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Kierkegaard on Knowledge
By
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Department of Philosophy
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August, 1994

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements
of the degree of Ph.D., Philosophy.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Professor Merold Westphal, of Fordham University made helpful criticisms of the manuscript, as did Professors Paul Müller and Arne Grøn, of The Theology Faculty of the University of Copenhagen. Many other individuals including Dr. Julia Watkin, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Tasmania and former Assistant Director of the Kierkegaard Library at the University of Copenhagen, Alastair Hannay, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Oslo, Bruce Kirmmse, Professor of History at Connecticut College, George Kline, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Bryn Mawr College and Robert L. Horn, Professor of Philosophy at Earlham College assisted either by commenting on parts of the manuscript, helping me with linguistic issues or helping generally in the formation of the ideas expressed in this thesis.

I would like to thank Ebba Mørkeberg of Frederiksværk, Denmark for her help with the translation of the many German quotations contained in the thesis and Christine Piety, of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and Stéphane Hogue, of Montréal, Québec for their work in connection with the preparation of the French abstract. Monsieur Hogue was also responsible for the final preparation of both the original and the revised manuscript and thus merits an extra acknowledgment.

I would also like to express my gratitude for the help given me by the staff of both the Theology Faculty of the University of Copenhagen and the Fulbright Commission office, Copenhagen. This help was crucial to me at many stages of my research.

This work would not have been possible had it not been for the generous financial support from the following institutions and individuals: McGill University, the Fulbright Commission, Dr. and Mrs. Walter C. Bauer of St. Louis, Missouri, Olivier Barrelet, of Bevaix, Switzerland and Paul

A. Bauer.

Special thanks must go, however, to Paul A. Bauer who read and commented on the entire thesis throughout the period of its production and whose help in the refinement of the views expressed therein was invaluable.

English Abstract

Almost no work has been done on the substance of Kierkegaard's epistemology. I argue, however, that knowledge plays a much more important role in Kierkegaard's thought than has traditionally been appreciated.

There are two basic types of knowledge, according to Kierkegaard: "objective knowledge" and "subjective knowledge." I argue that both types of knowledge are associated by Kierkegaard with "certainty" and may be defined as justified true mental representation (forestilling). I also argue, however, that the meaning of 'certainty,' 'justified' and 'true' is derivative of the object of knowledge. That is, I argue that Kierkegaard employs these expressions in both an objective and subjective sense and that the latter sense is not, as it has often been interpreted to be, subjectivist.

Finally, I argue that an appreciation of the substance of Kierkegaard's epistemology reveals that the charges of irrationalism which have often been made against him, are without foundation.

French Abstract

La recherche de l'essentiel de la théorie de la connaissance de Kierkegaard est pratiquement non-existante. Cependant, j'avance que, pour Kierkegaard, la connaissance joue un rôle beaucoup plus important qu'admis traditionnellement.

D'après Kierkegaard, il y a deux sortes de connaissances: "la connaissance objective" et "la connaissance subjective". Je prétends que Kierkegaard associe ces deux sortes de connaissances avec "la certitude" qui peut être définie comme l'exacte et légitime représentation mentale. Cependant, je prétends aussi que le sens des mots "certitude", "légitime" et "exacte" dérive de l'object de la connaissance. Donc, je maintiens que Kierkegaard utilise ces expressions dans un sens objectif comme dans un sens subjectif et que celui-ci n'est pas, comme souvent interprété, subjectiviste.

Finalement, je maintiens qu'une appréciation de l'essentiel de la théorie de la connaissance de Kierkegaard révèle que les accusations d'irrationalisme, souvent proférées contre lui, sont sans aucune base.

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INTRODUCTION

Kierkegaard is generally recognized as one of the most important thinkers of the nineteenth century. Very little scholarly work has been done, however, that is devoted specifically to determining the substance of Kierkegaard's epistemology. Among the thousands of articles written on Kierkegaard, only about a dozen are primarily concerned with his views on the nature of knowledge and there is at present only one book on this subject, Anton Hügli's Die Erkenntnis der Subjektivität und die Objektivität des Erkennens bei Søren Kierkegaard (Knowledge of Subjectivity and the Objectivity of Knowing in Søren Kierkegaard),¹ which has, unfortunately yet to be translated into English.²

¹Anton Hügli, Die Erkenntnis der Subjektivität und die Objektivität des Erkennens bei Søren Kierkegaard (Knowledge of Subjectivity and the Objectivity of Knowing in Søren Kierkegaard), Basler Beiträge zur Philosophie und ihrer Geschichte (Basel: Editio Academica, 1973).

²Cf. Jens Himmelstrup, Søren Kierkegaard. International Bibliografi (International Kierkegaard Bibliography) (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag/Arnold Busk, 1962); Aage Jørgensen, Søren Kierkegaard-litteratur, 1961-1970. En forløbig bibliografi (Literature on Søren Kierkegaard, 1961-1970: A Preliminary Bibliography) (Århus: Akademisk Boghandel, 1971); Aage Jørgensen, "Søren Kierkegaard-litteratur, 1971-1980" (Literature on Søren Kierkegaard, 1971-1980) Kierkegaardiana No. XII, 1982: 129-229; Francois Lapointe, Søren Kierkegaard and his Critics: An International Bibliography of Criticism (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980) and Aage Jørgensen and Stéphane Hogue, "Søren Kierkegaard Literature 1981-1991. A Bibliography," Kierkegaardiana No. 16, 1993: 166-239.

There is also a German dissertation, Martin Slotty's "Die Erkenntnislehre S. A. Kierkegaards" (The Epistemology of S. A. Kierkegaard), Friedrich-Alexanders-Universität

So little is understood about Kierkegaard's views on the nature of knowledge that prominent Kierkegaard scholars still debate such fundamental issues as whether, according to Kierkegaard, it is possible to know--in the sense of have propositional knowledge--that God became man in the person of Christ. A recent issue of Kierkegaardiana, the Danish journal devoted exclusively to publishing scholarly work on Kierkegaard, includes two articles which constitute a debate between the respective authors, Steven M. Emmanuel and Louis P. Pojman, on precisely this issue.³ Pojman defends the claim he made in The Logic of Subjectivity, that such knowledge is not only possible, on Kierkegaard's view, it provides the foundation for what he refers to as Kierkegaard's irrationality. Emmanuel contends, however, that this claim is inconsistent with Kierkegaard's secular epistemology as well as with his theology or "epistemology based entirely on Christian terms."⁴ Emmanuel argues that Christian knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, is not of the propositional sort, but is rather equivalent to a skill or practice, which, in this case is the ability to live a certain kind of life. Pojman responds, however, by citing Kierkegaard's claim that "knowing the truth follows as a matter of course from being the truth" (PC, 205/SV XII, 189)⁵ and that thus leading the right kind of life must give

Erlangen, 1915. This tremendously helpful work is not readily available, however, to most scholars.

³The articles are "Kierkegaard on Knowledge and Faith," by Stephen M. Emmanuel and "Kierkegaard's Epistemology," by Louis P. Pojman, Kierkegaardiana 15, 1991: 136-146 and 147-152 respectively.

⁴Emmanuel, op. cit. 79; cf. JP 3:3245/Pap. I A 94.

⁵The wording of this quotation comes from the Lowrie translation of Training in Christianity (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947) 201. I have used this translation because this is the one to which Pojman refers in his article.

rise to abstract or propositional knowledge, which is, in turn, knowledge of the truth.⁶

The dearth of scholarship devoted specifically to determining Kierkegaard's views on the nature of knowledge is explicable, in part, from the obstacle represented by the language in which he wrote.⁷ Unlike, for example, French and German, Danish is not an important language for scholarship, thus few scholars possess a knowledge of Danish that is sufficient to allow them to make detailed studies of Kierkegaard's texts in the original. Without such study, however, it is almost impossible to identify fundamental epistemological distinctions like the one between acquaintance knowledge and propositional knowledge, as they appear in Kierkegaard's works.

Epistemology is, however, one of the most important areas of philosophical study. A delineation of the views of a particular thinker on the nature of knowledge is often, if not always, a prerequisite for understanding his or her views on many other issues of philosophical significance. Kierkegaard is no exception to this rule. Kierkegaard's epistemology provides the framework for his position on the nature of religious belief, or faith (tro).

The form of the references to Kierkegaard's published works as well as to his journals and papers used throughout this work is more or less standard for secondary literature on Kierkegaard. That is, direct quotations will include a reference to Kierkegaard's works in parentheses immediately following the quotation. The first part of the reference will be to the relevant English translation and the second part will be to the corresponding Danish text. Complete information concerning the editions used and their corresponding abbreviations is contained in the bibliography.

⁶This passage is quoted by Pojman on page 150 of his article.

⁷Cf. Alastair Hannay, Kierkegaard. The Arguments of the Philosophers (London/New York: Routledge, 1982), 1.

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It is thus important that more scholarly work be done on the subject of Kierkegaard's epistemology. The present thesis represents a contribution to this scholarship and is intended primarily for Kierkegaard specialists rather than for philosophers or theologians more generally.

Historical Background.

It may strike one as peculiar to attribute such significance to the epistemology of a thinker who is often considered to be something of a skeptic.⁸ The prominence of epistemological concerns in Kierkegaard's authorship was noticed, however, as early as 1849 by both Hans Lassen Martensen in his Den Christelige Dogmatik (Christian Dogmatics),⁹ and by Rasmus Nielsen in his review of the views expressed in the writings of Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus as compared to those expressed by Martensen in his Dogmatik.¹⁰ That is, Nielsen argued that

⁸Cf., Richard Popkin, "Kierkegaard and Skepticism," Kierkegaard: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Josiah Thompson (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday [Anchor Paperback], 1972) 342-372; Terrence Penelhum, "Skepticism and Fideism," The Skeptical Tradition, ed. Myles Burnyeat (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) 287-318 and Slotty, op. cit. 19.

⁹Dr. H. Martensen, Den Christelige Dogmatik (Christian Dogmatics) (Copenhagen, 1849); cf. Robert L. Horn, Positivity and Dialectic: A Study of the Theological Method of Hans Lassen Martensen, diss. Union Theological Seminary (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1969) 262 and Niels Thulstrup, "Indledning Til Philosophiske Smuler" (Introduction to Philosophical Fragments), in Søren Kierkegaard, Philosophiske Smuler, Udgivet med Indledning og Kommentar af Niels Thulstrup (Philosophical Fragments, edited with and Introduction and Commentary by Niels Thulstrup), (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel, 1977) XLI.

¹⁰R. Nielsen, Mag. S. Kierkegaards "Johannes Climacus" og Dr. H. Martensens "Christelige Dogmatik" En undersøgende Anmeldelse af R. Nielsen, Professor i Philosophien, (Master

the issue around which both theology and philosophy revolved at the time was that of whether the truth of Christianity could be known objectively.¹¹ Nielsen chose to contrast Kierkegaard's position on this issue with that of Martensen not merely because the position expressed by Johannes Climacus was in direct opposition to that of Martensen, but also because it is a question with which Climacus--i.e., Kierkegaard--and Martensen were equally preoccupied.

I should explain at the outset that I will make no effort to place Kierkegaard's ideas in a historical context except, of course, to the extent that an understanding of this context is necessary in order properly to delineate the ideas themselves. It is not that I think this task is either uninteresting or philosophically irrelevant. The difficulty is that before more is known about the substance of Kierkegaard's epistemology any effort to place it in a historical context will be self-defeating. That is, such efforts would serve only to confuse the task of determining the substance of Kierkegaard's views by prematurely identifying, or contrasting, them with those of other thinkers.

It is important, however, that something be said concerning Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel and, in particular, to the Danish Hegelians. Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel has been the subject of heated philosophical debate.¹² The fact that much of Kierkegaard's

Søren Kierkegaard's "Johannes Climacus" and Dr. H. Martensen's Christian Dogmatics, A Critical Review by Professor of Philosophy, R. Nielsen) (Copenhagen, 1849).

¹¹Ibid. 4.

¹²Almost every German book on Kierkegaard addresses this issue at some point with Heinrich Schmidinger's Das Problem des Interesses und die Philosophie Søren Kierkegaards (The Problem of Interest and the Philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard), Symposion, Philosophische Schriftenreihe

terminology comes from Hegel complicates this issue and makes the task of understanding his views on almost any subject particularly problematic. It is thus important that the reader approach Kierkegaard with some appreciation for his concerns as they are distinguished from those of Hegel.

One of the most prominent Danish Kierkegaard scholars, Johannes Sløk, maintains that despite the fact that the terminology of Kierkegaard and Hegel is quite similar, a comparison of the views of these two thinkers is "not just a difficult, perhaps impossible task, it is a very misguided one."¹³ "Their thoughts," Sløk continues

have nothing to do with each other. Their intentions are completely different; their interests, their methods, their focus, everything is completely different. They are not two philosophers who had opposite thoughts on the same problem. They are two individuals who had completely different thoughts on completely different problems. . . . The difference between them is categorical. Hegel's categories are the world and the idea and Kierkegaard's categories are man and God.¹⁴

(Freiburg/München: Verlag Karl Alber, 1983) offering what may be the best treatment.

Among the works in English which examine Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel or to the tradition of German idealism are: Niels Thulstrup, Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel, trans. George L. Stengren (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Mark C. Taylor, Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), Stephen N. Dunning, Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness: A Structural Analysis of the Theory of Stages (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) and Alastair Hannay, op. cit. (especially 19-53).

¹³Johannes Sløk, "En Studie i Kierkegaards Erkendelsesteori" (A Study of Kierkegaard's Epistemology), Dansk theologisk Tidsskrift, 1' Hefte, 1941: 50. All translations of secondary material, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

¹⁴Ibid. 50; cf. Schmidinger, op. cit. 200.

Sløk argues that when Kierkegaard uses what appear, at least, to be Hegelian terms, these terms "as Kierkegaard employs them, have another meaning."¹⁵ This point is reiterated by both Birgit Bertung and J. Heywood Thomas. Bertung argues that "Kierkegaard consciously uses the expressions 'abstract' [abstrakt] and 'concrete' [konkret] differently from Hegel, and [that] something similar holds true for almost all the central existential concepts even though Hegelian terminology is at the same time his philosophical starting point."¹⁶ The position of J. Heywood Thomas is less radical than that of Sløk. Thomas does not deny that there is a relation between Hegel and Kierkegaard. He argues, however, that "[f]rom The Concept of Irony (1841) onwards he [i.e., Kierkegaard] took characteristically Hegelian terminology and used it to make his great accusation against Hegel."¹⁷ If Thomas' charge is correct, the question becomes: What is Kierkegaard's "great accusation against Hegel"?

"A convenient starting point," argues Thomas, "is the crucial doctrine of Hegel's Logic that there is an identity between thought and being."¹⁸ That is, the Hegelian doctrine of mediation ultimately resolves (or purports to resolve) the opposition between appearance and reality, or

¹⁵Ibid. 50.

¹⁶Birgit Bertung, Om Kierkegaard Kvinder og Kærlighed - en studie i Søren Kierkegaards kvindesyn (On Kierkegaard, Women and Love: A Study of Kierkegaard's Views on Women) (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Forlag, 1987) 29.

¹⁷J. Heywood Thomas, "Logic and Existence in Kierkegaard," Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, vol. II, 1971: 10.

¹⁸G. W. F. Hegel, Hegel's Science of Logic, trans. A. V. Miller (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd./New York: Humanities Press, 1969), "Introduction," 43-64.

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between subject and object, by bringing them together in a higher unity which is accessible as such for what Hegel refers to as "pure thought."¹⁹

Kierkegaard argues, however, that while

[t]he systematic idea is subject-object, is the unity of thinking and being [Væren]; existence [Existents], . . . is precisely the separation. . . . Objectively understood [he continues], thinking is pure thinking, which just as abstractly-objectively corresponds to its object, which in turn is therefore itself, and truth is thus the correspondence of thinking with itself. (CUP I, 123/SV VII, 101).²⁰

That is, what is missing, according to Kierkegaard, in Hegel's identification of reality with thought, is an appreciation of what he refers to as the "distinction between factual being [faktisk Væren] and ideal being [ideel Væren]" (PF, 41n./SV IV, 209n.).²¹ The being which, according to Kierkegaard, may be identified with thought is ideal being rather than actual or concrete being,²² thus the "systematic" unity of thinking and being, or of subject and object, is, he argues, "a chimera of abstraction" (CUP I, 196/SV VII, 164).²³

Absolute knowledge is possible for Hegel as the

¹⁹Ibid. 46.

²⁰Cf. Herman Deuser, "Kierkegaards Verteidigung der Kontingenz: «Daß etwas Inkommensurables in einem Menschenleben ist.»" (Kierkegaard's Defence of Contingency: "That there is something Incommensurable in a Human Life"), 15, 1991: 104-105 and Hügli, op. cit. 144.

²¹Cf. Thomas, op. cit. 5.

²²Cf. Hügli's claim that, according to Kierkegaard, concrete or actual existence "is another type of being than the being that is thought" (Hügli, op. cit. 99; cf. CUP I, 329/SV VII, 284 and Deuser, op. cit. 104).

