I SHALL ATTEMPT TO EXPLAIN WHY, according to Kierkegaard, we have to adopt the religious mode of existence in order to find fulfillment. We need to understand why self-development cannot come to fruition at the ethical stage. In this chapter, we will see that for Kierkegaard a relationship to God is the only secure foundation of ethics. I begin with a description of the religious stage.

THE RELIGIOUS STAGE

The biblical story of Abraham depicts the ordeal of having to throw into question the ethical for the religious. Abraham is asked to kill his son, and has to will himself to believe in the face of uncertainty. As Kierkegaard writes, "He destroys his happiness in the world in order to have his happiness with God—and now if he has misunderstood God—where shall he turn?"

The main theme in these stories is loss and recovery. The religious stage recovers, in fact, redoubles, what has been lost. In Kierkegaard’s thought experiments, we have seen what it means to live by pleasure and commitment. Yet, there is an emptiness that haunts us—the loss—and fulfillment is what is hoped to be recovered in the religious stage, the redoubling. Johannes de Silentio, the pseudonym used to write Fear and Trembling, provides us with the following example of Kierkegaard’s religious writings:

When the child has grown big and is to be weaned, the mother virginally conceals her breast, and then the child no longer has a mother. How fortunate the child who has not lost his mother in some other way!... When the child is to be weaned, the mother, too, is not without sorrow, because she and the child are more and more to be separated, because the child who first lay under her heart and later rested upon her breast will never again be so close. So they grieve together the brief sorrow. How fortunate the one who kept the child so close and did not need to grieve any more?

Kierkegaard writes, however, “Separation forced its way in everywhere to bring pain and unrest, but there is rest!” The rest is gained through a special relationship to knowledge, which Kierkegaard calls “faith.” Johannes de
Silentio remarks, "But Abraham had faith, and therefore he was young, for he who always hopes for the best grows old and is deceived by life, and he who is always prepared for the worst grows old prematurely, but he who has faith—he preserves the eternal youth." 4 For Kierkegaard, faith yields belonging.

According to Johannes de Silentio some types of knowledge are yielded by human reason, but faith is the best response to that which is absurd. Johannes sees (instrumental) reason as that which will deny metaphysical truth, "in worldly shrewdness, in petty calculation, in paltriness and meanness, in everything that can make man's divine origin doubtful." 5 Given the despair experienced during our self-becoming, we do indeed have little reason to believe we have a relationship to a benevolent God. Yet, he writes, "The deeper natures never forget themselves and never become anything other than what they were." 6

The religious stage does not annul the ethical mode of existence but transfigures it. The ethical took the love of the aesthete and perfected it in marriage. So the process goes on. Johannes de Silentio says:

His love for that princess would become for him the expression of an eternal love, would assume a religious character, would be transfigured into a love of the eternal being, which true enough denied the fulfilment but nevertheless did reconcile him once more in the eternal consciousness of its validity in an eternal form that no actuality can take away from him. 7

The aesthetic experience of love becomes a commitment, which is then abstracted from the world unto the "eternal being." Love is retained yet again transfigured.

The way to achieve a relation to truth qua truth, and fulfill ourselves, is through faith. At times faith is characterized as the paradox that the single individual is higher than the universal, that is, the ethical. 8 For example, in the story of Abraham there is what Kierkegaard calls a teleological suspension of the ethical. Put simply, we have to suspend the ethical (Abraham has to kill his son) for God. The point is not a literal one, in that we have to be unethical to achieve the religious. The moral of the story is twofold. There is the incipient idea of sacrificing worldly things—a son—for something above the world. But more crucially, the story of Abraham is a lesson in faith.

When Abraham is asked to sacrifice his son, he is asked to do something absurd. To have faith then is to act in the midst of the absurd. To believe that life makes sense is to have faith when, perhaps, there does not seem any good reason for doing so. "God is a friend of order," 9 as Anti-Climacus says. Faith is termed by Kierkegaard as a passion that allows us to place ourselves "in absolute relation to the absolute." 10

Faith affirms the inner will over the outer circumstances. As in the case of Abraham, the outer circumstances seemed absurd. Johannes de Silentio writes: "But faith is the paradox that interiority is higher than exteriority." 11 Faith has
The God-Relationship

more to do with perception than with any actual state of affairs. If we view the same situation through faith it appears in a different light than if we do not. Thus, when the exterior world seems impossible, faith changes this perception by affirming the interior will or vision over the exterior circumstance.

