually do, and we have less reason to regard it as a reliable guide than we might do in an 'ordinary' situation.<sup>35</sup> Because of this, we ought not to treat any of the works – (even one that has the author's signature upon it) – as providing readers with definitive instructions for reading the other works found within the production.<sup>36</sup>

Secondly, it becomes a tricky process to account for the collective 'totality' of the works, and to provide a unifying interpretation of them. Given that there are so many different, conflicting views offered in the authorship, perhaps it is a mistake to try and 'unify' them as a collective whole, or to talk of the 'totality' of the authorship at all.

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<sup>35</sup> By 'ordinary', I am simply referring to the type of authorship such as that that Mackey compares Kierkegaard's to in the above quotation – namely, one in which there is no pseudonymous/non-pseudonymous distinction, and which presents compatible arguments. (Mackey's example is Kant).

<sup>36</sup> Berthold also believes that Kierkegaard does possess authorial authority, although for slightly different reasons, and the implications of his view do not seem to be as concerning as those that are connected to Mackey's interpretation. Thus, I will restrict my critique here to Mackey's account in *Points of View*.

Because of the reasons outlined above, Mackey argues that Kierkegaard's *PV* can only be regarded as 'a point of view', and not *the* point of view for Kierkegaard's work as an author. That is, it ought not to be thought of as the definitive guide to Kierkegaard's activity as an author. Instead, there are many 'perspectives' both within the authorship itself and also upon it (i.e. perspectives on its purpose or meaning) (Mackey 1986: 190).

However, perhaps Mackey takes his account too far. It's not just that he wants to say that the work *PV* ought not to be taken as a definitive guide to navigating Kierkegaard's authorship; in saying that *PV* is only one view amongst many others, he also wants to claim that 'Søren Kierkegaard' (the supposed author of the work *PV*) was itself yet another pseudonym (Mackey 1986: 188). Furthermore, he claims that 'Søren himself had always been, absolutely, absent' (Mackey 1986: 190); by this, he seems to mean that the real Kierkegaard is to be found nowhere in the authorship, including his non-pseudonymous works (and perhaps also, that this is what Kierkegaard intended).

There do seem to be some alarming implications of Mackey's view, which writers such as Schönbaumsfeld and Evans touch upon in their own accounts of Kierkegaard's authorship.<sup>37</sup> According to Schönbaumsfeld's classifications of the interpretative strategies often applied to Kierkegaard's authorship, Mackey appears to have undertaken a 'purely literary reading' in his *Points of View*. These types of reading do have the advantage of taking into account the importance of the pseudonymous works within Kierkegaard's total oeuvre, and the fact that many of Kierkegaard's works have strong literary dimensions. Having said this, as Schönbaumsfeld notes, a 'purely literary reading' of the works does reduce Kierkegaard to 'a pointless (...) one-joke wonder', as well as 'flatten(ing) his *oeuvre* out every bit as crassly as the literal-minded reading does' (Schönbaumsfeld 2010: 5). (According to Schönbaumsfeld, a literal-minded reading is one which fails to acknowledge the distinctions to be made between the pseudonymous/non-pseudonymous, published/unpublished works, thereby failing to note the possibility of there being a point or purpose behind Kierkegaard's pseudonymity. A 'purely literary reading', of course, is able to avoid this, but at the cost of taking things too far in the opposite direction.)

It does need to be acknowledged that there is *some difference* between Kierkegaard's pseudonymous and non-pseudonymous works, and that this is relevant to an interpretation of the authorship. Arguing that we ought to think of 'S. Kierkegaard' as yet another pseudonym, *a la*

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<sup>37</sup> It ought to be pointed out that Schönbaumsfeld is not directly replying to Mackey. However, the concerns she lists as being tied up with a particular reading arguably applies to accounts such as Mackey's.

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Mackey, fails to take into account this difference, and is guilty of viewing all of his works in the same way – as some sort of 'high-spirited romp', to use Schönbaumsfeld's words (Schönbaumsfeld 2010: 5).

There is also concern that Mackey's account of Kierkegaard's authorship implies an interpretation of his authorship as fragmented, unconnected, and having nothing of substantial philosophical importance to say. This is an idea which Evans touches upon when he discusses the implications of reducing Kierkegaard to a 'constant evanescence', a 'postmodern Kierkegaard', 'who does not write to edify or to make us aware of any religious truth, but who helps us to see the way human language inevitably fails to convey what is intended' (Evans 2009: 12-13). Whilst I do not agree with the entirety of Evans account, (given that he takes the claims of *PV* as authoritative, arguing that Kierkegaard's primary aim was to make us aware of religious truth), he is right to pick up on concerns about a 'purely literary' account, in a way similar to Schönbaumsfeld. He also argues, in a similar vein to Schönbaumsfeld, that accounts such as Mackey's, reduce Kierkegaard to a mere 'object of aesthetic appreciation'. This, he claims, is 'much less interesting (...) than a Kierkegaard who has something to say to me, someone whose voice can challenge my beliefs and assumptions, and even the way I live my life. A conversation with a human being is much more interesting than a "conversation" with an "evanescence"' (Evans 2009: 13-14). Again, I believe that this is a relevant concern, as it seems that we ought to want to avoid viewing the whole of Kierkegaard's authorship as just a great literary masterpiece, a work of art, but one that is of very little philosophical or existential importance. An account such as Mackey's does run the risk of reducing Kierkegaard's works to mere 'objects of aesthetic appreciation' in a way, and he seems unable to account for any substantial connections between Kierkegaard's works, as well as there being a philosophical purpose (or purposes) behind the authorship.<sup>38</sup>

In section 2.2, I discuss an alternative to Mackey's view, showing how we can accept some of his concerns about attributing authorial authority when faced with a complex authorship such as Kierkegaard's, but avoid the reduction of Kierkegaard's works to a mere 'object of aesthetic appreciation'.

### **2.1.5 Inconsistencies and ambiguities relating to The Point of View**

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<sup>38</sup> Of course, an authorship can be both an object of aesthetic appreciation, whilst still having something of importance to say, but this is not what Mackey's claim is here, as he doesn't seem to acknowledge any substantial connections or meaning tying Kierkegaard's works together.

Whilst I believe that a proper consideration of the reasons provided in sections 2.1.3 and 2.1.4 are enough to warrant treating Kierkegaard's claims within *PV* as an unreliable guide to Kierkegaard's activity within authorship, I will now explore one final reason for thinking this. I shall return to *PV* itself, for I believe that a closer examination of this text will reveal inconsistencies within this work itself – i.e. not only are the claims of *PV* inconsistent with the claims of *CUP*, *PV* itself is also inconsistent and ambiguous. In addition to this, I will look at the ambiguities which surround the production of this work; in particular, I will look at Kierkegaard's *Journal* entries, and consider the meaning behind Kierkegaard's apparent reluctance to publish *PV*.

To begin, I will take a closer look at Kierkegaard's own 'classification' or 'division' of his works. These divisions are important, because they lend weight to Garff's claim that what Kierkegaard was doing by the time of *PV* was taking charge of his own posthumous reputation (Garff 2007: 562).

In *PV*, Kierkegaard makes the following 'divisions' within his authorship:

'First division (aesthetic writing): *Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling*, *Repetition*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, *Prefaces*, *Philosophical Fragments*, *Stages on Life's Way* – together with eighteen religious upbuilding discourses, which came out successively. Second division: *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Third division (only religious writing): *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, *Works of Love*, *Christian Discourses* – together with a little aesthetic article: *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress* (*PV* 29).

Schönbaumsfeld also draws attention to an interesting fact about Kierkegaard's categorization here, which is that it does not match his *actual* total production. For instance, missing from Kierkegaard's listing of the 'totality of the authorship' above are the following works: *On the Concept of Irony*, *A Literary Review*, and *From the Papers of One Still Living*, in addition to several journal articles which Kierkegaard does acknowledge in a 'First and Last Declaration' (Schönbaumsfeld 2010: 65). It is not clear why Kierkegaard would not include these works here, unless of course Schönbaumsfeld is right when she claims that what Kierkegaard was doing in *PV* was 'carefully editing out works that don't fit his plan', in order for him to 'rewrite history' (Schönbaumsfeld 2010: 64-5). Again, this lends weight to the suggestion that what Kierkegaard wanted to do with the work *PV* was to ensure that he was understood a certain way by history – i.e. as a religious philosopher or thinker.

Not only are certain works missing from Kierkegaard's classification above, the divisions themselves are also arguably ambiguous. In particular, it is interesting that Kierkegaard has here

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placed the eighteen religious *Upbuilding Discourses* in the 'aesthetic' division, when these works appear more 'obviously religious' than other works which Kierkegaard is in fact willing to label as such (see Schönbaumsfeld 2010: 65). As noted by Schönbaumsfeld, in the work *On My Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard is in fact willing to concede that these eighteen *Upbuilding Discourses* are to be classified as religious. Thus it would appear that the divisions which he makes between the 'aesthetic' works and the 'religious' works are used arbitrarily (Schönbaumsfeld 2010: 64).

This unclarity and ambiguity on the part of Kierkegaard is only further exacerbated by evidence suggesting that he was hesitant to have the work *PV* published at all. In a journal entry, we find the following statement in regards to this: "*The Point of View for My Work as an Author*" must not be published, no, no! (...) And this is the deciding factor (...): I cannot tell the full truth about myself' (*PV* 174). At first glance, this may seem like evidence in support of accounts such as Roberts', as this 'full truth' might be that the purpose of authorship really was religious all along (as Kierkegaard claims in *PV*). However, matters are not all that straightforward. Firstly, if Kierkegaard's authorship really was a 'Christian mission' as Roberts claims, then it seems strange that he would not wish to have this revealed. Secondly, even if there were reason to think that this is not something that Kierkegaard would want revealed to readers, this statement still does not provide us with sufficient reason for believing that there really had been a religious purpose all along. As Berthold notes, the claims of *PV* stand at odds with the 'ethics of subjectivity' Kierkegaard endorses throughout the rest of the authorship prior to *PV* (Berthold 2011: 111). Plus, there is no reason to accept Kierkegaard's authority over dictating the meaning of his authorship in light of other evidence presented to us, (namely, evidence presented in the previous sections).

Furthermore, things are complicated even further when we then learn that he even ironically toyed with the idea of ascribing the work to a pseudonym:

'Moreover, what I have written can very well be used – if I do indeed continue to be an author – but then I must assign it to a poet, a pseudonym. For example –

by

the poet Johannes de Silentio

edited

by

S. Kierkegaard.

But this is the best evidence that "The Point of View for My Work as an Author" cannot be published. It must be made into something by a third party: A Possible Explanation of Magister Kierkegaard's Authorship, that is, so it is no longer the same book at all. For the point of it was my personal story' (PV 177).

This further illuminates that Kierkegaard himself had become very indecisive and uneasy about the publication of this particular work, which might give us further concern about viewing it as Kierkegaard's decisive opinion on the authorship as a whole, and as providing a reliable guide for reading the rest of his works. Note also Kierkegaard's own choice of words above: 'A Possible Explanation of Magister Kierkegaard's Authorship' (my emphasis here). This lends support to Mackey's argument (explored in the section prior to this), as this appears to be Kierkegaard's own suggestion that *PV* ought to be thought of as just one possible point of view on what to make of the authorship, and not *the* (definitive) point of view. As he says, it is *his personal story*. That is, it is his opinion on the authorship, but this does not mean that his opinion ought to be taken as authoritative – indeed, if we take seriously the claims found in *CUP*, it ought not to be.

Hopefully now it can be seen that not only do some of the claims found within *PV* contradict those of *CUP* (claims made by both Johannes Climacus and Kierkegaard in this work), but that the claims of *PV* itself are ambiguous and unreliable. These concerns are put into context when we recall sections 2.1.3 and 2.1.4; that is, we cannot easily dismiss these concerns about *PV* when we recall Kierkegaard's other motivations at the time of writing this book, as well as the concerns about the nature of the authorship itself. Therefore, we have better reason to trust the earlier claims of *CUP*, than those made in *PV*. *PV* may contain Kierkegaard's wishes at the time that it was written, but this does not mean that it ought to be taken as a definitive guide for interpreting a production which repeatedly says otherwise.

## 2.2 What was Kierkegaard's authorship as a whole aiming at?

### 2.2.1 Wittgenstein and 'Family Resemblances' – an analogy for Kierkegaard's works?

In the previous section, I argued that part of the issue with taking the claims found within *PV* as a blueprint for reading Kierkegaard's production is that it fails to acknowledge the complexity of Kierkegaard's authorship by reducing all of his works to fit under one unifying theme. I want to propose the alternative suggestion here that instead of there being just one overarching theme ('unifier') of all of the works, a singular thread that runs throughout and pieces them together, it

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may be better to think of there being several overlapping themes or threads that can be found within the authorship.

To explain what I mean by this, I will consider Wittgenstein's use of the analogy 'family resemblances', and see if it can be applied here. I hope to show that carrying this analogy over to an interpretation of Kierkegaard's authorship allows us to find a middle ground between reducing the authorship down to one essence, and on the other hand, failure to acknowledge a connection and coherence between the works.

Wittgenstein introduces the concept 'family resemblances' in his work *Philosophical Investigations* as an alternative to the Platonic idea of 'essences' of language or of words, suggesting instead that we partake in a great number of 'language games' in which 'we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: similarities in the large and small' (Wittgenstein 2009: 66). He characterizes these 'similarities', (known as 'family resemblances'), as follows:

'(...) the various resemblances between members of a family – build, features, colours of eyes, gait, temperament, and so on and so forth – overlap and criss-cross in the same way. – And I shall say: 'games' form a family. And likewise the kinds of number, for example, form a family. Why do we call something a "number"? Well, perhaps because it has a – direct – affinity with several things that have hitherto been called a "number"; and this can be said to give it an indirect affinity with other things that we also call "numbers". And we extent our concept of number, as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread resides not in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres' (Wittgenstein 2009: 67).

There may be no one singular feature which *all* family members share, but we can observe the commonalities between the features of family members; that is, in some way these commonalities 'overlap and criss-cross' between various members of a family. Wittgenstein is here attempting to demonstrate the way in which the same might be true for how we use our concepts in language (the example here is how we use the concept 'number'); we can observe the affinity that is shared between all those things which we label as 'numbers', but there may not be one feature that underpins all uses of this concept.

The 'family resemblances' analogy is employed by Wittgenstein at this point in *Philosophical Investigations* as an alternative to 'essentialism' – i.e. the view that the words we use have an underlying 'essence', which can explain all of the various ways in which these words are used. This

attempt to pick out an 'essence' of our concepts and words, Wittgenstein thought, was a mistake, and cannot fully account for all of the ways in which they are used in language.

What I want to suggest here is that it may be useful to think of the themes found within Kierkegaard's works in a similar way; we can observe an 'overlapping and criss-crossing' of themes within Kierkegaard's works, a shared affinity amongst them. That is, we don't need to pick out one unifying theme within his corpus, or an 'essence', in order to see the resemblances between the works, and an underlying coherence to them. Instead, it may be more accurate to think of overlapping fibres existing within the works, without there being one fibre that holds them all together. (In due course, I will say a little bit more about what these overlapping themes and aims are.)

I propose this alternative account, because I believe that any attempt to impose one overarching unifier on Kierkegaard's works (or to pick out an 'essence') is to fail to acknowledge their sheer complexity, and the subtleties that are to be found within each. To re-use a phrase from Ferreira quoted towards the end of the previous chapter: the authorship that we are faced with is one in which 'there is much ambiguity, many unresolved questions, no pat answers, and no "results" we can easily summarize – a bit like life' (Ferreira 2009: 2). This just seems to me like a straightforward truth about Kierkegaard's authorial strategy; and thus to attempt to fit all this under one unifying theme is reductive, and also seems to completely defeat the point of writing in this way.

Arguably, it would appear that Kierkegaard himself falls prey to the very idea which he had wanted so badly to resist (in addition to subscribers of *TI*); Kierkegaard himself appears to be guilty of attempting to identify one 'essence' within his works in *PV*, as well as attempting to provide a definitive guide for readers on how to understand the other works found within his corpus. That is, in *PV*, Kierkegaard identifies the 'essence' of his works as a religious one, in a similar way that the 'essentialist' of language which Wittgenstein criticizes in *PI* attempts to pick out the 'essence' of a concept. As I have explained in section 2.1.3, however, there is sufficient evidence to think his attempt was largely influenced by his own personal motivations at the time, as opposed to being an accurate reflection of the authorship and his authorial intentions throughout its production. Applying the 'family resemblances' analogy to Kierkegaard's authorship, and the themes found within it, allows us to avoid oversimplifying the complex production to this one 'essence'.

If we apply the 'family resemblances' analogy to Kierkegaard's authorship, it also appears to be able to avoid the exact opposite error to the one which Kierkegaard himself makes in *PV*. That is,

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this analogy, if applied to the way we interpret Kierkegaard's production, is also able to avoid the appearance of a fragmented, chaotic authorship, a literary masterpiece, but with little to say that is of substantial philosophical significance – as seen in section 2.1.4, this is the appearance that Mackey's *Points of View* argument gives. The family resemblances interpretation still allows for some unity and connectivity between the works (since there are various shared commonalities), as well as allowing for the possibility that there is a philosophical purpose (or purposes) behind the authorship.

As Schönbaumsfeld also notes, there is a need to strike a balance between a 'literal minded reading' and a 'purely literary reading' (Schönbaumsfeld 2010: 5-6); one needs to note the importance of the pseudonymous works within Kierkegaard's authorship, and the likelihood that they served a purpose beyond protecting the author's identity, whilst still noting that there is some distinction to be made between the pseudonymous and non-pseudonymous works.

I believe that the 'family resemblances'/ 'overlapping threads' argument does successfully strike an appropriate balance between the two extremes – i.e. between what Schönbaumsfeld calls a 'literal minded reading' and 'a purely literary reading'. As noted above, it doesn't reduce Kierkegaard's authorship to just a purely literary pursuit, an 'object of aesthetic appreciation' (as it is able to overcome the appearance of a highly fragmented, but very aesthetic and literary authorship), whilst at the same time acknowledging the complexity of the authorship, and the distinction between the pseudonymous and non-pseudonymous works (by not attempting to pick out one common 'essence' found within all of the works). In other words, it isn't guilty of reducing Kierkegaard in the ways which both the 'literal minded' readings and the 'purely literary' readings do – it allows us to respect the authorship as it is found, and in this sense it is a much more neutral interpretation than the other two readings commonly found within the secondary literature.

This interpretation, I believe, is also a much more accurate representation of how we find Kierkegaard's works. Whilst we do find religious themes and purposes within Kierkegaard's works, to conclude that this is the only significant theme there is to ignore the themes of aestheticism, melancholy, inwardness, communication, subjectivity, ethical concerns, immediacy, repetition, (and the list goes on), which also play an important part in his oeuvre. These themes crop up many times within Kierkegaard's authorship, and feature in several of Kierkegaard's works. For instance, as I will explore in later chapters, the notion of a 'trial' seems highly significant to both the aesthetic portrayal, and the portrayal of the religious; within this notion, inwardness and melancholy also appear to play significant roles in Kierkegaard's authorship. In other words, the

aesthetic and the religious on Kierkegaard's depictions seem to possess a special kind of 'affinity', or 'family resemblance'.

These overlapping themes are, in part, what give Kierkegaard's production an underlying coherence, in the same way that Wittgenstein's employment of the 'family resemblances' analogy is able to successfully account for the shared affinity amongst our use of certain concepts thereby demonstrating how these concepts are used in our language. In both instances, there is no need to pick out one central 'essence' as the answer – any attempt to do so is to oversimplify matters.

### **2.2.2 Overlapping aims of Kierkegaard's authorship**

In this section, I will develop the 'family resemblances' analogy, by pointing out that there are several overlapping philosophical purposes (in addition to the overlapping themes noted above) which can be observed within Kierkegaard's works – two of which I have already identified in Chapter One. Here, I will recall some of the argument contained within Chapter One, whilst also pointing out that there may be other aims connected primarily (although not exclusively) to the non-pseudonymous works. My aim is not only to show that these various aims of Kierkegaard's are not mutually exclusive to one another, and can co-exist, but that this is a more accurate interpretation of Kierkegaard's aims than those which have been explored in this chapter so far.

In Chapter One, I presented Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms as a means to engage the reader, claiming that his purpose was a therapeutic one. I argued that this therapeutic purpose was two-fold: firstly, to get the unreflective individual to examine themselves and their lives, by removing the illusion that this is unnecessary, as well as removing any self-deceptions which the individual may have about themselves and the options that are available to them; secondly, to remove the philosopher's illusions of objectivity – i.e. the illusion that one can, and ought, to take a neutral perspective when considering the question of how to live one's life. Both purposes here share the goal of getting the reader to re-orientate themselves to the question of how to live, and to answer this question having undergone the appropriate processes of self-reflection and self-examination. Only once this has happened can one meaningfully consider committing to one of the existential options (i.e. existence spheres) on offer.

I argued that, built into this process, is the notion that readers are left to decide for themselves what to make of these ways of life which Kierkegaard displays via his pseudonyms. Readers are granted autonomy due to the level of authorial distance which Kierkegaard maintained within the pseudonymous works. As we saw in section 2.1 of this chapter, this authorial distance leads to

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many issues surrounding interpretations of authorial intention, but it also seems obvious that there was a point to writing this way. Kierkegaard did not write under pseudonyms as a means to protecting his identity, nor does it seem likely that it was merely a stylistic quirk – therefore, it seems reasonable to infer that his pseudonymity had an intellectual purpose.

I am suggesting here that this element of authorial distance appears to imply that Kierkegaard believed it more important that readers reach their own conclusions with regards to which existence sphere they ought to commit to, as opposed to possessing the intention that they all reach the same conclusion, and see matters as he did. Within later chapters, I will examine the evidence contained within his portrayal of each of the existence spheres in support of this claim, but for now, I think it seems plausible to accept the likelihood of this. As I argued towards the end of Chapter One, this is partially because the aim of getting readers to reach the same conclusion about the existence spheres – (i.e. that the religious existence sphere is the highest, and the telos of human existence) – seems contrary to Kierkegaard's aims, particularly to Kierkegaard's insistence that we take a subjective approach to existential matters. One of his aims was to highlight the importance of context – i.e. of one's situation – as essential to existential matters. There can be no 'recipe' or set of instructions for how to live, given the various individualities that there are, and so to think that Kierkegaard had the aim of simply showing that the religious way of life is best for all individuals, (regardless of their situation and beliefs), seems contradictory to this.

By arguing this, however, I ought to make it clear that my claim is not that Kierkegaard is not a religious thinker or philosopher (as it seems fairly obvious that he is); rather, my denial is that Kierkegaard intended, via his use of pseudonyms, to push the reader towards the religious sphere. It is of course true that Kierkegaard did have the aim of revealing the true nature of Christianity and genuine faith (in contrast to the acceptance of 'Christendom' which he perceived in his society). This aim is seen most clearly within the non-pseudonymous *Upbuilding Discourses*, as well as arguably within some of the pseudonymous works such as *FT* and *SUD* – so, there appears to be an overlapping of themes even between the pseudonymous and non-pseudonymous works.

These aims pertaining to the true nature of Christianity and faith, however, are not inconsistent with allowing readers to decide for themselves what to make of the existence spheres which are illustrated within the pseudonymous works. It is perfectly plausible that Kierkegaard wanted to make truth claims about the true nature of Christianity and faith, but to also allow that the religious way of life may not be the best existential option for an honest atheist – this would completely contradict the true nature of Christianity, and instead looks suspiciously close to the

kind of Christendom which he was so critical of. (More on this in Chapter Five.) That is, it is not inconsistent to think that Kierkegaard intended to present the existence spheres in a more neutral way than it is argued by Roberts, Evans and Phillips, along with other proponents of TI, *and* that he had the intention of revealing certain truths about religion.

So, in a similar way to the various themes which are observed within Kierkegaard's works, his aims and intentions within his production may also be said to overlap and co-exist in interesting ways.

## Conclusion

To conclude, *PV* alone ought not to be taken as a blueprint for reading Kierkegaard's production – to take it as such would be to oversimplify and to misjudge the aim of his writings. Additionally, as explored in section 2.1.3, there are reasons which can explain Kierkegaard's claims within *PV*, and its inconsistency with what he says/shows elsewhere.

As seen, *PV* is best regarded as just one perspective amongst others on Kierkegaard's authorship – and not to be taken as a definitive guide to his total production – but accepting this does not mean that we have to reduce his production to nothing but a literary masterpiece, with little philosophical significance or purpose, and no underlying coherence. Instead, I proposed an alternative suggestion that there are several themes and aims to be found within Kierkegaard's oeuvre, and that these are not mutually exclusive, but instead may be thought of as something similar to Wittgenstein's use of the concept 'family resemblances'. This alternative is able to strike an appropriate balance between two misguided interpretations of Kierkegaard's authorship: the attempt to reduce Kierkegaard's works to fit under one over-arching, unifying theme, and to deny the philosophical significance of the pseudonymous works (something Kierkegaard himself was arguably guilty of trying to do in *PV*, as are advocates of TI); and the opposite error, to view all of his works as fragmented, and unconnected in any meaningful way. Both of these interpretations, although they are also polar opposites, fail to acknowledge a crucial distinction between Kierkegaard's pseudonymous and non-pseudonymous works, as well as failing to account for the philosophical significance of both of these categories within Kierkegaard's complete oeuvre – this is something which the alternative which I have proposed here is able to avoid.

Overall, I hope that this has shown that the claims which Kierkegaard presented in *PV* are not worrying for my interpretation, or my challenge to TI.

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With these issues relating to the method of Kierkegaard's communication dealt with, I will now be able to examine the existence spheres themselves as we find them in the pseudonymous works.

## Chapter Three      Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthetic sphere of existence

### Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthetic sphere. I will be paying attention to Kierkegaard's depiction of this existence sphere in *E/O* in particular, as this is where we find one of his most detailed illustrations of the aesthetic sphere, and it also appears to be the portrayal of the aesthetic found within Kierkegaard's works that is paid the most attention in the secondary literature.

A core aim in this chapter is to demonstrate the various ways in which TI misconstrues Kierkegaard's depiction of the aesthetic sphere. I will show that it is not as obvious that Kierkegaard's intention was to portray the aesthetic sphere as the lowest sphere of existence as these commentators argue.<sup>39</sup>

Rather, I hope to offer an alternative interpretation of Kierkegaard's illustration of the aesthetic sphere, showing that the aesthetic life as he portrays it can best be thought of as a sophisticated response to the situation in which the aesthete finds himself – i.e. one in which his suffering/melancholy cannot be comforted or explained away by a belief in God. Moreover, I hope to show that this response may be one which can be interpreted in a more positive light than it generally has in the secondary literature, and that the aesthetic is portrayed within the pseudonymous works as a genuine existential option, which may be a valid, rewarding life choice. In particular, I will argue that the aesthetic sphere can be viewed as a way of allowing the atheist to use her experiences (including those of suffering and melancholy) in a constructive and artistic way. So, contra TI, I will show that Kierkegaard's aesthetic sphere is able to offer the modern-day atheist reader something of significance (i.e. the way in which one is able to create a valid and rewarding life for oneself in the absence of belief in God).

Alongside this, I will explore the connections which Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthetic has with cultural references to 19<sup>th</sup> Century Romanticism, as this I believe will also help to explain the aesthete's relationship to melancholy/suffering. I will be contrasting this connection to Romanticism with a traditional branch of (18<sup>th</sup> Century) hedonism, as I believe that confusing

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<sup>39</sup> Included in this bracket are: Pattinson; Jothen; Rudd; Taylor; Caputo; Evans; Watkin; and Grimsley.

Kierkegaard's aesthete with this type of hedonism can, and does, lead to mistakes when interpreting his portrayal of the aesthetic sphere.

In section 3.1, I begin with an important distinction between two strands of 'aestheticism' which can be identified within Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works – one which is perhaps most prominent in 'Volume I' of *E/O*. That is: the distinction to be observed between the aesthetic as primarily concerned with 'immediacy'; and the aesthetic as primarily concerned with 'reflection'. This distinction is crucial to any discussion of Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthetic existence sphere; as we shall see, a failure to acknowledge this distinction can only lead to an interpretation that is fundamentally misconstrued.<sup>40</sup> This is because, as I will show, this first type of aestheticism is one which is not possible in practice, but the latter is – that is, only a reflective type of aestheticism is existentially possible.

Section 3.2 will be largely concerned with two particularly significant chapters of *E/OI*: 'The Unhappiest One', and 'Crop Rotation'. I will examine the problem which 'The Unhappiest One' is often taken to pose for the aesthete, exploring what this section of the book is intended to show. I will then attempt to show that this section of the book does not pose such a problem for the aesthete as it might initially seem to; I hope to show instead that the aesthete intends 'Crop Rotation' to act as a remedy to the problems that 'The Unhappiest One' raises.

Laying the foundations in section 3.2 will hopefully begin to contribute to the 'alternative' interpretation of the aesthetic existence sphere which I will advocate in section 3.3. In this section (3.3), I will draw out the distinction to be made between interest (the aesthete's primary focus, as identified in 'Crop Rotation') and pleasure (which has often mistakenly been taken as the aesthete's primary focus). Clarification of this distinction will reveal that – as noted above – Kierkegaard's aesthete shares a closer affinity to romanticist than to hedonist ideals; and that what the aesthete is trying to do (at least in part), is to reclaim an interest in his melancholic situation.