²³Cf. CUP I, 112/SV VII, 92.

product of pure thought,²⁴ but what, one may legitimately wonder, is pure thought and how is the individual knower related to it? Thomas argues that, according to Hegel,

the absolute is because I think it and [that] in order to make his position more secure he turns the statement round and says that my thinking of the absolute is the self-thinking of the absolute in me. But pure thought is then described not only as absolute but also in terms of some subject which is absolute so that unless we are to go on talking of two subjects we are bound to assert the coincidence of the empirical [i.e., the particular, or concrete individual] and the absolute subject.²⁵

Kierkegaard argues, however, that such a coincidence of the individual thinking subject and the absolute subject is "fantastical" (CUP I, 196-197/SV VII, 164). "[N]o human being," he argues, "is more than a particular individual" (CUP I, 197/SV VII, 164).²⁶ "When," argues Kierkegaard, "an existing person asks how pure thinking relates itself to an existing person, how he goes about being admitted to it, pure thinking gives no answer" (CUP I, 313-314/SV VII, 269).²⁷

²⁴Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, Hegel's Science of Logic, op. cit., "Introduction" and The Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), chapter seven "Absolute Knowledge."

²⁵Thomas, op. cit. 7.

²⁶Cf. CUP, 313-314/SV VII, 269.

²⁷Cf. Deuser's claim that "Kierkegaard's concept of subjectivity is a response to idealistic philosophy in that the latter, to the extent it centers on res cogitans, transcendental apperception and the unity of subject and object, not only misses living, human or, in an existential sense, concrete subjectivity, it positively ignores it" (Deuser, op. cit. 104).

No individual, according to Kierkegaard, can be admitted into the realm of pure thought. As long as he exists, his thought will always be in some sense relative to his particular existence. This means that, for Kierkegaard, all knowledge is, in some sense, relative rather than absolute, or as Gregor Malantschuk has observed: "A human being is tied, in his quest for knowledge, to specific epistemological assumptions."²⁸ To argue, however, that all knowledge is relative does not in any sense imply that it is arbitrary. "Kierkegaard did not dispute the possibility of a logical system, or a system of universally valid thought-determinations [Denkbestimmungen]."²⁹ What he disputed was the practicable nature of Hegel's absolute method as well as the manner in which this method was actually employed by Hegel."³⁰ That is, "Kierkegaard did not reject the idea of objective knowledge in itself, but only its claim to absoluteness."³¹

What is perhaps most problematic for Kierkegaard about Hegel's philosophy is that it does not, on his view, leave

²⁸Gregor Malantschuk, "Das Verhältnis zwischen Wahrheit und Wirklichkeit in Søren Kierkegaards existentiellen Denken" (The Relation between Truth and Actuality in Søren Kierkegaard's Existential Thought), in Frihed og Eksistens (Freedom and Existence) (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel, 1980), 50. Cf. JP 1:50/Pap. V B 14; Hügli's observation that according to Kierkegaard, "[t]he activity of philosophizing must always proceed from specific assumptions" (Hügli, op. cit. 49) and Slotty, op. cit. 23.

²⁹Cf. Slotty, op. cit. 38.

³⁰Slotty, op. cit. 16.

³¹Hügli, op. cit. 33. Cf. Robert Perkins, "Kierkegaard's Epistemological Preferences," in International Journal for Philosophy of Religion, Vol. IV, no. 4, 1973: 216; Thulstrup, "Kommentar," op. cit. 187; Malantschuk, "Das Verhältnis," op. cit. 52 and Slotty, op. cit. 20.

any room for ethics.³² "Am I the good," asks Kierkegaard, "because I think it, or am I good because I think the good?" (CUP I, 330/SV VII, 284). "With this question," observes Hügli, "Climacus identifies the genuine starting-point for the ethical skepticism concerning the identity of thought and being."³³ That is, Hegel's philosophy, "in that it tries to prove that the idea [die Idee] is actual and that the actual is ideal,"³⁴ eliminates the contradiction between is and ought and thus does away with ethics.³⁵

Part of the difficulty in establishing the nature of Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel concerns the fact that there is evidence that much of what has traditionally been interpreted as his criticism of Hegel was directed not against Hegel, but against the speculative theology of the Danish Hegelian H. L. Martensen.³⁶ It has even been suggested that "until Kierkegaard's relation to Martensen is understood in detail we will have little chance to understand Kierkegaard at all."³⁷ A detailed treatment of Kierkegaard's relation to Martensen is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of the present essay. It is, however, crucial to understanding Kierkegaard, that something of his relation to Martensen is known.

³²Cf. CUP I, 119/SV VII, 98; CUP I, 296-297n./SV VII, 254-255n. and Hügli, op. cit. 113.

³³Hügli, op. cit. 203; cf. CUP I, 329/SV VII, 283-284.

³⁴Ibid. 105.

³⁵Ibid. 105.

³⁶Cf. JP 1:707/Pap. X¹ A 658; Frederik Barfod, Fortællinger af Fædrelandets Historie (A Narrative History of the Fatherland) (Copenhagen, 1874), 419 and Slotky, op. cit. 41.

³⁷Horn, op. cit. 268.

Ph.D. Thesis (M. Piety)

Paul Holmer's claim that "Kierkegaard was not primarily an epistemologist"³⁸ is undoubtedly correct if by that designation one understands an individual who is entirely absorbed in the investigation of the nature of knowledge for its own sake. "[T]he religious framework," it has been observed, "is axiomatic for Kierkegaard."³⁹ That is, Kierkegaard's interest in the nature of knowledge is inexorably intertwined with theological concerns.⁴⁰ Kierkegaard was convinced that the speculative theology that was becoming increasingly popular in Copenhagen in the mid-nineteenth century was hopelessly confused.⁴¹ H. L. Martensen was the leading proponent of this theology⁴² which is presented in detail in both his Den menneskelige Selvbevidstheds Autonomie i vor Tids dogmatiske Teologie (The Autonomy of Human Self-consciousness in Contemporary Dogmatic Theology)⁴³ and Den christelige Dogmatik (Christian Dogmatics).⁴⁴

"[A]ll religion," argues Martensen,

is a consciousness of God, a relation to God
which includes both a consciousness of an

³⁸Paul Holmer, "On Understanding Kierkegaard," A Kierkegaard Critique. An International Selection of Essays Interpreting Søren Kierkegaard, eds. Howard A. Johnson and Niels Thulstrup (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), 45.

³⁹Hannay, op. cit. 331.

⁴⁰Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 223.

⁴¹Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 240.

⁴²Cf. Sloty, op. cit. 41.

⁴³H. L. Martensen, Den menneskelige Selvbevidstheds Autonomie i vor Tids dogmatiske Teologie (The Autonomy of Human Self-consciousness in Contemporary Dogmatic Theology), trans. L. V. Petersen (Copenhagen, 1841).

⁴⁴Dr. H. Martensen, Den christelige Dogmatik (Christian Dogmatics), (Copenhagen, 1849).

opposition between God and the world and a reconciliation [Løsning, Ophævelse] of this opposition in a unity. Religion may thus be more precisely defined as man's consciousness of his community with God, his union with God.⁴⁵

That is, Martensen makes reference to the Hegelian doctrine of the mediation of opposites to resolve the apparent opposition between God and man. According to Martensen, man's consciousness of his community with God means that

God himself is actively present in our consciousness, in systematic thought and in the rational and conceptual development of this idea; he who is thought by us [continues Martensen], thinks also in us. This [he argues], is the true content of the [Hegelian] teaching of the unity of subject and object in speculative thought⁴⁶. . . . The same law that is the foundation of the unity of God and man in religious love also applies with respect to religious knowledge.⁴⁷

Hegel's absolute thinking itself thus becomes God thinking himself and the coincidence of the empirical and the absolute subject, to which Kierkegaard objected so strongly in Hegel, becomes the coincidence of the human and the divine subject, to which Kierkegaard has even stronger objections.⁴⁸ Christianity, argues Kierkegaard, does not teach the essential unity of God and man, but their separation.⁴⁹ Such an attempted resolution of the opposition between God and man, as Hannay rightly points

⁴⁵Martensen, Doqmatik, op. cit. 8.

⁴⁶Cf. Martensen, Doqmatik, op. cit. 8.

⁴⁷Martensen, Autonomie, op. cit. 13.

⁴⁸Cf. Thulstrup, "Kommentar," op. cit. XXIX.

⁴⁹Cf., e.g., Philosophical Fragments and Practice in Christianity.

out, "obviates the need for redemption."⁵⁰

There are a number of things Kierkegaard objected to in Martensen's speculative theology. Absolute certainty concerning the truth of Christianity was, for Martensen, the starting point of speculative theology. But what Martensen "treats as a presupposition, is, according to Kierkegaard, the entire essence and purpose of Christianity"⁵¹ Martensen viewed the systematic explication of the content of Christian faith as a more profound development or expression of that faith,⁵² whereas for Kierkegaard, the fact that the content of faith admits of explication, at least to a certain extent, does not in any sense imply that such explication may be thought of as higher than faith itself. Faith, as we will see, was considered by Kierkegaard to be the highest achievement of an individual's existence.

There are many more specific points of disagreement between Martensen and Kierkegaard. What is important, however, for the purposes of the present discussion, is that Martensen fails to make a rigorous systematic distinction between knowledge and belief.⁵³ Christianity, according to Martensen, represents a re-birth of the individual through the belief in Christ.⁵⁴ "Dogmatics," he argues, "takes as its point of departure the fullness of [this] faith [Troens Fylde] and develops from this fullness a wealth of knowledge."⁵⁵ Martensen also claims, however,

⁵⁰Hannay, op. cit. 172.

⁵¹Slotky, op. cit. 42.

⁵²Martensen, Autonomie, op. cit. 13 and Dogmatik, op. cit. 5-6.

⁵³Horn, op. cit. 265.

⁵⁴Martensen, Dogmatik, 20.

⁵⁵Ibid. 6.

that the foundation of dogmatics is an immediate [umiddelbare] religious knowledge [Erkjendelsen or Viden]⁵⁶ which characterizes every individual as such.⁵⁷ It thus appears that he uses the expressions 'faith' and 'knowledge' interchangeably.

Martensen had been Kierkegaard's tutor and Kierkegaard attended his lectures on "Speculative Dogmatics" during the academic year 1838-39. The theological views expressed in Den menneskelige Selvbevidstheds Autonomie and in Den christelige Dogmatik were thus well known to Kierkegaard long before the publication of the latter work in 1849.⁵⁸ It appears that much of Kierkegaard's authorship up to the publication of the Dogmatik was directed specifically at clearing up what he felt was a category confusion--i.e., the confusion of the categories of faith and knowledge--in Martensen's thought.⁵⁹ This interpretation is supported by the fact that "the whole Kierkegaardian approach to the relation of faith and knowledge is ridiculed by Martensen in the preface"⁶⁰ to the Dogmatik.

⁵⁶Ibid. 12-13.

⁵⁷Ibid. 13.

⁵⁸Cf. Pap. II C 20 and Gregor Malantschuk, Fra Individ til den Enkelte (From Individual to the Single-One) (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel, 1978) 14 and Thulstrup, "Kommentar," op. cit. 185. It is important to note at this point that some of the material from Kierkegaard's Papirer has not been published in an English translation. It will thus occasionally happen that a reference will be given to the Papirer without a corresponding reference to the Journals and Papers. The reader should assume that, if no reference to the latter is given, then the passage in question was not included in that translation.

⁵⁹Horn, op. cit. 261-268.

⁶⁰Ibid. 262.

Kierkegaard is, again, often considered to be something of a skeptic.⁶¹ I am going to argue, however, that this interpretation is misleading. Kierkegaard is not, I will argue, pessimistic about the possibility of knowledge of reality external to the knower. His objection is rather directed to the Hegelian-Martensenian thesis concerning the possibility of absolute knowledge.⁶² "He merely wanted it irrefutably established⁶³ that [the validity of] the highest principles of thought cannot be positively proven,⁶⁴ that every science operates on the basis of a principle, or principles, which it merely assumes and cannot explain."⁶⁵ That is, knowledge, for Kierkegaard, is always based upon some presuppositions the truth of which has not been proved and is thus relative to those presuppositions. This does not mean, however, that Kierkegaard rejects as unfounded all claims to knowledge of the external world. "He simply rejects [the claim] that our thought can attain a complete grasp of actuality."⁶⁶

Belief in the power of reason to attain knowledge of objective reality is, for Kierkegaard, more fundamental to human beings than is skepticism as to the possibility of such knowledge.⁶⁷ That is, "[t]he individual," argues

⁶¹Cf. note 8 above.

⁶²Cf. Slotty, op. cit. 18-19, 22 and 48.

⁶³Cf. CUP I, 112-116/SV VII, 91-95.

⁶⁴Cf. CA, 58/SV IV, 328n.

⁶⁵Slotty, op. cit. 18.

⁶⁶Slotty, op. cit. 18.

⁶⁷Cf. Slotty's claim that, according to Kierkegaard, "certainty precedes skepticism [in the sense that] a person rarely grasps actuality as the result of a choice he makes after having convinced himself of its reality by systematic means [durch wissenschaftlicher Gründe]" (Slotty, op. cit. 20).

Kierkegaard, "first of all begins his life with an ergo, with faith. But most men do not even faintly notice that in one way or another at every moment of their lives they live by virtue of an ergo, by a faith--so carelessly do they live" (WOL, 218/SV IX, 221).

All knowledge, for Kierkegaard, ultimately rests upon faith, either implicitly or explicitly, in the truth of the presuppositions upon which it is based, thus it is possible to speak of Kierkegaard as an "epistemologist of belief."⁶⁸ To argue, however, that Kierkegaard is an "epistemologist of belief" might make it appear that he falls victim to the same conflation of faith and knowledge which characterizes Martensen's philosophy. There is an important difference, however, as we will see, between the claim that knowledge rests on a foundation of faith or belief and the straightforward identification of the two. An appreciation of the contingency, or relativity, of all human knowledge was precisely what Kierkegaard believed was lacking among his philosophical and theological contemporaries and, in particular, in the philosophy of H. L. Martensen. It is the "peculiar epistemology"⁶⁹ of the speculative Danish theologian Martensen which is in fact the primary target of much of Kierkegaard's authorship. Thus Slotty argues: "Whoever ignores that Kierkegaard . . . opposes speculative theology, is in danger of misunderstanding him."⁷⁰

The impossibility of universal doubt is actually one of the main themes of Johannes Climacus.

⁶⁸Slotty, op. cit. 12.

⁶⁹Christensen, op. cit. 48.

⁷⁰Ibid. 41.

The Problem of Translation.

Before turning to the issue of Kierkegaard's terminology, a couple of points need to be made concerning general differences between Danish and English as these differences affect the present project. It is difficult to draw a clear picture of Kierkegaard's epistemology in English, because Danish, like German and unlike English, has several expressions each of which may be, and often is, translated as 'knowledge.' These expressions are: 'erkendelse' or 'erkendelsen,'⁷¹ 'kendskab,' 'kundskab' and 'viden,'⁷² 'Erkendelsen,' as the reader may already have guessed, is

⁷¹The definite article in Danish is enclitic. 'Erkendelsen' is just 'erkendelse' with the addition of the definite article 'en.' The definite article is often used in Danish to create abstract nouns (e.g., death in general (døden), rather than the death of some particular individual, is created in Danish from the noun 'death' (i.e., død) with the addition of the definite article 'en' in the enclitic form (cf. Elias Bredsdorff, Danish: An Elementary Grammar and Reader [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956] 51).

⁷²Each of these terms is spelled here according to the contemporary practice which was initiated with the Danish spelling reform of 1948. Among other changes to Danish spelling, this reform resulted in the substitution of 'å' for 'aa' and in a discontinuation of the earlier tradition of the capitalization of nouns. I will adhere to contemporary Danish spelling conventions except when directly quoting Kierkegaard (cf. Julia Watkin, A Key to Kierkegaard's Abbreviations and Spelling/Nøgle til Kierkegaards Forkortelser og Stavemåde [Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1981]).

a cognate of the German 'Erkenntniss,'⁷³ hence 'epistemology,' in Danish is 'erkendelsesteori,' just as it is 'Erkenntnisstheori' in German.⁷⁴ 'Viden' corresponds to the German 'Wissen.'⁷⁵ Both 'erkendelsen' and 'viden' are normally used to refer to knowledge in the propositional sense,⁷⁶ thus it is with Kierkegaard's use of these two expressions that the present essay is primarily concerned.

English translators of Kierkegaard have chosen to translate each of the above Danish expressions with a variety of English expressions, depending upon the context in which they occur (e.g., 'erkendelsen,' following the convention associated with 'Erkenntniss,' is sometimes translated as 'cognition' rather than as 'knowledge,' although no English translator of Kierkegaard has been consistent in this practice). This is not necessarily a bad practice, its appropriateness depends, however, upon the context in which the expression is found and the purpose of the discussion at hand. Since the aim of this project is the elucidation of Kierkegaard's epistemology or erkendelsesteori, I believe that it is important that each

⁷³Cf. Friederich Breseemann, Hand-Wörterbuch der deutschen und dänischen Sprache (Concise Dictionary of the German and Danish Languages) (Copenhagen, 1855), Erster oder deutsch-dänischer Theil (First Part), 211 and Zweiter oder dänisch-deutscher Theil (Second, or Danish-German Part), 70 and G. H. Müller, Deutsch-Dänisches Wörterbuch, Revidirt von Profess. Fr. Høeg Guldberg (German-Danish Dictionary, Revised by Professor Fr. Høeg Guldberg) (Kiel, 1807) Erster Theil, 628.

⁷⁴Cf. Hermann Vinterberg and C. A. Bodelsen, Dansk-Engelsk Ordbog (Danish-English Dictionary) 2nd ed. (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1966) vol. I, 273 and Politikens Filosofi Leksikon (Politikens's Philosophical Lexicon) (Copenhagen: Politikens Forlag, 1983) 116.

⁷⁵Cf. Breseemann, op. cit., Erster Theil (First Part), 642 and Zweiter Theil (Second Part), 373 and Müller, op. cit. Dritter Theil (Third Part), 705.