Also, there is a change in our relationship to time. Kierkegaard remarks, "There is still one thing of which the simplest and most profound person must, if he talks about it, talk mysteriously—that is: time." We may wish to recall that the aesthete exists by the moment alone. At the aesthetic stage we could be said to be egoistic. Conversely, the ethical person is committed to what goes beyond the here and now. With the ethical there is the commitment to others. The religious brings us back to the moment when we have to take a leap of faith.

In *Philosophical Fragments*, Johannes Climacus, another pseudonym, engages the philosophical tradition more than in any other of Kierkegaard's works. He writes of the moment at length:

> If the moment is posited, the paradox is there, for in its most abbreviated form the paradox can be called the moment. Through the moment, the learner becomes untruth; the person who knew himself becomes confused about himself and instead of self-knowledge he acquires the consciousness of sin etc., for just as soon as we assume the moment, everything goes by itself...all offence is in its essence a misunderstanding of the moment, since it is indeed offence at the paradox, and the paradox is the moment.  

Johannes Climacus writes, "But such a being that nevertheless is a non-being is possibility, and a being that is being is indeed actual being or actuality, and the change of coming into existence is the transition from possibility to actuality."

What becomes actual with regards to our selves, occurs in freedom, and can be traced back to free choice. "All coming into existence is actuality; the transition takes place in freedom. No coming into existence is necessity..." We return to the moment in the religious by making a choice in the now.

Furthermore, in the religious, we also return to the egotistical. As Johannes de Silentio remarks:

> The knight of faith has simply and solely himself, and therein lies the dreadfulness...the knight of faith, who in the loneliness of the universe never hears another human voice but walks alone with his dreadful responsibility. The knight of faith is assigned solely to himself; he feels the pain of being unable to make himself understandable to others..."

One thing that is brought out in the story of Job more clearly perhaps is the consequence of faith, which Kierkegaard terms "repetition." For the Greeks, truth was a matter of recollection, remembering something forgotten. Whereas recollection moves backwards, repetition moves forward. Constantin Constantius, the pseudonym used to write another of Kierkegaard's religious works, *Repetition*, writes:
He alone is truly happy who is not deluded into thinking that the repetition should be something new; for then one grows weary of it... He who wills repetition is a man, and the more emphatically he is able to realize it, the more profound a human being he is. But he who does not grasp that life is a repetition and that this is the beauty of life has pronounced his own verdict and deserves nothing better than what will happen to him anyway—he will perish...it will be manifest whether one has the courage to understand that life is a repetition and has the desire to rejoice in it.

This brings to mind process ontologies, where there is talk of the constant repetition of day and night, summer and winter, and so on. At one point, Constantin Constantius goes as far as to speak of repetition in metaphysical terms: "If God himself had not willed repetition, the world would not have come into being...the world continues, and it continues because it is in repetition." Repetition is also linked to actuality, and the person who wills it is said to be "mature in earnestness." At one point, repetition is referred to as "transcendence." It is fair to say, I think, that Kierkegaard uses the word repetition in more than one way; the important thing is to identify the canonical meaning.

We can move from seeing repetition metaphysically, as a feature of the world itself, to viewing it ethically, as a description of human development. As a rule, however, repetition is a category applicable to human beings. Repetition is deemed a task for freedom, which, in Kierkegaard's terms, only humans possess. Repetition lies in recovering ourselves. This recovery of ourselves occurs at the religious stage. Hence, Kierkegaard writes, "Repetition progresses along this path until it signifies atonement, which is the most profound expression of repetition."

The story of Job serves to illuminate human development, and as such to illustrate repetition. To recall the story, Job has everything taken away from him by God. Job is made to suffer. "This category, ordeal, is not aesthetic, ethical, or dogmatic—it is altogether transcendent." Thus Kierkegaard says, "Repetition remains a religious category...Eternity is indeed the true repetition in which history comes to an end and all things are explained."