More than this can be said of the aesthetic life, however; and in section 3.3.3, I will be exploring the idea that the aesthetic life is an attempt to 'turn life into a work of art', as a way of dealing

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<sup>40</sup> Watkin, for instance, appears to fail to draw this distinction, as she sums the aesthetic sphere up as thus: 'In essence, the aesthete is one who lives a spontaneous or 'immediate' life and, changeable in feelings, moods and bodily condition, thus interacts with his changing environment' (Watkin 1997:53). As will be demonstrated in this chapter, this is a much more basic and hedonistic version of aestheticism than that which (at least one of) Kierkegaard's aesthete(s) subscribes to.

with what that life throws at us when we can no longer turn to God for this.<sup>41</sup> In brief, I will argue that 'living artistically' (in the way Kierkegaard's aesthete strives to), offers a way of providing life with meaning and narrative to the atheist reader. This allows the atheist reader to take something of existential significance from Kierkegaard's writings; whereas on TI's view, the atheist must surely either be condemned to a meaningless and nihilistic life, or they must nonetheless attempt to move into the religious sphere – and it is not clear how they can do the latter in an authentic and honest way, (an idea which I will explore in greater depth in Chapters Four and Five).

In the final section (3.4), I will show how everything that I have said up to that point is able to successfully challenge the depiction of the aesthetic sphere in the secondary literature.

### 3.1 A Distinction: Two types of aestheticism observed within Kierkegaard's works

#### 3.1.1 Immediacy

In the pseudonymous work *E/O*, we encounter at least two types of aesthete, or two possible ways to live in accordance with aesthetic principles: firstly, a type of aestheticism closely linked to 'immediacy'; and secondly, a more reflective type of aesthete (aestheticism linked to recollection). In *E/O*, Mozart's 'Don Giovanni' is employed as a paradigm example of aestheticism as the embodiment of 'pure immediacy'. There is some ambiguity over exactly who is intended to represent the aesthetic sphere as an existence concerned primarily with reflection; some writers take this to be 'Johannes the Seducer' of 'The Seducer's Diary', and some take it to be 'A' – i.e. the author of the papers which make up 'Volume I' of *E/O* (potentially excluding 'The Seducer's Diary'). ('A' is also sometimes just referred to as 'the aesthete'. I will continue to use these names interchangeably throughout the remainder of the thesis.) Despite 'A's claims that he is not the author of 'The Seducer's Diary', there is debate within the secondary literature with regards to whether 'A', the aesthete of 'Volume I', and Johannes the Seducer are the same person (and whether this reveals anything important about the aesthetic life). However, given that this will not impact my claims in any significant way here, I will assume that 'A' and Johannes are not the same character, although both are intended to represent a more reflective type of aestheticism (even if this is to varying degrees). That is, I will take 'A's claim that he is not Johannes at face value.

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<sup>41</sup> I will also occasionally draw upon the works of Nietzsche here, as I think that some similar ideas can be found within his works.

For now, I will focus on the first type of aestheticism associated with Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works: one concerned with 'immediacy', as embodied by Don Giovanni. 'A' begins his discussion of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in 'The Immediate Erotic Stages'. This is essentially the aesthete's supreme 'aesthetic manifesto', in which he tells the reader what he would really like to achieve, but can't in practice – (more on why this is unachievable in due course).

'A' believes Mozart's opera to be the incarnation of pure immediacy, with *Don Giovanni* achieving the supreme accomplishment of perfect harmony between form and content – thus, he argues it is logically impossible for Mozart to have a competitor. The subject-matter of this opera is desire, with Don Giovanni acting as the embodiment of pure sensuousness; he makes no discrimination amongst the various features of women that he pursues (e.g. with regards to age, beauty, and so forth), rather, he is concerned with 'womanhood' in general. He desires desire for desire's sake only.

In the opera, Don Giovanni is given no self-reflective aria, as the other characters are, and is only ever presented as being in action. Therefore, we have no sense of what he is like when he is alone, or what kind of 'self' he might be or possess, if any at all (see Williams 2006: 108). In this way, he can be said to be 'at one with the moment' – in a sense, Don Giovanni and the moment become almost indistinguishable. He is completely unreflective, and thus his experiences are direct and unmediated – i.e. 'immediate'. His experiences are immediate because they are simply 'had' before any reflection can mediate between them and the individual receiving these experiences (see Mackey 1971: 3). That is, immediacy is grounded in the sense experience itself (experiences as they happen), as opposed to the subsequent reflections that tend to follow our experiences. In other words, the initial feeling, or initial experience, is immediate experience; the reflective processes that tend to follow our experiences, are what render these experiences no longer immediate – reflection has mediated between the initial experience and the individual receiving this experience, meaning that immediacy is lost to the receiver.

Don Giovanni is a representation of the immediate (or *pure* immediacy, to be precise), as his focus is upon a conquest of the flesh, an immediate gratification (although this is perhaps not something that he actively seeks, given that this would undermine immediacy).<sup>42</sup> There are no subsequent reflections on these immediate gratifications (conquests) – as shown by the lack of a self-reflective aria for Don Giovanni in the opera – he simply moves on to his next conquest.

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<sup>42</sup> The very idea of having a 'goal' (of any sort, arguably) appears to stand in tension with the idea of immediacy.

It is also due to this lack of reflection that 'A' claims that Don Giovanni is 'not a seducer'. At first this claim might seem slightly odd, given what we know about Don Giovanni thus far, but as the aesthete tells us:

'Being a seducer requires always a certain reflection and consciousness, and once this is present one may talk of cunning and intrigues, and of wily measures. This consciousness is something that Don Giovanni lacks. So he does not seduce. He desires, and this desire acts seductively. To that extent he seduces. He savours the satisfaction of desire; as soon as he has savoured it he seeks a new object, and so on endlessly. (...) He desires and stays constantly in a state of desire, and he constantly savours its satisfaction. To be a seducer he lacks the time ahead in which to lay his plans, and the time behind in which to become conscious of his act. *A seducer should therefore be in possession of a power which Don Giovanni does not have, however well equipped he is otherwise – the power of speech*' (E/O 104-5).

So, according to the aesthete, Don Giovanni cannot properly be regarded as a 'seducer', given that he lacks the power of speech; he must lack this power, for if he possessed it, then 'that would straightaway make him a reflective individual' (E/O 107). The aesthete adds to this by explaining that if Don Giovanni, (or any other individual for that matter), *spoke* about having seduced as many as 1,003 women, then this would become comical. This is not what the opera is intended to convey – therefore, he must lack the power of speech (E/O 99).

Don Giovanni communicates the opera's intended subject matter of pure sensuousness and *infinite* desire so successfully ('he seeks a new desire and so on, endlessly'), precisely because it is done so through the medium of music. According to 'A', the use of this particular medium allows direct access to the emotions, and furthermore, is not concrete – this is important, because as language is concrete, it would not be appropriate to convey the infinity of desire. By 'concrete', I mean that language is generally perceived as objectively definable (i.e. it can be universally understood), rigid (inflexible), precise, and in a sense – impersonal; whereas, on the other hand, music as a medium is much more personal in a sense, due to its undefinable and un-conceptual nature. The conceptual (i.e. language), for Kierkegaard, cannot capture the immediate, hence the appropriateness of music here. (Additionally, perhaps this conceptual nature of language is why 'A' claims that if Don Giovanni spoke of having seduced 1,003 women, then this would be comical – hence, the un-conceptual and subjective medium of music is more appropriate.) Don Giovanni, 'A' asserts, is 'not character, but essentially life, he is absolutely musical' (E/O 121-2).

Because of his interest in immediate gratification, or sensory gratification, this first 'version' of the aesthetic may be interpreted as close to classical hedonism, (i.e. a life centred around maximising pleasure and minimizing pain). As we will see in due course, however, the aesthete of 'Volume I' does not choose to centre his life around immediacy (nor is any kind of sensory gratification his *primary concern*), and is not a hedonist – not even in a loose sense of the word.

The way in which 'A' writes about Don Giovanni in 'The Immediate Erotic Stages' suggests in some ways that this kind of immediacy is what he would really like to achieve – that he looks to Don Giovanni in admiration, as a kind of ideal. Having said this, 'A' does seem to acknowledge that the immediacy of Don Giovanni is not possible in practice, and that he himself is much too reflective for this. The aesthete notes that, in the opera, Don Giovanni is intended to embody 'desire as a principle' (*E/O* 94; my emphasis here); this is crucial because embodying a principle may not entail that this sort of *existence* is actually possible (i.e. possible in practice). There seems to be an important distinction to be made here between what is possible in principle (i.e. in mere theory), and what is possible in practice (i.e. in existence). As we saw in Chapter One, for Kierkegaard, existential matters ought to only be concerned with the latter; knowing what is possible in principle tells us nothing substantive about what is possible in practice – the fact that Don Giovanni is possible as a principle, does not entail that this sort of existence is possible in actuality. Thus, we are beginning to see how this type of aestheticism – (namely, one primarily concerned with 'the immediate') – falls apart. It may be perfectly plausible in theory (as shown by Mozart's opera), but whether it is possible in practice is another question altogether. 'A' himself seems to recognise this, through his acknowledgement that Don Giovanni is the embodiment of a principle (*E/O* 94), as opposed to even qualifying as a 'character' (see *E/O* 121). (Additionally, as we will see in due course, the principles which 'A' subscribes to later in the book also seem to suggest that he has accepted that a life of pure immediacy is existentially impossible, thus an alternative is needed if one is to live aesthetically.)

One of the key problems with immediacy, Mackey notes, is that 'it never *is* where it is asked about. Asking about immediacy is already an act of reflection once removed from the immediate' (Mackey 1971: 4). As soon as one recognises a desire for immediacy, and attempts to find it, immediacy is already lost; so, paradoxically, the quest or desire for immediacy must ultimately fail due to the fact that this very task renders immediacy impossible.

It may, however, be possible for individuals to occasionally indulge in immediate experiences in their lives – it doesn't seem that some level of immediacy on occasion is altogether impossible

(that is, a *weakened* version of Don Giovanni might be possible in reality). However, a life which is solely focused upon it seems less plausible – particularly, a life in which one actively seeks to find immediacy (due to the paradox that Mackey points out). Hence, if achieving pure immediacy were to be 'A's goal, he would inevitably fail to fulfil this quest; given that in thinking about immediacy (and setting it up as his goal), he would have ironically already moved past it.

The struggle (and ultimate failure) to attain immediacy is demonstrated by the aesthete of *E/O* himself in 'Volume I' of the book, that is, by the narrator of the first volume: the very fact that the aesthete is here reflecting on Mozart's opera and the immediacy of Don Giovanni can only show that 'A' is already operating from within the realm of reflection. His experience of the opera is no longer direct and unmediated, due to this process of reflection which he has become engaged in. As noted, once the aesthete has started thinking about immediacy (as he does in 'The Immediate Erotic Stages'), it is already lost to him.

Therefore, a life of 'pure immediacy' *a la* Don Giovanni seems altogether impossible, but perhaps *particularly* for the aesthete of *E/O*. 'Volume I' of *E/O* itself appears to be wholly reflective in nature, and exists both as a result of, and for the purpose of recollection. As Cross states, 'If the mark of immediacy is a lack of reflection, 'A' seems anything but immediate' (Cross 1998:143). Whereas the immediate man has 'at best' a low degree of self-consciousness, the aesthete of 'Volume I' is so self-absorbed he is self-conscious to a fault (Cross 1998:142). So, even if immediacy were possible (perhaps in a weakened sense), it would still be out of 'A's reach, given his highly reflective nature. Not only is 'The Immediate Erotic Stages' essentially an act of 'A's reflection upon Mozart's opera, arguably, so is the whole of 'Volume I'. That is, the very fact that 'Volume I' exists shows us that 'A' is anything but a man of immediacy – the Volume itself is an act of the aesthete's reflection upon his own life and moods, amongst other themes. In the next section, I will explore the aesthete's reflective nature in more detail.

### 3.1.2 Reflective aestheticism

This does not mean that aestheticism is unsustainable on Kierkegaard's account however, given that – as noted – a life of pure immediacy is only one type of aestheticism to be found within Kierkegaard's works. Despite his admiration for Don Giovanni, the aesthete of *E/O* acknowledges that this type of immediacy is unachievable in practice, and in any case, the aesthete himself seems much too reflective for this (being the highly reflective individual that he is, this is also something which he seems to acknowledge). Thus, this first type of aestheticism gives way to an alternative type of aestheticism: one primarily concerned with reflection and recollection.

Standing in direct contrast to Don Giovanni in 'Volume I' of *E/O*, is Johannes the Seducer of 'The Seducer's Diary'. Unlike Don Giovanni, who is interested in 'womanhood' in general and desire for desire's sake, Johannes is overly concerned with the particulars and the method of his seduction. He focuses all of his efforts on one particular girl, Cordelia. In his first diary entry, we see a rich description of the scene in which Johannes first encounters Cordelia. As he watches her from afar, he observes:

'Her head is a perfect oval; she inclines it a little forward, thus heightening her forehead, which rises pure and proud without any phrenologist's signs of intellect. Her dark hair closes softly and gently about her brow. Her face is like a fruit, every transition perfectly rounded. Her skin is transparent, like velvet to the touch, I can feel it with my eyes. Her eyes – well, yes, I haven't seen them yet, they are hidden behind lids armed with silken fringes curving like hooks, dangerous to whoever would meet her glance. She has a Madonna head, pure and innocent in cast; and like the Madonna she is bending forward, but she is not lost in contemplation of the One. There is a variation of expression in her face (...)' (*E/O* 258-9).

Johannes goes on to describe Cordelia's appearance and movements in further detail, but it will not be necessary to quote his description at any more length for now – the above is sufficient for telling us what we need to know about Johannes and his concern for particulars. The stark contrast to Don Giovanni here seems intentional: whereas Don Giovanni had complete disregard for the particular features of the women he encountered (such as age, beauty, intellect), and no real reflection upon his conquests at all; Johannes appears to be obsessed with the particulars and fine details. The fact that the events are recorded in a diary seems also to serve as a reminder of just how reflective Johannes is, in contrast to Don Giovanni, who is completely unreflective (at least in this depiction).

Furthermore, much unlike Don Giovanni, Johannes the Seducer is less interested in a conquest of flesh than he is in a conquest of the mind or spirit. The method of seduction, for Johannes, seems to carry even more importance than the final conquest of flesh: 'Still now it is over and I never want to see her again. Once a girl has given away everything, she is weak, she has lost everything; for in the man innocence is a negative factor, while for the woman it is her whole worth' (*E/O* 367). This is Johannes's last diary entry – revealing that he has little to say after this event – the central focus of the diary as a whole is much more upon the build-up leading up to this final act.

Johannes is constantly reflecting on his actions and his strategy to seduce Cordelia, and he comes across as skilful, manipulative, and calculated in his approach – he is, again, Don Giovanni's opposite in this respect.

Although perhaps not quite as extreme as Johannes,<sup>43</sup> the aesthete of 'Volume I' ('A') also seems to belong to this latter category of 'reflective aestheticism'. The first clue to this that readers are given is on the title page of the 'Diapsalmata', where we find the inscription 'ad se ipsum' – translated as 'to himself'. Although 'A''s papers are not in the format of diary entries (as Johannes's are), there is a striking resemblance to a diary format, and this inscription on the title page seems to signify that the aesthete's papers are not necessarily *for* anyone else. As Victor Eremita says in the book's 'Preface', 'A would surely have no objection to the publication of the papers; to the reader he would presumably cry out, 'Read them or don't read them, you will regret both" (*E/O* 37). We can assume that this is partly the case since the aesthete doesn't seem like an individual who would necessarily care whether others read his papers and subsequently take up his way of life or not. As noted previously, the prescriptive language concerning how one 'ought' to live and 'ought' to act belongs primarily to the ethical sphere – hence, the ethicist's papers take the format of letters (i.e. they presumably have been written for the purpose of somebody else reading them).

Conversely, 'A''s papers appear to have been written merely for his own sake, and his own enjoyment/interest. Caputo claims, 'the poetic recollection of the affair is essential to the pleasure, multiplying and even exceeding in value the actual execution of the plan. An aesthete enjoys even more the after-glow of looking through his scrapbook of his past enjoyments' (Caputo 2007: 28). This is particularly evident in the case of 'The Seducer's Diary', given that the purpose of keeping a diary seems to perfectly fit Caputo's description here – it seems to serve no purpose other than for the sake of recollection. However, the whole of 'Volume I' also arguably seems to fit this description, because – as noted above – the aesthete's papers appear to be written for his own sake only ('ad se ipsum'), and as we will see, are very reflective and introspective in nature throughout.

At this point, it is important to note the poetic dimension of recollection, which distinguishes it from memory. This will also allow us to see more clearly why this theme is so central to the aesthetic life. Whereas to 'remember' past events involves striving to accurately and truthfully

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<sup>43</sup> 'A' expresses horror and 'anxiety' over the contents of the diary (see for instance, *E/O* 247 & 251), showing that for him, there is perhaps *some* room for ethical categories, (although ethical considerations will of course not be the primary motivation for the aesthete).

recall these events exactly as they happened, 'recollection' might involve a certain element of 'editing'. For instance, recollection may involve 'enhancing' the memories one has, or selectively editing out less interesting or favourable parts of the memory, in order to make them more gratifying/interesting/dramatic, and so forth. This of course doesn't mean completely fabricating memories – inventing them – rather, it is a tweaking of one's memories of actual events that happened to them. So, we can easily see why recollection may be of vital importance to the aesthetic existence sphere: it is aesthetically superior to mere memory, given that one can maximise the gratification or interest from their original memory (i.e. the event as it actually happened) by later recollecting it.

There appears to be another benefit to recollection, as Constantine Constantius – (another of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms) – tells us: 'The great advantage of recollection is that it begins with loss. This is its security – it has nothing to lose' (*Repetition* 8). This allows us to identify another crucial element of the aesthetic life, alongside recollection: control. Loss is outside of one's control, but by beginning with it, one no longer runs the risk of unexpectedly encountering it during the process of recollection – that is, one cannot encounter unforeseen losses, which is arguably much worse than those which are inevitable or expected. Recollection is secure. Furthermore, in the event of loss, there will invariably be some elements of unpleasantness present – during recollection, however, the aesthete can edit out these unpleasant parts of the memory, making it a more gratifying experience for himself.

In addition to this, recollection is also secure in the sense that it differs from memory with regards to the fact that memory can often be involuntary, and therefore has the possibility of becoming overwhelming. By having this greater degree of control over recollection (as it is a more active, voluntary process), the aesthete is also able to avoid becoming overwhelmed by his past experiences.

The aesthete of *E/O* repeatedly makes it clear how important being in control is for him. For instance, in the book's 'Diapsalmata', 'A' says:

'The real pleasure consists not in what one takes pleasure in but the mind. If I had in my service a humble spirit who, when I asked for a glass of water, brought me all the world's most expensive wines nicely blended in a goblet, I would dismiss him until he learned that the pleasure consists not in what I enjoy but in having my way' (*E/O* 49).

We also gain a much stronger understanding of how important control is to the aesthete in 'Crop Rotation'. Here, the aesthete tells us that the root of evil is *boredom* (E/O 228). The solution to keeping boredom at bay, he tells us, is via his method of 'crop rotation':

'The method I propose consists not in changing the soil but, as in the real rotation of crops, in changing the method of cultivation and the type of grain. Here, straightaway, we have the principle of limitation, which is the only saving one in the world. The more you limit yourself, the more resourceful you become' (E/O 233).

So, we can see here that control and self-discipline appear crucial to the aesthetic life. This is of central importance, because it tells us that the aesthete is not the traditional hedonist that some commentators take him to be.<sup>44</sup> This, I believe, is the second basic error which is made in the secondary literature regarding Kierkegaard's depiction of the aesthetic sphere: that aestheticism can be conflated with traditional hedonism.<sup>45</sup> As we can see from the above extracts, the aesthete's life is not one of excess and over-indulgence, but rather one of careful balance, and self-control. I will return to this point about hedonism in due course, as it is an important one.

In addition to the 'principle of limitation', the aesthete also believes that crucial to his method of 'crop rotation' is the ability to remember and forget *at will* (E/O 233-4). According to him, it is necessary to have control over this, given that life moves in these two currents – remembering and forgetting. 'A' tells us, 'Only when one has thrown hope overboard is it possible to live artistically; as long as one hopes, one cannot limit oneself' (E/O 233).

Forgetting at will, the aesthete tells us, is an *art* which must be *practised* beforehand, but being able to do this itself depends on how one remembers. How one remembers, however, depends in turn on how one *experiences* reality in the first place. Because of this, according to the aesthete, the real wisdom of life is to admire nothing ('nil admirari'). That is: 'every life-situation must possess no more importance than that one can forget it whenever one wants to; each single life-situation should have enough importance, however, for one to be able to remember it' (E/O 234).

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<sup>44</sup> For instance, evidence of this view can be seen in Mackey's *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*. Here, he notes the 'strange sadness' of the 'Diapsalmata', and the theme of death which is present in prominent sections of *E/O* such as 'The Unhappiest One'. These, he claims, seem to be 'strange themes for a hedonist, and yet they follow irresistibly from the aesthetic presupposition that life consists in enjoyment' (Mackey 1971: 11-12).

<sup>45</sup> The first to be identified was the mistake of failing to distinguish between the two strands of aestheticism present in Kierkegaard's works. Although these two mistakes can of course sometimes be connected. For instance, given that Don Giovanni is closer to a version of hedonism, if one fails to distinguish between this version of aestheticism found in *E/O*, and the latter (reflective) aestheticism, then this will of course lead to the conflation of Kierkegaard's aestheticism with hedonism.

Again, we see the need for careful balance here: the aesthete must not over-indulge, and push his experiences to the limit, because this can result in becoming overwhelmed – consequently, one may be less likely to be able to forget the event and move on. Hence, the aesthete must distance himself appropriately from his own experiences – note, this is the exact *opposite* to what Don Giovanni's character does, (recall, that he is 'at one with the moment'). So, the only way to be able to forget at will in the way that is required of the aesthete, is to experience things in a certain way in the first place: to not enjoy oneself *too much* by over-indulging and pushing experiences to the limit. Having said this, he still needs to enjoy himself *enough*, in order to gain some enjoyment or pleasure.<sup>46</sup> Once more, we see a careful balancing of elements, and a large degree of self-discipline exercised by the aesthete. As suggested before, this tells us that this type of aesthete cannot be the hedonist of popular legend, an individual who is constantly seeking over-indulgence and excess.

Because of the need to remember and forget at will, the aesthete suggests that one must be on one's guard against friendship (*E/O* 236), and that one never enter into marriage (*E/O* 237) – such long-term commitments to others, 'A' claims, are dangerous if one wants to be able to maintain control over these elements, and are also counter-intuitive to his theory of 'social prudence', i.e. 'crop rotation'. (Having said this, 'A' notes that this doesn't require that he lives without any human contact at all (*E/O* 236) – presumably, one must just be careful not to over-indulge, as this would risk potential future disappointment and consequently forfeit the ability to forget at will.)

'A' goes on to reveal that the secret to success in the aesthetic life lies in arbitrariness (*E/O* 239). As he notes, there is much skill required in perfecting this art, despite what people tend to think – therefore, arbitrariness is distinct from immediacy (which, given its very nature, is not a skill which one can polish). This, however, does not entail that the aesthetic life itself is arbitrary; rather, being able to master this will allow the aesthete to become a 'poet of chance' (Schönbaumsfeld's terminology, Schönbaumsfeld 2010: 43). That is, if the aesthete is able to perfect this skill, then he will be able to find interest in even the most mundane things,<sup>47</sup> and will be able to work with all of

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<sup>46</sup> In some ways, the aesthete's editing of memories and the prior careful balance involved in experiencing seems akin to the Nietzschean idea of 'making one's life beautiful'. In particular, we are reminded of Nietzsche's ideal attitude to one's past when the aesthete says '(F)orgetting is the shears with which one clips away what one cannot use' (*E/O* 235) – in other words, we ought to dispose of memories of past events which will have no use to us (i.e. those which we cannot take any value from).

<sup>47</sup> For instance, 'A' notes, 'One thinks of one's schooldays. When one is at the age when no aesthetic considerations are taken in the choice of one's teachers and the latter are for that very reason often very boring, how inventive one is! How amusing to catch a fly and keep it imprisoned under a nut shell and watch how it rushes about with the shell! What pleasure one can get by cutting a hole in the desk to imprison a fly in it, and spy down on it through a piece of paper! How entertaining it can be to hear the

life's 'materials' as it were (more on this metaphor in due course, as well as on 'A's claim about living 'artistically'). The result of limiting oneself in this way, 'A' believes, is that one will be able to become more resourceful (*E/O* 233).<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, it appears that given that the aesthete has carefully devised these principles by which he lives his life, and thought about his experiences in this reflective way, the aesthetic life must also be a conscious choice, a way of life which one can explicitly and consciously commit to. This is contrary to the perceptions of writers who view Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthetic sphere as a way of life which has been passively accepted, contrary to the ethical and religious spheres, which are conscious commitments. For instance, Grimsley refers to the aesthetic man as the 'natural man' (Grimsley 1973: 27), claiming that, '(T)he man who is still imprisoned in the aesthetic stage must be exhorted to despair; only then will he be able to escape from the limitations of his selfish attitude and move on to a higher plane of existence. Yet this new phase cannot be achieved by mere thought, but only by active choice and inner decision' (Grimsley 1973:36-7). This seems to imply that there is some passive acceptance of the aesthetic life, in comparison to the ethical and the religious, which conversely require 'active choice and inner decision'. In a similar vein, Marino claims that '(F)or Kierkegaard, there is no sitting on the fence between selves. If you have not chosen, you are an esthete, but if you really are facing the choice, you have already chosen to choose' (Marino 2001:116). Given that neither of these scholars make the distinction between aestheticism as concerned with 'immediacy' and a reflective type of aestheticism, it seems fair to assume that they have either made one of two mistakes: either they are conflating Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthetic sphere with the first kind of aestheticism (i.e. a kind which Kierkegaard's aesthete, 'A', does not in fact subscribe to); or, they have implicitly acknowledged that Kierkegaard's aesthete is a reflective kind of aesthete (in contrast to Don Giovanni), but still regard this existence sphere in this way (i.e. as one which is not consciously committed to). As we have seen, there first needs to be a clear distinction drawn between the 'immediate' aesthete and the 'reflective' aesthete, with Kierkegaard's aesthete of *E/OI* belonging to this latter category – failure to acknowledge this difference can only lead to misinterpretation of Kierkegaard's aesthetic sphere. Secondly, if these scholars are talking about Kierkegaard's aesthete (i.e. the second kind), then the claim that acceptance of the aesthetic isn't a serious

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monotonous drip from the roof! How thorough an observer becomes, the slightest noise or movement does not escape one! Here we have the extreme of the principle that seeks relief, not extensively, but intensively' (*E/O* 233).

<sup>48</sup> Note that this claim from the aesthete coheres with the above idea that the aesthete is able to use all of life's materials, to use whatever life throws at him, and to be able to find interest in even the most mundane things, if he is able to get the balance right.

commitment still seems misguided: as we can see, the aesthete has clearly reflected upon the principles which will guide his life, made a conscious commitment to them, and endeavoured to apply these principles to his life (this is particularly evident in 'Crop Rotation'). The fact that he has given conscious thought to such things contradicts the claim that one who lives aesthetically has only passively accepted this way of life. (To passively accept a way of life seems to entail that one has just 'drifted' into that way of life, or perhaps that one simply goes along with a certain way of life because it is a way of life which one's peers appear to have adopted. The aesthete, however, does not seem to be either of these people.) I will expand upon this reply to those who subscribe to views such as Marino's and Grimsley's in sections 3.3 and 3.4.

Whereas *Don Giovanni* is a work of art (as acknowledged by 'A'), Kierkegaard seems to present 'A' as a potential real individual with real thoughts and feelings, whom has made a conscious commitment to this way of life. So, this second, more reflective type of aestheticism does seem to be sustainable and possible in practice, in a way that the first type of aestheticism was not. However, the fact that it may be sustainable, does not rule it out as a contender for the lowest sphere of existence on Kierkegaard's picture; that is, it may be achievable to occupy this existence sphere, but it might still be portrayed as the lowest existence sphere. Therefore, I have only achieved half of the task thus far of refuting the claims of TI in regard to what Kierkegaard intended to portray via the aesthetic sphere. I have shown, at least, that Kierkegaard's aesthetic sphere of existence is one which is possible and sustainable, but I will now have to say something about the way in which it can rightly be deemed a viable existential option (contrary to the arguments of those who endorse TI). Otherwise, my opponents are able to push the line of argument that the aesthetic existence is simply one of misery, and that choosing this over other existential options is wholly irrational.

## 3.2 'The Unhappiest One' & a Potential Solution

### 3.2.1 'The Unhappiest One' – A Paradox?

Before I move on to a more fully-fleshed account of the ways in which the aesthetic sphere might be deemed a viable, genuine existential option within Kierkegaard's corpus, it will be worth exploring why subscribers to TI believe that this cannot be the case. We have already seen that whilst an aesthetic life primarily concerned with immediacy is unsustainable in practice, a more reflective type of aestheticism focused on recollection does seem likely to be existentially sustainable. However, many proponents of TI (such as: Rudd 2005; Evans 2009; Taylor 1980;

Pattison 2005) appear to acknowledge this distinction, as well as acknowledging that commitment to the aesthetic can be a conscious choice,<sup>49</sup> and yet still view the aesthetic sphere as the lowest sphere of existence that an individual could possibly occupy (and furthermore, that this was Kierkegaard's intention).

At least one key problem that TI has with the aesthetic is that (in *E/O* at least) it is presented in a very gloomy light; this is particularly evident within an aptly named chapter of the book, 'The Unhappiest One'. In this section, I will explore this chapter of *E/O* in detail, considering its implications, before beginning to advance my own argument in defence of the aesthetic. The part of my argument which I will espouse here is one in connection with the chapter that follows 'The Unhappiest One' – 'Crop Rotation'. Here, I will examine the idea that the aesthete proposes a way out of the predicament he finds himself in (or at least *could* find himself) in 'Crop Rotation'.