⁷⁶Cf. Politikens Filosofi Leksikon, op. cit. 116.

of the relevant Danish expressions be translated as 'knowledge' whenever such a translation is possible.

The translation of both 'kendskab' and 'Kundskab' is more problematic than that of 'erkendelse' and 'viden.' Both 'kendskab' and 'kundskab' are translated into contemporary German as 'Kenntniss.'⁷⁷ Such a translation is slightly misleading, however, in that these expressions do not mean precisely the same thing in Danish.⁷⁸ Although there was a German cognate of 'kundskab', namely 'Kundschaft' which meant knowledge in the sense of familiarity (Kenntniss) with, in the first half of the nineteenth century,⁷⁹ the meaning of this term has since altered somewhat so that its definition no longer corresponds to that of 'kundskab.'⁸⁰ 'Kundskab' is related to the verb 'kunne' which means "to be able."⁸¹ 'Kundskab' may thus be translated as 'knowledge' in either the acquaintance, or the skill sense.⁸² That is, to have 'kundskab' is to be familiar with something (e.g., a

⁷⁷Cf. Egon Bock, Tysk-Dansk Ordbog (German-Danish Dictionary) 13th ed. ved Christian Liebling (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1992) 376.

⁷⁸Cf. C. Molbech, Dansk Ordbog (Danish Dictionary), Anden, forøgede og forbedrede Udgave (second revised and expanded edition) (Copenhagen, 1859), Første Deel (First Part) 1186 and 1329-1330.

⁷⁹Cf. Bresemann, op. cit. Erster Theil (First Part), 375 and Müller, op. cit. Zweiter Theil (Second Part), 1150.

⁸⁰Cf. W. Scholze-Stubenrecht and J. B. Sykes, The Oxford Duden German Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) 463.

⁸¹J. S. Ferrall and Thorl. Gudm. Repp., A Danish-English Dictionary (Copenhagen, 1845) 172; cf. Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit. vol. I, 740-741.

⁸²Cf. Ferrall-Gudm. Repp., op. cit. 172; Molbech, op. cit. Første Deel, 1329 and Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit. vol. I, 270.

language) in the sense that one is able to make practical use of this familiarity (e.g., to communicate in that language). 'Kundskab' is occasionally used by Kierkegaard in a manner similar to that in which one would use the German 'Wissenschaft.'⁸³ That is, it is occasionally used by him to refer to propositional knowledge that forms a systematic whole which is intimately related with some practice.⁸⁴

Apart from 'knowledge,' there is no other single expression by which 'kundskab' is generally translated. It is not actually an expression which Kierkegaard uses very much. It occurs most often in specifically religious discussions because 'kundskabens træ' is the Danish expression for the "tree of knowledge" as it appears in Genesis.⁸⁵ Apart from such contexts, references are few and translation is problematic. It is sometimes translated as 'attention'⁸⁶ and other times as 'information.'⁸⁷

⁸³'Kundskab' was, in fact, often offered as a possible translation of 'Wissenschaft' in the first half of the nineteenth century (cf. Bresemann, op. cit., Erster Theil [First Part], 642 and Zweiter Theil [Second Part], 175 and Müller, op. cit. Dritter Theil [Third Part], 705-706).

⁸⁴Cf., e.g., KAUC, 47/SV XIV, 68-69; CD, 250/SV X, 243-244; CUP I, 25/SV VII, 14 and CUP I, 542/SV VII, 535.

⁸⁵That 'kundskab' refers to an ability to do something is reinforced by Kierkegaard's remark that "the forbidden tree could just as well have had another name than the tree of knowledge [kundskabens træ]. It makes no difference which it is. This only remains fixed--that there belongs in paradise a tree which is a forbidden tree" (JP 3:3012/Pap. VIII, A 69). That is, it would appear that what is important here is not knowledge, but the self-assertion of the ability of the subject to posit his own moral commands through action in defiance of God's command.

⁸⁶KAUC, 47/SV XIV, 70; KAUC, 50/SV XIV, 73; POV, 123/SV XIII, 601 and CD, 249-50/SV X, 243.

⁸⁷SLW, 245/SV VI, 231; CUP I, 542/SV VII, 535; KAUC, 47/SV XIV, 68-69 and CD, 25/SV X, 243-244.

It is not, however, merely the differences between Danish and English with respect to the expression 'knowledge' which present an obstacle to understanding Kierkegaard's epistemology. It is important to point out, for example, that there is no terminological distinction in Danish between 'certainty' in the formal sense and 'certitude,' or certainty in the psychological sense. The Danish term which most closely resembles 'certitude' is 'overbevisning' which translates literally as 'above proof,' and which is generally translated into English as 'conviction.'⁸⁸ There is only one Danish term 'vished,' which is used by Kierkegaard to denote both certainty, in the sense of demonstrability, and certitude, in the sense of subjective conviction.⁸⁹

The second point relating the general differences between Danish and English concerns the Danish expressions 'videnskab' and 'videnskabelig,' which are often translated into English as 'science' and 'scientific' respectively. These expressions are, however, cognates of the German 'Wissenschaft' and 'Wissenschaftlich,'⁹⁰ and are used by the Danes in precisely the same manner in which the latter expressions are used by the Germans. That is, they refer to any systematic discipline including, for example, literary criticism, and are thus much broader in meaning than are the English expressions 'science' and 'scientific.' It is for this reason that 'videnskab' is

⁸⁸Cf. Ferrall-Gudm. Repp., op. cit. 233 and Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit. vol. II, 94.

⁸⁹Cf. Ferrall-Gudm. Repp., op. cit. 367; Molbech, op. cit. Anden Deel, 1551 and Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit. vol. II, 820. The Hongs translate this single expression as both 'certainty' and 'certitude' (cf., e.g., PF, 81/SV IV, 245).

⁹⁰Cf. Bresemann, op. cit., Erster Theil (First Part), 642 and Zweiter Theil (Second Part), 373 and Müller, op. cit. Dritter Theil (Third Part), 705-706.

often translated as "science and scholarship,"⁹¹ or as "scientific scholarship,"⁹² or even as "philosophy."⁹³ The new English translations of Kierkegaard unfortunately occasionally render 'videnskab' and 'videnskabelig' as 'science' and 'scientific.'⁹⁴ I believe, however, that such translations are seriously misleading and so I have, when appropriate, revised the passages cited in the present work by replacing these expressions with 'scholarship' and 'scholarly,' or similar expressions. When Kierkegaard actually refers to science in the sense of the natural sciences, the Danish expression he uses is always 'naturvidenskab,' which translates literally as 'natural science.'⁹⁵ 'Natural science' quickly becomes cumbersome, however, so when the discussion below turns to that topic, it will most often be referred to simply as 'science.'

Kierkegaard's Terminology.

It is, of course, with the various forms of 'erkendelse' and 'viden' that I will primarily be concerned. These expressions, it appears, are usually used interchangeably by Kierkegaard, as is exemplified by two references to

⁹¹Cf., e.g., JP 4:3854/Pap. I A 255 and JP 3:2809/Pap. VII¹ A 186.

⁹²Cf., e.g., JP 4:3860/Pap. X³ A 702.

⁹³Cf., e.g., Swenson-Lowrie trans. of CUP, 258/SV VII, 249 and CUP 262/SV VII, 253.

⁹⁴Cf., e.g., CUP I, 21/SV VII, 12. To be fair to the Hongs, however, it should be noted that they rarely translate 'videnskab' as 'science,' but usually as 'science and scholarship' (or simply 'scholarship') and they usually translate 'videnskabelig' as 'systematic' or 'scholarly.'

⁹⁵Cf., e.g., JP 3:2806/Pap. I A 31; JP 2:2811/Pap. VII¹ A 189 and JP 3:2814/Pap. VII¹ A 194.

Plato's theory of knowledge as recollection, one in a journal entry from 1840, where the expression is "Viden" (Pap. II A 5), and the other in the Postscript, where the expression is "Erkjenden" (CUP I, 184/SV VII, 172).⁹⁶ The conflation of these two terms should not be disturbing, however, for 'viden' is a more general or colloquial expression for knowledge than 'erkendelsen.'⁹⁷ Non-academics often use the expression 'viden' for knowledge of the propositional sort, thus it is this expression which Kierkegaard usually uses to denote propositional knowledge in his less scholarly works.

Kierkegaard occasionally appears, however, to distinguish between knowledge in the sense of 'erkendelsen' and knowledge in the sense of 'viden.' We will see, for example, in the chapter on objective knowledge, that Kierkegaard occasionally associates knowledge in the strict sense with skeptical isostheneia. This association is particularly prominent, for example, in Works of Love. The expression used by Kierkegaard to designate such knowledge is almost always 'viden.' Distinctions of this sort appear, however, to be dependent on the context of the references and cannot be extended to the authorship as a whole.

Kierkegaard displays a general disdain for terminological consistency for its own sake. "It is characteristic of Kierkegaard," explains Birgit Bertung, "that he often uses commonly employed expressions [formuleringer] idiosyncratically [på sin egen måde], at the same time he uses these expressions in their parallel

⁹⁶'Erkjenden' is a noun made from the verb form--i.e., 'erkende'--of 'erkendelse' (cf. Molbech, op. cit. Første Deel, 447-448).

⁹⁷Cf. Politikens Filosofi Leksikon, op. cit. 116.

ordinary sense."⁹⁸ Part of the difficulty involved in trying to understand Kierkegaard's epistemology thus concerns the fact that he makes no rigorous terminological distinctions either among the various Danish expressions for knowledge or among the various types of knowledge referred to in his works.⁹⁹

Such play with words was possible for Kierkegaard because he was not an academic philosopher and hence was not subject to the same constraints on terminological consistency to which the latter are routinely subject and because, as Hügli points out, Kierkegaard "views the concept, which is independent of particular linguistic indicators [der jeweiligen Bezeichnung], as the meaning constant."¹⁰⁰ That is, language, for Kierkegaard, is composed of two elements: the word and what is meant by it.¹⁰¹ "When I am speaking," explains Kierkegaard, "the thought, the meaning, is the essence, and the word is the phenomenon" (CI, 247/SV XIII, 322).

Perhaps the clearest statement of Kierkegaard's philosophy of language is in Lars Bejerholm's Meddelelsens Dialektik, where he explains that

[t]he relation between a linguistic term and a concept according to Kierkegaard, is usually such

⁹⁸Op. cit. 24. Cf., Schmidinger's reference to the consistency which underlies Kierkegaard's "apparently arbitrary use of the term 'interest'," Schmidinger, op. cit. 221. Cf., also Schmuëli, Kierkegaard and Consciousness (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) 5.

⁹⁹Cf. "The Project," below.

¹⁰⁰Hügli, op. cit. 276 note 4.

¹⁰¹The wording here is particularly important. That is, language, for Kierkegaard, is not made up of words and meanings which are bound to them independently of any reference to a particular speaker. This point should become clear, however, in the text which follows.

that the linguistic term denotes a concept.¹⁰² This concept may, however, be denoted by a variety of linguistic terms. It is, therefore, a matter of indifference which terms are used to denote a given concept. The most important thing, according to Kierkegaard, is that one "knows what one is talking about"; the particular terms used are, in contrast, unessential. Linguistic confusion arises first [according to Kierkegaard], when terms are used in such a way that uncertainty arises concerning which concept they denote. "[L]inguistic confusion" is, therefore, a consequence of conceptual confusion or a blending of unlike "categories."¹⁰³

Disdain for terminological consistency can, however, create confusion in the reader, hence one of the tasks of the present essay is to distinguish the different senses in which Kierkegaard uses various philosophical expressions. Despite the fact that Kierkegaard observes that occasional linguistic ambiguity can have a positive function to the extent that it reflects a more substantial ontological or epistemological ambiguity,¹⁰⁴ he does have the equivalent of technical expressions which he uses fairly consistently in their technical senses.

The task of distinguishing these expressions and their associated meanings is complicated, however, by the fact that the English translations of Kierkegaard's works available to scholars until about five years ago, while

¹⁰²Cf. CI, 247/SV XIII, 322.

¹⁰³Lars Bejerholm, "Meddelelsens Dialektik": Studier i Søren Kierkegaards teorier om sprog, kommunikation och pseudonymitet ("The Dialectic of Communication": Kierkegaard's theories of language, communication and pseudonymity), Publications of the Søren Kierkegaard Society II (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1962) 60. The second of the quotations within this quotation abstract comes from CUP I, 256/SV VII, 216. Bejerholm did not, unfortunately, include references for these quotations and I have been unable to locate the first.

¹⁰⁴Cf. CA, 9/SV IV, 281.

masterpieces of stylistic integrity, were extremely problematic in a technical sense and hence completely unsuitable for scholarly work. 'Virkeligheden,' for example, the Danish cognate of the German 'Wirklichkeit,' was often translated as 'reality' rather than as 'actuality'¹⁰⁵ hence conflating what are, for Kierkegaard, two distinct technical expressions.¹⁰⁶ Reality, or the Danish *realitet*, is a much broader category for Kierkegaard than is actuality.¹⁰⁷ 'Reality,' on Kierkegaard's view, is equivalent to 'being' (i.e., *vøren* or *tilværelsen*).¹⁰⁸ That is, reality includes everything that is, whether the being in question is abstract (*abstrakt* or *ideal*) or concrete (*konkret* or *virkelig*). Thought, for example, has reality according to Kierkegaard, but this reality should not, on his view, be confused with actuality.¹⁰⁹

I have made a number of revisions to the English translations of Kierkegaard referred to in the present work. There are several reasons for this. First, there are instances in which these translations are incorrect. Second, there are other instances in which, although the

¹⁰⁵Cf. Robert Widenman, "Kierkegaard's Terminology - and English," *Kierkegaardiana* VII (1968): 116-118 and Louis Mackley, "The Loss of the World in Kierkegaard's Ethics," op. cit. 271n.

¹⁰⁶Cf. Gregor Malantschuk, *Nøglebegreber Søren Kierkegaards tænkning* (Key Concepts in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard) (Copenhagen, C. A. Reitzel, 1993), 210-212 and Widenman, op. cit. 116-118.

¹⁰⁷Cf., e.g., FT, 41/SV III, 92.

¹⁰⁸Cf. chapter one.

¹⁰⁹Cf. CUP I, 328/SV VII, 283, and Mackley, "The Loss of the World," op. cit., 271n. For more information concerning Kierkegaard's terminology see Robert Widenman, "Kierkegaard's Terminology - and English," in *Kierkegaardiana* VII, 1968: 113-129.

translations are not incorrect, some modification is required to make the desired point sufficiently clear. There are also instances in which the translations are so literal that they make little sense in English and thus require modification to become comprehensible.

Extensive footnotes can be distracting. I have thus decided that the best way to deal with this issue is to include a note giving the reasons for the modification of a translation when such a modification is necessary. If this passage is cited again, a note will be included directing the reader back to the note which gave the reasons for the relevant modifications. There are a number of instances, however, where modifications are made to the translation of a new reference for the same reasons similar modifications were made to an earlier reference. In such instances a note will be included directing the reader back to the earlier reference, but no new justification will be given.

I have tried as much as possible not to modify the translations for purely stylistic purposes and to refer to the new English translations even when the earlier translations were clearly superior in respect of style. As I noted above, however, there are instances in which the issue of style becomes blurred with that of substance. That is, there are instances in which the new English translations are so literal that their meaning is unclear. My practice, in such instances, has been to try to rescue the new translation with the help of minor modifications. Failing that, I have referred to the earlier English translations, resorting to providing my own translations only when the first two methods would not yield satisfactory results.

The Pseudonymity.

Most of Kierkegaard's works which are considered philosophically interesting were written pseudonymously. Many of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms make claims which are at least apparently inconsistent with those of other pseudonyms as well as with views expressed by Kierkegaard in his non-pseudonymous writings. The significance of this pseudonymity is far too complicated to be treated adequately in the context of the present discussion. It is important, however, to appreciate that Kierkegaard cautioned his reader against making a straightforward identification of the views expressed by the pseudonyms with those of himself.¹¹⁰ It is the view of most Kierkegaard scholars, however, that the pseudonymous works contain a wealth of information concerning Kierkegaard's own views¹¹¹ and it is my opinion that the pseudonymous literature exhibits a remarkable consistency in many respects with both the non-pseudonymous works and views expressed by him in his journals and papers.

It has been argued that Kierkegaard is not a philosopher in the usual sense,¹¹² but a kind of poet.¹¹³

¹¹⁰Cf. CUP I, 625-630/SV VII, 545-549.

¹¹¹Alastair Hannay emphasizes this point when he addresses the issue of the pseudonymity of many of Kierkegaard's works. That is, Hannay observes that "[i]t suffices . . . to note that Kierkegaard has told us that the works are all his, and that at the time this was something most of his readers quickly knew in any case" (Hannay, op. cit., 57).

¹¹²Cf. Pojman, "Kierkegaard on Faith and Freedom," International Journal for Philosophy of Religion 27, 1990: 41 and Wisdo, op. cit. 98.

¹¹³Louis Mackey, Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971) ix. It is interesting to note in this context that despite Kierkegaard's occasional protest that he was merely a poet,

Kierkegaard was indeed a far more self-conscious literary stylist than are most philosophers¹¹⁴ and understanding the irony, humor and poetry which characterizes much of his authorship is thus essential to understanding the substance of that authorship. There is a reason, however, that Kierkegaard is studied by philosophers, as well as by theologians and scholars from other disciplines.