The story of Job is a metaphor for human development: innocence put to an ordeal. The regaining of what was lost, ourselves, signifies a repetition. Job does not just get back what was taken from him, he gets it back doubled. Similarly, Kierkegaard wants to maintain that when we leave the aesthetic life, we get everything back doubled. In short, the salvation of faith gives us more than we could ever hope for as aesthetes.

Constantin Constantius writes: "A poet's life begins in conflict with all life. The point is to find reassurance, for he must always lose the first conflict, and if he wants to win immediately, then he is unjustified." The final stage is the religious when we gain a special relationship to knowledge. Under a pseudonym, Kierkegaard writes of the result of faith:
I am myself again. This "self" that someone else would not pick up off the street I have once again. The split that was in my being is healed; I am unified again. The anxieties of sympathy that were sustained and nourished by my pride are no longer there to disintegrate and disrupt. Is there not, then, a repetition? Did I not get everything double?" The term we can use is "redoubling."

Hitherto, we have spoken of terms such as "the sudden," "despair," "anxiety," and so on. These terms all suggest an ordeal, a break in continuity. In terms of development, we could envision a person who lives for momentary pleasure or relief, such as a drug addict (the ideal Freudian child), who at a certain point reaches such despair as to cause a break of some kind in this mode of existing. As we find written in the Psalms, "But God will break you down forever; He will snatch you up, and tear you away from your tent, And uproot you from the land of the living."

According to Kierkegaard, it is when we have reached the rock bottom depths of our being that we undergo the critical ordeal. "Here only repetition of the spirit is possible, even though it is never so perfect in time as in eternity, which is the true repetition...I am born to myself...the one who is in labour cannot give birth." We are born, and then we have to become ourselves. By saying we have become ourselves, Kierkegaard wants to indicate the fruition of the teleology of the spirit. Kierkegaard's poetical treatment of human development is celebrated in these words:

Three cheers for the flight of thought, three cheers for the perils of life in service to the idea, three cheers for the hardships of battle, three cheers for the festive jubilation of victory, three cheers for the dance in the vortex of the infinite, three cheers for the cresting waves that hide me in the abyss, three cheers for the cresting waves that fling me above the stars!

The ordeal we have to go through to become ourselves could be understood as the hardships of battle. Human beings do not just require knowledge about this or that specific thing, but also a general understanding that sets in context all other activities we do; Kierkegaard thinks the only way to render the world truly intelligible is through faith. The entire movement is towards abstraction from the finite to the infinite. More specifically, there is a "God-relationship."

In the religious mode of existing, we attain a relationship to God by faith.

**Motivation**

According to Kierkegaard, the ethical mode of existence cannot put an end to despair. The religious mode of existing is the fulfilment of the human being. Kierkegaard writes, "There is a power in a human being that can defy the whole world." The power referred to is the eternal. He remarks:

Or can you think of anything more appalling than having it all end with the disintegration of your essence into a multiplicity, so that you actually became several, just as the unhappy demonic became a legion, and thus
you would have lost what is the most inward and holy in a human being, the binding power of the personality?[61]

The disintegration of self is one effect of a misrelation to ourselves, which may lead to various types of mental illness. For instance, in his own words, Kierkegaard calls depression a hysteria of the spirit.[35] Also, he offers a cursory analysis of insanity: "There is an absolute misrelation between what the understanding is capable of doing and the task enjoined. The insanity manifests this misrelation."[36]

Kierkegaard says that if there is one wish we could make for another it would be to enjoy freedom from confusion.[37] A parable used by Kierkegaard is that of a sailor who is on a changing sea, but looks to the unchanging sky. The sea is like the world, and we need something permanent—eternal—by which to fix our changing place. Kierkegaard says, "Time can neither substantiate nor refute it, because faith expects an eternity"[38] and "My expectancy was not in the world but in God."[40] The desire to achieve a relationship with God is juxtaposed to "the world."[41] Yet, he says, "The goal is God, and in this sense patience teaches trust in life, and probably its purpose is poor in attire, but inwardly it is glorious, faithful, and unswerving at all times."[42] By enjoying a relation to God we are given that very faith in life that allows us to live.