'The Unhappiest One' – as we will see – seems to possess a central significance within 'Volume I', and as Hare notes, the position of this section within the first volume of the book may reflect its significance. He identifies several distinctive features about the form of the book, and the sections within it, one of these being the definite pattern of the lengths of each section in 'Volume I', which can be seen as follows: 92, 28, 52, 14, 50, 20, 144 (number of pages per section). The sections therefore appear to provide the first volume with an arch-like structure. Given that 'The Unhappiest One' features as the shortest section, at the crown of the arch as it were, this seems to signify a central importance of this section – its placing and form in a way reflects its content (Hare 1995: 91-3). This seems to have at least some truth in it, given that this does indeed appear to be a chapter which is given much attention in the secondary literature. The reason for this seems likely to be because this is where readers are presented with a key problem encountered within the aesthetic sphere, a fundamental revelation that the aesthete has about his own life. In fact, many Kierkegaard scholars seem to take 'The Unhappiest One' as presenting a central paradox of the aesthetic sphere of existence.

In 'The Unhappiest One', the aesthete describes who the potential contenders for winning this title may be, and as the discussion progresses it becomes a concern that 'A' himself is dangerously close to taking the crown. 'A' begins by announcing to the 'Symparanekromenoi' (fellowship of the dead), 'the unhappiest would be the one who could not die, the happy man the one who died at birth, happiest of all the one who was never born' (*E/O* 212). In other words, immortality would

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<sup>49</sup> Rudd, in particular, seems to allow for this, given the distinction that he draws between 'crowd life' (one who gives little or no thought to how they ought to live can be said to exist in this category) and the aesthetic life (see Rudd 2005: 24).

be the greatest misfortune that could befall an individual. However, given that death seems to be 'the common fortune of all men' (*E/O* 212), the aesthete declares that a 'free competition' has been opened,

'from which none are excluded except the happy man and the one who fears death – every worthy member of the community of the unhappy is welcome, the seat of honour assigned to every really unhappy person, the grave to the unhappiest (...) we will not be so sophistical as to exclude the departed because they are dead; after all they have lived' (*E/O* 213).

The aesthete then identifies that the second worst fate – (that is, second worst to immortality) – is something akin to Hegel's 'unhappy consciousness' (*E/O* 213). Namely, the individual who is always absent from himself, and never present.<sup>50</sup> One is absent from oneself, 'A' claims, when either living in the past or when living in the future (*E/O* 214), and the unhappiest man is one who is turned 'back to front in two directions' with regards to hope and memory in relation to one's past and future (*E/O* 216). A healthy relation for an individual to have to hope and memory would be to direct hope towards one's future, and to direct memory towards the past. However, for the unhappiest individual, these relations have become muddled:

'The combination can only be this: that what prevents him from being present in hope is memory, and what prevents him from being present in memory is hope. This is what it amounts to: on the one hand, he constantly hopes for something he should be remembering, his hope is constantly disappointed, but on its being disappointed he discovers that the reason is not that the goal has been moved further on, but that it has already been experienced, or is supposed to have been, and has thus passed over in memory. On the other hand, he constantly remembers something which he should be hoping for; for in thought the future is something he has already taken up, he has experienced it in thought, and that which he has experienced is something he remembers instead of hopes for. Consequently, what he hopes for lies behind him, and what he remembers lies before him. His life is not backwards but back-to-front in two

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<sup>50</sup> I take it that the reason that 'A' sees this as a bad thing, is because what he admires most about Don Giovanni (who, in many ways, he sees as a kind of 'ideal') is his complete 'present-ness' and his ability to be 'at one with the moment' – the 'absentness' of 'the unhappiest one' seems to be precisely the opposite of this. Whilst, as I noted in the first section of this Chapter, 'A' does acknowledge that living like Don Giovanni is actually impossible in practice (i.e. in real-life) – (and he adapts accordingly) – this can still, nonetheless, be something that he admires. Hence, this could be the reason why 'A' thinks that the worst fate (aside from immortality) is being 'absent' from oneself.

directions. He will soon notice his misfortune even if he does not grasp what it really consists in' (*E/O* 216).

Looking at his sketch of 'the unhappiest one' in the above passage and considering discussion elsewhere in the book, we can slowly begin to see how 'A' himself is at significant risk of winning the title. Arguably, the aesthete of 'Volume I' comes rather close to fulfilling the first part of the 'criteria' for winning the title of 'the unhappiest one'; it seems true of 'A' that in a sense, 'he constantly hopes for something he should be remembering'. This is largely due to his highly reflective nature, and his love for recollection – that is, edited memory (recall section 3.1.2). 'A' is constantly reflecting on past memories and editing them in order to make them more gratifying/interesting – when engaging in this process of recollection he is clearly no longer 'present'. By editing his memories, it would appear that the aesthete is in some way hopeful for something that didn't actually happen – what he 'remembers' is actually an altered memory, due to the process of reflection.

'(T)he past, for the remembering individual to be present in it, must have had reality for him' (*E/O* 215). For the aesthete, this doesn't seem to have been the case: given that he is interested in recollection – and as this is distinct from the attempt to accurately recall past events – it could be said that his past lacks reality in some sense. The aesthete does of course *have* a past (so, in some sense, it *has had* a reality for him), but this is not exactly what he remembers when he engages in the process of recollection – i.e. he does not remember the past as it *actually happened* for him, he recollects a revised version of this as it were. Hence, in some sense, the aesthete might be said to be directing hope to his past; although he seems to recognise that he cannot actually change the past, his love for recollection seems to suggest that he is at least contented by altering the past via imagination (recollection) – this seems hopeful in some sense (even if not in a straightforward, obvious sense).

Furthermore, in order to have hope directed to the future (this would be the healthy relation to have), one must have long-term goals to direct it towards. In order to have goals, however, one must have made some prior commitments – i.e. something to care about, and to aim for. Given the aesthete prescribes in 'Crop Rotation' that he ought to have no long-term commitments (e.g. in friendship or marriage) (see *E/O* 236-7), this cannot be the case for him. The aesthete has also claimed in the 'Diapsalmata' that he doesn't wish to commit to any values or decisions, giving the

reason that regret will follow regardless of which option one chooses (see *E/O* 54)<sup>51</sup> – this also lends weight to this worry. He has no hope directed towards his future, but only to his past (given his love for recollection). Given that one cannot fulfil past goals (at least not in the literal sense), his hope is constantly disappointed (*E/O* 216). As long as one has an element of hope directed towards one's past, one risks an inability to move on – in 'Shadowgraphs', the aesthete discusses the perils of becoming stuck in 'reflective sorrow' (*E/O* 177-9).

Even more dangerous than 'A's love for recollection then, is the fate of the figures which 'A' discusses in the 'Shadowgraphs', such as Marie Beaumarchais from Goethe's *Clavigo*. Figures such as Marie Beaumarchais seem to have even more distorted ways of relating to the past than the aesthete does, whereby they very literally, and obviously direct hope towards the past, by hoping for a different past outcome. As a result, these figures end up becoming stuck in 'reflective sorrow' – essentially stuck in the past. This dangerous fate that Beaumarchais exemplifies may in fact be a reason that 'A' later prescribes throwing *all* hope overboard (*E/O* 233); a deeply unhealthy relation to one's past (like that of Beaumarchais's) must be avoided, lest he become stuck in 'reflective sorrow' too. His love for recollection is risky; but as it stands, it is not the same as being stuck in reflective sorrow – there seems to be an element of denial, or perhaps even a lack of self-awareness, involved in reflective sorrow, whereas 'A' seems aware of what he is doing when he indulges in recollection.

The aesthete also seems to risk fulfilling the second 'criterion' that he lists for being 'the unhappiest one'; in a way he also seems to be 'remembering something which he should be hoping for' (*E/O* 216). This seems like it could easily be true of the aesthete, as he is an individual who has explored all possibilities in thought – again, due to his highly reflective nature. So, in a way it is as though he has already experienced all that there is to experience – in this sense he can be said to be directing memory towards his future. As he himself states, '(T)he future for a hoping individual to be present in it, must be real, or rather must acquire reality for him' (*E/O* 215). As with the past, this appears to be a risky situation for the aesthete: he has no 'real' future, because there is nothing left for him to experience, he has already used up all of his possibilities in thought.

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<sup>51</sup> 'If you marry, you will regret it; if you do not marry, you will also regret it; if you marry or do not marry, you will regret both; whether you marry or do not marry, you will regret both. Laugh at the world's follies, you will regret it; weep over them, you will also regret it; if you laugh at the world's follies or you weep over them, you will regret both; whether you laugh at the world's follies or you weep over them, you will regret both. Believe a girl, you will regret it; if you do not believe her, you will also regret it; if you believe a girl or do not believe her, you will regret both; whether you believe a girl or do not believe her, you will regret both (...)' (*E/O* 54).

This would mean that the aesthete himself is ironically close to becoming the real winner of the title 'the unhappiest one'. Perhaps even more ironically, the aesthete himself seems (at least vaguely) aware of this fact. Note, the aesthete's claim above that 'the unhappiest one' 'will soon notice his misfortune even if he does not grasp what it really consists in' (*E/O* 216) – perhaps this might be taken to signify the aesthete's own acknowledgement that he is in fact talking about himself, or that he comes very close to the fate of 'the unhappiest one'.

Given this apparent recognition that he bears a striking resemblance to the unhappiest one in more ways than one, coupled with his claim that death is the greatest fortune (see *E/O* 212), one might take suicide to be an appealing option for the aesthete. (Suicide would, of course, also be a way to escape the possibility of being crowned 'the unhappiest one'.) However, the problem with this is that suicide itself is inconsistent with the aesthetic aim/an aesthetic life; the only way that it would be consistent would be if one could gain subsequent enjoyment or gratification from the event, which, for obvious reasons, one cannot (see Mackey 1971: 14). Therefore, the aesthete must find another way to avoid winning the title 'the unhappiest one'.

At least partially for the reasons explored here, Kierkegaard's aesthetic existence sphere gets portrayed in the secondary literature as the lowest, most miserable, existence sphere. That is, the aesthete himself appears to realise that he shares a close likeness to 'the unhappiest one', not even being able to escape via suicide – this, of course, (alongside the other melancholy and gloomy themes found within 'A's papers) paints a pretty bleak, miserable picture of the aesthetic existence sphere. For example, this picture of the aesthetic presented in 'The Unhappiest One' seems to motivate accounts such as Marino's ('The Place of Reason in Ethics' 2001), Grimsley's (*Søren Kierkegaard: A Biographical Introduction* 1973), Caputo's (*How to Read Kierkegaard* 2007), Mackey's (*Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* 1971), and Piety's ('Kierkegaard on Rationality' 2001).<sup>52</sup> <sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, if one takes something like pleasure or gratification or happiness to be the central aim of the aesthetic life, then 'The Unhappiest One' presents us with a paradox: in his pursuit for pleasure/happiness, the aesthete has ironically ended up almost sharing the fate of 'the unhappiest one'. However, as noted, it doesn't seem clear that this is indeed the aesthete's focus – if this is true, then there doesn't seem to be any paradox. I will return to an examination of why I believe this is to be the case in section 3.3.

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<sup>52</sup> It ought to be noted that for Piety, the problem does not so much appear to be that the aesthetic life is one of suffering and misery, but rather that the aesthete (unlike the ethicist) is unable to supply his suffering with any meaning (Piety 2001). This, of course, is a claim which I will later challenge.

<sup>53</sup> Some of the claims found within the secondary literature in regards to this will be discussed further in the final section of this chapter.

Furthermore, it is not actually clear that the aesthete *ends up* in the position of the unhappiest one, given that – as I will now show – he does seem to provide a method for avoiding this fate ('Crop Rotation').

### 3.2.2 'Crop Rotation' – A Solution?

In 'Crop Rotation' (which is itself a method which 'A' proposes in order to prevent boredom), the aesthete appears to suggest many ways in which he could potentially avoid the situation depicted in 'The Unhappiest One'. In this section, I will demonstrate that 'Crop Rotation' goes *part of the way* in addressing the problems that 'The Unhappiest One' raises, and show how it is intended as a strategy by 'A'. However, I will also advance what I believe to be a *stronger* response to the TI proponent who sees 'The Unhappiest One' as a paradox in section 3.3.

Within 'Crop Rotation', the following claim appears to possess central importance in this chapter of the book: 'Only when one has thrown hope overboard is it possible to live artistically' (E/O 233). As long as one hopes, one cannot limit oneself; and, as I will explain below, if one is unable to limit oneself, then one leaves oneself open to the possibility of disappointment and future boredom.

As I suggested earlier, the strategy of 'throwing hope overboard' could be intended as a way of avoiding the fate of reflective sorrow; that is, the fate of getting stuck in the past, and thereby lacking any presence in the present or the future. If the aesthete is able to do this, he is able to take at least one step further away from the crisis that the unhappiest one faces (namely, complete absence from oneself). The aesthete will at least be able to have a healthier relationship to his past; although his love for recollection may be problematic with regards to this, it does not seem as dire as the situation of the 'Shadowgraph' figures (i.e. one of reflective sorrow). As long as the aesthete is able to distinguish between recollection and reality, then he should be able to avoid the situation in which the unhappiest one finds himself. A key difference here, I believe, is that 'A' – unlike the individual stuck in reflective sorrow, and 'the unhappiest one' – *knows* what he is doing, and remains in control of the process of recollection. He is very conscious of the process of recollection (i.e. edited memory) which he indulges in, and the process is, for him, a very active one. Thus, 'A' cannot truly be said to be 'absent from himself' in the same way that is true of 'the unhappiest one'; 'the unhappiest one' does not seem to have such control over the situation that he is in, and is presented as a passive subject within his situation.

Alongside 'throwing hope overboard', the aesthete also prescribes the 'principle of limitation', which I discussed briefly in section 3.1.2. These two principles are essential to the success of one another, because: as long as one hopes, one cannot limit oneself; and in turn, if one has not limited oneself in the proper way, one cannot successfully throw hope overboard.

At the core of the principle of limitation is the aim of not becoming overwhelmed, so that one cannot let go of experiences. The aesthete must enjoy himself enough, but not *too* much (for instance, by over-indulging, pushing experiences to their limits). Again, this attempt seems to be intended as a further way (in addition to the above) to avoid becoming stuck in reflective sorrow in the way that both the figures from 'Shadowgraphs' and the unhappiest ones do. The aesthete must be in control of all of his experiences, and his relationships to them in order to avoid complete absence from himself. If the aesthete cannot let go (because he has pushed his experiences to their limit, thus neglecting adherence to 'the principle of limitation'), then he loses a certain degree of control. Possessing control and remaining active in the process of recollection – as noted above – is a crucial difference between the aesthete and 'the unhappiest one', hence, it is an important part of the strategy that 'A' implements in 'Crop Rotation'.

The solution that 'A' provides for avoiding the fate of 'the unhappiest one', however, is two-fold. Firstly, he may be able to implement some means to avoid an unhealthy relation to his past and future – these means being those that are presented in 'Crop Rotation', as illustrated briefly above. As I will explore in the next section of this chapter, a further – and I believe a more promising – strategy of the aesthete's, is mastering the ability to take an interest in his sorrowful situation, thereby working with all of the 'materials' which life provides him with, being able to use them in his attempt to turn life into a work of art. My argument is that a combination of these two elements saves Kierkegaard's aesthetic sphere from the criticisms of it made by TI.

### **3.3 An alternative interpretation of Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthetic sphere**

#### **3.3.1 A distinction between interest and pleasure**

In this section, I will provide a more positive account of Kierkegaard's portrayal of this existence sphere than has been done so far – although the account presented in this section will be one that builds upon what has already been said.

To begin, I will return to the distinction to be made between the hedonist – an individual who seeks to maximise pleasure, and reduce pain – and Kierkegaard's aesthete. As we saw in previous sections, the aesthete of *E/O* subjects himself to high levels of self-discipline and careful balance with regards to his enjoyment. So, we know from this that the aesthete is not a classic hedonist, an individual generally regarded as one who pursues pleasure or enjoyment to its absolute limit, and thus is very over-indulgent. However, one might still plausibly insist that the aesthete is a variation on the classic hedonist. That is, one could refine their argument and say that Kierkegaard's aesthete is just a 'sophisticated hedonist', an individual concerned with pursuing higher-order pleasures, (whereas an aesthete such as Don Giovanni pursues lower-order pleasures).

However, if we take another closer look at the text, this doesn't seem to be the aesthete's main concern. In 'Crop Rotation', as mentioned previously, the aesthete states that boredom – and not idleness – is the root of all evil (see *E/O* 227 & 230). Given this, boredom should be avoided at all costs. This is a crucial element of the aesthete's life to note, because much hangs on the distinction that is to be made here. The opposite of boredom is arguably not pleasure, but interest, so there is now an important distinction between pleasure and interest to consider here. If 'A' is primarily concerned with making life interesting, then this motivation needs to be distinguished from the motivation to make life pleasurable/enjoyable. Whilst the two things are often connected, arguably one can take an interest in unpleasant or unenjoyable things – for instance, many individuals have a morbid curiosity or fascination for things which bring them little or no pleasure. As we will see later, accepting that interest is the aesthete's main focus will account for the presence of the 'gloomy themes' in chapters such as 'Shadowgraphs' and 'The Unhappiest One' (Mackey's terminology, Mackey 1971: 11-2; see footnote 43).

So, one mistake which can be made when discussing Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthetic sphere is to get it confused with hedonism, and to fail to note that the aesthete is primarily concerned with making life interesting. This is a mistake which Judge William seems to make in his letters to the aesthete. For instance, the following statements are found in 'Volume II':

'I now return to the life-view which thinks one must live to satisfy desire. A prudent common sense readily perceives that this cannot be carried through and that it is therefore not worth starting on. A refined egoism perceives that it misses the point in pleasure. Here, then, we have a life-view which teaches 'Enjoy life', and then expresses itself again thus: 'Enjoy yourself; it is you yourself in the enjoyment that you must enjoy" (*E/O* 500).

'Now if someone wanted to learn *the art of pleasure*, it would be quite right to go to you; but if he wants to understand your life, he is addressing himself to the wrong person' (E/O 493; my emphasis).

As noted above however, it's not clear that the aesthete is primarily concerned with enjoyment or pleasure. The Judge is, of course, picking up on the element of recollection that is a core element of 'A''s life – ('Enjoy yourself; it is you yourself in the enjoyment that you must enjoy') – but it is not clear that the point of recollection, for the aesthete, is for the sake of enjoyment – or at least this may not be the main motivation. Given the Judge's error here, we may plausibly think that his criticisms of the aesthete's life are not particularly damning; if the Judge fails to recognise what the aesthete's core maxim is, then the criticisms which he aims at 'A' must surely be a misfire. This point will be returned to later, but for now, I think this should at least be a worry that we have about Judge Williams' criticisms of 'A''s way of life – namely, that a failure to note the aesthete's focus on interest (as opposed to pleasure/enjoyment), may have a significant impact on the other claims he makes within his letters. Furthermore, it will also have a significant impact for those that *endorse* 'B''s criticisms of 'A', (as will be discussed in section 3.4).

Given 'A''s drive to make life interesting, we can now begin to understand the presence of gloomy themes in sections of E/O such as 'Shadowgraphs' and 'The Unhappiest One', in which 'A' addresses the 'Symparanekromenoi'. Furthermore, if indeed it is true that the aesthete is 'the unhappiest one', it is not entirely clear that this is inconsistent with the principle 'make life interesting'. It seems perfectly plausible that one can take an interest in one's own misery or suffering, (which seems to be what 'A' is doing in 'The Unhappiest One', by discussing his situation with a kind of morbid fascination and curiosity). This seems supported by the following diary entry of Johannes the Seducer; he is suffering, but he is the fascinated observer of his own suffering:

'I hardly recognize myself. My mind rages like a sea tossed by the storms of passion. If another could see my soul in this condition, it would look as if, like a boat, it bored its bow down into the sea, as if with its fearful speed it had to plunge into the depths of the abyss. He does not see that high up on the mast there sits a sailor on lookout. Rage, you wild forces, stir your powers of passion! Even if the crashing of your waves hurls foam to the skies, you will still not manage to pile up over my head; I sit serene as the King of the Cliff.

I can almost not find my footing, like a water bird I seek in vain to alight on my mind's turbulent sea. And yet such turbulence is my element, I build upon it, just as *Alcedo ispida* builds its nest on the sea' (E/O 267).

So, like the sailor who observes the turbulence of the sea in a kind of awe, the aesthete looks upon the turbulence of his life (his suffering primarily) with a similar kind of fascination. The sailor (and likewise, the aesthete) ought to be concerned and worried by what he observes, as his life is potentially at risk, but nonetheless, it seems like he cannot help but look on in this terrified kind of awe, revelling in the turbulence.

It also seems that the explanation which I have provided here is able to account for some rather puzzling remarks that the aesthete makes towards the end of 'The Unhappiest One':

'So live well then, you, the unhappiest one! But what am I saying the unhappiest, I ought to say the happiest, for this indeed is a gift of fortune that no one can give to themselves. See, language fails, and thought is confounded; for who is the happiest expect the unhappiest, and who the unhappiest except the happiest?' (E/O 220-1).

These odd claims are often ignored in the secondary literature, particularly by those that advance a version of TI. However, (at least some of) these interpreters are guilty of failing to take into account the whole picture that Kierkegaard presents of the aesthetic existence sphere, neglecting even to acknowledge these statements found at the end of 'The Unhappiest One' – (a section of the book which is generally viewed as possessing great importance to the aesthetic depiction) – and unpacking what they might mean. The account that I have provided here, however, can at least begin to explain what the aesthete might mean when he makes these statements: if we think of the aesthete as reclaiming an interest in his situation – i.e. in his misery or sorrow – then we can see how this might be 'a gift of fortune that no one can give to themselves'. The aesthete is able to do something constructive with his sorrow, something he can benefit from, hence his viewing it as a 'gift'. Whereas, conversely, a problem with 'the *happiest* one' is perhaps that they are not even aware of the fragility of life, and the omnipresence of suffering – it is the unhappiest one's reflection and introspection that allows him access to this 'gift'. This then also explains 'A's bizarre claim that the happiest is also the unhappiest (and vice versa); the aesthete is ironically able to gain something from his own sorrow or melancholy, by taking an interest in it.<sup>54</sup> As noted, this point seems to often get neglected in the secondary literature, particularly by those that

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<sup>54</sup> Note that here, I believe the aesthete uses the term 'happiness' fairly loosely; as I have identified here, the aesthete is not concerned with the standard hedonistic pursuit of 'happiness' – at best, what he is concerned with is a melancholic variation on happiness (although as I have claimed here, this is more like 'interest'). So, the fact that the aesthete talks here of 'happiness' does not hinder my account. An additional point to note in defence of this, is that the aesthete does also claim that 'language fails, and thought is confounded' (E/O 220-1); which potentially refers to the fact that the 'melancholic 'happiness'' or 'melancholic interest' which he actually means is hard to express in language, and that we can take the language actually employed at that point with a pinch of salt.

subscribe to TI, (as does the aesthete's attempt to provide a solution to his situation in 'Crop Rotation').

Hare picks up this idea of the aesthete taking interest in his own misery as in some way redeeming. Doing this, he claims, is the aesthete's 'only remaining hope':

'For an aesthete, to find one's own misery interesting is a kind of salvation; it is to become happy by being unhappy. This is a kind of *atonement* because it achieves salvation by suffering; the Aesthete's frustration would be a kind of ransom paid to his ideal, and the reward would be that he regains interest in his life' (Hare 1995: 103).

In the next section, I hope to show what the implications of this interpretation of the aesthete are for the way in which we perceive Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthetic sphere, and how this differs from the one which TI advances. In particular, I will build upon this idea of the aesthete 'regaining interest in his life'.

### 3.3.2      Romanticism and Kierkegaard's aesthete

My suggestion here is that we can now also start to see the way in which 19<sup>th</sup> Century Romantic ideals were reflected in Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthetic sphere of existence. This is contrary to the depiction of Kierkegaard's aesthetic sphere as a version of hedonism.

The fact that Kierkegaard's illustration of the aesthetic sphere shares a greater affinity with the Romantic ideals of his century than with those associated with hedonism has not gone unnoticed in the secondary literature, even though this feature of the aesthetic sphere has often been glossed over or ignored. For instance, Gardiner asserts:

'Aestheticism' as understood in Kierkegaard's generous and in some ways idiosyncratic sense, can take on different guises: it manifests itself at diverse levels of sophistication and self-consciousness and it ramifies in directions beyond those of a mere pursuit of pleasure for pleasure's sake; indeed what he says about it is *frequently reminiscent of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Romantic attitudes than the rather mundane hedonism associated with much 18<sup>th</sup> Century philosophical literature*' (Gardiner 2002: 47; my emphasis).

As Gardiner notes, part of the reason that the aesthete is to be distinguished from the 'mundane hedonist', is because the depiction of the aesthetic sphere which we receive in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works is so much more complex than this. (These levels of 'self-consciousness'

and 'sophistication' were explored in section 3.1.2., where I discussed the 'reflective aestheticism' which we are presented with in *E/O*.)

I will now expand upon this affinity that Kierkegaard's aesthete shares with the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Romantic. To identify exactly what these '19<sup>th</sup> Century Romantic attitudes' were, and in what way they are reflected in the aesthete, I will employ the help of Dewey. Dewey's paper ('Seven Seducers') will become useful again shortly, but for now I want to focus on his definition of 'Romantic Consciousness', and see if it can help us better understand Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthete. According to Dewey, this can be characterized by traits such as,

'the overflow of sensibilities, a restlessness, a craving for more than ordinary life offers, a desire to transcend the limits of finitude, to use intuition, imagination, and feeling to soar artistically to richer realms beyond. In consoling memory, some Romantics sought to preserve perfections of a golden past – even an unexperienced past, a past that never was but might, somehow mysteriously in them, be reborn. But alongside these sublime sentiments sometimes went the gnawing sense that, when all is said and done, this life is tragically flawed. Late Romantics, especially, felt caught in this dissonance and experienced a brooding melancholy and even a longing for extinction. Nevertheless, in their brief span of years, some would reach towards perfect beauty, strive for the infinite – sensing all the while that the world would ultimately defeat even the noblest amongst them, pulling them down, down into the meaningless void' (Dewey 1995: 190).

When considering the characteristics which Dewey notes here as being associated with Romantic attitudes, straightaway I think that we can see some obvious similarities shared between the Romanticist who embodied these ideals, and the aesthete of *E/O*. Perhaps starting with the most obvious feature, we certainly saw that the aesthete is in some sense an individual 'longing for extinction'. When contemplating this feature, 'The Unhappiest One' immediately springs to mind, especially when we recall the aesthete's claim that 'the unhappiest (individual) would be one who could not die, the happy man the one who could; happy the one who died in his old age, happier the one who died at birth, happiest of all the one who was never born' (*E/O* 212).

Similarly, in the 'Diapsalmata', the aesthete muses,

'Why wasn't I born in Nyboder, why didn't I die as a small child? Then my father would have laid me in a little coffin, taken me under his arm, carried me out one Sunday morning to the grave, thrown the earth upon the coffin himself, and said a few words

half aloud that only he could understand. It could only occur to the unhappy days of old to let small children weep in Elysium because they had died so young (...)' (*E/O* 55).

Another feature picked out by Dewey which seems pertinent to the aesthete's life is a 'brooding melancholy'. Whilst this is also apparent in 'The Unhappiest One', given that I have already dedicated much discussion to this particular section of *E/O*, I want to draw upon evidence from elsewhere in 'Volume I' of the book. It seems in fact that we don't have to look very far, as there is an abundance of evidence in the book's 'Diapsalmata'. This opening section of the volume essentially allows us an insight into 'A's day-to-day mood, as what is presented to us here appears to be his stream of consciousness, and a description of his general moods. This may also be to give readers an initial idea of just how complex the aesthete is, and what a conflicted, and complicated individual he is – perhaps also beginning to highlight the multiplicity of ways in which one can live as an aesthete. Below are some examples of the kind of mood that the aesthete reports in the 'Diapsalmata':

'Besides my other numerous circle of acquaintances I have one more intimate confidant – my melancholy. In the midst of my joy, in the midst of my work, he waves to me, calls me to one side, even though physically I stay put. My melancholy is the most faithful mistress I have known; what wonder then, that I love her in return (...)' (*E/O* 44).

'I say of sorrow what the Englishman says of his home: my sorrow is my castle. Many consider sorrow one of life's comforts' (*Ibid*).

'I have only one friend, Echo. And why is Echo my friend? Because I love sorrow, and Echo does not take it away from me. I have only one confidant, the silence of the night. And why is it my confidant? Because it is silent' (*E/O* 51).

We can see from these reports, and from the themes of later chapters such as 'Shadowgraphs', and 'The Unhappiest One', that 'A's melancholic attitude is persistent, and that melancholy seems to feature as a central tenet of the aesthetic life. These remarks also suggest that there is a sense of comfort which the aesthete takes in melancholy and sorrow – note that he appears to refer lovingly to these features of his life as a 'friend', a 'confidant', a 'faithful mistress'.

The opening passage of the 'Diapsalmata' is also particularly revealing:

'What is a poet? An unhappy man who hides deep anguish in his heart, but whose lips are so formed that when the sigh and the cry pass through them, it sounds like lovely music. His fate is like that of those unfortunates who were slowly tortured by a gentle

fire in Phalaris's bull; their cries could not reach the tyrant's ears to cause him dismay, to him they sounded like sweet music. And people flock around the poet and say: 'Sing again soon' – that is, 'May new sufferings torment your soul but your lips be fashioned as before, for the cry would frighten us, but the music, that is blissful' (E/O 43).

The aesthete thinks of himself as akin to the poet here who pours his tortured soul out. His sorrow and pain, however, are misunderstood and perceived as 'sweet music' by his audience in the same way that the tyrant gains pleasure from the cries that were caused by torture in Phalaris's bull. As Ferguson notes – and as the above passage highlights – a core feature of melancholy is its incommunicability (Ferguson 1995: 4). That is, the nature of melancholy makes it extremely difficult (or perhaps impossible) to successfully communicate to others.