"The 'old' dispute," observes Jochem Henningfeld, "as to whether Kierkegaard ought to be considered a philosopher . . . has quite properly become obsolete. The diversity of weighty philosophical issues treated in Kierkegaard's works was long ago made famous by scholars."¹¹⁵ The failure to award Kierkegaard the status of a philosophical thinker is based, as Wisdo has observed, "on a rather narrow conception of philosophy."¹¹⁶ Kierkegaard was clearly a philosophical thinker.¹¹⁷ Much of his authorship is

there is at least one place in his authorship where he protests that he is not a poet (i.e., FT, 90/SV III, 138)

¹¹⁴Cf. Wisdo, op. cit. 103.

¹¹⁵Jochem Henningfeld, "Denken der Existenz. Einübung in Kierkegaard" (The Thought of Existence. Practice in Kierkegaard), in Philosophische Rundschau 40, Hefte 4, 1993: 310; cf. Hügli's claim that Kierkegaard's works "have specific objective content: The general category relationships [Kategorien-Verhältnisse] of existence and, in particular, of subjectivity and objectivity" (Hügli, op. cit. 237).

¹¹⁶D. Wisdo, op. cit. 98.

¹¹⁷Cf. Hannay, op. cit. 330. Kierkegaard's occasional insistence that he was not a philosopher was most likely made tongue-in-cheek. Not only did he clearly think of himself as a philosopher (cf. LD, no. 228/Breve og Aktstykker no. 228 and JP 6:6256/Pap. X⁶ B 40), but he was also convinced that he was a much better philosopher than were many who went under that name in Copenhagen at that time. He was convinced, in particular that he was a much better philosopher than was his contemporary H. L. Martensen (cf. JP 6:6256/Pap. X⁶ B 40) with whom he was engaged in almost constant debate and there is some

concerned with traditional philosophical issues like the nature of knowledge and its relation to belief.¹¹⁸ The philosophical significance of these issues and of his treatment of them was clearly not lost on Kierkegaard.¹¹⁹ He referred to himself as a philosopher in a letter to Rasmus Nielsen,¹²⁰ who was himself a professor of philosophy at the University of Copenhagen during the period of Kierkegaard's authorship.

I will, for the most part, be treating Kierkegaard as a philosopher in the traditional sense not because I believe this method is superior to the method of scholars who study Kierkegaard with the tools of literary criticism, but because I believe a more traditional philosophical analysis of the substance of his thought serves to complement the work of such scholars and that with respect to the issue of Kierkegaard's epistemology it is a treatment which has long been badly needed.

The assumption that Kierkegaard is an important philosophical thinker does not, in itself, address the issue of how one is to extract Kierkegaard's views from his pseudonymous works without doing violence to Kierkegaard's

evidence to support this view (cf. R. Nielsen, op. cit. and Robert L. Horn, op. cit.).

¹¹⁸Cf. Malantschuk's observation that "reflections on the structure of human knowledge, as well as on its beginning and limits, run parallel with Kierkegaard's earliest journal entries in which he is in eager pursuit of a coherent interpretation of all the possibilities of human existence" (Malantschuk, "Das Verhältnis," op. cit. 49).

¹¹⁹Cf. Hügli's claim that Kierkegaard "believed that, in a time of conceptual dissipation, he was the only one who knew how the [various] categories had to be applied and in what "spheres" they were at home" (Hügli, op. cit, 240; cf. EO I, 53-54/SV I, 37; CUP I, 362-363/SV VII, 314; CA, 9ff./SV IV, 281ff. and JP 6:6275 [pp. 73-74]/Pap. IX A 413 [p. 241]).

¹²⁰LD, no. 228/ Breve og Aktstykker, no. 228.

own pedagogical or philosophical intentions.¹²¹ I believe the most effective way to deal with this issue in the context of the present essay is to accompany, whenever possible, references from Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works with supporting references from his non-pseudonymous works as well as from his journals and papers.¹²² Such a practice is preferable to restricting the references to the latter works because one of the objectives of this essay is to show that Kierkegaard's works may be understood as a whole and that his authorship is characterized throughout by consistency in the substance of many of his views (e.g., the ones with which the present essay is concerned).¹²³

Because my objective here is to show that there is a coherent epistemology that underlies Kierkegaard's authorship as a whole, I have not restricted my treatment of this subject to specific works, but have included references from as many of Kierkegaard's works, both published and unpublished as possible. Like Hannay, I believe that "[o]f the forty or so volumes of the collected works and papers none can truthfully be said to be

¹²¹For other treatments of this issue see: Louis Mackey, Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet, op. cit. ix-xiii; Gregor Malantschuk, Kierkegaard's Thought, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) and Schmidinger, op. cit. 199-204.

¹²²This is a common practice among German Kierkegaard scholars. The works of, for example, Hügli, Schmidinger and Slotty that are referred to in this thesis are rich with references to both Kierkegaard's published works and his journals and papers.

¹²³This consistency appears less remarkable in light of the fact that most of Kierkegaard's works were written over a period of approximately only ten years. This is quite easily forgotten, however, because the sheer bulk of the authorship tends to create the impression that it was the product of a normal span of adult activity.

irrelevant to a presentation of his thought."¹²⁴ I am also in agreement, however, with Hannay's observation that "some" of Kierkegaard's works "are clearly more suited than others as sources for systematic presentation,"¹²⁵ thus certain works will be more heavily represented in the references than others. There are, for example, significantly more references to the Postscript than to any other single published work. The reason for this is not merely that it is particularly rich with references to knowledge, nor that as one of "the dialectical works,"¹²⁶ it is particularly well-suited for systematic presentation, but also because, as has been observed, "the Postscript alone offers a synoptic view of the whole range of Kierkegaard's thought."¹²⁷ Despite the fact, however that Kierkegaard's name appears on the Postscript as the editor and that he identifies himself at the end of this work as its actual author,¹²⁸ it is still a pseudonymous work.¹²⁹ References to the Postscript are thus almost equally balanced by references from Kierkegaard's journals and papers.

It will occasionally be possible to produce references to Kierkegaard's writings which would appear to contradict much of what I will say, or attribute to Kierkegaard, in

¹²⁴Hannay, op. cit., 21.

¹²⁵Ibid. 21.

¹²⁶Ibid. 93.

¹²⁷Ibid. 21.

¹²⁸Cf. CUP I, 625-630/SV VII, 545-549.

¹²⁹Because Kierkegaard's name appears on both Climacus books and because many Kierkegaard scholars believe that Climacus' views are essentially in agreement with those of Kierkegaard himself, these works are occasionally treated as if they were not pseudonymous (cf., e.g., Thulstrup, op. cit. 114).

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the following pages. Kierkegaard is no different in this respect from any other thinker. My objective, however, like that of any scholar engaged in an effort to determine the substance of the views of a particular thinker, is to develop an interpretation of those views that will be supported by the preponderance of evidence, taken in context.¹³⁰ That is, my aim here is to develop what Hannay has referred to as a "philosophically amplified" presentation of Kierkegaard's epistemology, "a version which emphasizes its overall unity and logical structure, as well as the conceptual content of the parts, to a degree and in a way not found in Kierkegaard's own writings."¹³¹

The Project.

The most unambiguous definition of knowledge offered by Kierkegaard appears in his journals in the context of his examination of another issue namely doubt. "Doubt," argues Kierkegaard, "is produced either by bringing reality [Realitet] into relation with ideality, . . . or by bringing ideality into relation with reality" (JP 1:891/Pap. IV B 13,18). The latter activity is referred to by him as that of ethics and the former as that of knowledge (i.e., erkendelsen).¹³² Knowledge, on Kierkegaard's view, is thus the result of reality having been brought into relation to ideality which is to say, it is a representation of reality in the abstract or ideal

¹³⁰Cf. Wisdo, op. cit. 99 for the importance of the context in which particular expressions appear in Kierkegaard's works.

¹³¹Ibid. 329.

¹³²Cf. JP 1:891/Pap. IV B 13,18.

categories of thought.¹³³ Despite the fact that all knowledge is, for Kierkegaard, based upon faith in the truth of presuppositions the truth of which has not been proved, there are, on his view, different types of faith.

Danish, unfortunately has only one word 'tro,' or 'troen,'¹³⁴ to cover both faith in the sense of belief in the reality of the external world and faith in the sense of belief in the forgiveness of sins.¹³⁵ Kierkegaard distinguishes, however, between what he refers to as "faith [Troen] in the ordinary sense" (PF, 87-88/SV IV, 251) and faith [Troen] in the "eminent sense" (PF, 88/SV IV, 251). Faith in the first sense--i.e., belief--is often automatic. That is, faith in this sense rarely requires any sort of effort. Faith in, for example, the reality of the external world is something which it appears possible to speak of human beings as being born with.¹³⁶ Faith in the second sense, however, requires, a great deal of effort, because it is, as we will see, always in some sense in opposition to one's natural instincts or inclinations.¹³⁷ I am going to argue that there are actually several kinds of

¹³³Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 106.

¹³⁴Cf. note 71 above.

¹³⁵Cf. Christian Frederich Bay, Fulstændig Engelsk og Dansk Ordbog (Complete English and Danish Dictionary) (Copenhagen, 1806), Første Deel, 193-194 and 813; Ferrall-Gudm. Repp., op. cit. 334; Molbech, op. cit. Anden Deel (Second Part) 1250-1251 and Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit., vol. II, 630.

This is undoubtedly the reason that 'faith' as both Pojman and Wisdo have observed, "has no single meaning for Kierkegaard, and the [thus] exegetical success depends upon our ability to explain the notion in its particular context" (Wisdo, op. cit. 99; cf. Thulstrup, op. cit. XXX and 200.

¹³⁶Cf. WOL, 218/SV IX, 221.

¹³⁷Cf. JP 2:1094/Pæd I A 36.

knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, and that the various types of knowledge he delineates correspond to the various types faith referred to above. Knowledge may be divided into two basic groups: "objective knowledge [den objektive Viden]" (CUP I, 200/SV VII, 168) and "subjective knowledge [den subjektive Viden]" (CUP I, 200/SV VII, 168).

One might expect that Kierkegaard's objection to the possibility of absolute knowledge would compel him to reject the possibility of objective knowledge. As I explained above, however, "Kierkegaard had no objection to 'objective knowledge' as such."¹³⁸ There is an important difference for him, however, between absolute knowledge and objective knowledge. Objective knowledge is designated as such by Kierkegaard not because of any pretension it carries to absoluteness, but because of the specific nature of its object. That is, objective knowledge is not essentially related to the existence of the individual knower and is thus distinguished from subjective knowledge which, according to Kierkegaard, does have such a relation.¹³⁹

Objective knowledge may be subdivided into what I will refer to as knowledge in the strict sense and "knowledge," or knowledge in a looser sense. Knowledge in the strict sense, I will argue, is a representation of being, or reality, in thought, the truth of which is equivalent to what Kierkegaard refers to as an "agreement" (CUP I, 169/SV VII, 157) between the two. This knowledge is associated, by Kierkegaard, with certainty in the sense of the necessity of the correspondence of the mental representation in question to reality and may be characterized as a justified true mental representation

¹³⁸Perkins, "Kierkegaard's Epistemological Preferences," op. cit. 216.

¹³⁹Cf., e.g., CUP I, 197-198/SV VII, 165-166.

(forestilling).¹⁴⁰

Most mental representations are not capable, however, of demonstration in the sense that their correspondence to reality can be proved to be necessary, nor are they of such a basic character that this correspondence may be spoken of as self-evident. This means, of course, that the criteria for knowledge, in the strict sense, will rarely be satisfied in practice. One might as a consequence expect that knowledge would not, in fact, occupy an important position in Kierkegaard's thought and this is undoubtedly part of the reason Kierkegaard is often assumed to be a philosophical skeptic by inclination. If it were possible, according to Kierkegaard, for the knower to maintain an entirely disinterested perspective relative to the question of the correspondence of a particular mental representation to reality, then he would, for the most part, abstain from making knowledge claims. Such a perspective is rarely if ever possible, however, according to Kierkegaard, because the essence of the knower, on his view, is precisely interest, or passion, and this, as we will see, is going to incline him to make knowledge claims when the correspondence of the representation in question to reality is inherently uncertain.

The phenomenon of the loose employment of the expression 'knowledge' is so pervasive that it is, in fact, impossible to ignore. To restrict the application of the expression 'knowledge' to those instances in which the correspondence of a mental representation to reality was

¹⁴⁰The term 'mental representation' may seem an awkward departure from the standard 'belief.' It is, however, important to distinguish the two because 'belief' has dogmatic connotations which 'mental representation' does not. All beliefs, in this context, are mental representations, but all mental representations, as we shall see, are not beliefs (i.e., dogmatic statements about the way reality is in itself).

formally certain would mean a radical departure from the way the expression is most often used. While such a departure from ordinary language is not unusual among philosophers, it is, in fact, something which Kierkegaard abhors. "One does not want to lose sight of the daily speech and usage of language," he argues, "which sometimes happens to a scholar [with] the consequence that he constantly collides with the everyday and, without himself really being conscious of it, offends the genius of the language and the rightful shareholders in the common property of the language" (P, 71/SV V, 45).¹⁴¹

As a result, I will argue, of his desire not to lose sight of ordinary language, Kierkegaard develops, along with the strict sense of 'knowledge,' a looser sense which more accurately reflects how the expression is most often used. Knowledge in this loose sense is referred to by him as "approximate knowledge [Approximations-Viden]" (CUP I, 81/SV VII, 62-63). This knowledge, I will argue, is analogous to knowledge in the strict sense. It is a representation of reality in thought that is associated, however, with probability rather than certainty. This kind of knowledge, does not, I will argue, compete with knowledge in the strict sense but is restricted, on Kierkegaard's view, to particular sorts of objects with respect to which knowledge in the strict sense is inaccessible.

While objective knowledge is descriptive in nature, subjective knowledge, I will argue, is essentially prescriptive. That is, subjective knowledge is knowledge which is essentially related to the existence of the

¹⁴¹Cf. JP 1:98/Pap. V B 55, 10 and Hügli's claim that "Kierkegaard fought every attempt to develop a new language, in the sense in which this had been done by Hegelian speculation, which had created a language that was spoken by no human being with the exception of philosophers" (Hügli, op. cit. 51)

individual knower in the sense that it prescribes the manner in which that person ought to live. This knowledge, like objective knowledge, may be divided into two sorts, subjective knowledge proper and pseudo-knowledge. Subjective knowledge proper is associated, I will argue, with psychological certainty concerning the correspondence of the mental representation in question to reality, but it is problematic in a way that objective knowledge is not in that this certainty is inexorably intertwined with the correspondence of the reality of the knower to this mental representation. Subjective knowledge I will argue, is further complicated by the fact that truth, in this context, to the extent that it is prescriptive in nature, cannot actually be the property of a mental representation as such, but is rather a property of the existence of the knower.

Finally, there is, in Kierkegaard's works, what I will refer to as pseudo-knowledge which is a mental representation, or objective description, of something which is essentially subjective--i.e., prescriptive--but which is not conjoined with the subjective phenomenon to which it is properly related.

Kierkegaard's epistemology is, I will argue, both substantive and procedural in nature.¹⁴² That is, both objective knowledge in the strict sense and subjective knowledge proper are associated with the contact of the knower with the object of the mental representation in question, whereas both objective knowledge in the loose

¹⁴²For more information concerning these determinations see Richard Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) 45. Rorty's determinations are actually "substantive," or "hylomorphic," and "representational." I prefer the above determinations which were used by Charles Taylor in a course he taught entitled "Overcoming Epistemology" at McGill University in the spring of 1988.

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sense and pseudo-knowledge are the result, according to Kierkegaard, of the application of a procedure for determining knowledge as such.

Part of the difficulty involved in understanding Kierkegaard's epistemology concerns the fact that he makes no rigorous terminological distinctions either among the various Danish expressions for knowledge or among the four distinct types of knowledge referred to in his works. The variety of uses he makes of the expression 'knowledge' do not, however, represent an equivocation on his part as to its meaning. 'Knowledge,' for Kierkegaard, has a multiplicity of meanings which serve an important purpose within his authorship. Each of these meanings represents what I will argue is a legitimate sense in which the expression is used in everyday contexts. Kierkegaard's objective, I will argue, in detailing the various senses in which the expression 'knowledge' is used in everyday contexts is to show that there is no sense in which knowledge of the truth of Christianity may legitimately be interpreted to be superior to faith in this truth.¹⁴³

¹⁴³Cf. Slotty, op. cit. 43.

PART I: THE NATURE OF THE KNOWING SUBJECT

1. Introduction to Part I.

"Kierkegaard's epistemology can be understood," it has been argued "only if put into proper relation with his metaphysics of spirit."¹ Spirit, is synonymous, on Kierkegaard's view, with what he refers to as "the self"² in the "real" (egentlige),³ or absolute sense.⁴ Before beginning an examination of Kierkegaard's epistemology, we must thus look briefly at his views on the self, or on the essence of the knowing subject, as this subject is "intended," according to Kierkegaard, "to be spirit."⁵ My objective here is not to put forward an exhaustive explication of Kierkegaard's position on the nature of the self, but merely to sketch an outline of those aspects of his position which are indispensable for understanding the claims developed later concerning knowledge. The significance of much of what I will say in the next four chapters will become apparent only in part three. That does not mean, however, that the reader primarily interested in part two, or in Kierkegaard's views on the nature of objective knowledge, can dispense with reading

¹Jeremy Walker, "Ethical Beliefs: A Theory of Truth Without Truth Values," Thought LV, 1980: 305.

²Cf. SUD, 13/SV XI, 127; SUD, 26/SV XI, 140; SUD, 46/SV XI, 159; WOL, 68-69/SV IX, 58-59; PC, 159-161/SV XII, 149-150; EO II, 215-216/SV II, 193-194; Hügli, op. cit. 58 and Schmidinger, op. cit. 226.

³Cf. CA, 79/SV IV, 348 and Malantschuk, "Nøglebegreber," op. cit. 142-144.