Faith is motivated by suffering. Kierkegaard urges those who feel despair to take solace in the story of Job, a narrative of one who overcame despair. Kierkegaard writes:

> Job faithfully accompanies him [the person in despair] and comforts him, not, to be sure, as if he had suffered once and for all what would never be suffered again, but comforts as someone who witnesses that the horror has been suffered, the horror has been experienced, the battle of despair has been fought to the glory of God, for his own rescue, for the benefit and joy of others.[43]

"Earthly craving" has to be abandoned, on Kierkegaard's model of development, to make way for the religious. The soul, however, is a contradiction, being composed of the temporal and eternal. (He claims that if there was no contradiction in the soul, we could live in harmony with the moment since, presumably, we would not need to strive for permanence.)[44]

Since the self orients itself toward the future, possibility, this always leaves room for uncertainty. "Not only did he lose himself who danced the dance of pleasure until the end, but also the one who slaved in worry's deliberations and in despair wrung his hands night and day."[48] So it is not only by remaining in the aesthetic mode of existing that we can never become ourselves, but we equally thwart ourselves by endless wallowing in despair.

If we live in anxiety over the past or future, we will be absent from the present. Health, as the cliché goes, lies in being able to dwell in the present. To dwell in the present is not to give way to a poet-existence, because even the ethical has to affirm its commitment to duty in the moment. (The ethical ideal must be actualized in the present.) Similarly, the religious stage requires patience to
deal with the present. "Patience has discovered the danger and the terror, but it also comforts: Today we shall do this, tomorrow that, God willing...And yet the purpose is not thereby destroyed; does it not become truly glorious only in this way!" The final goal, becoming ourselves, may seem like an overwhelming task, especially when we are in despair.

Kierkegaard maintains that despair is an error in the will (and thus a sin). Insofar as faith is an act of will, there is some burden put upon the suffering individual to help himself. He states that it is only in trying to be something we are not that we hinder joy. Despair is precisely the resulting condition of not being ourselves. If we were to speak of teleology with respect to the self, we would have to maintain that what we are is always in some sense present in the person.

Even though Kierkegaard says “Let youth wear the crown of rosebuds before they wither,” he still holds that it is not as if the thought of the eternal is absent from youth. He writes:

Do not make it prematurely old, lest it drink the bitterness of not being allowed to be young when we are young, and for a second time drink the bitterness of not having been allowed to be young when one was young...thought of the Creator is still youth’s most beautiful glory, is also a rosebud, it does not wither.

According to Kierkegaard, when we move from the aesthetic mode of existing to the more developed stages, the temporal “rosebuds” of pleasure wither, but the idea of the eternal remains. Youth is, according to Kierkegaard, the time of life when we experience most of our spiritual growth. In fact, Kierkegaard claims that the thought of truth, first conceived in youth, is what in the end becomes the saving grace of old age.

Kierkegaard’s philosophy is permeated with a sense of the importance of the individual will, which is set against losing ourselves in the crowd: non-authenticity. Yet, once we have achieved a God-relationship, through faith, there is recognition. According to Kierkegaard, we realize we are capable of nothing at all. There is surrender to God. “The highest is this: that a person is fully convinced that he himself is capable of nothing at all.” Again Kierkegaard says, “Thus man is a helpless creature, because all other understanding that makes him understand that he can help himself is but a misunderstanding, even though in the eyes of the world it is regarded as courageous...” At the height of the religious stage, we are brought to a point of acceptance. Recognizing that we are capable of nothing is co-extensive with acknowledging that God can do everything. By faith in God we are given the power to conquer ourselves, according to Kierkegaard. To conquer ourselves means conquering our desire in the world. The discipline of the self becomes part of our ethical duty.

At the religious stage we come to know ourselves essentially. We do not just know ourselves in relative terms (e.g., by our financial status or attractiveness scale), which always change, but we come to know our essential nature. Kierkegaard introduces the idea of a “first self” by which he wants to indicate the self defined in terms of relations.
When a person turns and faces himself in order to understand himself, he steps, as it were, in the way of the first self, halts that which was turned outward in hankering for and seeking after the surrounding world that is its object, and summons it back from the external. 53

Kierkegaard uses the word “hankering” on more than one occasion when speaking disparagingly of desiring things of the world. The first self is oriented toward the world; it manifests itself in a “hankering after women,” for example. The essential self knows God through knowing his need for God. 54 The first self is concerned with the external world, not the internal world.