Returning to Dewey's definition of 'Romantic consciousness' one more time, we can see that there is a third feature which stands out as sharing a particular affinity with 'A'. The Romanticist's endeavour to 'preserve perfections of a golden past' sounds strikingly close to the aesthete's love for recollection, particularly when we note the next part of Dewey's explanation that this past sought by the Romanticist could be 'even an unexperienced past, a past that never was but might, somehow mysteriously in them, be *reborn*' (Dewey 1995:190). This sounds uncannily like 'A's process of recollection; there is the possibility that the aesthete's past may also be like the Romanticist's here in the sense that his past may too be 'unexperienced'. Recalling the discussion on 'The Unhappiest One' from section 3.2.1., we saw that this was true for the aesthete in the sense that he remembers an *edited version* of his past. Thus, in a sense he is not 'remembering' the past as it actually happened for him – really he is recollecting it.

Before moving on to the next stage of the argument, I will briefly summarise the implications that I believe my discussion thus far will have for the interpretations which I wish to challenge. In other words, I will say why the findings here pose a significant challenge to TI. The reason that the distinctions between pleasure and interest (and hedonism and Romanticism) are so important, is because understanding that Kierkegaard's aesthete is not a hedonist (i.e. an individual concerned with the pursuit of pleasure), reveals to us a highly complex picture of aestheticism that is portrayed in the pseudonymous works. This is important, because it allows us to reject interpretations which portray the aesthete as a more childlike, immature individual (in contrast to the ethicist and the religious individual)<sup>55</sup>. Clearly, the aesthete of E/O is a highly complex,

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<sup>55</sup> These features are ones which Dewey picks out as connected to the 'typology' of the aesthete as a 'sinner' (Dewey 1995: 167-8), and as a 'child' (Dewey 1995:175-181).

complicated individual; as highlighted in 'Crop Rotation' (see section 3.1.2), 'A' is very committed to making his life as interesting as possible, and he has careful strategies in place in order to ensure that he achieves this (think, for example, of his 'principle of limitation'). 'The Seducer's Diary' is also another good example of this, as it reveals Johannes's continuous careful planning, and his reflection on his method every step of the way in his quest to seduce Cordelia. As Dewey notes, what Johannes does is no child's play, and '(N)o dabbler could ever come close to Johannes's level of virtuosity and success' (Dewey 1995:168). Even more importantly, Dewey asks:

'Does he (Johannes) really not make genuine, serious choices? In the broadest sense of the word, hasn't he surveyed the possible lifestyles and chosen to be an aesthete? Is there any sense in the "Diary" that he could have drifted into it and would drift out? On the contrary, the "Diary" gives every indication that reflective people like Johannes are highly aware of the nature of the aesthetic life, that they have counted the costs and benefits, and then have chosen deliberately to pursue it. In fact, such a demanding lifestyle would seem to require a high level of selfhood – involving constant reassessment and constant recommitment' (ibid).

(These comments from Dewey also tie into section 3.1.2., where I discussed the choice of the aesthetic sphere as a conscious commitment.)

Perhaps more importantly in addition to providing evidence against portrayals of the aesthete as 'child', 'immature', the argument so far in this chapter also shows us that the aesthetic sphere is not in fact portrayed as paradoxical in the primary literature. The idea that the aesthetic sphere is fundamentally paradoxical arises from the mistake of conflating this existence with hedonism. It is only if we think the aesthete is primarily concerned with the pursuit of pleasure or enjoyment, that a paradox emerges. If indeed the aesthete does end up winning of the title 'The Unhappiest One', this does not reveal that the aesthetic life is paradoxical, given that being the winner of this

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Arguably, we also see evidence of this perception of the aesthete within 'B''s letters in 'Volume II' of the book; the Judge clearly attempts to make a case for the aesthete to 'progress' to the ethical sphere. He continually addresses the aesthete as 'young man' in his letters (see for instance *E/O* 480, 494, 507, 509), which may be read as a patronising or belittling jibe. We also see this patronising tone again at *E/O* 507: 'The next instant some little triviality captivates you. You look upon it, indeed, with all the superiority and pride your overbearing thought gives you, you despise it as a worthless toy, you are almost bored with it before you take it in your hand; but still it preoccupies you, and even if it is not the thing itself that preoccupies you – as always you are still preoccupied with your being willing to stoop to it' (*E/O* 507). The language here of the aesthete playing with a toy, becoming quickly bored of it, but being 'preoccupied' is clearly meant to remind us of the way in which a child plays with their toys, thus again, we see the insinuation that the aesthete is immature and child-like. Similarly, he says: '(I)f you were really serious there would be nothing to be done with you; one would have to put up with you as you were and regret that melancholy or frivolity had weakened your mind' (*E/O* 478).

title is not inconsistent with what the aesthete is striving for. Once we understand that the aesthete's central goal is 'to make life interesting', (as opposed to making life pleasurable), then the paradox seems to disappear. Therefore, I have shown that the aesthete's life is not doomed to failure, as proponents of TI argue.

### 3.3.3 Life as a work of art

We still seem to be left with a problem, however: even if the aesthetic life is not inherently paradoxical, or 'simple'/'childlike', we have still been painted a pretty bleak picture of the aesthetic sphere. Whilst the claims found within 'The Unhappiest One' have been overstated in the secondary literature, by the same token, they ought not to be ignored. The aesthetic existence still seems like a life full of misery and suffering, so tiered interpreters may still reasonably press the question: why would anyone choose this way of life if there are alternatives available?<sup>56</sup> Even if the aesthetic sphere doesn't have the pursuit of pleasure as its core maxim, we might still deem it odd to choose this existence over one of the other existential options on offer to us, (assuming that these other options – namely, the ethical sphere or the religious sphere – do not contain such high levels of misery and suffering).<sup>57</sup>

Taking into account the points already raised, I will now attempt to advance a more positive account of the aesthetic sphere. To do this, I will take a closer look at the argument that Dewey presents in his paper 'Seven Seducers: A Typology of interpretations of the Aesthetic Stage in Kierkegaard's "The Seducer's Diary"' (1995). He begins discussing the existent, negative, typologies of the aesthete which he has identified in the secondary literature, providing textual evidence to the contrary for each of them. For the purposes of this section of the chapter, however, I want to focus only on the positive valuation of the aesthete – I will be looking to see whether this is able to offer a more accurate reflection of the aesthetic personality than that which TI offers.

It is worth clarifying at this point that Dewey's discussion is specifically of *Johannes the Seducer* of 'The Seducer's Diary'. As noted in section 3.1.1, there is debate over whether Johannes is the same person as 'A' (also referred to as 'the aesthete' of 'Volume I'), despite 'A's claims that this is

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<sup>56</sup> Indeed, this does seem to be a line of argument Rudd pushes when he argues that it would be irrational for an individual to choose the aesthetic over the ethical (or the religious) (Rudd 2001: 143) – a view which I will explore in some depth in section 3.4.

<sup>57</sup> This claim I will later challenge, as I do not believe that this is straightforwardly the case.

not the case. For the purposes of the following discussion though, this distinction is not a relevant one which is necessary to be made. What matters, is only that Johannes is a type of aesthete, and more to the point he is a *reflective* aesthete (a category which 'A' also belongs to). What Dewey has to say about Johannes, then, will also arguably apply to 'A' / 'the aesthete' – there is nothing which indicates that the features which he picks out are specific to Johannes. Because of this, in the discussion that follows I will use these names interchangeably.

Dewey argues that the typology of 'Johannes as Artist' is the closest typology to that which Kierkegaard wanted and intended to present in *E/O*. He begins by discussing the connections to be made between the portrayal of Johannes and 'Romantic Consciousness'. I will not discuss this point any further, given that this is a connection that I have already explored in some depth (or at least with regards to the aesthete of 'Volume I') – (see section 3.3.2). Furthermore, Dewey himself decides that whilst drawing comparisons between the Romanticist and Kierkegaard's aesthete would be 'insightful', a better approach would be to look forward to our own era, to see Johannes as a vehicle for understanding the cluster of kindred challenges loosely labelled "the crisis of modernity" and reflected in "movements" such as "postmodernity" (Dewey 1995: 191).

Approaching 'The Seducer's Diary' in this way, Dewey thinks, addresses the 'current crisis of spirit which our age now faces', a crisis which he thought that Kierkegaard foresaw clearly, and addressed in 'The Seducer's Diary' (Dewey 1995:191-2). This so-called 'crisis of spirit' resulted in a Kantian/Copernican shift of gravity from external actuality, (where meaning can no longer be found), to man himself (i.e. a turn inwards). According to Dewey, the vital motivation behind this 'turn to self' was the perception of oneself on 'a world stage without God' (in some ways, he thought that this was Kierkegaard anticipating Nietzsche's proclamation that 'God is dead') (Dewey 1995: 191-2). There are several possible responses that could be given in a crisis of meaning and value such as this one, of which Dewey lists the following available options:

'He (Johannes) could cower – succumbing to the depression of spirit which produces lassitude and hopelessness. He could join the countless who feel abandoned by God, terrified into numbness<sup>58</sup>, and adrift in a silent universe without signposts or salvation. Or he could do whatever the majority of his peers do in their frantic attempt to fill the void with money, motion, the acquisition of goods and services – responding obediently to whatever signals the various commercial manipulators beam their way. Or he could

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<sup>58</sup> Nietzsche's 'Last Man' springs to mind here, as the individual who has lost belief in God, and a meaning to their suffering. This individual's solution is to try and eradicate suffering altogether, to become numb. There is no attempt to create a meaning, or value.

cling to the safe ethical centre of his age, tucked under whatever canopy of transcendent authority can still be salvaged<sup>59</sup> (Dewey 1995: 192).

Of course, the aesthete chooses none of these uninspired options. Instead, he chooses to become self-autonomous, and self-sufficient, through a 'turn to the self' (much like the Romanticist's 'turn to the self' or 'inwardness'<sup>60</sup>). By doing this, Dewey asserts, Johannes 'steps into the divine role himself', taking control over his own meaning, rules, and judgements (Dewey 1995: 192). So, unlike the ethicist who seems to turn 'outwards' as it were, (given that his relationships with others, and the social roles that he occupies are a vital part of the ethical life), the aesthete is an individual who turns 'inwards', to himself. This certainly seems to capture something essential about the aesthete's personality; as I hope to have shown in this chapter, the aesthete is a highly reflective, introspective character, who does not rely on others to tell him how to live or how to provide life with meaning.

It is in this way – through the turn to self – that Johannes can be thought of as an 'artist' or a 'creator'. What he is doing in his 'Diary' is taking the raw elements or 'fragments' of his chaotic life, and fashioning them into a pleasing, coherent whole. That is, he is striving to *make life beautiful* (Dewey 1995: 193). Or likewise, we might say that the aesthete is one who attempts to turn his life into a work of art (see Dewey 1995: 194). This seems particularly plausible given that there are many artistic references and metaphors within the diary. The following, for instance, would be good examples of this:

'I am not interested in possessing the girl in an external sense, but in enjoying her artistically. So the beginning must be as artistic as possible' (E/O 309).

'Then what am I doing? I am fashioning for myself a heart in the likeness of her own. An artist paints his beloved, that's his pleasure; a sculptor forms her. That's what I am doing too, but in a spiritual sense. She doesn't know I possess this picture, and that is really where my duplicity lies. I have got hold of it secretly, and in that sense I have stolen her heart' (E/O 325).

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<sup>59</sup> So, if anything it appears that the *ethicist* does not choose (at least, this is the case on this account). Maybe the ethicist believes he is doing so (as this is certainly what he claims in his letters to 'A', arguing that it is the aesthete who fails to choose), but in reality, he is blindly following social convention, and seeking refugee from the loss of meaning in the ethical.

<sup>60</sup> This inwardness is also in part a psychological effect of melancholy – recall Ferguson's claim that melancholy is 'incommunicable' (Ferguson 1995: 4; see section 3.2.1).

'My letters do not fail of their purpose. They are developing her mentally, not erotically. For that I have to use notes. The more prominent the erotic becomes, the shorter the notes will be, but all the more certain to grasp the erotic point. Nevertheless, in order to make her sentimental or soft, irony stiffens her feelings again, but also gives her an appetite for the nourishment most dear to her. The notes give distant and vague hints of the highest. The moment this presentiment begins to dawn in her soul, the relationship fractures. Through my resistance, the presentiment takes shape in her soul as though it were her own thought, her own heart's inclination. It's just what I want' (E/O 332).

There are many more instances of this kind of talk occurring, which I could also present at this point. However, for my purposes here, the above extracts are particularly illuminating. In the first two extracts above, Johannes uses the artistic metaphors much more explicitly than he does in the last – in part, simply because in the first two, he actually refers to an artistic process. My reason for including the final extract, however, is that it illustrates a subtler point about Johannes' relationship to 'art', strengthening the argument that he himself may be an artist of sorts. There, he is essentially referring to the way in which he moulds Cordelia into the person he wants her to be; to put it very crudely, he puts himself in control of his 'materials', and will manipulate them according to his desires. Although of course, in this extract Johannes is talking of Cordelia, and his manipulation of her as an individual, we might think that this can also be seen to apply to the aesthete's life more generally. That is, the above may be used as a metaphor for the way in which the aesthete wants to have control over his life as whole; whilst one doesn't have control over the individual fragments that make up life – (for instance, given that Cordelia is an autonomous human being, Johannes cannot be wholly in control of her) – one does have a degree of control over how one manipulates and uses these fragments to contribute to the wider picture. Hence, we arrive at the metaphor that life is like a work of art for the aesthete.

Both ideas discussed in this section – (that the aesthete could be attempting to make life 'beautiful', or to turn it into a work of art) – are also consistent with the claim that the aesthete's primary concern is with making life interesting (as opposed to pleasurable). This is because, it seems true that one can take interest in artwork that is not necessarily pleasurable or enjoyable in the usual sense of the word. Similarly, one can arguably find beauty in things which are generally deemed 'ugly'. By becoming a 'poet of chance' (Schönbaumsfeld 2010:43), the aesthete is able to take whatever 'materials' that life throws at him, and to use them as a means to turn life into a work of art, even if these 'materials' appear ugly at first. This ties into the idea above that although one may not have total control over the things that life presents you with, how one actually *uses* these materials might be a different matter.

To illustrate this point more clearly, the use of Nietzsche's 'digestion metaphor' may be relevant: Nietzsche (like the aesthete), was also very concerned with the relation that one possesses, or *could* possess, to the past – a pertinent worry being the idea of not being able to let go of past experiences, and not being able to give one's suffering meaning. Nietzsche thus proposes, as a way of dealing with the things that life throws at us (i.e. the things that are beyond our control), taking what nutrition we can from our past experiences – thinking about what positive aspects, or lessons, can be drawn from them. Anything that this can't be done for is simply waste, thus, we must get rid of these elements – i.e. let go.

The following quotes are also good examples of these lines of thought regarding a kind of 'self-artistry' within Nietzsche's work:

'What one should learn from artists. - What means do we have for making things beautiful, attractive, and desirable when they are not? And in themselves I think they never are! Here we have something to learn from physicians, when for example they dilute something bitter or add wine and sugar to the mixing bowl; but even more from artists, who are really constantly out to invent new artistic tours de force of this kind. To distance oneself from things until there is much in them that one no longer sees and much that the eye must add in order to see them at all, or to see things around a corner and as if they were cut out and extracted from their context, or to place them so that each partially distorts the view one has of the others and allows only perspectival glimpses, or to look at them through coloured glass or in the light of the sunset, or to give them a surface and skin that is not fully transparent: all this we should learn from artists while otherwise being wiser than they. For usually in their case this delicate power stops where art ends and life begins; we, however, want to be poets of our lives, starting with the smallest and most commonplace details' (GS 299).

'One thing is needful. - To 'give style' to one's character - a great and rare art! It is practised by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses that their nature has to offer and then fit them into an artistic plan until each appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. Here a great mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of first nature removed - both times through long practice and daily work at it. Here the ugly that could not be removed is concealed; there it is reinterpreted into sublimity. Much that is vague and resisted shaping has been saved and employed for distant views - it is supposed to beckon towards the remote and immense. In the end, when the work is complete, it becomes clear how it was the force of a single taste that

ruled and shaped everything great and small - whether the taste was good or bad means less than one may think; it's enough that it was one taste!' (GS 290).

I think that the aesthete might be thought to be doing a similar thing with the way that he approaches his own suffering (i.e. the sorrowful or melancholy situation which he finds himself in): he must take what he can from these circumstances, manipulating the various fragments of his life where he can, but letting go of the elements which cannot provide him with anything. 'A's love for recollection seems particularly important here, it ought to be said. Through the process of recollection, the aesthete is essentially able to 'weed' out the less gratifying or interesting parts of his past; thus, only using what is useful or rewarding for him. This seems similar in some ways to Nietzsche's suggestion above that the ugly – (presumably when it cannot be turned into something beautiful or interesting) – can be removed, or concealed.<sup>61</sup>

I now want to return to the point about pleasure vs. interest, and the aesthete's suffering/sorrow, which seemed to create huge problems for the portrayal of the aesthetic sphere in the secondary literature. On this note, something to bear in mind when discussing this more positive account of the aesthetic sphere, is that the aesthetic life that Johannes fashions for himself is still fundamentally a response to the struggle of facing a 'modern void' (Dewey 1995:199), and a solution for keeping 'despair at bay' (Dewey 1995:195). (Recall the earlier discussion that what the aesthete is doing is essentially finding a way of taking interest in his own suffering/sorrow – this suffering or sorrow being the 'ugly materials' with which the aesthete, as an artist must work with.)

This does not mean that the aesthetic life has no value, however. If the aesthetic life is indeed an attempt to turn life into a beautiful work of art, then it *at least* has aesthetic value. Hopefully, however, I have shown more than just this, and shown that it also has existential value (especially for certain individuals); the aesthetic life can plausibly be a valid, and meaningful response to a situation which the individual finds themselves in – perhaps, as Dewey suggests, it is the response to a world without God.<sup>62</sup> In a world in which individuals no longer turn to God as the centre of all meaning and explanation, nihilism becomes a very serious worry – arguably the aesthete himself comes very close to such a fate, as illustrated in 'The Unhappiest One'. Thus, in a world where fewer people can turn to God for purpose and meaning in their lives, it is absolutely crucial that

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<sup>61</sup> Note that I intend the comparison to Nietzsche here to be only a loose one, in which there are some interesting common themes found within Nietzsche's works and Kierkegaard's discussion of the aesthetic; I am not arguing that Nietzsche and Kierkegaard share identical existential worries all the way down.

<sup>62</sup> As Dewey notes, the ethical is of course another possible response to this situation.

they find a way to give their lives purpose and meaning in other ways, lest they give into the fate of nihilism. I hope to have shown here – and will continue to show below – how the aesthete, although he seems to waver dangerously close to a suicidal nihilism in an earlier section of *E/O*, is in fact able to avoid this by turning to the aesthetic.

It is also important to note that nowhere in the pseudonymous works does Kierkegaard attempt to provide a proof for God's existence. When the religious sphere is discussed, there appears to be the implicit assumption within the relevant works that the individual in question is already a believer. The questions at the centre of Kierkegaard's exploration of the religious sphere of existence tend to relate to the nature of faith, (as opposed to God's existence) – that is, *what it is* to have faith. For instance, the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22) is the core focus of *FT* (a work in which we encounter the religious sphere), and the concern here is with Abraham's faith in God, the result of the trial which God has set him. However, there appears to be no attempt to persuade a non-believer to enter into this existence sphere. The concern seems to be with those that already believe, and seeing whether they can truly be said to have *genuine* faith, as Abraham is said to have, (or whether they have just bought into the illusion of 'Christendom').<sup>63</sup> Given this, there seems to be no reason why we should think that there wouldn't be other viable existential options on offer to those who no longer possess belief in God or those who are honest atheists. If anything, trying to persuade a non-believer to transition into the religious sphere looks like it would end up being suspiciously close to the followers of 'Christendom' that Kierkegaard was so critical of. Therefore, it seems plausible to think that there are other ways of providing one's life with meaning, and, as noted above, one *must* in fact seek other ways to do so if one is to avoid nihilism after a so-called 'death of God'.

However, given that there still seems to be this element of suffering which is present in the aesthete's life (and indeed, appears to be a core tenet of it), it seems wise to ask the question of whether Dewey's account of the aesthetic sphere is too generous. We might still rationally have worries about the value that one could gain from this lifestyle, aside from the fact that one can reclaim meaning in one's suffering. Here, I will return to the 'therapy analogy' which I explored in Chapter One to strengthen my argument, and to further examine some of the messages to be taken away from Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthetic existence sphere.

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<sup>63</sup> Even in the non-pseudonymous works (such as the *Upbuilding Discourses*), we do not find proofs of God's existence, but rather, a focus on central biblical passages and religious concepts. Again, this lends weight to the suggestion that Kierkegaard was more interested in revealing the true nature of Christianity and genuine faith, (as opposed to converting non-believers).

Perhaps Dewey's (and my own) account appears a little ambitious at first glance, but it is also worth noting here (in addition to the above arguments expounded) that the picture of the aesthetic sphere which we find in *E/O* is arguably one in which the aesthetic has been pushed to its absolute limits. It has been pushed in this way in order to show what could happen if one pushed these existence spheres to their limits, and tested the boundaries. As I argued in Chapter One, part of the purpose of the 'therapeutic' aspect of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works might be to show the limitations of the various existential options (in this case, of the aesthetic). Both 'A' and Johannes the Seducer are arguably extreme caricatures of the embodiment of a wholly aesthetic life, and with regards to the latter particularly, one understandably might have moral concerns about viewing such a character as a model for how to live life. As I have argued here however, I think that one can still nonetheless take away some messages about how to live aesthetically, including perhaps seeing Johannes as a warning story<sup>64</sup>, an example of what could happen if one is not careful about how they apply aesthetic principles to their life – these sets of messages are not mutually exclusive. The picture that is built up by Kierkegaard of the existence spheres is a very complex one, but this is because there are many nuances of these ways of life that need to be shown if the reader is to come away with a proper understanding of the existential options on offer. The reader is being prompted by Kierkegaard to make a choice and to choose for themselves, but in order to do so in an informed manner, they must be guided and must be made aware of what the shortcomings of these choices might be.

So, perhaps if one accepts a weakened version of aestheticism, and carefully considers the various messages to be taken away from the depiction of the aesthetic existence, one can become the 'artist' of one's own life in the way that Dewey and I have described here. The illustration which we are presented with in *E/O* is in many ways a radical one, but again, this is to prove a point that this is *what could happen* if one pushed this type of existence to the extreme.

There is also nothing which stops us from thinking that the same could be the case for the other two spheres of existence.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, as we will see in the next chapter, the religious sphere of

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<sup>64</sup> Johannes serves as a way of highlighting what happens if one commits radically to aesthetic principles, and at the cost of all other principles (for example, ethical principles or considerations). He is morally reprehensible in a way that 'A' does not appear to be (and 'A' himself even claims to be repulsed by this 'depraved' individual – see *E/O* 247); hence, Johannes is a good example of what happens if one pushes the boundaries of the aesthetic sphere to the limit and excludes all other considerations.

<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, I would also like to explore the potential for overlap between the existence spheres later in the thesis. Kierkegaard's existence spheres are often portrayed as mutually exclusive to one another in the secondary literature, but this may not be the case. In Chapter Two, I highlighted some of the areas of overlap that exist within Kierkegaard's oeuvre, and I will later suggest that this may also be the case for the existence spheres themselves.

existence is also portrayed by Kierkegaard as one full of suffering and anguish, and arguably, the religious individual should not aspire to replicate Abraham (the figure employed as representative of the religious existence in *FT*) and his actions, but as I will argue, there is still a message that can be taken from this representative (Abraham). So, these features are not exclusive to Kierkegaard's depiction of the aesthetic sphere. If we take this point into consideration, I believe that we can accept the main argument that Dewey advances. Furthermore, I believe that this is a more accurate reflection of the aesthetic sphere which we are presented with in the pseudonymous production, (than that which proponents of TI offer us), as it more accurately captures the complexity of the aesthetic sphere, and the aesthete's 'inwardness'.

## 3.4 A Challenge to TI: The Aesthete and 'Selfhood'

### 3.4.1 TI, The Aesthetic Sphere & Selfhood

To conclude this chapter on Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthetic sphere, I will discuss how the view which I have advanced here acts as a rebuttal of the claims regarding the depiction of this existence sphere in the secondary literature – particularly those that reflect ideas associated with TI.

I want to return to a suggestion made in the 'Introduction' to the thesis: that proponents of TI often advance the claims that they do due to a connection that they perceive between Kierkegaard's depiction of the existence spheres and a notion of 'selfhood'. That is, such writers appear to map the so-called 'journey to selfhood' (Taylor's terminology, 1980) onto a hierarchical structure of Kierkegaard's three existence spheres.<sup>66</sup> Here, I examine some of the points put forth by Rudd (*Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical* 2005), Jothen (*Kierkegaard, Aesthetics, and Selfhood* 2016), and some points made by 'B' (i.e. the ethicist) in 'Volume II' of *E/O* in response to the aesthete of 'Volume I'.

According to Rudd, the aesthetic sphere of existence is the lowest sphere which an individual can occupy.<sup>67</sup> The ethical is an improvement on the aesthetic; however, Kierkegaard portrays this sphere as ultimately limited. Hence, what is needed is a progression to the religious sphere of

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<sup>66</sup> Note that my complaint is specifically that the individual's 'journey to selfhood' has been mapped onto an existential hierarchical structure. I do not wish to refute the claim that selfhood is a key theme within Kierkegaard's works.

<sup>67</sup> The lowest existence sphere after a pre-reflective state (see discussion in 'Introduction' and Chapter One for more on this).

existence. Only once one has achieved the religious way of life can one be said to have achieved the 'telos' or 'goal' of human existence. This is the overall picture which Rudd believes Kierkegaard to have portrayed; therefore, he views Kierkegaard as presenting the aesthetic sphere as a less valuable existence than either the ethical or religious. Conversely, he believes that Kierkegaard's primary intention must have been to push readers towards the religious sphere.

As noted, this is because he regards these spheres – or more appropriately, 'stages' on Rudd's account – to be connected to a progression through selfhood. Namely, the aesthete lacks a self at all (and has no narrative to his life), hence it is the lowest sphere of existence. The ethicist has attempted to provide his life with a narrative, and thus possesses some degree of selfhood, hence it is a transitory 'stage'. It is only the religious individual who has truly achieved selfhood, as only the religious can provide an individual's life with one overriding telos. Therefore, the religious stage of existence is the highest stage. Furthermore, according Rudd, the religious on Kierkegaard's picture is the synthesis of social commitment (which the aesthete lacks) and individuality (which the ethicist somewhat lacks) – this is in part why only the religious individual can properly be said to have fully realised their selfhood (Rudd 2005: 24-6).

I will now examine the specific issue that Rudd takes with the aesthetic sphere. Before advancing his core argument in relation to the existence spheres, Rudd asserts that he will be providing a rational reconstruction of some of the arguments central to 'Volume II' of *E/O* (i.e. of the ethicist's criticisms of the aesthete). Central to these arguments is the fact that the aesthete – (at least the aesthete of *E/O*) – is an individual who makes no long-standing commitments (the evidence of this is clear in 'Crop Rotation').<sup>68</sup> Due to this lack of commitment, Rudd argues, the aesthete has no life-projects – these projects are what give our lives, and our personalities, constancy and purpose.

The refusal to make any long-term commitments or involvement with on-going projects is what makes the aesthete an amoralist. That is, for the aesthete, moral judgements are not a serious concern within his life (or at least, this is how he chooses to see his life), and he sees no real use for ethical categories. The ethicist, however, is someone that has consciously committed to a sphere of existence in which judging himself within ethical categories is central to his life, and to his 'projects'. Because of this, Rudd thinks, the ethicist has chosen to become a coherent 'self'.

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<sup>68</sup> Recall that the aesthete advocates being on guard against long-term commitments such as friendship and marriage (*E/O* 236-7).

The aesthete, on the other hand, he argues has no coherent personal identity or sense of self – he has no narrative, according to Rudd. When discussing the importance of choosing a 'self', Rudd claims,

'For Kierkegaard, the self is not a – Cartesian or other – substance that is simply given; it is something that must be achieved. Each individual has a potentiality for selfhood, but to realize this potential, to become a self, is, Kierkegaard argues, a strenuous task. Indeed, it is *the* ethical or ethico-religious task; it is the self that is developed by one who passes through the various stages of life (...) The ethical task is to integrate the various aspects of human existence into a stable and coherent personality. This is what the aesthete lacks; his life falls apart into a series of disconnected moments; his various aptitudes and abilities may find separate expression, but they are not integrated with each other (...)’ (Rudd 2005: 75).

The result of this, according to Rudd, is that the aesthete lives in despair. The ethicist, and the religious individual, however, do not suffer from this same fate according to Rudd. In order for the aesthete to avoid this despair, it is essential that he accepts social roles and the moral judgements that come alongside accepting these roles (Rudd 2005: 69). Only then is he able to begin realising his potential for selfhood, and progress onto the other spheres of existence.

Rudd also makes a similar argument in his reply to MacIntyre in 'Reason in Ethics: MacIntyre and Kierkegaard'. Here, he argues – (in a similar vein to his argument in *The Limits of the Ethical*) – that the aesthete lacks a narrative, and therefore a cohesive self, but this time he wants to add that it is *irrational* to choose the aesthetic over the other existential options on offer:

'According to Kierkegaard, it is rational for me to choose an ethical over a purely aesthetic life (and a religious over a purely ethical life; but that is another story). It is rational because aestheticism undermines the coherence of my life, destroys its narrative structure, and thus leaves me prey to boredom and despair. To choose to live aesthetically and in full awareness of that – and in awareness that there is an alternative way of life which promises to overcome such defects – would surely be grossly irrational' (Rudd 2001: 143).