⁴Cf. EO II, 219/SV II, 196 and Hannay, op. cit. 231.

⁵SUD, 43/SV XI, 156; cf. SUD, 33/SV XI, 146 and SUD, 35/SV XI, 148.

these chapters. Even Kierkegaard's position on objective knowledge must be placed, I will argue, in the context of his views on the nature of the knowing subject.

§1.1. Consciousness as Interest

The best place to start when endeavoring to understand Kierkegaard's views on the essence of the knowing subject is to look at his views on the nature of consciousness. The richest resource for determining Kierkegaard's views on the nature of consciousness is his unpublished work Johannes Climacus or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est.⁶ There is, unfortunately, a dearth of evidence in Kierkegaard's journals and papers to substantiate that Kierkegaard agreed himself with the views expressed by Climacus on the nature of consciousness. What is important for my purposes, however, is that the views on the nature of consciousness found in Johannes Climacus are continuous with views Kierkegaard develops later, in both pseudonymous and non-pseudonymous works, on the nature of human psychology and the self and that these latter views, as we will see, are themselves substantiated by Kierkegaard's journals and papers. It is, in fact, I shall argue, the position on the nature of consciousness that is detailed in Johannes Climacus which provides the foundation for these latter views.

⁶An English translation of this work is found together with the Hongs' translation of the Philosophical Fragments. It is interesting to note at this point that despite the wealth of information in Johannes Climacus concerning Kierkegaard's views on the nature of consciousness, there are no references to this work in Schmuëli's Kierkegaard and Consciousness (op. cit.).

I argued in the introduction to this thesis, that Kierkegaard was a realist in the sense that he believed there was a distinction between what he referred to as "factual being [faktisk Væren] and ideal being [ideel Væren]" (PF, 41n./SV IV, 209n.).⁷ Factual being, on Kierkegaard's view, does not, as one might expect, refer to tangible existence, but to what one could call objective reality. That is, it refers to the being of everything which has reality in itself and not simply reality as an idea.⁸ Factual being is thus synonymous, in Kierkegaard's authorship, with reality in general, which is variously referred to by him as "being" (i.e. væren),⁹ "existence" in the sense of "tilværelsen"¹⁰ and "reality" (i.e.,

⁷Cf. Mackey, "The Loss of the World in Kierkegaard's Ethics," op. cit. 244 and Thulstrup, "Indledning," op. cit. XL.

⁸That this is the sense in which Kierkegaard uses the expression "faktisk Væren" is clear from his criticism of Spinoza's proof for the existence of God. That is, he argues that Spinoza tries to deduce the existence ("Væren") of God from an examination of the essence of the idea of God, whereas Kierkegaard argues that it is impossible to deduce from the idea of something that that thing has "factual being." That is, Kierkegaard's criticism of Spinoza is that he tries to prove that there really is a God--not that God has existence like human existence--by examining the idea of God.

⁹Cf., e.g., EO II, 169/SV II, 154; PF, 41n./SV IV, 209n. and CUP, 35n./SV VII, 24n.

¹⁰Cf., e.g., EO I, 34/SV I, 19; EO II, 48/SV II, 45; PF, 41-42/SV IV, 208-209; ED, 322/SV V, 102 and CUP, 39n./SV VII, 28n.; Widenman, op. cit. 124-125 and chapter eight, §8.1.1. 'Tilværelsen' was defined in the nineteenth century as "a things being [Væren]" (Molbech, op. cit., Anden Deel, 1213; cf. Ferrall-Gudm. Repp., op. cit. 331 and the definition of 'Væren,' in Molbech, op. cit., Anden Deel, 1586-1587).

realitet).¹¹

Consciousness, argues Climacus, is a relation between reality (realitet) and ideality (idealitet).¹² He is careful, however, to distinguish consciousness from reflection.¹³ The categories of the latter, he explains "are always dichotomous" (JC, 169/Pap. IV B 1, 147) (e.g., ideality and reality, and soul and body), while those of the former are "trichotomous" (JC, 169/Pap. IV B 1, 147-48), as is expressed when I say: "I am conscious of this sensory impression" (JC, 169/Pap. IV B 1, 148). That is, there is a sensory impression, a consciousness of it and finally an "I" whose consciousness it is. Reflection, argues Climacus, is the possibility of a relation between reality and ideality¹⁴ and as such it is "disinterested" (JC, 170/Pap. IV B 1, 148), but consciousness, as the relation, that is to say, as the actual relation is interested, or "is interest" (JC, 170/Pap. IV B 1, 148).¹⁵

¹¹Cf., e.g., EO I, 208/SV I, 183; EO II, 35/SV II, 33; FT, 98n/SV III, 146n.; CA, 11/SV IV, 283; CUP, 93/SV VII, 93; Malantschuk, Nøglebegreber (Key Concepts), op. cit. 210-212; Mackey, "The Loss of the World," op. cit. 271n. and Widenman, op. cit. 116-118. 'Real' was defined in the nineteenth century as "værende, tilværende" (Molbech, op. cit., Anden Deel, 5:5).

¹²JC, 168/Pap. IV B 1, 146. Johannes Climacus was not published by Kierkegaard, hence, despite the fact that there is an independent English translation of this work, the Danish text is found in Kierkegaard's Papirer rather than in his Samlede Værker.

¹³'Reflection' should not be confused with 'reflexion,' which is the Hongs' translation of the Danish 'reflex,' which, according to the Hongs means "the reflected image or the age in private, domestic, and social-political life" (TA, ix).

¹⁴Cf. JC, 170/Pap., IV B 1, 148.

¹⁵"Consciousness," argues Hügli, "is interest itself, namely, inter-esse in the original sense of being-between [dazwischen sein]. Consciousness forms the relationship between reality and ideality and is, in this sense, always

That is, consciousness is an "interesse" (JC, 170/Pap. IV B 1, 148), or a "being between" reality and ideality.

Kierkegaard's definition of consciousness as trichotomous should alert the reader to the fact that there is often little, if any, distinction in Kierkegaard's writings between 'consciousness' and 'self-consciousness.' That is, consciousness, as was described above, always involves an object, a consciousness of that object, and an I whose consciousness it is. Consciousness of objects, either physical or abstract, would thus always appear to involve some degree of self-consciousness, on Kierkegaard's view.

Consciousness is, however, not always identical, for Kierkegaard with self-consciousness.¹⁶ To the extent that consciousness may be distinguished from self-consciousness, it could be defined as the consciousness which characterized the subject in an immediate sense. Self-consciousness would then be the relation of the individual moments of consciousness, an interesse of interessers (i.e., a being-between of being-betweens).¹⁷ Self-consciousness, so defined, is thus interest just as consciousness is interest, with the difference being that the interest of self-consciousness is the subject of consciousness, whereas

in between" (Hügli, op. cit. 56).

¹⁶Cf. Pap. VII¹ A 182.

¹⁷'Interesse' is a Danish word which corresponds to the English 'interest.' The plural of 'interesse' is formed with the addition of an 'r.'

This claim about the nature of self-consciousness gives rise, of course, to the formal possibility of an infinite regress of self-consciousnesses. This should not be disturbing, however, because this possibility can be construed as evidence for the infinite or eternal aspect of the synthesis which is the self. Further, the possibility of such a regress need only be accounted for formally, because it is not something in which one ever finds oneself involved in a practical sense.

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the interest of consciousness is the object of knowledge, which may, of course, happen to be the subject, but only accidentally. That is, the subject of consciousness is not of essential interest to consciousness, but only to self-consciousness.

Consciousness, to the extent that it is distinguished by Kierkegaard from self-consciousness, is not of much interest to him. Hence despite the distinction identified above between these two types of consciousness, Kierkegaard's terminology often appears to conflate them.¹⁸ The interest of consciousness, according to Kierkegaard, is not essentially significant with respect to our existence as particular human beings. Only the interest of self-consciousness, on his view, is significant in relation to our subjective existence as such.

§1.2. Interest and Passion

Interest may be interpreted in two ways.¹⁹ It may be interpreted legalistically as referring to purely formal involvement independent of the presence, or absence, of subjective concern on the part of the "interested" party. The welfare of a ward is, for example, on this view, something in which his guardian is "interested," quite apart from the issue of whether the guardian experiences any subjective concern for this welfare. Interest may also, however, be interpreted as subjective concern.

Both these senses of 'interest' are involved in Kierkegaard's definition of consciousness as interest. Consciousness is interest in a purely formal sense in that, as a being-between reality and ideality, it is formally

¹⁸Cf. chapter two.

¹⁹Cf. Schmidinger, op. cit. 245-247 and 250-253.

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involved with both these realms. What is true of either reality or ideality is thus significant for consciousness, quite apart from the issue of whether the conscious subject experiences any concern for these truths. The fact, however, that this subject is formally involved with both ideality and reality is what makes subjective concern relative to these truths possible. This concern is, it appears, a natural consequence of this situation.

If we return to the example of the relation between a ward and his guardian, we can say that the fact that the guardian is legally responsible for the welfare of the ward means that we expect her to experience subjective concern for that welfare. We take the absence of such concern to indicate that the guardian has either failed to appreciate the significance of her position, or that there is something psychologically amiss with her. It is important to point out here that such subjective concern is not equivalent to affection. The guardian may indeed experience subjective concern for the welfare of her ward without feeling any affection for that person. That is, we expect the guardian to be anxious that the ward's needs are provided for because she wishes to avoid any negative consequences which would be associated with her failure to live up to the legal obligation to provide for those needs. The subjective concern of the guardian for the welfare of her ward stems from the fact that her formal involvement with that welfare has the potential to affect her own circumstances.

But while the fact that consciousness is defined by Kierkegaard as interest in a purely abstract sense makes concrete interest on the part of the subject possible and, in fact, even leads us to expect such interest, it is not immediately apparent, how the transition from the one type of interest to the other is effected. That is, there is no existence code, like there is a legal code, which spells

out for the conscious subject exactly what sort of practical significance various truths, or aspects of reality, have in relation to his or her existence. It is thus with the issue of how the transition from abstract to concrete interest in these truths is effected that I will be concerned in the present section.

It appears that the transition from abstract to concrete interest is accomplished, according to Kierkegaard, through suffering. The suffering in question, however, is not the result of some particular misfortune--i.e., it is not accidental in origin, but essential to human existence. Human existence, according to Kierkegaard, is temporally defined in the sense that it is constantly in the process of coming to be (tilblivelse). "All coming to be [Tilblivelse]," argues Kierkegaard, "is a suffering [Liden]" (PF, 74/SV IV, 237).²⁰ Indeed, Kierkegaard remarks in a draft of Johannes Climacus that "[t]he birth [Tilblivelse] of consciousness . . . is the first pain of existence" (JC, 257/Pap. IV B, 14:9). That is, the consciousness of change is itself characterized by change, thus the suffering associated, by Kierkegaard, with change becomes associated with consciousness itself to the extent that the object of consciousness is change.

"Existence [Existens]," argues Kierkegaard, "if one becomes conscious of it, generates [giver] passion" (CUP I,

²⁰Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 209. I have altered the translation slightly. The Hongs' translation has "all coming into existence" where I have "all coming to be." The Danish is actually "Alt Tilblivelse." 'Tilblivelse' may be translated into English as: 'birth,' 'origin,' 'genesis,' or 'creation' (cf. Ferrall-Gudm. Repp., op. cit. 327; Molbech, op. cit. Anden Deel, 1185 and Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit. vol. II, 590). Thus the above quotation may be translated literally as "all birth, generation or creation is a suffering" (cf. Hügli, op. cit. 63 and 270, note 21 and Hannay, op. cit. 102). 'Existence' (i.e., 'eksistens') is a technical term for Kierkegaard which does not actually appear in the passage in question.

351/SV VII, 304).²¹ To the extent that the subject is conscious of existence, he suffers. and to the extent that he suffers (liden), he is passionate (lidenskabelig).²² That is, it is his suffering which is consequent upon his consciousness of existence that generates concrete interest in that existence in the sense of subjective, passionate concern.

"Passion and interest," observes Schmidinger, "are considered by Kierkegaard to be equivalent concepts."²³ This point can perhaps be made more clearly if we return to the example of the relation between a guardian and her ward. That is, the formal interest that the guardian has in the welfare of the ward translates naturally into concrete interest because the former interest, when the guardian becomes conscious of it, generates a kind of suffering. The awareness of the guardian that her own welfare is connected with that of her ward creates in her a certain natural anxiety for the latter's welfare.

Consciousness, as interest, or as a being-between reality and ideality represents what one might call the

²¹Emphasis added. I have altered the translation here slightly. The Hongs have translated "giver" as "involves." 'Giver' literally means 'gives,' (cf. Ferrall-Gudm. Repp. op. cit. 111 and Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit. vol. I, 459-460) thus I believe that "generates" is a better translation than Hongs' "involves."

²²There is, in fact, etymological justification for the identification of suffering with passion insofar as 'suffering' in Danish is 'liden' or 'lidelse' and 'passion' is 'lidenskab' (the 'skab' ending in Danish functions like the 'schaft' ending in German) (cf. Ferrall-Gudm. Repp., op. cit. 179, Molbech, op. cit. Første Deel, 1398-1400 and Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit. vol. I, 784).

²³Schmidinger, op. cit. 254 (cf. 380) and Jörg Disse, Kierkegaards Phänomenologie der Freiheitserfahrung (Kierkegaard's Phenomenology of the Experience of Freedom), Symposium, Philosophische Schriftenreihe (Freiburg/München: Verlag Karl Alber, 1991) 41.

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formal involvement of the conscious subject in these two realms quite apart, again, from the issue of whether he or she experiences any subjective concern in relation to this involvement. To the extent, however, that this involvement gives rise to a kind of suffering, that is, to the extent that the object of consciousness is existence, the transition from abstract interest to concrete interest (i.e., subjective concern) is not merely possible, it is natural. That is, the concern of an organism to alleviate its suffering is interpreted as part of the instinct for self-preservation. It is a prerequisite for the existence of living organisms and thus a necessary presupposition of any definition of natural or rational behavior.²⁴

§1.3. Passion and Actuality

We saw above that the suffering (liden) which characterizes the consciousness of existence generates a passionate (lidenskabelig) concern in the subject for its alleviation. Concrete interest is thus synonymous with passionate interest. The point may also be made, however, by saying that passionate interest is concrete, or that passion is what distinguishes merely abstract interest from concrete

²⁴This does not compel one to conclude that the avoidance of suffering is always rational or that the choice of suffering can never be a rational one. It means merely that under normal circumstances, the avoidance of suffering is in keeping with the nature of all living organisms. Certain kinds of suffering may rationally be chosen in order, for example, to avoid other and more extreme sorts of suffering. One may choose, for example, to endure the suffering of withdrawal in order to avoid the greater suffering which can ultimately be associated with an addiction. Submission to torture and death may even be rational if the ultimate end is the preservation of the lives of other organisms, although this is not an issue which can be decided in this context.

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or actual (virkelige) interest (i.e., subjective concern). And, indeed, we find that Kierkegaard makes an explicit identification of such passionate interest with actuality.

"Possibility and actuality," explains Hügli,

have the same content; the difference lies in how, or in which form, this content [exists] for me, whether I view its objectivity at a distance in a state of uninterestedness, or whether I make it my own in the sense that, by being infinitely, subjectively,²⁵ passionately interested in it, I exist in it.

That is, interest in the sense of subjective passionate concern, is the vehicle for the transition from ideality, or possibility, to actuality. This can be seen in Kierkegaard's claim in the Postscript that "[t]o exist [at exister] constitutes the highest interest of the existing individual, and his interest [i.e., his subjective passionate concern] in his existence constitutes his actuality [Virkeligheden]" (CUP I, 314/SV VII, 270).²⁶ The fact that the individual has an interest in existing would not appear to be enough to give him actuality, in the technical sense, if he did not actively take an interest in his existence. This coheres with another claim in the Postscript that "an actual human being, composed of the infinite and the finite and infinitely interested in existing, has his actuality precisely in holding these two

²⁵Hügli, op. cit. 211.

²⁶Emphasis added. This quotation comes from the Swenson-Lowrie translation (279). I have altered this translation slightly, so that it more closely resembles the original Danish. The most significant alteration concerns the translation of "Virkeligheden" as "actuality" rather than as "reality." I have chosen the wording of the Swenson-Lowrie translation over that of the Hongs' translation because, once again, I believe it is a little easier to understand.

factors together" (CUP I, 302/SV VII, 259).²⁷

Kierkegaard, explains Hügli, "considers the Hegelian distinction between "existence" (i.e., Dasein) and actuality to be correct. That is, the outward appearance of a thing is merely "daseiend." It attains actuality only to the extent that it is taken up into the idea [die Idee]."²⁸ This means that an individual who does not synthesize reality and ideality in his existence has no actuality. The actuality of the individual is thus not straightforwardly identified with the fact that he is formally defined as an interesse of the finite and the infinite, but with the fact that he is concretely (i.e., passionately) interested in these two factors in that he is actively engaged in holding them together. Interest in existence is associated, on Kierkegaard's view, with suffering and is thus of the concrete, or passionate sort. Passion leads to the actualization, thus the actuality of individual conscious subject is the result of a passionate interest he takes in his existence.

²⁷Emphasis added.

²⁸Hügli, op. cit. 103.

2. Self-Consciousness

I argued in the preceding chapter that, according to Kierkegaard, consciousness of existence was associated with suffering. What remains to be examined, however, is the extent to which consciousness must be of existence. That is, it would appear that it would be possible to avoid being conscious of existence as such, and that to the extent such avoidance would be possible, consciousness would be "interested" in only the formal sense. In order, however, to answer the above question, we must turn briefly to an examination of what it is that Kierkegaard means by the expression 'existence' (i.e. eksistens).