Should it have no meaning for him that he is learning ever more and more to die to the world, to esteem less and less the external, what life gives and takes, what he himself is permitted to achieve in the external world, but to be all the more concerned about the internal, about an understanding with God... 55

We have not only the dichotomy that Kierkegaard sets up between temporality and the eternal but, alongside this, the dualism of the internal and external world. Kierkegaard writes:

A person is looking for peace, but there is change: day and night, summer and winter, life and death; a person is looking for peace, but there is change: fortune and misfortune, joy and sorrow; a person is looking for peace and consistency, but there is change... 56

The theme is recurring: An individual seeks peace from confusion, but he cannot find it in the external world and hence has to look internally, to God.

When we are oriented toward the world, we live by the values of the world, and so indulge in pride and cowardliness. Kierkegaard regards pride and cowardliness as the same thing, in that we are lost to the world of temporality. In pride we can think that we do not need God, and in cowardliness we can fail to take a resolution to overcome ourselves. The idea of attaining a reliance on God is thwarted by pride and cowardliness. It is through faith in God that one gets the power to conquer oneself (the “first self”). The aesthete has to conquer himself in order to commit himself to duty, and the religious must have the will to have faith in order to, paradoxically, surrender before God.

Kierkegaard holds that it is the struggle with truth that gives meaning to human existence: “But to venture the truth is what gives human life and the human situation pith and meaning, to venture is the fountainhead of inspiration, whereas probability is the sworn enemy of enthusiasm...” 57 Truth, for Kierkegaard, is to have faith in God. When we gain a relation to God through faith, it is not that God bestows knowledge upon the individual, in the sense of giving him more facts to carry around with him. Rather, the effect is therapeutic: we are transfigured by our relation to God. Kierkegaard remarks, “Or was it not
a victory that instead of receiving an explanation from God he was transfigured in God, and his transfiguration is this: to reflect the image of God.”

The religious mode of existing, in which we are transformed by faith in God, serves as a remedy to the enigma of being a self. Most notably, according to Kierkegaard, we achieve the fulfillment of self by the religious. The religious stage could be said to be where we achieve what Kierkegaard calls a “purity of heart,” which is the will to do and be good. The good is one thing, whereas the world is many things. As a consequence of attaining the religious we are able to overcome ourselves, live in the present, and be free from anxiety and despair. Anxiety persists until the point at which we attain the religious. We may wonder, however, why we should be ethical. If the entire idea is to escape temporality, why not just kill ourselves?

**God and Ethics**

I shall in the following draw upon what can be called Kierkegaard’s devotional works. Usually, the devotional works are written in the first person (rather than under a pseudonym), since they express Kierkegaard’s views directly. (Also, they aspire to reinforce the idea, for the reader, that there is a “total plan” to the edifice.)

Kierkegaard’s theory of human development does not, in the end, ask us to abandon the world (and ourselves), as that would not be ethical. At the religious stage, God provides the reason to be ethical. The story of Abraham is a parable, whose lesson is one of faith, and should not be read literally; we should not interpret it as meaning that to be religious one must prepare to be unethical. On the contrary, according to Kierkegaard, the reason we should be ethical is that it is God’s will. (God guarantees ethics.) Ethics is the very “home of existence.”

Even though Kierkegaard talks about dialectics and repetition, it is not to signify that we are to go through constant changes without end. That is to say, he sees an end to human development, and this end is the religious stage. It is the demonic who, on the other hand, face constant change and never escape repetition.

For illustrative purposes, Kierkegaard constructs imaginary personas that tend toward extremes. Examples of this would be his gender dialectics in which women represent those who live in immediacy, while men represent those who live in the temporal infinity of ideas. Kierkegaard uses womankind to represent the temporal world, and mankind to represent spirit. At times the personages seem close to his own self. It would, in fact, be fair to say that Kierkegaard is more present in his pseudonyms than in the first person narration of his devotional works.