More recently, Jothen has also presented a similar argument in regards to the aesthete's 'lack of self'. He argues:

'The aesthetic (...) lacks a telos. There is no eternal happiness that both enables a self to evaluate one's life and serves as a gift at the end of existence. Therefore, a self is lost,

with no purpose or truth of being to become; the aesthetic self has no point to existence (...) Self-development only happens by accepting the responsibility of having a historical dimension. Without such a temporalization, a self remains within an endless string of present moments, thus lacking any possibility of becoming a responsible self with a sense of past history and future possibility. Thus the aesthetic self is not a true subject; one either embodies natural desire or imaginative fantasy' (Jothen 2016: 17).

So, in a similar vein, to Rudd, Jothen concludes that the way to achieve selfhood is to 'progress' onto higher planes of existence – namely, to the ethical or religious sphere of existence (Jothen 2016: 11-2). On his interpretation, as on Rudd's, if one remains in the aesthetic sphere, one remains at the lowest stage of existence.

### 3.4.2        *Either/Or 'Volume II'* – An ethical argument against the aesthetic life

So, why do writers such as Rudd and Jothen believe that this is the portrayal of the aesthetic sphere which they find in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works? In part, perhaps for the reasons explored in the section on 'The Unhappiest One'. Also perhaps because these sorts of arguments regarding 'selfhood' are explicitly found within *E/O* itself. Such points are put forth in 'Volume II' of the book, via the voice of the Judge. In this second volume, we find letters from a character named Judge William, (an ethicist, who also gets referred to by the book's editor as 'B'), addressing the aesthete of the first volume. These letters are essentially an attempt from the Judge to get the aesthete to look seriously at his life, see its shortcomings, and to progress to the ethical sphere of existence. As noted above, Rudd does seem to acknowledge that he is closely following the Judge's line of argument, but it will be worth taking a closer look at exactly what this is with reference to the primary source.

In the first set of letters (compiled under the title 'The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage'), we see the Judge attempt to appeal to the aesthete on aesthetic grounds. Here, he endeavours to show how marriage (presumed to belong to the ethical sphere) is in fact compatible with the aesthetic life. The Judge believes that the aesthetic can be *transformed* into the ethical – (thus, he also seems to believe that an element of the aesthetic can be retained within the ethical). For now, I do not want to focus too much on this section of the volume, however.

The section which I am most interested in for the purposes of the arguments explored here is that which is entitled 'Equilibrium between the Aesthetic and the Ethical'. It is here that the Judge

makes a series of critical arguments regarding 'A''s lack of 'self', and the subsequent need to 'choose' oneself. For instance, he argues:

'Your choice is an aesthetic choice, but an aesthetic choice is no choice. In general, the act of choosing is a literal and strict expression of the ethical. Wherever it is a matter of an either/or in a stricter sense, one can always be sure that the ethical is involved. The only absolute either/or there is is the choice between good and evil, but it is also absolutely ethical. The aesthetic choice is either wholly immediate, thus no choice, or it loses itself in multiplicity' (*E/O* 485).

'Either, then, one is to live aesthetically or one is to live ethically. In this, as I have said, there is no question yet of a choice in a stricter sense; for someone who lives aesthetically does not choose (...)' (*E/O* 486).

So, we can now see where Rudd gets his inspiration from: perhaps from observations made on 'Volume I' of *E/O*, but it also seems likely that he has taken 'B''s opinion as more authoritative than 'A''s, and as one which is more closely aligned with Kierkegaard's own view than that of 'A''. Rudd himself even seems to admit that he is conflating the views of Judge William with Kierkegaard's own (see Rudd 2005: 68-9). When arguing that it is radical error to perceive Kierkegaard's ethics as largely Kantian, he points to the fact that Judge William's insistence is not that the aesthete adopts rationally universalizable maxims, as Kantian ethics demands of us, but rather, that he commit himself to a social role and to personal relationships in his life (Rudd 2005: 71-2). Although this claim is perhaps slightly controversial, this itself is not what I want to take issue with here, as I believe that the picture which we are presented with in 'Volume II' of *E/O* is one in which social roles play a core part, (hence, I believe at least this part of Rudd's claim to contain some truth). Rather, my concern is with the next claim that Rudd goes on to make; he says, '(I)t is this sort of commitment that is central to ethics as Kierkegaard understands it, and as Judge William advocates it' (Rudd 2005: 72).<sup>69</sup>

It's not entirely clear though, why Rudd perceives 'B' to be Kierkegaard's spokesperson, or as a representation of what Kierkegaard's own view was. As explored in Chapters One and Two, there is a good argument to be made for viewing Kierkegaard as equally distant from all his

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<sup>69</sup> It is clear, however, that Rudd is not the only one who wishes to conflate Kierkegaard's opinion with this particular pseudonym. For instance, we can also see 'B''s point that 'aesthetic choice is no choice' reflected in Marino's claim that an individual who has not chosen is just a self-deluded aesthete (Marino 2001: 116).

pseudonyms<sup>70</sup>, and for thinking that he did not intend to simply use the pseudonyms as a mouthpiece for his own opinions. (Recall in particular *CUP* 551, where Kierkegaard claims to be a 'mere reader' of the pseudonymous works, stating that he has 'no opinion' on the views presented by the various pseudonyms). Therefore, it seems that there is no good reason to think that Kierkegaard's voice is any more 'present' in the voice of Judge William than it is in the voice of the aesthete, (and Rudd does not present a case to the contrary). Perhaps one reason which might be given in support of this view (i.e. in support of seeing a connection between Judge William's voice, and Kierkegaard's own), is that 'B' does comment upon 'A' (whereas 'A' does not comment upon 'B'). Thus, one might be led to believe that 'B' has an interpretive advantage over 'A' – that his voice is a superior, higher-order one; it seems that he can understand the aesthete, in ways that the aesthete cannot understand him. However, there are two successful ways of responding to this line of argument, I believe. Firstly, as I noted earlier, 'A' would not be concerned with telling 'B' that he ought to be living aesthetically; the language of 'ought' is ethical in nature, hence the ethicist's attempt to get the aesthete to change, but the lack of comment upon the ethicist from 'A'. Secondly, as I have also argued (section 3.3.1), it is not entirely clear that 'B' does *understand* 'A', given that he makes some fundamental errors in representing 'A's way of life, and the aesthetic and existential aims that 'A' subscribes to.

Let us take a look at another of 'B's criticisms of 'A' and of 'A's way of life:

'You will also see from this why my view of a choice differs from yours, in the event that I can speak of your having such, for the difference is precisely that yours prevents a choice. The moment of choice is for me very serious, less on account of the rigorous pondering of alternatives, and of the multitude of thoughts that attach to each separate link, than because there is danger afoot that at the next moment it may not be in my power to make the same choice, that something has already been lived that must be lived over again. For it is a delusion to think that one can keep one's personality blank, or that one can in any real sense arrest and interrupt personal life. The personality already has interest in the choice before one chooses, and if one postpones the choice the personality makes the choice unconsciously, or it is made by the dark powers within it' (*E/O* 483).

Again, we see here a repetition of the claim that the aesthete doesn't seem to take his life choices very seriously, and has no cohesive way of creating a self (or that he has a 'blank personality' to

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<sup>70</sup> Perhaps except for Johannes Climacus, for reasons given in the first two chapters.

quote Judge William). As we can also see from this passage, the *very act of choosing*, and the moment of choice, is very important for Judge William – there is an importance to choosing itself in his eyes, and choosing *in time*. Here, we can see some of the motivation behind Jothen's argument, given that he also argued that a vital reason that the aesthete lacks a self is due to the aesthete's refusal to accept the responsibility of having a historical dimension (Jothen 2016: 17).

However, it's not clear that this is true, as the aesthete does seem to make a conscious commitment to the aesthetic, and thus he does make a choice. Perhaps it is just not a choice that the Judge would recognise – for him, choice just means ethical choice (see *E/O* 485 on previous page) – this does not mean that the aesthete has made no choice at all though. As section 3.1.2 demonstrated, 'A' displays much concern for the principles which will guide his life, and is careful and self-disciplined when he implements them. The level of control and self-discipline shown already seems to provide an indication that the aesthete does not live 'arbitrarily' in the usual sense of the word; he is not someone who drifts in and out of life indecisively, given that he adheres to strict principles and appears to have made a conscious and ongoing commitment to the aesthetic way of life. Indeed, the aesthetic life seems to be a highly demanding one, which – contrary to the above claims – is all about a turn inwards, *to the self*. (The idea that the aesthetic life is centred around a turn inwards, to oneself, was explored in section 3.3 – this 'turn inwards' being made particularly evident when we recall the affinity between Kierkegaard's aesthete and the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Romanticist.)

The way in which the aesthete can be said to live 'arbitrarily' seems to have more positive implications than the ideas which this word might conjure up; the aesthete is an individual who is able to work with all of life's materials, whatever life throws his way, thus becoming the 'poet of chance' (see Schönbaumsfeld 2010: 43). In order to successfully become 'the poet of chance', we also saw that the aesthete must distance himself appropriately from his experiences, in order to be able to let go when necessary – (becoming overwhelmed risks the fate of the 'Shadowgraphs' and 'unhappiest one' figures). I take it that this is the sense in which the aesthete wants to live 'arbitrarily'.

The idea of the aesthete working with all of life's 'materials' was explored specifically in section 3.3.3, where I considered the idea that the aesthete is an individual who possesses the core motivation of turning life into a work of art, in a response to the situation which he finds himself in. This, then, is the way in which the aesthete chooses to give his life meaning, and overall coherence; the notion of 'turning life into a work of art' is itself an underlying principle, which helps provide the aesthete's life with a narrative. Of course, it differs from *ethical* choice, but this

does not entail that it is *no choice*. It follows then, that this motivation, or principle, which underpins and guides the aesthete's life, is what allows him to possess a sense of 'selfhood' (in addition to the 'turn inwards'). Again, this narrative and concept of selfhood may not be one which individuals such as the ethicist find valuable or admirable, but this does not mean that this must be the case; aesthetic value and ethical value differ so much in nature, it seems unwise to use one as a means of measuring or judging the other. (As well as these values, I hope also to show that both of these existence spheres have *existential value*, given that they are able to provide meaning, value, and coherence to the individuals who occupy these spheres.)

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I hope to have built up a complex, multi-layered picture of Kierkegaard's aesthetic existence sphere, one which accurately reflects the aesthetic as it is portrayed in the pseudonymous works. This is intended to serve as evidence against those that argue that the aesthetic sphere is portrayed as less complex, and more childlike, than Kierkegaard's other two existence spheres (i.e. against TI).

I hope to have gone further than this, however, and to have also shown the various ways in which the aesthetic life may provide individuals and their lives with meaning and value. (Namely, by attempting to turn life into a work of art, as well as simultaneously giving one's suffering meaning.) Again, this is contrary to arguments from proponents of TI who claim the aesthetic sphere to be the lowest and most worthless existence sphere portrayed in Kierkegaard's literary production.

I also hope that my interpretation has shown how Kierkegaard's existential works have something of significance to offer a wider range of readers than TI can account for. On TI, the core aim is to get readers to transition to the religious sphere (and conversely away from the aesthetic sphere); so, it seems as if TI doesn't really have anything to offer the honest atheist who nonetheless wishes to find existential meaning/value. According to TI, there is really only one option for living a meaningful life – the other two spheres on TI (the ethical and the aesthetic) cannot ultimately provide one with a true telos or narrative. According to the account that I have offered here, however, there is an alternative to a purely religious existence to be found via the aesthetic (when defined as the attempt to turn life into a 'work of art'). This demonstrates the relevance of Kierkegaard's existential works in an increasingly secular society, and acts as an urge to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century atheist reader to find existential value in their life – by doing so they will be able to avoid

the nihilistic crisis which will befall the individual who can no longer turn to God, and has no outlet for providing life with meaning or narrative.

In the next chapter, I consider the intriguing and revealing similarities that are present between Kierkegaard's depiction of the aesthetic sphere and his depiction of the religious sphere. Again, part of my aim here is to show that the aesthetic sphere is indeed as complex, and rewarding as the religious sphere, whilst simultaneously demonstrating that neither sphere is without problem or inconsistency. Overall, the aim is to debunk the hierachal structure which has become associated with Kierkegaard's existence spheres, and which has ultimately oversimplified the overall scope of Kierkegaard's existential project.

## Chapter Four Religious & Aesthetic Trials

### Introduction

In this chapter, I will continue to build upon the interpretation of the aesthetic discussed in the previous chapter, whilst beginning to explore some of the overlap that exists between the existence spheres themselves (thus, also building upon my arguments from Chapter Two<sup>71</sup>). In particular, I intend to explore some of the overlap that exists between Kierkegaard's depiction of the aesthetic sphere and his depiction of the religious sphere. I will continue to demonstrate here the ways in which an aesthetic existence can be seen as an 'alternative' to a religious existence, and the ways in which an aesthetic way of life can provide certain individuals with similar materials (or 'life resources', if you will) as the religious.

In this chapter, I consider the notion that both the aesthetic sphere of existence and the religious sphere of existence are 'trials' of a sort. In doing so, I hope to reveal the common ground that these two spheres share. Specifically, I will argue that both trials are psychological in their nature; and, that both trials must be undergone as solitary trials. It is worth noting that this is my primary aim in this chapter; in the following chapter (Chapter Five), I will flesh out what these shared features (of the aesthetic and the religious in Kierkegaard's portrayal) might be taken to mean, and the way in which this strengthens my argument against TI.

In section 4.1, I will explore the idea that the aesthetic existence can be thought of as a trial in so much as it is an existential trial, the task of providing life with meaning in the wake of 'the death of God'.<sup>72</sup> This first section will be relatively brief, given that I have already discussed Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthetic sphere in some detail; I am merely wanting to re-emphasize some of the points from the previous chapter in this new context, and continue to show that these findings create problems for TI, particularly against proponents who claim that the aesthetic existence is doomed due to its fragmentary nature and lack of purpose.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> As Chapter Two advocated a method for approaching Kierkegaard's corpus which acknowledges the complexity of the works and the various overlapping 'threads' that run throughout multiple works.

<sup>72</sup> Whilst of course, the phrase 'the death of God' is Nietzsche's, what I hope to show here is that Kierkegaard displays signs of similar worries within his pseudonymous works – namely, worries about how one can provide one's life with existential meaning once less emphasis is placed on God, and God is no longer turned to as the centre for all explanation and justification.

<sup>73</sup> Examples of such accounts were provided in the previous chapter.

In section 4.2, I will begin to discuss Kierkegaard's illustration of the religious sphere of existence. This discussion will be much more detailed than the discussion in section 4.1, as the religious sphere has not been examined in any significant detail in the thesis. In this section, I will start to look at the idea of the religious trial as a psychological one, supporting my argument with an account found within Schönbaumsfeld's paper, 'The aesthetic as mirror of faith in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*' (Schönbaumsfeld 2019). As the discussion progresses, I will also make it clear in which ways I think the aesthetic trial and the religious trial are portrayed in a similar light, with respect to the input that individuals must devote to these respective trials.

In section 4.3, I consider in greater depth exactly what such trials amount to, building on this idea that such trials are in fact psychological trials, whilst showing that the theme of a 'trial' is perhaps intended in a less dramatic way than it first appeared – namely, I will explore the notion of an 'everyday trial'.

Section 4.4 will begin to address the psychological consequences of undergoing these trials which I will have argued are fundamental to the aesthetic and the religious spheres on Kierkegaard's account (regardless of whether these are the more extreme cases or an 'everyday' instance). In particular, I will address the issues concerning communication (or lack thereof) and 'inwardness' that seem to inevitably go hand-in-hand with both the aesthetic and the religious existence spheres. As such, I will argue that both the aesthetic sphere and the religious sphere are fundamentally solitary trials, (contrary to the ethical sphere which *necessarily* involves communication and collectiveness).

For my purposes here, when discussing Kierkegaard's portrayal of the religious sphere, I will be focusing heavily on the work *Fear and Trembling*. I have a few reasons for doing so; one reason for selecting this particular work, is that the depiction of the religious which we receive there is the one which best serves my purposes, and most clearly highlights the features that I will be discussing here. Aside from this, however, a further good reason for focusing on this particular work over others, is that this work is one in which we receive perhaps the most fully fleshed-out, complex (hence, also problematic) illustration of the religious sphere of existence. For this reason, it is consequently a portrayal which has been paid much attention in the secondary literature. So, for these reasons, I believe this work deserves pride of place within this chapter.

Alongside *FT*, I will also on occasion draw upon *CUP*, as we are also given a fairly detailed account of Christianity and religious existential concerns there. Furthermore, I believe that drawing upon

aspects of this work will help me develop my own account here, as there appear to be some similar themes to those featured within *FT*.<sup>74</sup>

For my purposes here, I will mostly be focused on drawing out the similar features of Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthetic existence sphere and his portrayal of the religious existence sphere. Whilst this will draw attention to the fact that the aesthete dedicates as much effort and self-discipline to committing to his chosen way of life, and is looking for many of the same overall results as the religious individual, much of this will be implicit with regards to how this serves as a response to TI. It is in Chapter Five, that I will begin to consider the significance of such depictions, and the significance of the overlap that seemingly exists between the illustrations of these existence spheres.

#### 4.1 The Aesthetic Trial – An Existential Trial

Before turning to consider the idea of a religious 'trial', and the way in which this is presented in both *FT* and *CUP*, I will first say something about the slightly less obvious way in which we might deem the aesthetic life to be a kind of 'trial' or 'challenge'. Although it might not be immediately obvious that this is true of the aesthetic, (and slightly more obvious why it is true of the religious), I believe that once I have reiterated some of my claims from Chapter Three within this new context, the notion that the aesthetic is in some way a 'trial' will become clearer.

I want to start by recalling the idea that the aesthete (as depicted in *E/O* especially) is an individual who must practice extremely high levels of self-discipline – this was an element of the aesthete's life which I highlighted throughout Chapter Three. Furthermore, contrary to arguments advanced by some (although perhaps not all) proponents of TI,<sup>75</sup> I argued that the self-discipline exhibited by the aesthete involves an element of commitment to this particular life-path. The strategies that the aesthete deploys, and the careful balance (for instance, of enjoying enough, but not over-indulging), clearly show that the aesthete is not someone who merely drifts into that way of life – he is someone who has given much thought to his life-style, and appears to be constantly reflecting on this.<sup>76</sup> This feature of self-discipline is important, because as we will learn, it is crucial to the aesthete's success in his 'trial'.

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<sup>74</sup> This is a good example of the way that themes 'criss-cross' and 'overlap' within Kierkegaard's works in the way that I explained (via analogy with Wittgenstein's 'family resemblances' analogy) in Chapter Two.

<sup>75</sup> See previous chapter for specific examples of these views (Chapter Three).

<sup>76</sup> As noted previously, the mere fact that 'Volume I' of *E/O* exists serves as evidence of this.

In Chapter Three, I also likened the aesthete to a type of 'artist' (given his motivation of turning his life into a work of art). This, I believe, is very significant to the idea of life as a 'trial', or a 'challenge', because an artist is someone who must constantly work upon themselves, and their skill-set, in order to become a better artist (this may involve an ability to work with a greater range of materials and tools). The self-discipline and careful balances which the aesthete is seen to employ in his life, and the strategy which he applies to his life – (recall: 'Crop Rotation', and the careful balancing of enjoyment that the aesthete implements in his life) – are in the end for the purpose of turning life into a work of art. That is, the aesthete must work upon himself, and discipline himself, if he is to truly live artistically and become the 'artist of his own life'.

Additionally, the aesthete can be said to face a 'trial' in the sense that he is tasked with finding meaning and value when it cannot be found externally (i.e. in God, or an objective moral code). In the last chapter, in order to reach my more positive account of Kierkegaard's aesthetic sphere of existence, I first had to begin by examining some of the bleaker aspects of the aesthete's life. (Note, my goal there was not to *deny* that the aesthete does indeed have some bleakness within his life – such as the continually-present melancholy and sorrow – rather, my argument was the aesthete was able to do something positive and constructive with these negative elements that will inevitably be a part of life.<sup>77</sup> Hence, the aesthete is not 'doomed to a life of despair' or 'failure' in the way that subscribers of TI claim him to be.)<sup>78</sup> Part of the reason for adopting this maxim of turning life into a work of art, or making life 'interesting', I argued, was that the aesthete must find value and meaning somewhere in life, and some way of dealing with what life throws at him. To use the art metaphor, the aesthete must find a way to work with the 'raw materials' which life provides him with, even if at first, these materials appear 'ugly' or undesirable. That is, we have little control (sometimes, at least) over what life throws at us, and suffering (ugliness) seems to be an inevitable part of our lives; but instead of leaving himself prey to unwanted experiences, the aesthete can find a way to use such experiences in a more positive, artistic way, as part of his overall narrative.

With the help of Dewey (1995), I argued that the reason that the aesthete must do these things for himself, and take control over his life in this way, is due to the fact that the aesthete is an individual who finds himself 'on a world stage without God'. In other words, the aesthete is likely the atheist who has become cynical about the existence of objective values (God being an obvious, but not the only, example), thus if he wishes to avoid a nihilistic crisis, he must step into

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<sup>77</sup> This will not just be true of the aesthete of course, but of the human condition generally – we must find a way to give our suffering meaning, if we are to avoid complete despair.

<sup>78</sup> See previous chapter (3) for examples of such accounts.

the role of 'creator' himself, and locate meaning and value elsewhere (see Dewey 1995). As we will see in the next chapter, living with honesty and authenticity are important messages of Kierkegaard's; so, perhaps the atheist must face up to his situation with honesty, and find an alternative way of providing life with meaning and value, rather than following the masses and partaking in a dishonest practice of Christianity (namely Christendom).

The avoidance of complete and suicidal nihilism is a very important part of the aesthete's life, I think; as we saw in the previous chapter, the aesthete wavers dangerously close to a nihilistic crisis,<sup>79</sup> but 'Crop Rotation' (alongside other evidence explored previously) shows that the aesthete is ultimately able to avoid this. Although he does warn against caring too much, and becoming too invested in life projects – (as too much investment leads to disappointment and loss eventually) – it is essential, 'A' stresses, to care a certain amount. Rather, the key point is about balance and a careful editing (in order to successfully turn life into a work of art). It is crucial that the aesthete must remain active and present in his life,<sup>80</sup> so-to-speak, in order to avoid the nihilistic crisis which threatens him – in the previous chapter, I discussed how he must do something constructive and artistic with his life, in order to take control, and avoid total nihilism.

Therefore, the trial that the aesthete faces is largely an existential one; faced with the potential of a nihilistic crisis (given that he truthfully no longer believes in objective values), and a life full of potential meaningless suffering/sorrow, the aesthete must find a way out of this predicament. Succeeding in this so-called trial, as noted previously, requires much skill, precision, and general self-discipline in order to become the 'artist'. So, whilst of course, this has some obvious differences with the religious trial (which I will examine next), I believe that nonetheless the aesthetic sphere of existence (like the religious) is presented in many ways as a 'trial' – and, as we will see, it is one which involves some of the same skills and attitudes which the religious individual, or the man of faith, must also deploy in the religious trial. As we will see in the next section, the religious individual is similar to the aesthete here, in that both must maintain a particular attitude; it is essential to both individuals that they avoid becoming resigned and merely giving up (as is the temptation for both) – for the aesthete, this would be to give into a nihilistic crisis. (I will explore what this would look like for the religious individual shortly.)

Moreover, as this chapter progresses, I believe it will become evident that undergoing such a trial as the aesthetic one, allows the individual to achieve some similar results and 'materials' that the

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<sup>79</sup> This is evidenced particularly in *E/O*'s 'Diapsalmata' (see *E/O* 43-57); we can see from this opening section of the book that it is very tempting for the aesthete to not care or choose *at all*.

<sup>80</sup> See my discussion of 'The Unhappiest One' in Chapter Three for an extended discussion of these themes.

religious individual is able to achieve as a consequence of the religious trial – by this, I am referring to the coherent sense of selfhood, ability to acknowledge one's despair, and to do something productive and meaningful with this despair. Also, as I will examine in some depth in section 4.4, the psychological effects of undergoing such trials are very similar for both the aesthete and the religious individual – in particular, I am going to pay attention to the element of 'inwardness', and the failure of successful communication, that appear to result directly from such trials.

## 4.2 The Religious Trial – A Trial of Faith

An immediate similarity to be observed when it comes the religious trial, is that like the aesthete, the religious individual has to work upon him or herself in a very specific way – as well as, of course, his or her relationship with, and commitment to, God. As Schönbaumsfeld notes, the religious trial is a 'spiritual' one, in which one must practice a form of spiritual discipline (which in many ways, reflects the strategy that the aesthete wants to apply to his life) (Schönbaumsfeld 2019). As I continue my exploration of the nature of the religious trial here, I will refer back to this idea, fleshing out exactly what is implied here, and what this discipline might be like – in particular, considering the notion of faith as fundamentally a kind of 'attitude' or mind-set that one takes to the challenges that could arise in one's life.

The idea that the religious is a 'trial', or can involve a trial, is presented most explicitly in the works *FT* and *CUP*. I will begin with an exploration of *FT*, as this is a particularly tricky work of Kierkegaard's, and one which has not yet been discussed – (some discussion of *CUP* has already occurred in earlier chapters) – and call upon *CUP* where relevant. Furthermore, as we will see, in many ways *FT* presents a paradigm example of the religious existence sphere as a trial.

At the centre of *FT* is the Genesis 22 story of the Bible, in which Abraham has his faith tested by God. In this story, Abraham is required by God to sacrifice his own son, Isaac. Abraham conceals the true nature of this command from his wife (Sarah), his faithful servant (Eleazar), and Isaac himself. Obeying God's command, he journeys to Mount Moriah with Isaac, and prepares to make the sacrifice. However, upon drawing the knife in order to sacrifice Isaac (indicating that Abraham was prepared to go through with the sacrifice), God provides a ram in place of Isaac. Seeing this, Abraham is able to sacrifice the ram instead, and Isaac is spared. Abraham then receives Isaac back with joy, and is said to have passed the test of faith which he had been set by God – consequently, he has been lauded as the 'father of faith'.

The ‘trial’ here, in its most obvious sense, is the test of faith which Abraham must pass, in order to prove his unwavering faith to God. It is therefore for this reason (alongside the reasons cited previously), that this work will be my primary source here; it perfectly presents to us a case in which the religious is obviously shown to be a trial, or at least – to involve a trial. (As I will note later, the religious may not *necessarily* involve a trial of Abraham’s kind at all – but in his instance, we are of course dealing with what can only be described as a test or trial, and this is presented as the paradigm of the religious/faith, so arguably, one must at least be willing to face the possibility of a trial of faith occurring.) Furthermore, as I will show, Johannes Climacus – the pseudonymous author of *CUP* – also uses the language of a ‘trial’ to discuss religious existence, and the nature of Christianity more generally. As these notions of a ‘trial’ (or a ‘task’ as it is sometimes referred to), feature heavily in both of these works, one can infer that such a theme must have held significance for Kierkegaard. (As we will see in Chapter Five, such language is also frequently used to discuss Christianity in Kierkegaard’s non-pseudonymous works.)

When examining the depiction of Abraham’s trial in *FT*, it is essential that one is cautious about such matters, given that the story of Abraham’s trial is presented through the lens of Johannes de silentio – one of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous authors. This is problematic for some obvious reasons – i.e. simply because it is a pseudonymous work, as opposed to one accredited to the true author at the time of its publication – but it is perhaps even more problematic than others of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous works, due to the lack of authority that de silentio claims to have over the subject which he is discussing. Here, I am referring to the fact that de silentio repeatedly tells the reader that he is an ‘outsider to faith’ and that he cannot understand the figure of Abraham (see, for instance, *FT63; FT66*). This complicates matters more than usual, since it may mean that we ought not to take de silentio’s claims all that seriously – if he admits to the fact that he cannot understand faith, and remains an outsider looking in, how accurate a picture can he give us? The issue of de silentio’s reliability as a pseudonymous author is itself a whole, intricate topic for debate – one which I do have not room to enter into here. So, for the time being, my strategy will be to note this feature of our pseudonymous author, and highlight points at which this feature particularly becomes an issue, but to leave it to one side for now. For now, I will be careful not to attribute views that de silentio expresses to Kierkegaard himself. As the following two chapters develop, I will compare some of the claims that de silentio makes in *FT* with claims that Kierkegaard himself makes in some of his non-pseudonymous works, as well as some of the claims made by Climacus in *CUP*, in order to see how the various claims compare, and whether there is much consistency between the works. Where there is more consistency, it seems safer to trust our pseudonymous author in those instances.

Another thing to note about *FT* before launching into an analysis of the work, is that interestingly, at no point in the book is any proof of God's existence offered, nor is there a clear attempt to persuade the reader that they *ought* to believe in God, or that they ought to pursue a religious existence. Rather, the focus is upon Abraham as 'the father of faith'; Abraham is already a believer, and in the Genesis 22 story, this pre-existing faith is *tested*. So, *FT* is essentially an exploration into the question of what it is to have faith, the problems encountered with this, and the problems that may generally be encountered in the pursuit of a religious existence. As will become evident in due course, there are many other themes and issues explored within this work as well; but for now, I believe that this feature is worth drawing attention to, as it seems to suggest that there is no explicit aim in *FT* to push readers towards the religious sphere of existence.<sup>81</sup>

The same also seems to be the case with *CUP*: as Law notes, a core tenet of *CUP* seems to be the need to 'recover the existential character of Christianity'; it is almost taken for granted that Christianity does indeed have content in this work, but the issue with how religious individuals can *relate* themselves to that content, instead seems to be what is taken up here (Law 2010). Exactly what is meant by these statements will be explored in Chapter Five, but as noted above, these features are worth noting from the outset of the discussion here; it is important to note, then, that both of these works seem to play with religious themes and questions, and various tensions that may arise from asking such questions, but neither seem to offer a systematic or serious examination of religious scriptures or doctrines.