We saw in the preceding chapter that being, or reality was variously referred to by Kierkegaard as "Væren," "Realitet," and "Tilværelsen." There was not, in general, any difference between the way the expressions 'eksistens' and 'tilværelsen' were used in the nineteenth century. 'Eksistens,' or 'Existents,' was merely the Latin equivalent of the Danish 'tilværelsen.'¹ There is a difference, according to Kierkegaard, between being (væren) and existence (eksistens).² "Formally," explains Hügli, "existence proves to be a contradiction between thought and being."³ Mathematical objects, for Kierkegaard, are thus understood to have being (i.e., ideal being), but they do

¹Cf. Ferrall-Gudm. Repp., op. cit. 331 and 389; Molbech, op. cit. Anden Deel, 1213 and Ludwig Meyer, Fremmedordbog (Dictionary of Foreign Words) (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1863) 243.

²Cf. CUP I, 330/SV VII, 285; CA, 12/SV IV, 285n.; Widenman, op. cit. 124-125 and Jörg Disse, op. cit. 35-40.

³Hügli, op. cit. 146.

not exist (i.e., have actual being). That is, the being of mathematical objects is purely abstract, which is to say, essentially eternal. Everything that "exists," however, on Kierkegaard's view, is temporal in that it has come to be.⁴

There are two Danish expressions in Kierkegaard's works that are used to refer to change in the sense of becoming. These expressions are 'vorden'⁵ and 'tilblivelse.'⁶ The former expression is used by him to denote change in general--i.e., changes which may, or may not, be associated with necessity.⁷ It is this expression which is used by him to refer to the changes which characterize nature. Nature "exists," in that it came to be at some point, but the changes which have subsequently characterized it are not changes in the sense of

⁴To "come to be [blive til]," according to Kierkegaard, is to become "actual" (cf. PF, 72-75/SV IV, 235-237).

⁵Cf., e.g., CUP I, 80/SV VII, 62; CUP I, 91/SV VII, 72 and SUD, 30/SV XI, 143.

⁶Cf., e.g., PF, 72-75/SV IV, 235-239; CUP, 583/SV VII, 508.

⁷'Vorden' is the Danish cognate of the German 'Werden' (cf. Breseman, op. cit. 337 and 636 and Müller, op. cit. Dritter Theil, 679) and Hegel uses 'Werden' to denote a certain unrest or state of oscillation between being and non-being (Sein und Nichts). Kierkegaard is not entirely happy, however, with this account of 'Werden' (i.e., 'vorden') which he says is "somewhat unclear, inasmuch as being is itself also the continuity in the alternation" (CUP I, 80/SV VII, 62). Hegel asserts, however, that when the discussion concerns 'Werden' as it pertains to "a particular, actual something [einem irgend Etwas und Wirklichem] the alternation in question is more accurately characterized as one between the positive and the negative (Hegel's Science of Logic, op. cit. 85). It is this latter account of 'Werden' which most closely resembles Kierkegaard's 'vorden' (cf., e.g., CUP I, 80/SV VII, 62; CUP I, 91/SV VII, 72 and CUP I, 578/SV VII, 504).

tilblivelse.⁸

To say that something "comes to be," on Kierkegaard's view, means that it has gone from a state of non-being (ikke-væren) to a state of being (væren). But this non-being, observes Kierkegaard, cannot be nothing because then the change of coming to be would be equivalent to getting something from nothing. Kierkegaard argues, therefore, that "this non-being which is abandoned by that which comes to be must also exist [være til] But such a being," he continues, "which nevertheless is non-being is possibility" (PF, 73/SV IV, 237). The change of coming to be is thus defined by him as the transition from possibility to actuality. Such a transition, Kierkegaard argues, cannot take place with necessity because "[c]oming to be is a change, but since the necessary is always related to itself and is related to itself in the same way, it cannot be changed at all" (PF, 74/SV IV, 237). He concludes, therefore, that if the change of coming to be does not come about with necessity, it must come about freely.

It is for this reason the changes which characterize nature do not exemplify genuine becoming (tilblivelse) and that nature does not, properly speaking, have a history on Kierkegaard's view.⁹ That is, these changes do not come about freely. Deciduous trees, for example, are not free to keep their leaves all year, just as flowers are not free to bloom at anytime whatever. The changes which characterize nature are determined, on Kierkegaard's view,

⁸Cf., e.g., PF, 75-76/SV IV, 239; CA, 21/SV IV, 294; CA, 89/SV IV, 359 and chapter six, note 38. The distinction between Kierkegaard's use of the expressions 'vorden' and 'tilblivelse' is discussed by J. Himmelstrup in his Terminologisk Register (Terminological Register) (746-747 and 765-766) which appears in vol. XV of the second Danish edition of Kierkegaard's collected works and which was re-printed in the third addition. Unfortunately, however, little scholarly use appears to have been made of this distinction.

⁹Cf. PF, 76/SV IV, 239.

by the essence of nature itself and are thus changes only in the phenomenal sense. It is clear, however, that phenomenal change is not, in itself, what Kierkegaard means by "coming to be." But if consciousness of phenomenal change is not equivalent to consciousness of existence, what does constitute consciousness of existence?

Humanity, according to Kierkegaard, unlike nature, has a history in what he calls "the stricter sense" (PF, 74/SV IV, 240). According to Kierkegaard, however, even the contemplation of human history does not constitute a consciousness of existence on Kierkegaard's view. Everything which has come to be, argues Kierkegaard, is historical.¹⁰ The difficulty is that

[b]ecause the historical intrinsically has the illusiveness of coming to be [Tilblivelse],¹¹ it cannot be sensed directly and immediately. The immediate impression of a natural phenomenon or of an event is not the impression of the historical, for the coming to be cannot be sensed immediately--but only the presence. But the presence of the historical has becoming [Tilblivelse] within itself--otherwise it is not the presence of the historical. (PF, 81/SV IV, 244)

To say that the historical cannot be immediately sensed or perceived is to say that actuality cannot be immediately sensed or perceived. "All knowledge [Viden] about actuality," argues Kierkegaard, "is possibility" (CUP I, 316/SV VII, 271). We have already seen, however, that possibility is opposed to actuality, thus it would appear that there is no knowledge of actuality as such. Indeed, Kierkegaard argues that "[t]he only actuality there is for an existing person [en Existerende] is his own ethical

¹⁰Cf., PF, 75/SV IV, 239.

¹¹Cf. chapter one, note 20.

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actuality" (CUP I, 316/SV VII, 271). All other actuality, according to Kierkegaard, is transformed by thought into possibility which is to say that it is not actuality for the knowing subject.

To claim, however, that the only actuality there is for an existing individual is his own ethical actuality would appear equivalent to saying that this actuality could be an object of immediate apprehension for the individual whose actuality it was. Such a claim is, indeed, consistent with what has been identified as Kierkegaard's "intuitionism."¹² That is, the knowing subject, on Kierkegaard's view, can be conscious of his own ethical actuality in that unlike all other actuality, he is immediately related to it. It appears that, according to Kierkegaard, one is conscious of one's own ethical actuality in much the same way one is conscious of one's own pain. It will, in fact, turn out that this ethical actuality is precisely a kind of pain (i.e., the pain of guilt-consciousness).

"Kierkegaard's psychology," explains Hannay, "flatly acknowledges the reality of ethics and attempts no scientific explanation of it."¹³ That is, everyone, on Kierkegaard's view, is presumed to possess a knowledge of eternally valid norms for human behavior.¹⁴ Consciousness of one's ethical actuality is, for Kierkegaard, equivalent to the awareness of an abstract, or ideal, ethical standard to which one is responsible for making one's existence

¹²Hügli, op. cit. 81 and Bejerholm, op. cit. 30.

¹³Hannay, op. cit. 160.

¹⁴Cf. Malantschuk, "Nøglebegreber," op. cit. 44-45 and Hügli, op. cit. 161.

conform¹⁵ combined with the conformity, or lack thereof, that one's existence exhibits.¹⁶ One will always fail, however, to conform fully to the ideal ethical standard,¹⁷ thus consciousness of one's ethical actuality is, to some extent, always consciousness of guilt.

Despite the fact, however, that one's ethical actuality is something of which one is immediately aware, on Kierkegaard's view, it is possible to try to ignore or to flee from this awareness in much the same way that one can try to ignore pain. Guilt consciousness presupposes self-consciousness. Yet, observes Kierkegaard, "how rare is the person who has continuity with regard to his consciousness of himself! As a rule people [Menneskene] are conscious only momentarily, conscious in the midst of big decisions, but they do not take the daily everyday into account at all" (SUD, 105/SV XI, 215). This observation of Kierkegaard's pseudonym, Anti-Climacus' is corroborated by an entry in his journal from 1850 where he observes that "[t]here are many people, surely the majority, who are able to live without any real consciousness penetrating their lives" (JP 3:3130/Pap. X² A 594).¹⁸ The lives of such individuals are, according to Kierkegaard, "a simulated

¹⁵The awareness of this standard, or moral law, is actually part of what Kierkegaard refers to as immanent metaphysical knowledge. This knowledge is examined in chapter fourteen.

¹⁶The awareness of such conformity (or the lack thereof) is examined in chapter fifteen.

¹⁷Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 218 and Slotky, op. cit. 70.

¹⁸Cf. JP 3:3217/Pap. X¹ A, 628. It is clear that what Kierkegaard means here by "consciousness" is, in fact, "self-consciousness." Such a conflation of expressions is, as was noted above, not unusual for Kierkegaard. What is important, again, is that one knows what is being talked about and in this instance, at least, this is relatively clear.

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posture [fingret Udfald] of a purely sensate existence" (JP 3:3705/Pap. IX A 365).¹⁹ "Consciousness," argues Kierkegaard, "is the decisive thing in relation to the self. The more consciousness, the more will [and] the more will, the more self" (SUD, 29/SV XI, 142). Consciousness is decisive, according to Kierkegaard, because it necessarily involves self-consciousness or, more particularly, consciousness of the existence (i.e., ethical actuality) of its subject, which consciousness is, in turn, associated with suffering. That is, suffering generates passion and decisiveness, as we will see below, inheres in passion.²⁰

"Accurate, clear, decisive, impassioned understanding [Forstaaelse] is of great importance," argues Kierkegaard, "for it facilitates action" (JP 3:3705/Pap. IX A 365). What Kierkegaard says here in his journal is consistent with the views on the relation between passion and action expressed by each of his pseudonyms which touches on this issue. As early as Either/Or we find Judge Wilhelm associating passion with decisiveness and action when he observes of A that "[p]assionate as you are, it was no doubt possible that you with your passionateness, could decide to forget your great plans, your studies" (EO II, 13/SV II, 13). This position is repeated in the Stages on Life's Way where we find references to the "passion of action [Handlings Lidenskab]" (SLW, 372/SV VI, 348), and to "pathos-filled passion that wants to act [pathetisk Lidenskab at ville handle]" (SLW, 436/SV VI, 406-7), as

¹⁹Emphasis added. According to Kierkegaard, however, no one can really have a purely sensate existence. Insofar as everyone is understood to be immediately aware of his own ethical actuality, the closest anyone can come to a purely sensate existence, on Kierkegaard's view, is a "simulated posture" of it. Cf. SUD, 17/SV XI, 131.

²⁰Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 133.

well as the observation that "without passion one never arrives at any resolution" (SLW, 163/SV VI, 155). Lastly, we find in the Two Ages the observation that "[t]he single individual [in the present age] . . . has not fomented enough passion to tear himself out of the web of reflection" (TA, 69/SV VIII, 65-66).

The identification of passion with decisiveness appears unproblematic at first. It becomes more problematic, however, when one remembers that passion is generated by suffering. That is, we most often think of suffering as something that one endures--i.e., something to which one's relation is passive rather than active. There are, however, two distinct but closely related senses in which Kierkegaard uses the expression 'suffering.' Suffering, as we saw, was associated, by Kierkegaard, with generation, or coming to be, which we now understand in the narrow sense of the ethical development of the knowing subject. It is important to appreciate, however, that this development need not be positive. It is most likely, in fact, to be characterized by a combination of ethical failures as well as successes. Such failure is not, however, on Kierkegaard's view, the result of a positive choice of evil. It is rather the result of the failure to choose good. Kierkegaard argues, for example, that

[i]f a person does not do what is right at the very second he knows [har erkjendt], it--then first of all knowledge [Erkjendelsen]²¹ simmers

²¹The noun 'knowledge' does not actually appear in the Hongs' translation of this passage. All the above references to "knowledge" appear in the Hongs' translation as "knowing." In each instance, however, the Danish expression in question is "Erkjendelsen," which is actually a noun rather than a verb. The same thing is true with respect to the following references to "the will." That is, all these references appear in the Hongs' translation as "willing," despite the fact that the Danish term in question is "Villien," which, like 'Erkjendelsen,' is a

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down. Next comes the question of how the will appraises what is known [det Erkjendte]. The will is dialectical and has under it the entire lower nature of human beings [Mennesket] if this does not agree with what is known, then it does not necessarily follow that the will goes out and does the opposite of what knowledge understood (presumably such strong opposites are rare); rather the will allows some time to elapse, an interim called: "We shall look at it tomorrow." During all this, knowledge becomes more and more obscure, and the lower nature gains the upper hand more and more; alas, for the good must be done immediately, as soon as it is known [erkjendt] (SUD, 94/SV XI, 205)

A person who fails in this way to act ethically, does not positively choose evil, on Kierkegaard's view, he just chooses not to do good. There is a sense, however, in which this "choice" is not really a choice on Kierkegaard's view. That is,

there are cases, particularly in connection with evil actions, where the transition from thought to action is scarcely noticeable, it is not denied; but these cases have a special explanation. They show what happens when the individual is in the power of habit, that through often having made the transition from thought to action he has lost the ability to keep the transition under the control of the will. It is a state of slavery to a habit which makes the transition on his behalf ever more quickly. (CUP I, 340/SV VII, 295)²²

noun.

²²The wording here is from the Swenson-Lowrie translation (304). I have chosen this translation not merely because I believe that it is more readable, but because the Hongs' translation is actually slightly misleading. That is, the Hongs' translation reads: ". . . by frequently having made the transition from thinking to acting he has finally lost the power for it" The individual has not, however, lost the power to make the transition from thought to action, but has rather "lost the ability to keep the transition under the control of the will." The Hong translation is not incorrect. It is, in

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The "habit," in this instance would be that of procrastinating. That is, a person can become so accustomed to extended periods of deliberation before undertaking any action that he loses the ability to act immediately. The thought which is then so quickly translated into action is the thought that 'I must deliberate before undertaking any action.' Ethical failure can thus be interpreted as a kind of passivity.

"Every person," argues Kierkegaard,

always understands [erkjender] the truth a good deal farther out than he expresses it existentially [existentielt]. Why does he not go farther out then? Ah there's the rub! I feel too weak (ethically too weak) to go as far out as my knowledge extends [som jeg erkjender]. . . . In this way everyone becomes guilty before God and must make this admission. (JP 2:2301/Pap. X⁴ A 247)

One is guilty of passivity because it could have been avoided. Much of what I have referred to as the consciousness of existence--i.e., the consciousness of one's ethical actuality--is thus clearly a consciousness of such passivity. "[T]he suffering of actuality," argues Kierkegaard, is "that the possible turns out to be nothing the moment it becomes actual, for possibility is annihilated by actuality" (PF, 74/SV IV, 237). Thus the consciousness of existence is often a consciousness of the annihilated possibility of ethical action. The moment for acting comes and goes without the required action having been taken. It could have been taken, however, thus this

fact, a more literal translation of the Danish text than is the Swenson-Lowrie translation. The context of the passage makes it clear, however, that the latter is a more accurate representation of the substance of the text.

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annihilated possibility is retained in the actuality of the individual who failed to act. What comes to be from the annihilation of the possibility for ethical action is thus guilt.

One does not, however, actively endeavor to become guilty in the way one actively endeavors to be ethical. To the extent that ethical duty concerns one's relations to others, opportunities, or demands for ethical action are made on one from without. That is, these demands are made on one by people with whom one comes into contact.²³ To fail to respond to these demands is, in a way, to endure becoming guilty and is thus to suffer in a passive sense.²⁴

²³Mackey argued in "The Loss of the World in Kierkegaard's Ethics" (op. cit), that one of the difficulties with Kierkegaard's ethics is precisely that the people with whom one comes into contact cannot make such demands. He concludes from Kierkegaard's contention that "the only actuality there is for an existing person is his own ethical actuality" (CUP I, 316/SV VII, 271), that other people are merely possibilities for Kierkegaard and that, of course, possibilities cannot "impinge on [one] directly" in the sense that they can obligate one ethically (ibid. 276). I believe, however, that this criticism is based on an identification of reality (i.e. 'realitet,' 'væren,' or 'tilværelsen') and actuality (i.e. 'virkelighed'). The reality of other people, according to Kierkegaard, is self-evident. It is "nonsense," on his view, to demand of a person that he prove he is "really there [er til]" (CUP I, 39/SV VII, 28; cf. PC, 204/SV XII, 188; cf. Slotty, op. cit. 21). It is, I believe, the reality of other people, not their actuality (which, as we will see in the next chapter refers to an individual's ethical development) that obligates one to behave ethically toward them (cf. chapter nine, §9.2.1. on our relation, according to Kierkegaard, to the reality of other people and Slotty, op. cit. 68).