Anyhow, the terror we experience prior to the religious phase is seen as the storm preceding the rainbow, the time when we get everything double. This final end of human development, which accrues in the religious stage, is Kierkegaard’s own hope for destination.

Since Kierkegaard’s ethics rest on his metaphysics, caring for others does not yield sufficient rewards to make it a good in itself. One way of grasping the
relation between the religious and the ethical is by examining Kierkegaard’s meditations on “love.”

He takes Christian love to be eternal, whereas other types of love, such as the affection between lovers, are seen as transient. "This is precisely its weakness and tragedy, whether it blossoms for an hour or for seventy years—it merely blossoms; but Christian love is eternal." Love between lovers bears the mark of temporality. Like all blossoms it dies. The love that is eternal he deems as Christian. The mark of Christian love, says Kierkegaard, is that it is free of preference. In what we might call earthly love, love is ruled by preferences. For instance, I like person X, for this or that reason, and do not like person Y for other similarly particular reasons.

Kierkegaard contrasts religious love with ephemeral, worldly love, which he considers a form of self-love. “True love is self-renunciation’s love. But what is self-renunciation? It is precisely to give up the present moment and the immediate.” Earthly love he takes to be a “rebellion” against what is Christian, insofar as its form of love is based upon inequalities and distinctions, just as all are made equal in the eyes of God, so too should each be loved equally.

We should have love for others simply because it is through love that we fulfill the law of God, which commands us to love our neighbour. In other words, in being ethical, we are carrying out the will of God. Kierkegaard writes:

> Worldly wisdom thinks that love is a relationship between man and man. Christianity teaches that love is a relationship between: man-God-man, that is, God is the middle term...For to love God is to love oneself in truth; to help another human being is to love God is to love another man; to be helped by another human being to love God is to be loved.

According to Kierkegaard, Christian love requires the “middle term” between man and man. In short, to love God is to love others, the one is manifested in the other; love of God is (supposed to be) evident in the love of others (and ourselves).

Kierkegaard, however, does not posit the human relationship to others as merely some distant effect mediated through our relationship to God. As he says:

> All through the ages everyone who has thought deeply over the nature of man has recognized in him this need for community...the cure is precisely to learn all over again the most important thing, to understand oneself in our longing for community.

These words may surprise the reader of Kierkegaard, in that they see the constant emphasis on individuality and being at odds with society (the public). Even though it is true that one must ultimately stand as an individual (before God), that is, alone, Kierkegaard does not see the need for community as a defect. Rather, he views community as having offered too little for the lonely,
and been too much in evidence for those who now seek solitude. The desire for community is an attempt to solve the problem of despair.

Yet, by resting truth on community standards, the spectre of relativism looms large. Kierkegaard states, "But the fact that he really loves the unseen shall be indicated precisely by this, that he loves the brother he sees. The more he loves the unseen, the more he will love the men he sees." The love of God, the unseen, is expressed through ethical actions, which are seen. Kierkegaard warns against loving just the unseen. In other words, Kierkegaard thinks that we should not think we can love God to the exclusion of the world.

To love, says Kierkegaard, is to come into an infinite debt. If we were to think about the idea of a debt, we could see how it gives us a purpose. When we have a debt, we have a task, and this is the ethical. It is worth emphasizing that for Kierkegaard ethics do not just pertain to relations with others, like modern ethics, but also, like ancient ethics, it has to do with ourselves. Hence, Kierkegaard remarks, "To build up by conquering oneself satisfies only love." The task can be seen to have two manifestations: to love others and to conquer ourselves. The relation to ourselves is played out in the ascetic side of Kierkegaard's thought where we have to abandon the temporal world for the eternal.

Kierkegaard asks what good it would be to gain the entire world and yet lose one's soul? The incipient idea is that perhaps there is some conflict between being a person of the world (e.g., in seeking fame and wealth) and the religious quest. Imagination also plays the same role as wishing, emblematized by the gambler. Wishing is temporal and earthly, and thus not aimed at achieving the eternal. Kierkegaard remarks that "earthly hope should be put to death" in order to achieve "true hope." Earthly hope is merely a "wishing" in Kierkegaard's lexicon, whereas hope worthy of the name is aimed at the eternal.