As with a considerable amount of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works, in addition to being attributed to a pseudonym, it is also essential to note before we can begin our exploration of Abraham's trial in *FT*, that this work possesses 'multiple layers'. The three Problemata of the book are often taken to be the core of *FT* – (and are subsequently paid a lot of attention in the secondary literature) – but before readers can get to these, *de silentio* presents us with four different 'openings'. As Mooney notes, this is one of the many interesting features of the work in question:

'Johannes' work darts from image to claim, from question to paradox, from lyric to parable to argument. It weaves its fabric in ways that can be seen as haphazard, and for all its brilliance, frustratingly incomplete. This creates obvious difficulties for a helpful reading that stays reasonably close to the text. Too quick or too abstract a

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<sup>81</sup> Of course, one may argue that there is instead an *implicit* aim. I will also show that this is, at best, questionable.

reconstruction will leave a false sense of order, system, or finality, yet too loose or desultory a review – perhaps staying *closer* to the original – will fail to provide the needed orientation and insight' (Mooney 1991:19).

Mooney then prescribes, much like Schönbaumsfeld in her approach to Kierkegaard's authorship (Schönbaumsfeld 2010; see Chapter Two for extended discussion on this), that one tries to find a middle path between these two extreme methods of interpretation. As noted in Chapter Two, this is also an approach that I will be taking here, by drawing attention to the overlapping themes that exist within Kierkegaard's corpus as a whole, and within the existence spheres themselves. Thus, I hope to avoid some of the errors identified by Mooney above, instead providing a picture which is more reflective of the existence spheres as presented by Kierkegaard; that is, I hope to do justice to the sheer complexity of the work at hand.<sup>82</sup>

In the first of the book's 'openings' – (and perhaps the most official of the openings) – *de silentio* provides some indication of which notions of faith he takes issue with, and will challenge throughout the rest of the book. I will discuss the details found within the book's 'Preface' at length in Chapter Five, where it is most fitting. For now, though, it is worth highlighting a couple of things from this section of the book, as we immediately receive the message that the religious is best understood as some kind of 'trial or 'task' in this opening section. A particularly crucial passage for our purposes here is as follows:

'Today nobody will stop with faith; they all go further. It would perhaps be rash to inquire where to, but surely a mark of urbanity and good breeding on my part to assume that everyone does indeed have faith, otherwise it would be odd to talk of going further. In those old days it was different. For then faith was the task of a whole lifetime, not a skill to be acquired in either days or weeks. When the old campaigner approached the end, had fought the good fight, and kept his faith, his heart was still young enough not to have forgotten the fear and trembling that disciplined his youth and which, although the grown man had mastered it, no man altogether outgrows – unless he somehow manages at the earliest possible opportunity to go further. Where these venerable figures arrived our own age begins, in order to go further' (FT 42).

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<sup>82</sup> Note, that whilst I have chosen to focus primarily on the notion of the aesthetic and the religious as 'trials' in this chapter, I do not of course take this to be the only core theme of Kierkegaard's works, or indeed the only core theme of either of these spheres. My reasons for choosing to focus on this particular theme here are as stated in the 'Introduction'.

There are two things which I want to note about this extract: firstly, the idea that faith is 'the task of a whole lifetime', or rather, that it *used* to be, whereas de silentio (the author of the 'Preface') claims that these days it is taken merely as a starting point. Secondly, is the notion of 'fear and trembling', which seems to be being associated with the idea of faith as a task of a lifetime in the above extract. Both of these themes, as we will see, are continually present throughout the book, and in fact, there seems to be a conscious effort being made to pick up on the 'anguish' of Abraham's trial – the Genesis 22 story may itself have been selected due to the presence of such features (over any other biblical story or figure).

Such a description of religion and faith is also notable as we also find the employment of similar language within *CUP*. For instance, the following extracts in particular highlight the idea that religious existence is in some fundamental way a 'trial', or a 'task' – or, perhaps more specifically, that a *truly* religious existence is like this.

'Becoming a Christian is then the most fearful decision of a man's life (...) (The) most terrible of all tests in human life (...)' (*CUP* 333).

'But becoming a Christian really is the most difficult of all human tasks' (*CUP* 337).

'The individual is without further ado supposed to be related to the development of the human spirit as a particular specimen to its kind, just as if spiritual development were something that one generation could bequeath to another; and as if spirit were a character belonging to the race and not to the individual, a supposition which is self-contradictory, and ethically abominable. Spiritual development is self-activity; the spiritually developed individual takes his development with him when he dies. If an individual of a subsequent generation is to reach the same development he will have to attain it by means of his own activity, and he cannot be permitted to omit anything' (*CUP* 308-9).

The first two of these extracts are fairly straightforward, with the second being more-or-less a reiteration of the first; although, the first extract does additionally draw attention to the notion of the 'fear' and 'anguish' with which one undertakes the religious trial – also a feature of the religious sphere which is repeatedly highlighted in *FT*.

I have included the third of the above here, as it appears to reflect a central theme from the 'Preface' of *FT*: that faith is the task of a lifetime. In the above extract, Climacus is discussing the thought that Christianity (true Christianity) cannot be inherited, passed down from one's parents – (speculative philosophy, he asserts, is often indirectly guilty of making the assumption that it can be) – rather, Christianity is a practice, a spiritual development, which one must go through

oneself if one is to become a true Christian. This idea will come up multiple times in this chapter, so it is worth picking up on here: as this section progresses, I will be further discussing the idea of the religious trial as a spiritual development and discipline; in section 4.4, I will explore the notion that the religious trial (like the aesthetic trial also) is in many ways a ‘lone activity’, which cannot really be dealt with collectively or generationally. I will also return to similar ideas in Chapter Five, where I discuss the demarcation between genuine and inauthentic Christianity on Kierkegaard’s view. For now, however, it is worth identifying the type of language used when the religious existence is being explicitly discussed, and noting the commonalities between these discussions.

Returning to *FT* and its many ‘openings’, it is worth exploring the ‘Attunement’ section in some detail (which follows the ‘Preface’), given that this will shed some light upon the nature of Abraham’s trial, and provide us with some clues with regards to what it is that makes Abraham the ‘father of faith’. In ‘Attunement’, we are presented with four ‘sub-Abrahams’ to use Lippitt’s terminology (Lippitt 2003: 22): four variations on the Abraham and Isaac story, but none of which can be appropriately said to be *the* Abraham, the true ‘father of faith’. As Mooney suggests, ‘(...) the musical resonances of *attunement* are especially apt, for they suggest tuning an instrument and ear for what is to follow. The versions *need* tuning. Each attempt is slightly off-key – close but not quite right (...) a set of *false starts*’ (Mooney 1991: 25). Setting up and explaining these ‘false starts’ will be useful nonetheless, as it will reveal what is unique about the real Abraham – giving us an indication to what it is to *really* possess faith, and what it is about Abraham that makes him so admirable.

In the first re-telling of the story, Abraham is willing to obey God’s command to sacrifice Isaac. However, unlike Abraham of the Bible, this Abraham seems to believe that Isaac will not be returned to him – that he will have to go through with the sacrifice. In order to do as little damage as possible to Isaac’s faith, at the moment of sacrifice, Abraham throws Isaac to the ground and says: “Foolish boy, do you believe I am your father? I am an idolater. Do you believe that this is God’s command? No, it is my own desire” (*FT* 45). By allowing Isaac to believe that he is a monster, and that he is following his own will (as opposed to God’s), he is at least able to preserve Isaac’s faith in God, (even if he will no longer have faith in his earthly father). By employing this tactic, it seems that Abraham *himself* lacks faith in God – evidenced by the fact that he felt the need to protect Isaac from the truth. Although the real Abraham conceals the purpose of the journey to Mount Moriah from Sarah and Isaac, he does not attempt to pass his actions off as manifestations of his own desire; given this, he is shown to retain trust in God – thereby proving his faith – and successfully completing his trial.

The second re-telling is slightly less dramatic than the first, the only key difference between the Genesis 22 story and the ‘Attunement’ story being depicted in the aftermath of the sacrifice, i.e. upon the return home from Mount Moriah. In this version, Abraham is willing to sacrifice Isaac, but there is a troubling consequence of the events: ‘From that day on, Abraham became old, he could not forget what God had demanded of him. Isaac throve as before; but Abraham’s eye darkened, he saw joy no more’ (FT 46). Although Abraham had still been willing to obey God’s command – thus, in a sense, facing the trial as before – this trial changes him, and he becomes disillusioned by it. His joylessness at the end of the story suggests that his faith and trust in God has diminished as a direct result of his trial. In the original story, Abraham is able to receive Isaac back with joy after the events have taken place – therefore, there is not a significant change in outlook as a consequence of undergoing the trial. This key difference between the ‘real’ Abraham (the ‘true father of faith’) and this ‘sub-Abraham’ suggests that whilst Abraham’s actions and attitudes during the trial itself are important, what is also important, is the outlook that one is able to carry forward *after* such a trial has taken place. (This is a big clue with regards to the question of what makes Abraham the father of faith, and I will pick up upon the idea in more detail towards the end of this section.)

In the third variation on the story, Abraham and Isaac again journey to Mount Moriah, and as before, Abraham is willing (at least initially) to sacrifice Isaac. However, in this re-telling, Abraham later rides to Mount Moriah alone and throws himself to the ground, begging God’s forgiveness for his sin – the sin of having been willing to sacrifice his own son, thus forgetting a father’s duty to his son. Despite his plea for forgiveness, Abraham remains confused and somewhat conflicted about his situation: ‘He could not comprehend that it was a sin to have been willing to sacrifice to God the best he owned; for that which he would have many a time gladly laid down his own life; and if it was a sin, if he had not loved Isaac, then he could not understand that it could be forgiven; for what sin could be more terrible?’ (FT46-7).

This third re-telling hints at the tensions between one’s ethical duty and God’s command which are to be discussed at length in the book’s Problemata. Or, to use the terminology which will be employed later in the book, it brings up the theme of the relation between the universal (i.e. the ethical) and the particular (i.e. the command which Abraham has personally received from God). To spell out Abraham’s problem a little more, I will turn to Lippitt’s explanation for help. Lippitt notes that this sub-Abraham clearly holds his duty to his son as possessing ultimate importance. This duty is an ethical duty, which can be expressed in universal terms such as: ‘one ought not to kill one’s own innocent offspring’. This can be understood; it is publicly comprehensible. Abraham thus believes that his willingness to sacrifice his son is a sin – the ‘sin’ here being a violation of a universalizable moral rule. On this account, his preparedness to contemplate that he, as a

particular individual, could possibly have thought that his relationship with God enabled him to override such an ethical duty is regarded as a ‘temptation’. However, confusion over this arises because on the other hand, he struggles to understand why being prepared to sacrifice his most treasured possession really is a sin, as opposed to the highest manifestation of a life of self-denial and devotion to God (Lippitt 2003: 26-7). This Abraham is of course different to Abraham of the Bible, as there is no such plea for forgiveness there; the real Abraham’s faith and obedience to God never seems to falter – he is prepared to face the trial that he has been set, and will see it through to the end.

The fourth and final re-telling shifts its perspective from Abraham’s to Isaac’s, and we gain a small insight into Isaac’s thought-process. In this re-telling, Abraham and Isaac make the journey to Mount Moriah, and Abraham is willing to go through with the sacrifice as before. However, just before Abraham draws the knife, Isaac sees Abraham’s left hand was ‘clenched in anguish’, a shudder going through his body (*FT* 47). Upon returning home, it is Isaac who has lost his faith due to what he has witnessed. Yet, Isaac remains silent about what he has seen, and Abraham never suspects that his anguish that day on Mount Moriah had been witnessed. It is here that we are first introduced to the theme of silence, another theme which will play a crucial role in the rest of the discussion in *FT*, particularly in the lengthy third Problema (which I will discuss in more detail in section 4.4). Unlike in the original, however, in this version it is *Isaac* that is silent, as opposed to Abraham.

All four of these modifications of the Abraham story depict ways that Abraham could plausibly have responded to the test of faith which he was set by God, and the consequences of such responses; yet, none of them are the ‘real’ Abraham, the true father of faith.

What all of these stories still have in common (with each other, and with the ‘true’ Abraham) is that in every one of these versions, Abraham in the end obeys God’s command. However, the point of these variations is that none of them depict the *real* Abraham; as Johannes notes, none of these Abrahams measure up in greatness to the real Abraham (*FT*48).

What can be gleaned from this, is that it is more than just mere obedience to God, more than just straightforwardly carrying out the tasks that God demands of one, that makes Abraham the father of faith (and hence makes him so ‘great’, according to de silentio). It is crucial not to underestimate the importance of ‘Attunement’, despite the fact that it is only one of the four ‘openings’ of the book, and only a few pages in length. Part of its importance, as Lippitt points out, is that it seems to provide substantial evidence against views that perceive *FT* as sponsoring the message that one always ought to obey the will of God in a clash between this obligation and

an ethical duty. If this were the case, then all of these ‘sub-Abrahams’ could also be reasonably deemed the ‘father of faith’ – but they are not, they are all inferior to Abraham of the Bible. It seems that at least, *how the will of God is obeyed* is a crucial factor here (Lippitt 2003: 28-9); the alternate Abrahams all seem to undergo a change in attitude as a result of the trial that they have been set, or their faith seems to waver in one way or another, which is not the case for the real Abraham – so, it seems to be a psychological feature of Abraham’s which differs from these alternate versions of him. Because of this, it seems that as well as being a religious trial, Abraham’s is also in many relevant ways a psychological and personal trial. Just as we saw with the aesthetic, attitude and self-discipline are also important within the religious sphere; the man of faith must work on himself, as well as his relationship with God. Most notably, one thing that seems to be missing from all of these alternate stories is Abraham’s joy; when he sees the ram which God has provided, he receives Isaac back with joy, and their relationship is not significantly changed by the trial.

Following ‘Attunement’, is another opening it seems: ‘Speech in Praise of Abraham’. This section is largely intended as de silentio’s (a poet) praise for Abraham (a hero), in which Johannes attempts to valorise Abraham (see Lippitt 2003: 29). Johannes here introduces the figures ‘the knight of infinite resignation’ and ‘the knight of faith’, although they have not yet been named as such (more on these figures shortly): ‘it is great to give up one’s desire, but greater to stick to the temporal after having given it up’ (FT 52). Again, this begins to explain what it is about Abraham that is so great, so admirable, in Johannes’s eyes: Abraham was willing to give up Isaac – to sacrifice him to God – and yet he still believes that in some sense Isaac will return to him; once he is indeed returned, Abraham takes him back with joy. Thus, he can rejoice in the temporal, even after he has evidently given it up. Again, this is suggestive of the idea of a psychological trial, as well as one that is religious in nature – although Abraham’s relationship with God (and his obedience to God) is of course central in his trial, also important it seems is his endurance of attitude and outlook (emphasising the psychological and personal aspect of the trial).

Another critical point is that the faith which Abraham possessed was faith for *this life* (FT 53). Abraham could have consoled himself with the thought that after his trial, after the sacrifice had been made, he would be reunited with his son in the afterlife; but it is not this kind of faith that he has – it is faith that Isaac will be returned to him in this life. According to de silentio: ‘a faith like that [faith in the afterlife] is not really a faith but only its remotest possibility, a faith that has some inkling of its object at the very edge of the field of vision but remains separated from it by a yawning abyss in which despair plays its pranks’ (FT 54). A significant part of this account of faith is that one is able to find joy in the temporal, the finite, and part of this seems to be because failing to find value and joy in these things would imply that this world is thereby devalued.

The final 'opening' – entitled 'Preamble of the Heart' – acts as a kind of preface to the Problemata which will make up the core of de silentio's investigation – as Mackey writes, it appears to act as a 'methodological preparation' for the Problemata that are to follow (Mackey 1986: 47). Johannes here draws attention to Abraham's 'anguish' – a feature which he claims is often left out of discussions of the Abraham story. Note, the language of 'anguish' here bears a certain similarity to the language and notion of a 'trial' (particularly considering its psychological aspect); the presence of such language throughout de silentio's discussion of the Genesis 22 story places a significant emphasis on the 'fear and trembling' with which Abraham undertook his so-called trial. Hence, courage and inner-strength is required of Abraham, as well as faith in God. Again, this highlights the overlap that seems to exist between Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthetic in *E/O* and his portrayal of the religious in *FT*; whilst the aesthete does not need faith in God, he must arguably possess a courage similar to the man of faith, in order to face his situation with honesty, and to subsequently step into the role of the artist and take charge of his own life. It would be easier for him to fill the void (after the death of God) with things such as money and material goods, or by mindlessly following the crowd; the individual who instead takes on the task of living artistically (the aesthete) must possess a certain strength of mind and courage.

It is also here (in the 'Preamble'), that we are first (explicitly) introduced to the distinction between the knight of faith, and the knight of infinite resignation. However, Johannes first draws attention to the following psychological features of Abraham's trial:

'All along he had faith, he believed that God would not demand Isaac of him, while he was still willing to offer him if that was indeed what was demanded. He believed on the strength of the absurd, for there could be no question of human calculation, and it was indeed absurd that God who demanded this of him should in the next instant withdraw the demand. He climbed the mountain, even in that moment when the knife gleamed he believed – that God would not demand Isaac. Certainly he was surprised by the outcome, but by means of a double movement he had come back to his original position and therefore received Isaac more joyfully than the first time' (*FT* 65).

There are two psychological features of Abraham's faith which de silentio seems to be indicating as possessing central importance here, which must be unpacked carefully if we are to understand the account of faith that is provided in *FT*. They are: Abraham's belief on 'the strength of the absurd' that Isaac will be returned to him; and the idea of faith as a 'double movement'.

I will begin by unpacking the second of these, as doing so will help with an understanding of the first, then I will explore an alternative reading of these aspects of de silentio's account of faith

(Schönbaumsfeld 2019), which doesn't seem to require that Abraham hold two inconsistent beliefs at the same time. For the time being, however, I will take de silentio's words above at face-value, and I will examine what might be meant by this idea of a 'double movement' which de silentio thinks he has identified, before considering the problem that this raises, and then moving onto an alternative.

The story of the 'young lad and the princess' is the example used by de silentio in order to illuminate the distinction between the knight of infinite resignation and the knight of faith, and hence, to draw out what this supposed 'double movement' of faith is – thus, I will also use this example here. The story tells of a young lad – a knight of infinite resignation – who was in love with a princess. The lad recognises that he will not get the princess, thereby reconciling himself with the movement of infinite resignation, so that what the princess does can no longer affect him. That is, the young lad decides that he will renounce the love which is central to his life in the finite, temporal world (i.e. his love for the princess).

By renouncing something finite (his love for the princess), however, he gains something back infinitely. As Mooney notes,

'In renouncing the princess, the knight discovers (or generates) a new perspective. His life is no longer focused by concern for a finite individual. His standpoint is now *outside* the flux of petty, worldly things. It represents the possibility of *surviving* the crushing loss of the princess, a point of leverage from which the old frames of experience can be abandoned' (Mooney 1991: 49).

The result of this is that the lad's love is transformed into an eternal love:

'His love for the princess would take on for him the expression of an eternal love, would acquire a religious character, be transformed into a love for the eternal being which, although it denied fulfilment, still reconciled him once more in the eternal consciousness of his love's validity in an eternal form that no reality can take from him' (FT 72).

However, from this moment the princess is lost; he pays no future finite attention to what she does, and he cannot be disturbed by her actions – this, de silentio claims, is proof that the young lad has made the movement infinitely (FT 73). This is the knight of infinite resignation.

Just as the aesthete must remain 'present' in his life<sup>83</sup> in order to avoid a nihilistic crisis (i.e. complete complacency, no value, nothing redeeming to be found in life), the knight of faith must

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<sup>83</sup> See discussion from Chapter Three and section 4.1.

also avoid a type of complacency – for the knight of faith, though, this would look more like the resignation that is characteristic of the knight of infinite resignation, as displayed above. As we will see then, both the aesthete and the religious individual/knight of faith must maintain a certain attitude and ‘presence’ essential to those respective existence spheres in order to avoid a crisis of values. So, a negative phrasing of the ‘trial’ for both the aesthete and the religious individual sounds something like the following: at the core of these trials is an avoidance, or overcoming, of resignation (itself a kind of nihilism). This resignation just takes on a different form for each of these individuals: for the aesthete it is essentially suicidal nihilism (not caring for either A or B, or wanting to choose anything); and for the religious individual, it looks like the resignation of the knight of infinite resignation (represented above by the ‘young lad’ in de silentio’s tale of the young lad and his princess). Therefore, both the aesthete and the religious individual – if they are to live authentically within the respective spheres – must face a ‘spiritual trial’ in which resignation is to be resisted. (Resignation in both cases is the temptation – it is the easier and more passive choice, but it is a choice which would result in a kind of ‘nihilism’ for both individuals.)

Given this negative phrasing of the religious trial, I will now turn to examine how the knight of faith is able to avoid the complacency and the ‘temptation’ that the knight of infinite resignation represents, and consider the key difference between the knight of infinite resignation and the knight of faith.

The knight of faith does also make the move of infinite resignation it seems; but, he appears to make a further movement in addition to this (at least on the face of things), meaning that he is ultimately able to overcome the fate of infinite resignation:

‘He does exactly the same as the other knight, he infinitely renounces the claim to the love which is the content of his life; he is reconciled in pain; but then comes the marvel, he makes one more movement, more wonderful than anything else, for he says: ‘I nevertheless believe that I will get her, namely on the strength of the absurd, on the strength of the fact that for God all things are possible.’ The absurd is not one distinction among others embraced by understanding. It is not the same as the improbable, the unexpected, the unforeseen. The moment the knight of faith resigned he was convinced of the impossibility, humanly speaking (...) Accordingly he admits the impossibility and at the same time believes the absurd; for were he to suppose that he had faith without recognising the impossibility with all the passion of his soul and with all his heart, he

would be deceiving himself, and his testimony would carry weight nowhere, since he would not even have come as far as infinite resignation' (FT 75).

Using this distinction (between the knight of infinite resignation, and the knight of faith), we can now begin to see more clearly why Abraham is lauded as the father of faith, but why the same cannot be said of the variants in 'Attunement'. Evidently, what sets Abraham apart from these 'sub-Abrahams' is his belief that Isaac will be returned to him, and his subsequent joy at receiving Isaac back. That is, he is able to take joy once more in the finite. The knight of infinite resignation, on the other hand, is no longer affected by what the princess does – he has completely renounced the finite. Whilst the knight of faith (such as Abraham) has renounced the finite also, he seems to believe (absurdly) that the finite will nevertheless be returned to him. This he believes on 'the strength of the absurd' according to *de silentio* – this, according to him, means that one believes that what is humanly impossible can nonetheless occur; as Johannes states in the above extract, it is not believing in that that is logically impossible.

Furthermore, the knight of faith, although he must be ready to make the move of infinite resignation at any time, still takes pleasure in the finite – this is how he is able to resist the complacency of the knight of infinite resignation. Unlike the knight of infinite resignation,

'He drains in infinite resignation the deep sorrow of existence, he knows the bliss of infinity, he has felt the pain of renouncing everything, whatever is most precious in the world, and yet to him finitude tastes just as good as to one who has never known anything higher, for his remaining in the finite bore no trace of a stunted, anxious training, and he still has this sense of being secure to take pleasure in it, as though it were the most certain thing of all. And yet, and yet the whole earthly form he presents is a new creation of the strength of the absurd. He resigned everything infinitely, and then took everything back on the strength of the absurd. He is continually making the movement of infinity, but he makes it with such accuracy and poise that he is continually getting finitude out of it, and not for a second would one suspect anything else' (FT 70).

The first step of the so-called 'double movement', Johannes claims to be able to get his head around – he can understand the notion of infinite resignation – however, the second step, he cannot. This second step, he claims, 'dumbounds' him, and his 'brain reels' (FT 76). This explains why he cannot understand the real Abraham, but can understand those depicted in the 'Attunement' – these 'sub-Abrahams' appear to have made the movement of infinite resignation, given that they are all willing to give up Isaac in obedience with God's command, but none have made the 'additional step' that seems to be required for faith. Namely, none of these variations seem to believe that Isaac will be returned.

However, thinking about the knight of faith's 'movements' in this way presents an obvious problem: it requires that Abraham believes both that he will have to sacrifice Isaac (this is the move of infinite resignation), *and* that he will receive Isaac back. Perhaps this is why de silentio says that the belief is held 'on the strength of the absurd'; it requires that Abraham holds two inconsistent beliefs at the same time (see Schönbaumsfeld 2019).

To conclude that this renders Abraham's faith paradoxical is too quick, however. Firstly, we must question the reliability of the account itself. Recall that this account of Abraham's faith (as outlined above) is de silentio's – a self-proclaimed outsider to faith – so, may not be in line with Kierkegaard's own views about what faith requires. This is a complex matter, of which I cannot dedicate an appropriate length of discussion here; but, it is worth noting that de silentio may not have the appropriate authority to accurately describe the 'movements' that Abraham made when he was said to have possessed faith on Mount Moriah. That is, it is important to bear in mind that Johannes is merely an outsider to faith, 'looking in' so to speak – so, he can only report what he believes went on in the Abraham story from that 'outsider' perspective.<sup>84</sup>

The fact that it is tricky to answer the question concerning de silentio's reliability, however, does not necessarily mean that we are stuck with the paradox of Abraham's seemingly inconsistent beliefs. A second possibility – and a perhaps smoother way out of the problem – is presented by Schönbaumsfeld in her paper, 'The aesthetic as mirror of faith in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*'. One of the core claims of this paper, is that we ought *not* to espouse the 'linear' model of faith that de silentio seems to be providing readers with (by means of this idea of a 'double movement'). The two 'movements' which de silentio thinks he has identified in the progression to faith may not be two separable and distinct movements; rather, these so-called movements are aspects of a whole attitude which the knight of faith must take in light of his trial. Or, as Schönbaumsfeld herself describes it, the knight of faith must 'practice a form of spiritual discipline' akin to that which the aesthete also practices (Schönbaumsfeld 2019:1). As evidence for this view, Schönbaumsfeld draws attention to the ballet dancer metaphor in *FT*:

'It is supposed to be the most difficult feat for a ballet dancer to leap into a specific posture in such a way that he never once strains for the posture but in the very leap assumes the posture. Perhaps there is no ballet dancer who can do it – but this knight

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<sup>84</sup> It is interesting to note here, that – just as Abraham (in at least some ways) cannot be understood by outsiders to faith – we will recall that the aesthete (and what he does – i.e. his attempt to find meaning in sorrow, and to turn life into a work of art) is also not truly understood by 'outsiders'. This is another area of overlap between the portrayal of the aesthetic and the religious, and I will turn to these themes of 'communication' within aesthetic and religious trials in detail in section 4.4.

(of faith) does it. Most people live completely absorbed in worldly joys and sorrows; they are benchwarmers who do not take part in the dance. The knights of infinity are ballet dancers and have elevation. They make the upward movement and come down again (...) But every time they come down, they are unable to assume the posture immediately, they waver for a moment, and this wavering shows that they are aliens in the world. It is more or less conspicuous according to their skill, but even the most skilful of these knights cannot hide this wavering. One does not need to see them in the air; one needs only to see them the instant they touch or have touched the earth – and then one recognizes them. But to be able to come down in such a way that instantaneously one seems to stand and walk, to change the leap into life into walking, absolutely to express the sublime in the pedestrian – only that the knight can do it, and this is the one and only marvel' (FT 41).

In drawing attention to this often-neglected extract from the book, Schönbaumsfeld explains how the knight of faith is similar to the ballet dancer above who is able to land in the right way, due to the fact that they have launched themselves ('leaped') in the right way. As she describes:

'(A) leap does not consist of two, discrete, linear movements – leaping up and then, as it were, jumping down again. Rather, how one lands is a function of how one leaps. So, if one leaps in the right way – with the right kind of elevation and one's centre of gravity in the right place – then one will be able to land without a wobble, as does the knight of faith. If one leaps, on the other hand, only paying attention to one's elevation (...) and not to one's centre of gravity – that is to say, if one jumps up but with one's weight back – then one will not be able to assume one's landing position with ease. This shows that, right from the beginning, the knight of infinite resignation and the knight of faith do different things: they both leap, but in completely different ways' (Schönbaumsfeld 2019: 8).

This highlights the different perspectives and different attitudes which the knight of infinite resignation and the knight of faith take, without ascribing the knight of faith an inconsistent belief-pair, thus rendering faith paradoxical – and such a view is essential to avoid, unless one wants to end up attributing an irrational and incoherent account of faith to either Kierkegaard, or his pseudonymous author.

On Schönbaumsfeld's view, the two 'steps' which Johannes described (above), are in fact not distinct and separable from one another in a way in which step one occurs first, and then – at a later time – step two occurs; rather, they are elements of an attitude, or frame of mind, that the knight of faith possesses. The very 'starting point' of the knight of faith is different to the knight of

infinite resignation; he does not start out in the same place (mind frame) as the knight of infinite resignation, and then later add an additional step in order to become the knight of faith. Rather, the knight of faith has worked upon himself (this is the ‘spiritual discipline’ which Schönbaumsfeld refers to) in such a way that he is already a knight of faith by the time he is called upon by God. To return to the ballet dancer metaphor, the dancer who thinks that their leap consists of jumping up, and then coming back down again, will not achieve the same results as the dancer who understands that how they leave the ground in the first place (i.e. how they ‘leap’) will affect how they land. The second ballet dancer has presumably worked upon themselves and is continuing to do so, in order to make their transition back down to the ground as smooth as possible.