²⁴Cf. J. Heywood Thomas' claim that "[t]he characteristic of the aesthetic [as opposed to ethical] life is that it is ultimately determined from without. It is basically a passive attitude toward the world which is a surrender to forces other than the agent's own will" ("Kierkegaard's View of Time," Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, vol. 4, no. 1, [1973] 34).

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It is important to appreciate, however, that the determinations of active and passive are, in this context, relative. That is, there is a sense in which even morally reprehensible actions may be understood to be initiated within the agent. Thus to say that ethical failure is the result of a kind of passivity, or of the surrender of the freedom to determine one's own actions to outside forces is not equivalent to saying that these forces determine one's subsequent actions with necessity. The possibility to take control of one's actions exists, on Kierkegaard's view, at every instant.

Strictly speaking, however, the suffering associated with ethical failure is not, in itself, the suffering of actuality in an ethical sense. It is rather the individual's acknowledgment of this failure which is associated, by Kierkegaard, with his ethical actuality. "[A]n actual human being," he argues, "composed of the finite and infinite and infinitely interested in existing, has his actuality precisely in holding these two factors together" (CUP I, 302/SV VII, 259). Guilt may represent a relation between the finite and the infinite in the sense that it is equivalent to a particular relation between the finite individual and the infinite moral law. It is not, however, equivalent to the ethical actuality of the guilty individual in that these factors are not "held together" by this individual in the guilt itself, but only in his consciousness of his guilt. That is, the infinite, in the form of the moral law, is brought into relation to the finite in his consciousness of his ethical failures. To be conscious of one's ethical failures as such is to have accepted these failures in the sense that this consciousness represents the annihilation of the possibility of self-deception concerning one's guilt.

It is not actually possible, on Kierkegaard's view, to deceive oneself completely concerning one's guilt. "There

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is," argues Kierkegaard, "inside every human being a witness who is always and everywhere present: conscience" (SV XII, 285).²⁵ Guilt which could be entirely hidden, argues Kierkegaard, would, in fact, no longer be guilt.²⁶ Guilt will thus always be accompanied by some degree of its acceptance as such. That this acceptance clearly admits of degrees does not, however, change the fact that it is an act and is thus distinguished from the relative passivity of the guilt itself. The individual accepts that the reason he suffers is that he is guilty and, in this sense, the passive suffering of guilt is prerequisite to the active suffering of guilt consciousness.

We saw in the preceding chapter that Kierkegaard associated decisiveness with passion. Many of the references to passion in the religious or non-pseudonymous works are, however, of a different character from those given above. In The Sickness Unto Death, Works of Love, Christian Discourses, and Purity of Heart²⁷ passion is often disparaged as a confusing or destructive force.²⁸ The passion disparaged in the context of the religious works is often qualified, however, as "earthly" or "worldly" passion

²⁵Cf. FT, 75/SV III, 123. The reference above to Kierkegaard's Samlede Værker is to To Taler ved Altergangen om Fredagen (Two Discourses for the Communion on Fridays). I have been unable to locate an English translation of this work. The reader may assume that whenever there is no reference to an English translation that such a translation either does not exist or is not readily available to scholars.

²⁶Cf. SV XII, 285.

²⁷Purity of Heart is the title of the English translation of a portion of a larger work of Kierkegaard's which Danish title is Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand (Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits).

²⁸Cf. SUD, 65/SV XI, 176-77; SUD, 111/SV XI, 221; WOL, 315/SV IX, 325; WOL, 343/SV IX, 353; CD, 77/SV X, 78 and POH, 203/SV VIII, 232.

(jordisk lidenskab).²⁹ It would thus appear that there are two kinds of passion--which may be understood to correspond to the two types of suffering--for Kierkegaard. This view is born out by a reference in his journal from 1844 which reads: "Let no one misinterpret all my talk about pathos [Pathos] and passion [Lidenskab] to mean that I sanction every uncircumcised immediacy, every unshaven passion" (JP 3:3127/Pap. V A 44).³⁰

There is an essential opposition, for Kierkegaard, between what he identifies in the Postscript and in the Christian Discourses as "earthly passion [CD, 77/SV X, 78]" and in the Attack Upon Christendom as "immediate passion [umiddlebar Lidenskab]" and what he considers a "higher passion [høiere Lidenskab]" (SLW, 406/SV VI, 379). "All idealizing passion," explains Climacus, "is an anticipation

²⁹Cf., e.g., CD, 77/SV X, 78 and POH, 203/SV VIII, 232.

³⁰It is possible to consider that there are actually more than two types of passion insofar as Kierkegaard refers in various places to "false passion [usand Lidenskab]" (PC, 185/SV XII, 172), "primitive passion [primitiv Lidenskab]" (SLW, 430/SV VI, 401), the passions of "irony" and "humor," as distinguished from the "passion of faith [Troens Lidenskab]" (FT, 51/SV III, 101), to "the passion of freedom [Frihedens Lidenskab]" (CUP I, 175/SV VII, 145 and R, 207/SV III, 241); the "passion of possibility [Mulighedens Lidenskab]" (R, 154/SV III, 194); "thought passion [Tanke-Lidenskab]" (CUP I, 569/SV VII, 496), "the passion of existential effort [Existents-Anstrængelsens lidenskab]" (CUP I, 564/SV VII, 492) (The expression "existential effort" actually comes from the Swenson-Lowrie translation [p. 500]. The Hongs' translation has "existence-effort"), and finally, to the "purposeful passion of repentance [Angerens intenderede Lidenskab]" (SLW, 426/SV VI, 397), "Christian passion [christelig Lidenskab]" (KAUC, 185/SV XIV, 222) and "the passion of eternity [Evighedens Lidenskab]" (KAUC, 144/SV XIV, 174). Each of the above passions may be considered to come under one of the two general headings of earthly and worldly passion or religious passion which latter is sometimes referred to by Kierkegaard or his various pseudonyms as "a higher passion [høiere Lidenskab]" (SLW, 406/SV VI, 379).

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of the eternal in existence functioning so as to help the individual to exist" (CUP I, 312/SV VII, 268),³¹ whereas, all "[e]arthly passion tends to prevent existence by transforming it into something momentary" (CUP I, 312n./SV VII, 268n.)³² and this latter claim of Climacus' is expressed again in one of Kierkegaard's non-pseudonymously published works where he contends that "if passion continues in a man it changes his life into nothing but instants" (POH, 51/SV VIII, 133).

While it is probably accurate to say that Kierkegaard is concerned in his non-pseudonymous authorship with sustaining specifically religious passion, it is clear that in his pseudonymous authorship, his concern is with invoking passion in general as is expressed in Either/Or when A says: "Let others complain that the times are evil. I complain that they are wretched, for they are without passion" (EO I, 28/SV I, 12), and again in Fear and

³¹Emphasis added. I have chosen the wording of the Swenson-Lowrie translation (p. 77) because while the wording of the Hongs' version is a more literal translation of the original Danish, it is less clear. The first part of the two translations are identical, but where the Swenson-Lowrie translation has ". . . functioning so as to help the individual to exist," the Hongs' translation has ". . . in order for an existing person to exist."

³²Emphasis added. Compare the contrast expressed above between "idealizing passion" and "earthly passion" with the contrast between "immediate passion" as it is described in one of Kierkegaard's Bladartikler from 1855, where he claims that "[t]o become a Christian in the New Testament sense is accomplished by separating or loosening (in the sense in which a dentist speaks of loosening the tooth from the gums) loosening the individual from the connection by which he clings in immediate passion [umiddlebar Lidenskab] and which in immediate passion clings to him" (KAUC, 221/SV XIV, 262) and a "higher" or "unconditioned passion" which, as he explains in a journal entry from 1854, "is the formal condition for being able to receive the content of Christianity" (JP 3:3133/Pap. X¹ A, 126).

I have chosen the wording of the Swenson-Lowrie translation (277n.) for reasons of clarity.

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Trembling when he says that the age "has crossed out passion in order to serve science" (FT, 7/SV III, 59). "What our age needs," argues Kierkegaard, in a journal entry from 1847, "is pathos [Pathos] (just as scurvy needs green vegetables); [hence] all my dialectical reckoning of the comic, the pathos-filled and the passionate in order to get, if possible a beneficial pathos-filled breeze blowing" (JP 3:3129/Pap. VIII¹ A, 92).

Kierkegaard, observes Hügli, "sees in passion, not simply one among a number of psychological abilities, but, as it were, the ability instar omnium, the fundamental force present in all human expressions."³³ It is thus important to get a "pathos-filled breeze blowing" because, according to Kierkegaard, decisiveness inheres in passion--i.e., in passion in general to the extent that earthly passion, or passive suffering, is a necessary presupposition of active suffering and the idealizing passion to which it is related. The actual subject, which is to say the self as an actuality, is the product of the decisions of the individual. No passion, no decisions, no decisions no actuality, no actuality no self. It is for this reason Kierkegaard says in his journal that "passion is the genuine dynamometer for human beings" (JP 1:896/Pap. IV C 96) and that Hügli observes: "One in passion is the individual 'completely himself'."³⁴

Climacus claims that "[f]or an existing person, the goal of motion [Bevægelsens Maal] is decision" (CUP I, 312/SV VII, 268). It is thus the potential for activity inherent in suffering and, in turn, passion, on which Kierkegaard concentrates. That is, Kierkegaard's overwhelming concern is with ethics and religion, or with

³³Hügli, op. cit. 164.

³⁴Hügli, op. cit. 141; cf. UDVS, 248/SV VIII, 334 and FT, 121/SV III, 166.

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initiating in his reader the activity of striving to conform to the demands of the ethical, or religious, ideal. It is, in fact, this conformity which constitutes the existence of the individual in the sense that it is this conformity which constitutes his ethical actuality.

I began this chapter by asking to what extent, according to Kierkegaard, must consciousness be consciousness of existence. We now know that 'existence,' in this context, is equivalent to the ethical actuality of the knowing subject. He may try to deceive himself concerning the substance of this actuality. According to Kierkegaard, however, there is an important sense in which he is always aware of it. Thus his consciousness will, to varying degrees, always include a consciousness of existence.³⁵

³⁵Kierkegaard thus occasionally conflates 'consciousness' and 'self-consciousness.' That is, consciousness, as distinguished from self-consciousness, is, on Kierkegaard's view, merely an abstraction. This is apparent in the reference quoted above to the categories of consciousness as "trichotomous," as is expressed when I say: "I am conscious of this sensory impression" (JC, 169/Pap. IV B 1, 148). That is, there is, again, a sensory impression, a consciousness of it and finally, an "I" whose consciousness it is. One could postulate that animals could be conscious without possessing self-consciousness, but this is clearly impossible for people on Kierkegaard's view. The awareness of the subject of consciousness is going to intrude on every act of consciousness to a greater or lesser extent.

3. The Self

"Consciousness," argues Kierkegaard again, "is the decisive thing in relation to the self" (SUD, 29/SV XI, 142). That is, "consciousness is spirit [Aand]" (JC, 169/Pap., IV B 1, 148)¹ and "[s]pirit is the self [Selvet]" (SUD, 13/SV XI, 127).² "The self," continues Kierkegaard, "is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation" (SUD, 13/SV XI, 127).

We have seen, however, that consciousness, as distinguished from self-consciousness, is not a relation that relates itself to itself, but is merely the relation between reality and ideality. "[T]he self," argues Kierkegaard, "is not the relation, but is the relation's relating itself to itself" (SUD, 13/SV XI, 127). That is, the self is the interest of the inter-esser (or between-beings) of consciousness, which is to say that "the self," strictly speaking, is equivalent to self-consciousness rather than consciousness.³

We also saw, however, that Kierkegaard sometimes conflated 'consciousness' with 'self-consciousness' to the extent that consciousness, on his view, always involves some degree of awareness of its subject. Consciousness may, however, as we have also seen, involve varying degrees

¹Cf. Schmidinger, op. cit. 212-213 and Hügli, op. cit. 127.

²Cf. Schmidinger, op. cit. 226; Hügli, op. cit. 57; Disse, op. cit. 89 and Malantschuk, "Problemer omkring Selvet og U dødeligheden" (Problems in relation to the Self and Immortality), Frihed og Eksistens, op. cit. 119.

³Cf., Hügli, op. cit., 57.

of self-consciousness. Thus the equation of consciousness in general with the self makes sense to the extent that the awareness of the subject of consciousness present in every moment of consciousness is what makes self-consciousness, or the self in the strict sense, possible. Consciousness thus appears to be equivalent to the self in the sense that it represents the possibility, rather than the actuality of the self.

There is an important sense, however, in which the self is possibility for Kierkegaard. He refers continually in Either/Or to the subject's choice of himself.⁴ This self one chooses is "concrete," argues Kierkegaard, in the sense that it is the particular determinate self of the subject who chooses it,⁵ but it becomes actual only with this choice. That this is the case is apparent in Kierkegaard's claim that "[t]his self was not before, because it came to be with the choice, and yet it was because it was 'himself'" (EO II, 215/SV II, 193).⁶ That is, this nebulous being which the self had before it was chosen was nothing other than possibility, for "such a being," argues Kierkegaard, "that nevertheless is non-being is possibility" (PF, 74/SV IV, 237). The choice of oneself is thus a transition from possibility to actuality such as we saw described in the Fragments, which is to say that it is a process of self-actualization.

"The contradiction," explains Hügli, between reality

⁴There are too many references to the subject's choice of himself to list here. All such references come, however, from the second volume of Either/Or and may be found in the index to that volume.

⁵That is, Kierkegaard argues that the individual "has not created himself, but has chosen himself" (emphasis added) (EO II, 270/SV II, 242); cf. Hügli, op. cit. 176 and 210.

⁶The translation here is my own (cf., chapter one, note 9).

and ideality is assumed, but consciousness emerges from [this contradiction] only as the result of a leap."⁷ Consciousness may thus be interpreted to be a product of the collision of reality and ideality and is, in fact, referred to by Kierkegaard as "a contradiction" (JC, 168/Pap. IV B 146) in the sense that reality and ideality may be understood to be essentially opposed to one another. Consciousness, on Kierkegaard's view, insofar as it is characterized as "the self" is merely the possibility for a self that we inherit by virtue of the fact that we are human, or conscious, beings. Self-consciousness, on the other hand, would appear to represent the self we create from the possibility we have inherited and it is this latter self in which Kierkegaard is ultimately interested.

The self, argues Kierkegaard, is a "synthesis" of "the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity," (SUD, 13/SV XI, 127)⁸ or of the "soul and [the] body" (CA, 88/SV IV, 358). That is, "the Kierkegaardian self," as Hannay explains, "is not to be identified with the relation between soul and body; for then the self would be merely a dependent factor, mirroring the interplay of the other two with each other and with the environment."⁹ The task of the individual is to synthesize these opposites. The question thus becomes, in what sense can the opposing factors referred to above be synthesized to form a self?

"The contradiction," explains Hügli, "can neither resolve itself nor be resolved because I think it; it can only be overcome as the result of my action, and even then not once and for all, but through constantly renewed

⁷Hügli, op. cit. 56.

⁸Cf. JP 4:3854/Pap. I A 255.

⁹Hannay, op. cit. 191.

efforts."¹⁰ The self may thus be understood to be "created," or to come to be (bliver til) through the actions of the individual.¹¹ Just as was the case, however, with respect to suffering and passion, there are two types of what one could call "acts" on Kierkegaard's view. There are genuine acts initiated within the individual and then there is behavior which has the appearance of an act, but which rather than being initiated within the individual,¹² is, in a sense, determined from without. Earthly passion, or passive suffering, may, as we saw, occasion "decisions" which do not represent a positive involvement of the higher elements of the synthesis which is the self. It is possible, for example, to say that one "decided" to have an extra-marital affair because the immediate presence of the person concerned created in one an overwhelming desire for such a relationship. This kind of "decision" does not, however, on Kierkegaard's view, represent a reconciliation of the opposing factors of consciousness, but is rather a surrender to one of these factors--i.e., immediacy.¹³

One could not actually be said to be responsible for the "decision" to have an affair.¹⁴ One would, however, be

¹⁰Hügli, op. cit. 115; cf. Slotky, op. cit. 40.

¹¹Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 211. I have placed 'created' in quotation marks because it is only the concrete, or actual self, which comes to be in this way. That is, to claim that one "creates" oneself in this sense is not to contradict Kierkegaard's observation that choosing oneself is distinguished from creating oneself (cf. note 5 above).

¹²Cf. NRF, 53 and Hügli, op. cit. 171 and 216.

¹³Cf. Hügli's observation that "[a]s long as the individual lives aesthetically, he remains under the determinations of real existence [realen Dasein]" (Hügli, op. cit. 156).

¹⁴Cf. Hügli's observation that, according to Kierkegaard, "only the ethical choice can, according to Assessor Wilhelm, be called a choice" (Hügli, op. cit. 171).

said to be responsible for having let immediate factors determine the nature of the "decision,"¹⁵ which is why, as we saw above, one could be said to be "guilty" of having an affair. That is, such a "decision" is not actually a decision to do X or Y. It is rather a decision to surrender the autonomy to decide.¹⁶ One endures becoming guilty of having an affair because one failed to exercise control over what Kierkegaard refers to as one's "lower nature."¹⁷ It is for this reason Kierkegaard says "[t]he person of immediacy [Den Umiddelbare] . . . is bound up in immediacy with the other in desiring, craving, enjoying, etc., yet passively in its craving, this self is dative, like the 'me' of a child" (SUD, 51/SV XI, 163).

It is interesting that Kierkegaard refers to such a person as having a "dative self." That is, to the extent that his actions would appear determined by external forces, it would appear that they could not represent a genuine synthesis of finitude and infinitude, or of reality and ideality, and as it is just such a synthesis which is supposed to be constitutive of the self, it would appear that such a person could not have any self at all, not even a "dative" one.