According to Kierkegaard, it is when wishing comes to an end that an experience of the religious can take its beginning. When wishing comes to an end, we enter a "strange land" of loss, as Abraham did when asked to sacrifice his child. A sufferer cannot find solace in the temporal world, so looks to the eternal for a cure. If we are to be crude in order to make the point that Kierkegaard himself arguably makes, we could say that when we fail to find lasting solace in the earthly comforts of, for example, alcohol, women, or money, we start to look away from what laymen call "the world." Kierkegaard openly states, "Commitment to the eternal is the only true salvation." He also uses phrases such as "healed by the eternal," "only the wish pains, while the eternal cures." The eternal could be said to be therapeutic insofar as it "cures" and "comforts." The faculties of imagination or wishing, however, always seek to keep us occupied thinking of new schemes, and thus he pejoratively terms them a cleverness, but nothing more.

Yet Kierkegaard, in Hegelian style, does not wholly eschew any perspective, even the temporal. He acknowledges that we, even when committed to the eternal, are not lifted out of the temporal world. The commitment rather lets us live our earthly life in earnestness, open to being healed by the eternal.
We fulfill our “eternal responsibility” in the ethical by being an authentic individual.76

What Kierkegaard calls “the greatest contradiction” is this: “he stands alone—by another’s help.”77 The contradiction lies in holding, first, that we stand alone, and second, and at the same time, with another’s help. The question that ensues is how we can be alone if we are being helped. The person who helps us in this way is referred to as a “spiritual midwife.” The best thing we can do for another, says Kierkegaard, is “to help him stand alone, to become himself, to become his own...inasmuch as it is every human being’s essential destiny to become free, independent, to become himself.”78 Similarly, the religious stage puts us in a better and more true relationship to the temporal world through the grace of God. Kierkegaard thinks of suicide, thus, as despair of salvation.79 And to despair is to abandon or deny God’s love.

There is a greater guide in life than imagination (of great import to the aesthete), namely, remorse. Remorse, says Kierkegaard, as well as repentance belong to the eternal in man. Remorse is oriented toward the past, so that we feel bad for this or that thing we have done or omitted doing, and is a call away from evil. Repentance, on the other hand, is aimed at the future, because we can think of the future as the place where we will have the opportunity to repent, and this leads us toward the good. Repentance and remorse are, thus, the two guides on our way to the love of God.80 In Kierkegaard’s own words: “The path is the striving soul’s continuant transformation.”81

One of the more obscure appendages to Kierkegaard’s meditation on love is a notion called “like-for-like.” Kierkegaard claims that God repeats all that man does and says. Recognizing there are many men doing many different things, it becomes apparent that God’s omnipresence and omnipotence allows the like-for-like. “For God is really the pure like-for-like, the pure rendition of how you yourself are.”82 We are never completely alone insofar as God is there, repeating whatever you do. Also, “The word of blessing or judgment which you express concerning someone else, God repeats; he says the same word about you, and this same word is blessing or judgment over you.”83 God commands ethics as his law. According to Kierkegaard, good action brings on further good and bad deeds engender more bad deeds: like-for-like. The like-for-like is like a metaphysical giving and receiving.

With the very trajectory of Kierkegaard’s thought toward the eternal, love becomes ontological. It is “the very ground of everything, exists before everything, and remains when everything is abolished.”84 Kierkegaard uses the word “love” as co-extensive with “God” here. Kierkegaard writes, “The only true object of a human being’s love is love, which is God, we therefore in a deeper sense are not an object at all, since he is himself love.”85 As Kierkegaard says:

God is indeed everything, and precisely by having no mine at all self-renunciation’s love wins God and wins everything...Only spiritual love has the courage to will to have no mine at all, the courage to abolish completely the distinction between mine and yours, and therefore it wins God—by losing its soul.86
By caring about ourselves, we put ourselves into an infinite debt, which means a complete surrendering to God, and an ethical life (through the man-God-man relationship). As is explained in the book of James, "You see that faith was working with [our] works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected." More precisely, as it says in John, "If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us." According to Kierkegaard, we must embrace the religious stage because it is the only sure foundation for ethics. In the next chapter I delve deeper into what knowledge really means for Kierkegaard.
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