Schönbaumsfeld’s interpretation is also easily able to account for what appears to be going on in the ‘Attunement’. If we recall my discussion earlier in this section, a key point in ‘Attunement’ seemed to be that faith cannot *merely* be about obedience to God; as we saw by way of the various re-tellings of the Genesis story, a key part of what makes the Abraham of the bible ‘the father of faith’, is something relating to his attitude to the trial which he faced. All of the other ‘Abrahams’ in the ‘Attunement’ stories *in the end* went through with the sacrificing of Isaac, but de silentio suggested that none of these Abrahams would be as admirable as the Abraham of Genesis 22, and none of them can be said to possess genuine faith. I identified that what these ‘sub-Abrahams’ had in common is that at some point during the trial, their faith seemed to waver – they seemed to have doubts (in one way or another) about the command which they had been issued by God. A key element of the true father of faith’s trial on the other hand, appears to be the attitude which he takes to it – he never wavers in his faith – thus indicating, as Schönbaumsfeld identifies, the religious trial on this account has much to do with a spiritual disciplining of oneself. As she suggests, the starting point for the knight of faith is completely different to that of the knight of infinite resignation’s – hence the reason that the Abraham of the Bible succeeds in his trial and is said to have kept his faith in a way that the ‘sub-Abrahams’ cannot be said to. Cultivating the mind-frame and attitude that is ‘faith’ (which is in part, a lack of doubt with regards to what God asks of one) is itself part of the ‘trial’ – it is not something everyone will be able to achieve.

Additionally, for my purposes here, the interpretation from Schönbaumsfeld is very useful, due to the fact that it draws out the overlap that exists between the aesthete’s trial and the knight of faith’s trial. As we have seen from the last two sections (sections 4.1 & 4.2), the perspective which each of these individuals must take is crucial to ‘passing’ their respective trials; and, in turn, self-discipline is of upmost importance to maintaining this new perspective and attitude. Both the aesthete and the knight of faith must constantly work upon themselves and their frame of mind,

in order to ultimately succeed in their respective trials, and both must resist a resignation of sorts. In both instances, then, we might say that the trials of the aesthete and the knight of faith are psychological (at least in part) in their nature. As I hope to show in later sections, the results of each of these so-called trials are also very similar; that is, I will explore the ways in which both the aesthete and the knight of faith appear to endure an element of ‘silence’ or ‘inwardness’ as part of their respective trials, but also how undergoing these trials allows these individuals to avoid a crisis of value.

### 4.3 Everyday Trials

So, what exactly does the religious ‘trial’ amount to? Does one have to undergo a trial akin to Abraham’s in order to become a ‘knight of faith’ on Kierkegaard’s account? Is a ‘trial’ even a necessary component of Kierkegaard’s religious sphere of existence?

In this section, I will address each of these questions, with the aim of showing that the notion of ‘trial’ may be understood in a subtler way than we perhaps initially thought; that is, the notion of a ‘trial’ may not refer to one particular situation or moment in an individual’s life, such as Abraham’s trial on Mount Moriah. Rather, building upon Schönbaumsfeld’s interpretation, I will argue here that the religious trial, (and indeed the aesthetic trial also), is more of an ongoing practice and a continual development of the self. That is, I will argue that both the aesthetic life as a whole, and the religious life as a whole, are themselves psychological trials – (as opposed to the ‘trial’ being one distinctive moment within one’s life which can be pinpointed). Towards the end of this section, I will also be returning to the ‘therapy analogy’ discussed in Chapter One to aid my account here.

As hinted at in the previous discussion, Schönbaumsfeld’s explanation, and specifically the ‘Attunement’ section of *FT*, appears to imply that Abraham’s success (his lauding as the father of faith) is due to the *attitude* which he takes to his request from God. It is not so much the act of sacrificing Isaac itself which results in the success of the trial (otherwise, the other Abrahams of the ‘Attunement’ stories would surely also be appropriately deemed fathers of faith) – rather, it is something about the whole attitude with which Abraham approaches the trial which warrants the title ‘knight of faith’. Similarly, the success of the ballet dancer’s leap cannot be pinpointed as being due to one particular movement that he or she makes during the leap; rather, the success lies in how one departs the ground initially and presumably, how one keeps one’s poise during the leap itself (see section 4.2; Schönbaumsfeld 2019; *FT* 41). The leap is the whole process of rising,

descending, and landing – not one of these particular aspects alone is what we can properly call ‘the leap’.

Given this, one may think that a key message to be taken away from *FT*, is not that one ought to sacrifice one’s offspring should it be required by God. The true message about what it takes to be a knight of faith, then, is perhaps as Schönbaumsfeld sums up: one must be spiritually disciplined in the right way in order to properly be called a knight of faith, or the possessor of genuine faith. Becoming the knight of faith is not about following distinctive, separate steps in order to reach a particular end point; it is a process of continual self-development and disciplining of the mind.

Indeed, in addition to the clues found within ‘Attunement’, we also find the following hint in *FT* that there is a message to be heard with regards to the ‘everyday’ nature of the knight of faith’s ‘spiritual trial’:

‘The knights of infinite resignation are readily recognizable, their gait is gliding, bold. But those who wear the jewel of faith can easily disappoint, for their exterior bears a remarkable similarity to what infinite resignation itself as much as faith scorns, namely the *bourgeois* philistine. (...) As I said, I still haven’t found such a one; still, I can very well imagine him. Here he is. The acquaintance is struck, I am introduced. The moment I first set eyes on him I thrust him away, jump back, clasp my hands together and say half aloud: ‘Good God! Is this the person, is it really him? He looks just like a tax-gatherer.’ Yet it is indeed him. I come a little closer, watch the least movement in case some small, incongruous optical telegraphic message from the infinite should appear, a glance, an expression, a gesture, a sadness, a smile betraying the infinite incongruity with the finite. No! I examine him from top to toe, in case there should be some crack through which the infinite peeped out. No! he is solid through and through. His stance? Vigorous, it belongs altogether to a finitude (...) he belongs altogether to the world, no *petit bourgeois* belongs to it more. One detects nothing of the strangeness and superiority that mark the knight of the infinite. This man takes pleasure, takes part, in everything, and whenever one catches him occupied with something his engagement has the persistence of the worldly person whose soul is wrapped up in such things. He minds his affairs. To see him at them you would think he was some pen-pusher who had lost his soul to Italian book-keeping, so attentive to detail is he. He takes a holiday on Sundays. He goes to church. No heavenly glance or any other sign of the incommensurable betrays him; if one didn’t know him it would be impossible to set him apart from the rest of the crowd (...)’ (*FT*67-8).

Here, we have an example of what ‘everyday faith’ might look like. There is nothing that marks out this knight of faith amongst his peers; there is no outward mark that signifies that he possesses genuine faith – (this also demonstrates the potential ‘invisibility of faith’). This lends support to the suggestion that what makes this man a knight of faith is his attitude and disciplined mind; we can say of the man in the above passage that he is spiritually disciplined in the right way, so that he has resisted the temptation of infinite resignation. Again, it is the tax-gatherer’s attitude and positive spiritual disciplining that makes him the knight of faith; there is no discrete and singular event which one could properly call ‘the leap of faith’ – the so-called ‘leap’ is instead an ongoing movement (i.e. the practicing of an ongoing spiritual discipline).

So, perhaps the notion of a ‘trial’ in *FT* is subtler than it first appeared. Whilst we are presented with one obvious way in which a religious trial might be encountered, via the figure of Abraham and his test of faith; the above extract demonstrates that the notion of a trial of faith underpins the book as a whole in some less obvious and less dramatic ways. The example of Abraham’s trial specifically is employed by de silentio as it *exaggerates* the features of a religious trial and acts as a paradigm of such a notion. Aside from aiding readers to grasp this notion of a psychological trial though, there may be other reasons why de silentio has made a particular example of the Genesis 22 story. In the ‘Preface’ and the ‘Epilogue’ of the book, Johannes hints that the ‘price’ of faith needs to be inflated to counter-balance the fact that it has been so drastically cheapened in recent times. Faith has been made so easily accessible, he claims, that everyone thinks they possess it, viewing it merely as a point of departure, and not the ‘task of a lifetime’ as it once was (*FT* 41-3 & 145-7). Perhaps what he has done in order to assign faith its proper value then, is exaggerate the price of faith so much by deploying an examination of one of the most dramatic examples of a knight of faith, a true possessor of faith. But, as he suggests elsewhere, one can also imagine a knight of faith very dissimilar to Abraham in some ways; the knight of faith he describes in the above passage (‘the tax-gatherer’) seems to carry none of the anguish that Abraham does. Thus, the ‘outward features’ of the knight of faith and the ‘spiritual trial’ that he partakes in are largely unimportant; rather, what is going on ‘inwardly’ (i.e. psychologically) is significant.

These findings also square with my suggestions in earlier chapters that what Kierkegaard is intending to do with his portrayal of the existence spheres is to push them to their limits, so that readers can begin to see tensions and boundaries. Part of the purpose may be therapeutic; as I suggested in Chapter One, Kierkegaard (as analogous to the therapist) is attempting to dispel misconceptions which readers might have about the religious existence sphere (as is the case for the other two existence spheres), and perhaps also showing what the limits of committing to this way of life might be.

However, one can nonetheless take away important messages, and valuable lessons about how to provide life with narrative and value in ways that are still true to one's self, whilst still bearing these more extreme cases in mind (and the warning stories that they might come with). If we recall discussion from the previous chapter on the aesthetic, with regards to Kierkegaard's aesthetic existence sphere, I argued that a 'real-life' aesthete may not look or act much like 'the aesthete' of *E/O* (the character 'A') or 'Johannes the Seducer'. The importance, as with the religious existence, is with working upon oneself in the appropriate way. In the case of the aesthete, I argued that it was so that one could become the 'poet of chance' (Schönbaumsfeld's terminology 2010); that is, that one is able to use all of life's materials in the most resourceful way, and make life beautiful and valuable as a result. Like the knight of faith, this is largely about an attitude which one possesses to the various 'trials' and tribulations that life presents one with; I have argued here that in the case of the religious, these will be trials of faith, and in the case of the aesthetic, these will be existential trials. What both have in common, however, is that both are psychological trials, which require a particular disciplining of the mind if one is to complete it, and that at the core of both, is the overcoming of the temptation of resignation. As I am going to explore in the following section (section 4.4), both are also fundamentally solitary trials.

#### 4.4 Solitary Trials: Silence and Communication

In this section, I want to further develop this notion of the aesthetic and religious as types of trials, and explore some of the psychological effects that such trials seem to have on the respective individuals. My intention here is to show that, in contrast to the ethicist, the aesthete and the knight of faith both face problems of communication, and in many ways, must remain silent due to the very nature of their trials. Furthermore, I believe that considering these psychological effects will also demonstrate how both the aesthetic and the religious trials are fundamentally lone trials, which cannot be completed as a collective effort; this refers back to Climacus' idea that 'spiritual development is self-activity', and not an inherited, generational quality or activity (see *CUP* 308-9) – one must face either the religious or the existential trial as an individual.

Concerning the knight of faith's silence (i.e. Abraham's), I will mainly be focusing on 'Problema III' of *FT*, which is aptly entitled 'Was it ethically defensible of Abraham to conceal his purpose from Sarah, from Eleazar, from Isaac?' Having said this, although it is 'Problema III' that tackles the issue of Abraham's 'silence' over his trial head-on, this theme does seem present throughout the whole book. Mulhall convincingly makes a case for this point, as he points out that the theme of

silence is also present within the first two Problemata; within both of these sections, the fact that Abraham's task is inexpressible is pointed out on several occasions.<sup>85</sup> Tying the three Problemata together, Mulhall argues, is de silentio's understanding of universality:

'The ethical exemplifies the universal in two ways: first, its demands are exceptionless, made upon everyone at all times (Problema I); and second, they apply not only to one's outward behaviour but to one's inner life, and hence forbid any incommensurability between outer and inner – any aspect of interiority that could not find legitimate public articulation or realization (Problema II). Thought and language exemplify the universal in different, but related, senses: for nothing can be thought or said without the employment of concepts, general categories and acknowledging the logical relations between concepts; and anything thinkable or sayable must be intelligible to anyone capable of thought or speech' (Mulhall 2001: 357).

Furthermore, the themes connected to silence and communication also seem to feature prominently in (at least some of) the variations on the Abraham story in 'Attunement'. For instance, in one variation, Abraham throws himself to the ground and pleads God for forgiveness after having been willing to go through with the sacrifice; the fact that this Abraham *has* spoken here seems relevant, and appears to show precisely that he is not the true father of faith. In another of the variations, Abraham deceives Isaac into believing that he (Abraham) intended to murder him, in order to preserve Isaac's faith in God. What the 'sub-Abrahams' *do* say in each of these stories is important, and suggests that the concealment and silence of the real Abraham – the true father of faith – is a crucial part of Abraham's faith. Additionally, an essential part of these 'Attunement' stories was that Johannes claims to be able to understand each and every one of these Abrahams, but not the real Abraham. That is, each of the 'sub-Abrahams' can be explained, and can express themselves using language (which can be publicly understood) – the real Abraham, it seems, cannot do this and as a result is 'silent'.<sup>86</sup>

'Problema III' – which explicitly makes the theme of silence its central topic for discussion – begins by providing the following definition of the ethical: 'The ethical is as such the universal; as the universal it is in turn the disclosed' (FT 109). One must not hide their true intentions (thereby remaining in concealment), particularly from those whom one's intentions will affect. According

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<sup>85</sup> Of course, I do not take this to be the central theme/message of *FT*, given that I have already explored other key themes which I think are present within this work. Mulhall, on the other hand, seems to believe that there is something of central importance to the message that this theme of silence conveys.

<sup>86</sup> We might also add to this that the name 'Johannes de silentio' – which literally means 'John of silence' – does not seem to be an accident, and could be listed as a further indication that the theme of 'silence' in *FT* is a significant one.

to this definition of the ethical, Johannes tells us, if one were to remain in concealment (i.e. to remain silent), then one sins and remains in a state of temptation – one is only able to emerge from this state of temptation and sinfulness by disclosing themselves, by speaking (FT 109). I would argue that here, Johannes is picking up on a feature of the ethical as we tend to think of it; it seems fair to claim that (at least for the majority of the time) disclosure is required if one is said to behave in an ethical manner. As Taylor argues, ‘to remain silent and to refuse to express oneself in an honest and forthright way is to negate the very possibility of moral relationships. The ethical substance of a community depends upon honest self-expression amongst its members. In short, moral community is impossible without communication’ (Taylor 1981: 180). In order to be ethical, one must communicate their ‘inner’ motives and intentions; that is, one’s outer expressions and behaviours must reflect one’s true inner thoughts and feelings, provided that there is not some higher ethical reason for hiding one’s inner – in such a case, it seems it would be permissible not to fully disclose.

For the vast majority of cases however (i.e. excluding those in which silence serves some higher ethical goal), Taylor seems to present an intuitive picture of what is important to living ethically. Johannes himself also makes it clear that he has a particular formulation of the ethical in mind during this discussion of silence and concealment: ‘The Hegelian philosophy assumes that there is no justified concealment, no justified incommensurability. It is therefore consistent in its requirement of disclosure, but isn’t quite fair and square in wanting to regard Abraham as the father of faith and speak about faith’ (FT 109). So, if the Hegelian is to remain consistent, he must condemn Abraham as a murderer, and refuse to refer to him as the ‘father of faith’. As Mooney claims, Abraham does not remain silent in order to serve a ‘higher good’, his task does not have a ‘social aim’; but rather is the result of a private relationship with God:

‘Abraham cannot speak even if he so wills and he sets himself not *against* but devoutly with his God. Like the aesthetic hero, the knight of faith painfully conceals. But unlike this hero, the knight conceals for no social aim (such as saving another), nor as a voluntary project aimed at some transparently unintelligible good’ (Mooney 1991: 123).

In other words, there would not be so much of an insurmountable problem if Abraham was fulfilling some wider/higher ethical goal (as noted above, it seems that ethics can allow for silence in such cases) – but, of course, he is not. Thus, we cannot cash-out what Abraham is doing in any ethical terms.

Lippitt provides a useful elaboration on why Abrahams’s silence poses such a problem for the ethical (and particularly for the Hegelian conception of the ethical): because language is a public

sphere, in which shareable concepts are used by participants; thus, Abraham's inability to explain himself and his actions by using language is ethically problematic (Lippitt 2003: 87). Abraham remains concealed, and to stay concealed is to remain outside of the realm of ethics (at least according to the Hegelian conception) – this is because, as noted earlier, communication with one's wider community appears to be an essential component of the ethical life. Another way to express this would be to say that Abraham's inner does not match his outer; his outward behaviour around his loved ones before and during the journey to Mount Moriah fail to communicate his true intentions. He deceives Sarah and Isaac in the sense that although he does not technically lie to them, he withholds vital information from them – information which will dramatically affect their lives and wellbeing.

So, we can see a clear tension which religion may have with ethics. It is not necessarily clear what the correct answer to this apparent clash of duties is – or, indeed, if there *is* a correct answer – rather, the aim appears to be to highlight the fact that a tension exists, and that the ethical, defined in this particular way, has trouble accounting for Abraham and the faith that he displays. As de silentio points out, to not obey an ethical command is usually itself thought of as being the 'temptation'; but, the interesting thing about Abraham's case is that the ethical itself is seen as a temptation for him (FT 100). It is tempting to communicate, and to try and make oneself understood to one's loved ones. If Abraham is to complete his trial successfully, however, he must arguably resist such a temptation.

Now, further considering *why* Abraham does not speak, it seems like one obvious reason is that if he were to attempt to do so, he would surely sound like a madman; attempting to explain the nature of the task which he has been set by God to others around him would surely leave them questioning his sanity. Moreover, as Mooney notes in the extract above, perhaps *even if* Abraham wished to speak of his task to others, it might actually be the case that Abraham *cannot* speak – according to Mooney, Abraham '*painfully* conceals' (Mooney 1991: 123; my emphasis here). It is precisely this that distinguishes Abraham's silence from a 'demonic silence', which is actually the *choice* to remain hidden and silent, although one *could* in fact make one's intentions linguistically comprehensible (FT 121-3). Rather, his silence – according to de silentio – is a kind of 'divine silence' (FT 114), given that he is ultimately obeying God's command, and putting his trust in God.

Silence is not just a prominent theme in Kierkegaard's portrayal of the religious sphere of existence; it also appears to be a key feature of the aesthetic life. However, contra Taylor, (who argues that unlike Abraham, the aesthete's silence is *voluntary silence*), I will argue that the aesthete's silence is largely involuntary in a similar way to Abraham's silence (Taylor 1981: 171-2)

– or, to borrow Mooney’s terminology, the aesthete also must ‘painfully conceal’ (Mooney 1991: 123; see above).

As touched upon in the previous chapter – (Chapter Three) – Kierkegaard’s aesthete seems to be an individual defined by a ‘turn inwards’ to oneself, as opposed to being defined by his relationships with others, with the external – (the ethicist being defined primarily by the latter). Of course, Abraham (as the paradigm of the religious) does have an extremely important relationship with one external entity – namely, with God (hence, his silence is referred to as ‘divine’). In this sense, he is obviously different to the aesthete, who has no such relation. However, the result of this private relationship with God and the trial he has been set, is in some ways also best described as ‘a turn inwards’, due to the element of silence discussed here. Furthermore, the trial is a personal and deeply psychological trial, making it an isolating one; it seems that in order to succeed in his trial – to actually see it through – he must have faith in himself, as well as in God and God’s command. Both of these individuals, however, have to face their respective trials alone, as individuals. Only the aesthete himself can step into the role of ‘artist’, and find the best possible way to give his life a narrative; because the nature of the aesthete’s trial is existential, there is a solitary aspect to it – only he can find an appropriate way to give the various elements of his life value.

The aesthete’s ‘turn inwards’ or ‘silence’, on the other hand, is largely a result of his melancholic affliction. The relationship between Kierkegaard’s aesthete and his melancholy (amongst other features such as interest in his own suffering, an embodiment of Romantic attitudes) was explored in the previous chapter, and as Ferguson noted, a core feature of melancholy is its ‘incommunicability’ (Ferguson 1995: 4). Given that melancholy features heavily and persistently in the aesthete’s life, he becomes isolated from the external world, from his relationships with others. The aesthete cannot communicate the nature of his melancholy to others around him (in this sense, he is ‘silent’ given that he cannot communicate the true nature of his plight), hence he instead turns inwards. (A further result of this ‘turn inwards’ is the aesthete’s highly reflective nature – something which was also explored previously.) The following passage from the ‘Diapsalmata’ of *E/O* demonstrates the aesthete’s ‘incommunicable’ situation appropriately:

‘What is a poet? An unhappy man who hides deep anguish in his heart, but whose lips are so formed that when the sigh and cry pass through them, it sounds like lovely music. His fate is like that of those unfortunates who were slowly tortured by a gentle fire in Phalaris’s bull; their cries could not reach the tyrant’s ears to cause him dismay, to him they sounded like sweet music. And people flock around the poet and say: ‘Sing again

soon' – that is, 'May new sufferings torment your soul but your lips be fashioned as before, for the cry would only frighten us, but the music, that is blissful' (E/O 43).

Although the aesthete is here talking about 'the poet', it is clear that he significantly identifies with this figure; if one recalls the quotes from Chapter Three, it is undeniable that the aesthete thinks of himself in a similar way – as one whose plight is misunderstood by others.

The following extract is also especially illuminating with regards to the affinity that the aesthete perceives between himself and the poet:

'I struggle in vain. My foot slips. My life is still a poet's existence. What could be more unhappy? I am chosen; fate laughs at me when it suddenly shows me how everything I do to resist becomes an element in such an existence' (FT 53).

By 'plight', I'm here referring to the aesthete's persistent melancholy (noted above). This persistent melancholic mood shapes the aesthete's personality and life in an integral way; the aesthete, like the poet in the above extract, cannot fully communicate as a result of his melancholy. The aesthete is not able to make himself fully understood to other individuals, thus he appears to suffer from a similar isolation to Abraham.

Whilst the aesthete does communicate with readers in his papers (in E/O), it still seems likely to be the case that he – and his existential intentions – would be misunderstood by others around him (and potentially even by his readers). He may be able to communicate via his papers, but this is not the same thing as successful communication of his trial to other individuals. So, whilst the aesthete does speak in a certain sense of the word (unlike Abraham it seems), it still seems clear that much of the aesthete's life and his intentions remain concealed from others. As we can see from Johannes the Seducer – the ultimate schemer and deceiver – disclosure is definitely not a core principle of the aesthetic existence. In fact, in order for him to live artistically, it seems that some concealment is required, and perhaps even encouraged. De silentio makes the distinction between this requirement and the requirements of the ethical very clearly himself: '(...) aesthetics called for concealment and rewarded it. Ethics called for disclosure and punishment concealment' (FT 113).

So, the ethical existence very explicitly stands at odds with both the aesthetic and the religious in this regard. As I have hopefully demonstrated throughout this chapter, the aesthetic and the religious are very much solitary trials, and in order to succeed in these solitary trials, some concealment will be inevitable. To return to a quote from Johannes Climacus:

'The individual is without further ado supposed to be related to the development of the human spirit as a particular specimen to its kind, just as if spiritual development were something that one generation could bequeath to another; and if spirit were a character belonging to the race and not to the individual, a supposition which is self-contradictory, and ethically abominable. Spiritual development is self-activity; the spiritually developed individual takes his development with him when he dies. If an individual of a subsequent generation is to reach the same development he will have to attain it by means of his own activity, and he cannot be permitted to omit anything' (CUP 308-9).

Here, Climacus is referring to the religious as a 'self-activity', a task for each individual him or herself; it is not a trial which ultimately others can help you complete. This reflects the sentiments of de silentio also: 'When a person sets out on the tragic hero's admittedly hard path there are many who could lend him advice; but he who walks the narrow path of faith no one can advise, no one can understand' (FT 95). And, in a similar way, I think it is clear that no one can advise the aesthete with regards to his trial; if the aesthetic trial is an existential trial, as I have argued it to be in earlier sections here, then in addition to the fact that the aesthete cannot fully communicate (due to his sorrow), it also seems *essential* that his or trial is a lone one, because the task of making one's life artistic must by default be an individual one. For reasons demonstrated in this section, Climacus' statement above is not so true of the ethical; the ethical is very much a collective task, which – for the vast majority of the time – requires disclosure and communication.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I started to examine some of the overlap that exists between Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthetic sphere of existence and his portrayal of the religious existence sphere. I chose to focus on the idea that both of these existence spheres pose trials to the individual occupying them, due to the fact that there are many elements and intricacies of these respective trials which the aesthetic and the religious seem to share (simultaneously being features which demarcate them from the ethical sphere).

Exploring this particular overlap also anticipates my arguments in the next chapter. In Chapter Five, I will explore why I think the aesthetic and the religious spheres mirror each other in these interesting ways – i.e. the rationale that there may have been for depicting these two existence spheres in this particular way.

I have also shown here that whilst the aesthetic and the religious existence spheres are illustrated in a somewhat dramatic light in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works (particularly in *E/O* and *FT*), there are nonetheless some subtler messages about the 'everyday' nature of such trials to be taken away from these characterisations. Just as I argued in Chapter Three with regards to a more complicated (but ultimately more positive, less paradoxical) interpretation of the aesthetic sphere, I have demonstrated here how the same could be true of the religious trial. That is, both of the trials largely concern a disciplining of the mind and an overall attitude which one takes to life and the various situations that it presents one with; the aesthete and the knight of faith are presented as extreme caricatures in Kierkegaard's works, but the point is not that Kierkegaard's readers go away and behave exactly like 'A' or Abraham. The key messages for readers to take away are about how one can incorporate these aesthetic or religious aspects into their everyday lives; to prompt readers to examine their lives, and to help them find meaning.

## Chapter Five Christianity & Christendom: The importance of honesty & authenticity in relation to existential choice

### Introduction

Now that I have explored some of the overlap shared between Kierkegaard's aesthetic sphere and religious sphere, I will begin to consider what this might indicate. Given that there is so much overlap between these two existence spheres, one might be led to believe that this was intentional on Kierkegaard's part – or, even if not, that it might signify something of importance nevertheless. Given that I believe this to be true, here I will explore the idea that part of the reason that this is the case (i.e. that there is a large amount of overlap), is due to the fact that the aesthetic sphere can be interpreted as an alternative to the religious sphere for the atheist. That is, that the aesthetic offers a potential way of providing the individual with some of the same things that the knight of faith receives by partaking in his spiritual trial. Again, this supports my argument that the aesthetic (the attempt to live 'artistically') is a way to create one's own meaning and value once one has lost belief in objective values and the existence of God – this also links back to my argument from the previous chapter, where I claimed that the trial that the aesthete faces is an existential and spiritual one. Developing these arguments here will make the challenge that this raises to TI more explicit.

In this chapter, I will be drawing upon Kierkegaard's non-pseudonymous works for support; in particular, with reference to Kierkegaard's repeated call for honesty and authenticity about Christianity. Therefore, I will be using these findings to support my argument that it is better for the atheist to turn to honest and creative ways of giving his life meaning (i.e. via the aesthetic), rather than dishonestly adopting a Christian lifestyle – such an approach would be worryingly close to 'Christendom', which – as I will explore here – Kierkegaard was extremely critical of. I will also at times be returning to *FT* and *CUP* throughout this section, as I will be examining the idea that both of these works (along with others of Kierkegaard's works) were intended as a criticism of the religious attitudes and habits of Kierkegaard's own time, as well as exploring the well-

known notion of Kierkegaard's attack on 'Christendom' as a central purpose of Kierkegaard's oeuvre.<sup>87</sup>

## 5.1 Christendom vs. Christianity

I will begin my exploration here with an explanation of what is meant by Kierkegaard's use of the concept 'Christendom', before discussing the potential cause of Christendom – (which Kierkegaard believed to be widespread during his lifetime). Towards the end of this section, I will begin to anticipate the solution to Christendom that Kierkegaard envisions.

By 'Christendom', Kierkegaard was largely referring to the kind of 'Christianity' that many of his fellow Danes appeared to subscribe to at the time. I have put Christianity in scare-quotes here, given that Kierkegaard believed this *not* to be genuine Christianity, true faith – hence, he refers to it instead as 'Christendom'. This pseudo-Christianity is a kind of illusion, according to Kierkegaard; the people of his day would claim to be true Christians, or persons of (genuine) faith, but Kierkegaard believed that what the majority of them really possessed was just a shallow imitation of faith or Christianity.

In the previous chapter, I explored some of the conceptions of faith and Christianity (i.e. the notion of becoming a 'knight of faith') presented to readers in Kierkegaard's work. By focusing on the idea of a 'religious trial', a 'test of faith', it is clear from my exploration that becoming the knight of faith (possessing genuine faith) is no easy feat – rather, it requires serious commitment and a 'working upon oneself'. It probably comes as no surprise then, that Kierkegaard thought that the existence of these 'knights of faith' was extremely rare. (Although Kierkegaard does not use the term 'knight of faith' in his non-pseudonymous works, the idea here is similar; I use the title 'knight of faith' to refer to the genuine Christian, the true possessor of faith.)

The following extracts taken from Kierkegaard's non-pseudonymous, aptly-named, *Attack Upon Christendom* make his sentiments on this matter very clear:

'when the *doctrine* which is preached as God's Word is different from God's Word for the fact that it is not the same, nor the opposite, but neither one thing nor the other, which is precisely what is most contrary to Christianity and to God's Word (...) when the state of the case is this – and then, privately aware of it, people make as if nothing were

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<sup>87</sup> For instance, Green (1998) claims this to be the first, most 'obvious' 'layer' of *FT*'s messages.

the matter: is this then Christian worship, or is it treating God as a fool, treating Him as a fool by such official worship, perhaps with the notion that, if only we call this Christianity, we can get away with it, by preachifying this at Him every Sunday we can make Him believe that this is Christianity' (AUC 26).

It is evident here that Kierkegaard clearly thought there to be a gap between what the people of his day called 'Christianity', or would refer to as 'Christianity' – (by appealing to their participation in certain religious activities, attendance at church, recital of the appropriate doctrines, and so forth) – and *genuine* Christianity. Later, he reiterates these feelings about the state of 'Christianity' with the following scathing remarks, this time explicitly referring to it as an illusion:

'What we have before us is not Christianity but a prodigious illusion, and the people are not pagans but live in blissful conceit that they are Christians. So if in this situation Christianity is to be introduced, first of all the illusion must be disposed of' (AUC 97).

So, the aim here is clear: what Kierkegaard wants from his readers (those who participate in the illusion of Christendom), is a recognition of this type of 'Christianity' as an illusion, and then an attempt to move to a genuine form of Christianity. Later in this chapter I will explore what might be said about the individual who wants to dispose of Christendom, but seeks a viable alternative to religious existence altogether. For now, however, I will continue my exploration of what Christendom is on Kierkegaard's view, distinguishing it from 'true Christianity'.

## 5.2 The Roots of 'Christendom'

In this section, I will draw out the distinction between true faith (genuine Christianity) and Christendom further, and the precise complaints to be made about it, whilst simultaneously exploring the possible *reasons* behind such a widespread illusion.

I will begin this discussion by leaving Kierkegaard's non-pseudonymous work to one side for a moment, and return to *FT*, as many of the relevant themes are present there. As we will see, the book's 'Preface' and 'Epilogue' in particular provide clues about the problem taken with the so-called faith of the time, as well as an indication of who is to blame for such problems.

It is obvious right from the book's 'Preface' that Hegel and the 'Hegelians' (i.e. the subscribers to Hegel's philosophy) are an obvious target of *FT*, and Hegel's name crops up a number of times throughout the book. It is also clear that Kierkegaard blamed Hegel (at least in part) for the *pervasiveness* of this illusion of Christendom. Given that Hegelianism was the dominant

## Chapter Five Christianity & Christendom: The importance of honesty & authenticity in relation to existential choice

philosophy of Kierkegaard's time, a Hegelian conception of religion and religious ideas was fairly widespread. I will begin by exploring some of the complaints levelled at the Hegelians found within *FT*, before moving on to examine the supporting evidence in some of Kierkegaard's non-pseudonymous works. (Whilst the claims of *FT* are of course made under the name of Johannes de silentio, we will see later in this section that similar ideas are echoed both in other pseudonymous works, and some of the non-pseudonymous works, thereby strengthening the reliability of such claims.)

A key complaint made against Hegelian thought is that it has cheapened faith, by making it too easy. This is obvious in both *FT*'s 'Preface' and its 'Epilogue', where the Hegelians and their conception of faith are directly criticised and made a mockery of by de silentio. He opens the book with the following cutting remarks:

'Not just in commerce but in the world of ideas too our age is putting on a veritable clearance sale. Everything can be had so dirt cheap that one begins to wonder whether in the end anyone will want to make a bid. Every speculative score-keeper who conscientiously marks up the momentous march of modern philosophy, every lecturer, crammer, student, everyone on the outskirts of philosophy or at its centre is unwilling to stop with doubting everything. They all go further' (*FT* 41).

De silentio's use of economic imagery in this extract relates to the 'price' of faith and the idea that faith has been cheapened so that it is something that everyone can possess, as opposed to something which only a few (the 'spiritually rich' if you will) have been able to achieve. The result is that faith is no longer seen as an 'achievement' or anything special, because everyone believes they have it; the focus, Johannes says, is now on 'going further than faith' – for reasons that I will explain shortly, this is a clear jibe at the Hegelians.

We also see a return of this economic imagery in the book's 'Epilogue', thus stressing the importance of this complaint regarding the 'price' of faith; the book ends with de silentio's reinstatement of the same ideas and criticisms advanced in the 'Preface'. For instance, in the 'Epilogue', he cites a case of some spice merchants dumping some of their cargoes at sea, in order to bump up the price during a time when the spice market in Holland was a little slack. He then ponders whether something similar is needed in the world of spirit – in other words, whether we need to bump up the price of faith (*FT* 145). Perhaps in fact, the price of faith needs to be artificially inflated in order to expose the illusion of 'Christendom' – hence, the economic imagery of the 'Preface' and 'Epilogue' is a tactic employed by Johannes purposefully. This also hints at the suggestion that perhaps what de silentio has been doing throughout the whole book has been an

attempt to over-inflate the ‘price’ of faith; the ‘Preface’ presses a concern (that faith has been made cheap), and in the ‘Epilogue’, our pseudonymous editor appears to be offering a tentative suggestion to the problem himself. However, perhaps it is more than a ‘tentative’ suggestion; the use of the Genesis 22 story, and the focus on Abraham’s ‘anguish’, his ‘trial’, may be ways in which Johannes has already put these tactics of over-inflation into practice.<sup>88</sup> That is, perhaps he deliberately portrays this radical picture of what faith looks like in order to awaken people and their so-called ‘Christianity’ from slumber – the story of Abraham is intended to shock, in order to re-awaken people, and to get them to start examining their own commitment to the religious.

To return to the ‘Preface’, de silentio then mentions Descartes and the well-known ‘Cartesian method of doubt’; however, his criticism is not levelled at Descartes as such, because as he notes, Descartes himself had repeatedly insisted that he was ‘no doubter’ when it came to matters of faith (FT 41). Rather, the complaint is that *everyone* has now made it their duty to doubt *everything*: ‘Descartes has not cried ‘Fire!’ and made it everybody’s duty to doubt, for Descartes was a quiet and lonely thinker, not a bellowing street-watch; he was modest enough to allow that his method was important only for himself and sprang partly from his own earlier bungling with knowledge’ (FT 41-2). The perspective of *Mediations* is a first-person perspective; Descartes’ enquiry, in other words, is purely for himself – he does not intend it as a universal recommendation (see Lippitt 2003: 19). What everyone has done, though, is taken this on as if it were their duty to do so; doubting everything, in order to ‘go further’.

The Greeks on the other hand, de silentio notes, took doubt to be the task of a whole lifetime – and not a skill which one simply acquires in days or weeks. Nowadays, he complains, everyone *begins* with doubt, and then wants to go further (FT 42). The same, he says, is true of faith (i.e. doubt’s natural opposite):

‘Today nobody will stop with faith; they all go further. It would perhaps be rash to inquire where to (...) In those old days it was different. For then faith was the task of a whole lifetime, not a skill thought to be acquired in either days or weeks. When the old campaigner approached the end, had fought a good fight, and kept his faith, his heart

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<sup>88</sup> Note that this would also support my own argument that one of things that Kierkegaard wanted to do with his depiction of the existence spheres was to push each of these ways of life to the absolute limit, to really test the boundaries of each sphere in order to prove a point.

The fact that de silentio is perhaps purposely exaggerating the price of faith in order to respond to the ‘slumber’ of the time also helps to account for my argument regarding ‘everyday trials’ and ‘everyday faith’ in the previous chapter; de silentio has specifically chosen the Abraham story, but the real knight of faith might seem nothing like Abraham of the Bible – the underlying point is subtler than what it first appears to be.

was still young enough not to have forgotten the fear and trembling that disciplined his youth and which, although the grown man had mastered it, no man altogether outgrows (...) Where these venerable figures arrived our own age begins, in order to go further' (FT 42).

Although this particular extract was explored in the previous chapter, it is worth revisiting it here in this new context, regarding its relation to the Hegelians, and considering its meaning in further depth. It is obvious that de silentio's jibes here are aimed at the Hegelians, because he immediately goes on to refer to the 'System', being careful to distance himself from this way of thought and make it clear that he does not subscribe to the so-called 'System' (FT 42-3). As noted in Chapter One also, Hegel had presented faith as a mere preliminary to knowledge/philosophy, as a stage in the spirit's development which will eventually be superseded. A consequence of this is that the Hegelians have made faith too easy to possess (thus, 'cheapening' its value); everyone now begins with faith, (seeing it as something to be superseded – a mere 'step' on the way to knowledge) and then attempts to go further, when really, faith is the task of the lifetime – a journey which ought to be embarked upon with 'fear and trembling'.

Genuine faith – according to de silentio, and indeed, arguably according to Kierkegaard himself – is something which requires constant renewal and recommitment.<sup>89</sup> This fact is obvious throughout *FT*, but it is also apparent in other Kierkegaardian works. In the previous chapter, I argued that in order to face the religious (and the aesthetic) trial, a certain amount of courage and strength of spirit is required; whilst I suggested that the 'fear and trembling' and 'anguish' of Abraham may have been overinflated, it nonetheless remains the case that one needs inner strength to become the knight of faith.

In particular, Constantin Constantius (of *Repetition*), stresses this need for repetition and renewal with regards to both ethical and religious ways of life. Representative of the religious in this work, is the biblical figure Job, who loses his family, friends, and wealth, but is still able to retain faith in God; as a result, and in reward for his steadfast faith, Job ends up better off than he was before this test of faith. In this work too, as with *FT*, an emphasis is placed on the suffering and anguish of Job, with the notion of return also playing a key theme in the end; both Job and Abraham have their faith tested, and experience suffering and inner turmoil because of this, but in the end their commitment is rewarded and a return (regain) is experienced. So, clearly the themes of loss and

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<sup>89</sup> This also squares with Schönbaumsfeld's argument that the conception of faith found in *FT* reveals a 'spiritual disciplining' as crucial to the knight of faith's success – an interpretation which I also endorsed in the chapter prior to this one.

return (a regaining of something) are central within Kierkegaard's portrayal of the religious sphere of existence.<sup>90</sup> The idea here is that faith is not easy, and requires constant renewal and recommitment – to use de silentio's words, it is the 'task of a whole lifetime' (*FT* 42; see above).

A further concern with the Hegelian conception of faith is that it has over-conceptualised and over-intellectualised it, making religion a thoroughly systematic and entirely intellectual process, (and as noted above, also just a 'step' in the overall progression to knowledge, which is ultimately superseded). Not only has the notion of 'faith' been cheapened, it has also been made inauthentic by the Hegelians. This is evident in *FT* (including some of the extracts presented thus far in this chapter), and also in some of Kierkegaard's other works.

In particular, *CUP* stresses the importance of subjectivity, and the notion that one must *live* religiously; that is, Christianity is not just about knowing the doctrines, but in order to be truly Christian one must embrace a Christian way of living. As noted in Chapter One, this is partly what seemed to be meant by the notion that 'truth is subjectivity'; this was intended to refer to a particular kind of truth – namely, existential truth.

The following extract taken from *CUP* also seems to reiterate such concerns:

'(...) it is important that the reflection which is to determine what Christianity is should not become a learned and scholarly affair; for as soon as this happens we are committed to an approximation-process which can never be completed (...) The question of what Christianity is must therefore be raised, but not as a problem of learning or scholarship. Nor must it be formulated in a partisan manner, under the presupposition that Christianity is a philosophical doctrine (...) The question must therefore be asked with an eye solely to the existential' (*CUP* 331).

Climacus is clearly stating his opposition to a Hegelian approach to Christianity, even though he does not explicitly mention Hegel here; mistakes will arise if one only approaches questions concerning faith (particularly, as Climacus notes above, the question of what Christianity is) from a strictly philosophical, intellectual perspective. Again, there is an emphasis on the existential dimension here. Only when we approach Christianity with 'an eye to the existential', can we get

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<sup>90</sup> Also, as I have argued previously, these themes are also reflected within Kierkegaard's aesthetic sphere of existence. This is perhaps somewhat controversial, as in *Repetition*, an 'aesthetic repetition' does not seem to work. I think that this is true in a very literal sense, but what I have argued is that – as with faith – the aesthetic 'trial' is an ongoing process, in which one must 'renew' a certain attitude and 'spiritual disciplining' in order to live artistically.

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close to a genuine form of Christianity; to simply examine it from a scholarly perspective can only lead to inauthenticity.

Additionally, in *The Present Age* (a non-pseudonymous work), Kierkegaard complains of the 'passionlessness' of his age, contrasting it to the 'revolutionary age' which was full of passion and action (TPA 2010). In some ways, this seems to echo de silentio's claim that faith is the task of a lifetime, to be undertaken with 'fear and trembling', as 'fear and trembling' here seems to be meant as a kind of passion which is missing from 'the present age' (i.e. a passionless age). The Hegelians, by contrast, have made things into a matter of pure reflection and intellectualisation; for Hegel, philosophy was the highest discipline, believing there to be no interesting questions which it could not answer – hence, questions of religious significance are subsumed by philosophical enterprise. Again, this has connections to the idea that existence/life (regardless of whether it is religious or not) must be *lived* on Kierkegaard's conception – theory or doctrine is not enough for this. At some point, reflection must end, and we must start living and acting. As Climacus emphasises in *CUP* (see *CUP* 331 as quoted above), we must approach questions concerning Christianity with an 'eye to the existential'; Christianity cannot – and must not – become 'a learned scholarly affair'.

In the *FT*'s Epilogue, we find de silentio's repetition of the idea that 'faith must go further' on the Hegelian conception, along with the correction that faith is the highest passion:

'Faith is the highest passion in a human being. Many in every generation may have not come that far, but none comes further. Whether there are also many who do discover it in our own age I leave open. I can only refer to my own experience, that of one who makes no secret of the fact that he has far to go, yet without therefore wishing to deceive either himself or what is great by reducing this latter to triviality, to a children's disease which one must hope to get over as soon as possible. But life has tasks enough, even for one who fails to come as far as faith, and when he loves these honestly life won't be a waste either, even if he can never compare it with that of those who had a sense of the highest and grasped it. But anyone who comes to faith (...) won't remain at a standstill there' (FT 146).

The final sentence above, which refers to the ever-changing nature of faith, seems to refer to the aforementioned ideas about the constant re-commitment and repetition required for faith. That is, the goal is not to possess faith, and then once one has reached this 'level', one stays there, with little else to accomplish in this realm. Hence, there appears to be a non-linear relation which the true Christian will have with faith; although we cannot go further than faith, faith can be

tested, and it requires recommitment and ‘renewal’.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, the story of Abraham (and Job) shows us how his own faith was tested by God, and how he was able to prove it, consequently reaffirming his faith – thus, in a way, there has been a sort of ‘return’.

These ideas about the lack of passion in ‘the present age’ (i.e. Kierkegaard’s day), are also reflected in *AUC*, where he very directly states the following:

‘Christianity simply does not exist. If the human race has risen in rebellion against God and cast Christianity off from it or away from it, it would not have been nearly so dangerous as the knavishness of dozing away with Christianity by a false way of spreading it, making Christians of everybody and giving this activity the appearance of zeal for the spreading of the doctrine, scoffing at God by offering him thanks for bestowing His blessing upon the progress Christianity was thus making’ (*AUC* 35).

So, clearly it is the *complacency*, the passionlessness, that Kierkegaard has a problem with (the ‘dozing away’); this lack of passion also seems to be the reason that he asserts Christianity not to exist – they are not Christians in the true sense, according to Kierkegaard (recall the distinction made earlier between true Christianity and Christendom). Staying at a purely intellectual level of enquiry (and not an existential one) encourages this docility.

We are also reminded here of the idea discussed in the previous chapter: namely, that true religiosity is a self-activity, which requires much work – this being work that one must do for *oneself*. So, in many of Kierkegaard’s works – the pseudonymous and the non-pseudonymous included – we find the emphasis on Christianity as a task; merely being born a Christian is not enough. True faith cannot be passed down from one’s parents, or simply acquired in virtue of being Christened or baptized; one must properly take on the task of becoming a Christian for oneself, and start from the beginning. As I argued in the previous chapter, true faith is a continual process of disciplining oneself and consistently renewing one’s faith – there is no one, singular event which can properly be said to make one a ‘knight of faith’.

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<sup>91</sup> As I argued in the previous chapter, the *whole* of the religious existence (like the aesthetic existence) can be thought of as a trial, because of this. A religious trial (and likewise an aesthetic one) is not merely one distinctive test or act, but a continual requirement to renew and affirm faith – it is an ongoing process.

### 5.3 Better to be an honest atheist than an inauthentic Christian?

So, what is it that Kierkegaard actually wants from his readers? I will argue in this section, that in short, the answer is *honesty*. I will also argue that precisely because of his urge for honesty and authenticity, readers that cannot find God ought to find alternative ways of giving life meaning and narrative. I will reiterate here my core claims from Chapters Three and Four: that the attempt to live artistically and to make life as beautiful as possible might be a viable alternative to the religious life. Furthermore, I will demonstrate how the aesthetic existence is able to provide individuals with similar sorts of ‘materials’ (e.g. a sense of ‘selfhood’) as the religious does.

To pick up from where I left off in the above section, following the passage above in which Kierkegaard criticises the passionlessness of his age (in particular, with regards to Christianity), he then goes on to quite explicitly state what it is he is urging his readers to seek. In a section of the book entitled ‘What do I want?’, he answers the titular question, by straightforwardly stating: ‘Quite simply: I want honesty. (...) I am not a Christian severity as opposed to a Christian leniency. By no means. I am neither leniency nor severity. I am...a human honesty’ (AUC 37).

And again:

‘I want honesty. If that is what the human race or this generation wants, if it will honourably, honestly, openly, frankly, directly rebel against Christianity, if it will say to God, “We can but we will not subject ourselves to this power” – but note this must be done honourably, openly, frankly, directly – very well then, strange as it may seem, I am with them, for honesty is what I want, and wherever there is honesty I can take part’ (AUC 39).

There is no doubt then, that authenticity and honesty trump an insincere religiosity (this insincerity in religion being what Kierkegaard called ‘Christendom’, as previously discovered). So, although faith is referred to in the above *FT* passage as the ‘highest passion’, the point doesn’t seem to be that it is the highest, or only valuable existence sphere; it seems that for Kierkegaard, it is better to be an honest atheist, than to ‘doze away’ with Christianity. As I argued in the previous chapter, it seems plausible that, for the honest atheist, the aesthetic sphere might present a genuine existential option. This can be gleaned from the pseudonymous works, I think; but also, the above quotes taken from *AUC* (and much else that Kierkegaard has to say there) can be seen as support for this – he clearly takes more of an issue with a lack of passion and commitment, over an outright rejection of Christianity. It seems that if one were to honestly reject Christianity, this wouldn’t be so much of an issue for Kierkegaard – as he states above,

honesty is all that he is after. (The issue with Christendom – in part – being that it is insincere and docile.)

This also reveals an overlap, or co-existence, of Kierkegaard's intentions with regards to the strictly religious (generally non-pseudonymous) works, and his intentions in connection to the existence spheres (presented pseudonymously). It is perfectly consistent that he wanted to make certain claims about Christianity and the truthfulness of Christianity, *and* that he believed other forms of existence to be valuable alongside the religious – the quotes from *AUC* make this particularly clear. If one cannot honestly commit oneself to a life of faith and Christianity, it seems preferable to find meaning and value elsewhere, as opposed to going along with a 'docile' crowd and partaking in the illusion that is Christendom – to do so would not be to live authentically or truthfully. Instead, the atheist must face up to his situation honestly, and find his own solution (which the aesthete does through living 'artistically') if he is to avoid nihilistic despair. By attempting to make life beautiful, or into a work of art, the aesthete is able to gain some of the things that the knight of faith has back – namely, a meaningful narrative, value, and a way in which to define himself (whereas the knight of faith does this religiously, the aesthete of course does this artistically). Furthermore, the aesthete shows in *E/O* that he is able to resist the temptation of nihilism and total complacency, by opting to live artistically. The 'passionlessness' of *TPA* seems like a very real threat for the aesthete, but by committing to the aesthetic sphere of existence, he is able to choose his own values and narrative.

So, although one of Kierkegaard's aims was to 'introduce Christianity into Christendom' (see above; *AUC* 97), and to convert followers of the 'Christendom' illusion into genuine Christians, if another aim is honesty, then the reader who cannot truthfully become a genuine Christian must instead find another way of developing themselves spiritually. As I have shown throughout Chapters Three and Four, the aesthete is able to find existential meaning and develop a coherent sense of self by making life beautiful, and taking control of his situation.

This raises a significant challenge to TI, as the picture which TI presents is much simpler than that which I have provided here. In particular, TI seems to underestimate the importance that Kierkegaard put on honesty and finding a way to live authentically, alongside the presentation of a reductive account of the aesthetic sphere. According to TI, Kierkegaard simply aimed to reveal the religious way of life as the only valid way to live, without any qualifications or exceptions to this; in other words, they seem to argue that Kierkegaard is pushing *all* readers (regardless of their other beliefs) towards a religious existence. This does Kierkegaard a disservice, as the honest atheist will then find little of value within Kierkegaard's works if this is the case. Moreover, to

argue that the honest atheist must nonetheless attempt to ‘move into’ or ‘transition’ to the religious sphere of existence sits at odds with Kierkegaard’s demand for honesty (see *AUC* 39 in particular), and risks making Kierkegaard appear inconsistent with regards to his aims.

As I noted in Chapter Two, some proponents of TI will also appeal to, or take for granted in some cases, the fact that Kierkegaard was himself a man of faith as a reason for espousing the view that he wanted to push readers exclusively towards the religious sphere. However, to overlook the importance of honesty and the need to choose for *oneself* is a mistake; if one genuinely believes in the existence of God, then they should seek genuine Christianity (and dispose of Christendom), but for the individual who finds themselves on ‘a world stage without God’, they must find other ways to live with meaning and develop themselves existentially. As I also hope to have shown (most explicitly in Chapter Three), the aesthetic life is also able to successfully provide individuals with these life resources.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the distinction that Kierkegaard thought to exist between Christianity and Christendom (a mere imitation of the former, ultimately an illusion), the wide-spreadness of Christendom and the reasons for the wide-spreadness of such an illusion (i.e. largely due to a Hegelian approach to questions concerning religion). I also suggested here that the dangers of Christianity must be addressed, and that Kierkegaard’s readers are urged to examine their lives with scrutiny and honesty. If one cannot honestly and genuinely dedicate themselves to the religious sphere, and provided that one wants to avoid an existential crisis in which the self becomes fragmented and loses purpose, then one must find alternative ways of providing life with the things which the religious (in its genuine form) provides individuals with. As I have shown throughout the last few chapters, the aesthetic existence offers a viable way of doing so.

## Conclusion Thesis Summary

In this thesis, the core aim was to show that the current secondary literature regarding Kierkegaard's portrayal of the so-called 'existence spheres' does not accurately represent the complexity of the portrayal found within his works. At least, that this is true of the dominant accounts within the secondary literature; these accounts I have referred to throughout the thesis as 'Tiered Interpretations' (TI), on account of their hierachal approach to Kierkegaard's three existence spheres – as I have identified and explored such interpretations in the main body of the thesis, I do not see it as necessary to repeat here. Instead, I will briefly summarise the aims, and reiterate the intended scope of my project.

I hope to have shown that TI fails to capture the depiction of the existence spheres as found within Kierkegaard's corpus of works in three key ways. Firstly, in Chapters One and Two, I examined the literary style employed by Kierkegaard, and the literary devices implemented within his works regarding the existence spheres. I hope to have shown in those chapters that an analysis of Kierkegaard's methodology when presenting existential matters conflicts with the core claims of TI, and suggests that matters are more complicated than TI conveys. That is, an examination of the method Kierkegaard employed when it came to the existence spheres, as well as some of the claims made about the pseudonymous works, strongly suggest that Kierkegaard had more in mind than merely pushing the reader towards a religious existence. I suggested in Chapter One that there is a therapeutic aspect to be seen in Kierkegaard's works, but that the goal of the 'therapy' is not to guide readers towards a particular way of life, but instead to prompt them to make the choice for themselves. It was also in these early chapters that I defined my own approach to Kierkegaard's extensive corpus of works, and dealt with a potential problem (see Chapter Two).

Secondly, in Chapter Three, I began my examination of the existence spheres themselves, starting with the aesthetic sphere. The aesthetic sphere of existence is deemed as the lowest sphere according to TI, hence my reason for starting here. Throughout the chapter, I explored some of the common perceptions of the aesthetic sphere (in connection with this idea of it as the 'lowest sphere'), drawing upon some specific examples from the secondary literature where appropriate. There were several smaller points that I made throughout the chapter in response to TI, but there were two main points I that I made overall: firstly, that the aesthete is portrayed as an individual who seeks interest in a sorrowful/melancholy situation, and that in this way, he is portrayed as a type of Romanticist, (in contrast to a hedonist, who merely seeks pleasure and enjoyment); and secondly, that the aesthete is portrayed as an individual who is trying to turn life into a work of art

(and to find interest in life), due to a loss of objective values (including a belief in God). I have argued the second point to be the stronger here, and put more emphasis on this idea throughout the remainder of the thesis; however, it is still worth noting the close similarity of the aesthete to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Romanticist, and drawing the distinction between the seeking of interest (one of the aesthete's main concerns) and the seeking of pleasure (i.e. the kind of hedonist pursuit that TI sometimes mistakes the aesthete as concerned with). A combination of these two points, I concluded, leads to the revelation that the aesthetic can best be thought of as an alternative to a religious existence – I was also able to show how the aesthete can successfully do this, and how he can use the aesthetic as a way of attaining similar resources to that which the religious can provide individuals with.

In Chapters Four and Five, I examined Kierkegaard's portrayal of the religious sphere of existence, whilst drawing out an apparent overlap between this portrayal and the depiction of the previously-discussed aesthetic sphere. Part of my aim, and my (third) challenge to TI, in Chapter Four was to show how both the aesthetic and the religious existences can be thought of as 'spiritual' or 'existential' 'trials', in the sense that both appear (in part) to be motivated by worries about resignation/nihilism, and both can be understood as attempts to give life meaning in the face of such worries. Alongside this, I also believe myself to have shown that both 'A' of *E/OI* and the 'knight of faith' figure in *FT* successfully overcome the fates of resignation/nihilism, (in contrast to figures depicted in those respective works who were not able to do so). This acts as a challenge to TI primarily due to the fact that it reveals the aesthetic and the religious to be closer in likeness than proponents of said interpretation argue. More specifically, it reveals that the aesthetic existence is much more than either just an arbitrary attempt to make life enjoyable, or a failure; I have shown that the aesthete is in fact depicted as being able to provide his life with similar materials to the religious individual in Kierkegaard's works, and that in many respects, both individuals are motivated by similar concerns.

Perhaps more straightforwardly, the overlap which I examined in Chapter Four also reveals that the hierachal structure that TI presents with regards to the existence spheres is much too simple – the picture that we are given as readers is much more complex than that which TI conveys.

Chapter Five built upon this interpretation, by considering other claims that can be found regarding the religious, and the state of Christianity, within Kierkegaard's corpus. It was revealed through looking at some of the non-pseudonymous work that honesty regarding Christianity and faith is of vital importance to Kierkegaard. I was able to show here that this, along with evidence from the pseudonymous works, stands in clear tension with TI, as proponents of TI do not allow

for alternatives to the religious sphere – hence, the honest atheist, on this picture, must force themselves to live religiously (dishonestly).

To summarise, the three core ways in which I have advanced my challenge to TI are as follows: firstly, through an examination of the method employed by Kierkegaard when presenting the existence spheres; secondly, through an examination of the aesthetic sphere of existence; and thirdly, through an examination of the religious sphere of existence and Kierkegaard's comments on the nature of genuine faith/honesty, (partially by comparing to the findings regarding the aesthetic).

Stepping back from these three approaches to the challenge, on the whole, I hope to have successfully demonstrated that there are multiple messages and overlapping themes to be found within Kierkegaard's corpus (and his depiction of the three existence spheres specifically). (I have provided some examples of such messages and themes in the thesis itself; although this is of course not exhaustive – there have been other messages that Kierkegaard intended to convey to his readers, alongside those already identified here.)<sup>92</sup>

So, I believe that what this has shown is that the meaning and philosophical significance behind Kierkegaard's portrayal of the existence spheres can be maintained without the need to reduce it to one message ('one essence' to use the Wittgensteinian term). Thus, my interpretation is able to avoid some of the mistakes which commonly occur in the secondary literature regarding this topic. As I discussed in Chapter Two, following Schönbaumsfeld's interpretation, I think there are two common mistakes made with regards to this: firstly, the reduction of Kierkegaard's works to one 'essence' or purpose (namely, a religious purpose); and secondly, the perception of Kierkegaard's works as ultimately so fragmented that, although they might be regarded as a 'literary masterpiece', they cannot be said to have any real philosophical significance. (TI, as I have previously identified, falls into the former category: the core message, on this view, is to push the reader (all readers) towards the religious sphere of existence; any other messages of Kierkegaard's are side-lined, or argued to eventually feed into this core message/intention.)

My interpretation is able to avoid both of these; I have argued that it is true that Kierkegaard successfully conveys certain messages of philosophical and existential importance and that there

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<sup>92</sup> For instance, I have not dedicated extensive discussion to the ethical sphere of existence in my thesis, mainly due to the fact that I think it has less relevance to my project here and its specific aims in challenging TI than the existence spheres which I have focused on. This would nonetheless be an interesting topic to look into, and I think it will undoubtedly be the case that Kierkegaard had certain messages and aims in mind regarding the depiction of this sphere.

are some prominent themes which crop up again and again within his production, but that this is a very complex matter (i.e. these messages and themes cannot be reduced to one overarching message/theme – to attempt to do so would be a mistake). This has allowed me to acknowledge the complexity of Kierkegaard's existence spheres as readers find them presented in the pseudonymous works, whilst identifying that there are meaningful themes and messages contained within these works, and that there is a genuine existential choice to be made. Therefore, not only have I challenged TI, I have also been able to avoid the opposite (equally worrying, but perhaps less prominent) error mentioned above, as I have shown throughout the thesis that Kierkegaard's works are certainly more than a literary achievement, and that there is much of philosophical significance to be found in them.

Furthermore, as previously noted, I also hope to have shown the philosophical significance of Kierkegaard's works in a more secular, 21<sup>st</sup> Century, thus showing how the atheist may be able to take something of philosophical importance away from Kierkegaard's works. As argued, it is a mistake to view Kierkegaard as just a religious thinker/philosopher; whilst his works of course have this religious significance, I hope to have shown that their significance and impact is even more far-reaching than this.

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