We saw above, however, that if an individual did not positively synthesize finitude and infinitude through the conformity of his actions to an abstract, or ideal, ethical standard, he could at least, negatively synthesize these elements of the self in guilt-consciousness. We also saw,

¹⁵Cf. Hannay's claim that "in sin a person positively affirms a willingness to be 'determined' by temporal goals" (Hannay, op. cit. 163) and Thomas, "Kierkegaard's View of Time," op. cit. 34.

¹⁶This insight is, of course, not unique to Kierkegaard. The expression 'not to decide is also a decision,' is so familiar it has become a cliché.

¹⁷Cf. SUD, 94/SV XI, 205.

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however, that becoming guilty was not an activity of the individual in the same sense that the positive ethical development of the self was understood to be an activity. If a synthesis of finitude and infinitude, or of actuality and ideality, is not effected within the individual, through his decision to make the actuality of his existence conform to the ideality of the moral law, then it is effected from without through the condemnation of his failure to make the above decision. In the former instance the infinite moral law is positively synthesized with finitude through its instantiation in the particular determinate actions of the individual. In the latter instance the moral law is again instantiated in the actions of the individual, but this time the instantiation is negative rather than positive. That is, the moral law clings to morally reprehensible actions in the form of condemnation.

Guilt is, however, not equivalent to guilt-consciousness. To the extent that the individual is assumed, by Kierkegaard, to be immediately aware of his own ethical actuality, guilt-consciousness is unavoidable. Just as self-consciousness, according to Kierkegaard, intrudes on every moment of consciousness, so does guilt-consciousness intrude on every act of the self-consciousness of the guilty individual. What is important, in this context, however, is that guilt-consciousness may characterize self-consciousness to varying degrees, not in the sense that the individual may be more or less guilty (although this is, of course, possible), but in the sense that he may be more or less willing to acknowledge his guilt. Kierkegaard speculates, in fact, that "a great many people [en stor Mængde Mennesker] . . . work gradually at eclipsing their ethical and ethical-religious comprehension

[Erkjenden]" (SUD, 94/SV XI, 205).¹⁸

There is a difference between a person who is merely guilty and a person who wills to acknowledge, or to become conscious of himself, as guilty in the sense that he accepts that he is guilty. The existence of the former represents a synthesis of the finite and the infinite in the sense that those elements are brought together from without in the form of a condemnation of the individual's actions. The existence of the latter, however, represents a synthesis that was initiated within the individual through his own efforts to acknowledge himself as guilty. That is, this individual's acceptance of himself as guilty is an act on his part, or a transition from possibility to actuality, in the sense that it represents an annihilation of the possibility of self-deception concerning his guilt. This is why it is possible to speak of a guilty self, on Kierkegaard's view, rather than simply a guilty individual.

Consciousness, as we saw, is associated, by Kierkegaard, with suffering. To the extent, however, that consciousness is also associated with the self, it is possible to identify the self with suffering. According to Kierkegaard, however, "only the suffering that is related to the idea is of interest" (SLW, 458/SV VI, 426).¹⁹ That is, the individual, as temporally defined--i.e., as constantly engaged in the process of coming to be--going to suffer, but only to the extent that this suffering is

¹⁸Cf. chapter two and SUD, 88/SV XI, 199-200; CD, 178-179/SV X, 174 and SE, 117-118/SV XII, 397-398.

¹⁹There are two senses in which this claim may be understood. It is true, according to Kierkegaard, from both an aesthetic and a religious perspective. The difference is that "it is only an immediate relationship that concerns esthetics...suffering must come from without" (SLW 457/SV VI, 425). Religiously, however, "I remove the externality and repeat the correct principle: only the suffering that is related to the idea is of interest" (SLW, 458/SV VI, 426).

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related to the actualization of the idea--which is actualized through his decision to express that idea in his existence--is of interest to Kierkegaard. The passion which is the active expression for this suffering is the "idealizing passion" identified above which, according to Kierkegaard, is an "anticipation of the eternal in existence" (CUP I, 312/SV VII, 268) which helps "the individual to exist" by facilitating "the true life of the individual" as that life is expressed in the synthesis of "the infinite and the finite" (SUD, 13/SV XI, 127) which is represented in "the divine [or infinite] inhabit[ing] and find[ing] its tasks in the finite" (JP 2:1587/Pap. III A 1).²⁰

The self, according to Kierkegaard, "is a relation that relates itself to itself, or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation" (SUD, 13/SV XI, 127). That is, the self is not merely a relation between the opposing elements of consciousness; it is a synthesis of these elements in the individual subject. It is a relation between these elements that relates itself to itself in the sense that it is aware of the character of this relation as either positive or negative. That is, the self is the activity of the individual both in the sense of his effort to bring the actuality of his existence into conformity with the abstract ethical ideal and in the sense of his effort to acknowledge the true extent of the conformity of that actuality to this ideal.

But to equate the self with activity is to imply that the self, as such, is never finished. That is, the self proper, on Kierkegaard's view,

is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude that relates itself to itself, whose task is to become [yorde] itself To

²⁰Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 121 and 214.

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become oneself is to become concrete. But to become concrete is neither to become finite nor to become infinite, for that which is to become concrete is indeed a synthesis. Consequently, the development [Udviklingen] must consist of an infinite moving away from itself in the infinitizing of the self, and in an infinite coming back to itself in the finitizing process Yet every moment that a self exists [er til], it is in the process of becoming [Vorden], for the self kata dynamin does not actually exist [er ikke virkelig til], [but] is simply that which ought to come to be [skal blive til]. (SUD, 29-30/SV XI, 142)²¹

Even while the subject is engaged in the process of self-actualization, the self proper, according to Kierkegaard, does not actually exist [er ikke virkelig til],²² because the self proper is the product of complete self-actualization, and this, if it is achieved at all, can be said to have been achieved only when the life of the individual is concluded. As long as the individual lives he has his self "as a task" (EO II, 262/SV II, 235).

²¹Emphasis added. I have altered the Hongs' translation slightly. The Hongs have "the progress of the becoming" where I have "the development." The Danish expression, however, is "Udviklingen" which translates literally as "the development" (cf. Ferrall-Gudm. Repp., op. cit. 347 and Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit., vol. II, 708).

²²Thus Kierkegaard argues that "the majority of people do not exist at all in the more profound sense" (PC, 129/SV XII, 120) and "Most men never become spirit. The stages--child, adult, oldster--they pass through these with no credit to themselves; it is none of their doing, for it is a vegetative or vegetative-animal process. But they never experience becoming spirit" (JP 1:67/Pap. VIII A 673). Cf. Schmidinger, op. cit. 318).

4. Conclusion to Part I.

My concern, in the preceding three chapters has been to detail those aspects of Kierkegaard's views on the nature of the knowing subject that would be essential for understanding his epistemology. Consciousness, as we saw, was defined by Kierkegaard as interest and, to the extent that it was equated with self-consciousness, was associated by him with suffering. It was this suffering, as we saw, which facilitated the translation of the abstract, or formal, interest of consciousness into passionate, subjective concern. Such translation, according to Kierkegaard, is always a matter of degree. That is, when the object of consciousness, or knowledge, is not something essentially related to the essence of the individual knower as such, then the degree of subjective concern associated with it is properly less than that associated with an object which does have such significance. Kierkegaard's definition of consciousness as interest means, however, that some degree of subjective concern will always characterize the activities of consciousness and that hence purely disinterested, or objective knowledge is impossible. This does not mean, however, that Kierkegaard was a subjectivist.¹

"Subjectivity," argues Kierkegaard "is passion" (CUP I, 131/SV VII, 106).² We saw in the preceding chapters that Kierkegaard identifies passion with decisiveness. It is for this reason that he emphasizes in the Postscript that

¹Cf. Schmidinger, op. cit. 257.

²Cf. CUP I, 203/SV VII, 169; CUP I, 509/SV VII, 442; Schmidinger, op. cit. 254 and Disse, op. cit. 159.

"[o]nly in subjectivity is there decision" (CUP I, 203/SV VII, 170). To the extent that the decisiveness required to initiate the conformity of one's existence to the ethical ideal inheres in passion³ which is itself characterized by Kierkegaard as subjectivity, it is a mistake, on his view, to become objective. That is, "[i]f dialectics and reflection are not utilized to intensify passion, it is a retrogression to become objective; and even the person who loses himself in passion has not lost as much as the person who lost passion, for the former had possibility" (CUP I, 611-612/SV VII, 533).⁴ The possibility that is lost, according to Kierkegaard, with the loss of passion, is the possibility for actual (virkelig) existence. That is, such existence consists of the possession of a self in the genuine sense and this self is, again, the result of the decision of the individual to bring his existence into conformity with the ethical or religious ideal, which is to say with the ideal, or with the eternal, and such decisiveness inheres only in the passion of subjectivity⁵ which one leaves behind as one becomes more and more objective.

What is interesting here is that insofar as the task of the individual is construed by Kierkegaard to be that of bringing his existence into conformity with ethical-religious ideality which is to say the eternal, then it would appear that this task could also be characterized as that of bringing one's subjective existence into conformity

³Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 143.

⁴I have used the Swenson-Lowrie translation of "det Dialektiske" as "dialectics" (540), because I believe it is a little clearer than is the Hongs' translation "the dialectical."

⁵Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 163.

Chapter 4: Conclusion to Part I

with the objective or unchanging truth.⁶ Hence the effort to become more and more subjective through the cultivation of the decisive passion which inheres in subjectivity would appear to be directed ultimately toward the end of becoming objective.⁷ So why not just become objective directly instead of indirectly aiming at objectivity through an effort to become subjective?

The answer, according to Kierkegaard, is that one is precluded from becoming objective directly by the fact that one is a subject--i.e., by the fact that one exists. Or, as Climacus explains: "[s]ince a human being is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, the speculative happiness that the speculative philosopher can enjoy will be an illusion, because he wants to be exclusively eternal within time" (CUP I, 56/SV VII, 42).⁸ One cannot become objective by escaping into the purely intelligible, or universal, because again, part of one will always remain particular and tangible and hence be excluded from this objectivity. The only way one can really become objective, for Kierkegaard, is through the conscious effort to make the

⁶It is important, in this context, to point out, however, that Kierkegaard would not characterize ethical-religious ideality as objective truth. That is, such ideality is always characterized by him as subjective truth.

⁷Cf. Hügli's observation that "if phenomenal actuality is designated as objectivity [das Objektive] and thought as subjectivity, then the goal of appropriation to make the subjective objective" (Hügli, op. cit. 31).

⁸I have chosen the Swenson-Lowrie translation of "Speculanten," as "speculative philosopher" (54) because the English "speculator" (i.e., the Hong translation) has come primarily to mean "[o]ne who speculates in business; one who engages in speculation, as in stocks, bonds, [or] real estate" (Nielson, Knott and Carhart, Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, 2nd ed. unabridged [Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Co.; London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1957] vol. 2, 2417).

particularity and tangibility of one's existence conform to the ideal which is itself objective.

Subjectivity is ultimately untruth for both Climacus⁹ and Kierkegaard,¹⁰ but one will never come to know this unless one comes to a complete appreciation of subjectivity as such. Hence Kierkegaard observes in his journal that "It is absolutely true [that] isolated subjectivity as the age understands it is evil, but restoration to health," he continues, "by means of objectivity is not a hair better. Subjectivity is the way of deliverance" (JP 4:4555/Pap. X² A 401). That is, Kierkegaard argues that "precisely in order to put an end to subjectivity in its untruth we must pass all the way through to the single individual" (JP 4:4555/Pap. X² A 401).

We "pass through the single individual" which each of us is, however, by stirring up the interest, or passion, which inheres in our subjectivity and this interest is excited through our attention to ourselves as subjects of consciousness. We engage in a process of self-actualization by exciting the passion which inheres in our subjectivity and invoking the decisiveness which inheres in that passion.

The self is defined, by Kierkegaard, as a relation.¹¹ We can see now, however, that this relation is both something we inherit by virtue of the fact that we are conscious beings, for consciousness itself is defined, by Kierkegaard, as such a relation,¹² and something we create. That is, the self is our beginning in the sense that it inheres, as possibility, in the consciousness which

⁹Cf. CUP I, 213/SV VII, 179.

¹⁰Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 218.

¹¹Cf. SUD, 13/SV XI, 127.

¹²Cf. JC, 169/Pap. IV B 1:148.

Chapter 4: Conclusion to Part I

characterizes us essentially, and it is our end, or goal, in the sense that we will to actualize it through the conformity of our behavior to the ideality of the moral law.¹³

Much more could be said concerning Kierkegaard's views on the nature of the self.¹⁴ My concern, however, has been merely to detail those aspects of Kierkegaard's views on the self that are indispensable to understanding his epistemology. What was said in the preceding chapters about the self, or the nature of the knowing subject, has obvious significance for the issue of the nature of self-knowledge. There are other and less obvious ways, however, in which the material in these chapters will be significant for subsequent discussions.

Scholars have long appreciated that it is not appropriate, according to Kierkegaard, to take a dispassionate, or impersonal interest in issues essentially related to one's subjective, or personal existence. We are now in a position to make this point even more strongly. That is, it is now clear that it is not appropriate, according to Kierkegaard, even to aspire to adopt an objective stance relative to these issues because it is fundamentally not even possible. No one can really be so "absent-minded," according to Kierkegaard, that he fails to

¹³Cf. "We are clearly presented here," explains Schmidinger, "with a circle, the two sides dialectically bound together; on the one side the necessary preexistence [das Schon-da-sein-Müssen] of the self, without which there could be no choice and, on the other side, the self as that which first comes to be [Erst-zustande-Kommen] in the choice and without which the choice would be meaningless" (Schmidinger, op. cit. 230; cf. EO II, 181/SV II, 164).

¹⁴At least two books have been written on this topic: Mark C. Taylor, Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and the Self (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975) and Journeys to Selfhood: Kierkegaard and Hegel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

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notice his own ethical actuality, which is to say that no one can be so absent-minded that he fails to notice his own suffering. The closest one could come, on Kierkegaard's view, to a perspective of impersonal interest in issues essentially related to one's existence would, as we saw, be a simulated posture of such an interest.

Ethical and religious knowledge will not be examined, however, until Part III. I will be concerned in Part II with identifying the nature of the various types of objective knowledge according to Kierkegaard. What is important at present is that the reader understand that consciousness, according to Kierkegaard, is essentially interest, and that hence all knowledge is interested on his view. What was said about the nature of consciousness will turn out to be important for understanding Kierkegaard's views on knowledge of what he identifies as immanent metaphysical reality, as well as to knowledge of actuality as it is represented in scholarship and natural science.

PART II: OBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE

5. Introduction to Part II.

We saw in the introduction to this thesis that despite Kierkegaard's famous association of truth with subjectivity,¹ he is no enemy of objective knowledge.² "He merely wanted," as Slotty explains, "to expose . . . the impossibility of absolute knowledge"³ That is, there is no presuppositionless knowledge according to Kierkegaard.⁴ Knowledge, on his view, is always relative to a particular set of presuppositions the truth of which has not been proved.⁵

We saw in Part I of this thesis that Kierkegaard associates the nature of the knowing subject with interest. It follows from this that there can be no such thing, on his view, as purely disinterested knowledge. All knowledge, according to Kierkegaard is interested.⁶ That

¹Cf. CUP I, 189-251/SV VII, 157-211.

²Cf. Introduction, 7-14; Perkins, "Kierkegaard's Epistemological Preferences," op. cit. 33; Thulstrup, op. cit. 187 and Malantschuk, "Das Verhältniss," op. cit. 52

³Slotty, op. cit. 20 (emphasis added).

⁴Cf. Malantschuk, "Das Verhältniss," op. cit. 50.

⁵Cf. Introduction, 11-12

⁶Cf. JP 2:2283/Pap. IV C 99. It is important to acknowledge at this point that this reference comes from the section of Kierkegaard's journals that contains his reading notes. References from this section are problematic because it is sometimes difficult to determine whether the view expressed is Kierkegaard's own, or whether he is merely paraphrasing a view expressed in a work he was reading at the time. The strategy of the scholar when dealing with such references must thus be the same as that used for dealing with views expressed in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works. That is, when continuity with what we

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is, reality, on his view, is not simply brought into relation to ideality; it is brought into this relation in the mind of a particular knower who always has some goal--either conscious or unconscious--which the activity of knowing is designed to meet. That is, the knower is always interested in some third thing such as beauty or truth.⁷

According to Kierkegaard, however, there are two fundamentally different types of interest: objective interest and subjective interest.⁸ That is, a scholar or scientist "asks about the truth, but not about subjective truth, the truth of appropriation. . . . [T]he inquiring subject is indeed interested, but is not . . . personally, impassionedly interested in his relation to this truth" (CUP I, 21/SV VII, 11).⁹ This is, of course, only right and proper for a scholar or scientist. That is, the truths with which these individuals are concerned have no essential relation to their subjective existence as do ethical or religious truths.

Let the inquiring scholar labor with incessant zeal, even to the extent of shortening his life in the enthusiastic service of scholarship; let the speculative philosopher be sparing neither of time nor diligence; they are none the less [sic] not interested infinitely, personally and passionately, nor could they wish to be. (CUP I,

can unproblematically identify as Kierkegaard's own views can be established, then the views in question can, and indeed should, be identified with those of Kierkegaard himself. It should be clear by the end of the present chapter that the above reference is unproblematic in that respect.

⁷Cf. JP 2:2283/Pap. IV C 99.

⁸Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 106 and Schmidinger, op. cit. 215.

⁹Emphasis added. Cf. JP 3:2807/Pap. VII¹ A 182.

21/SV VII, 12)¹⁰

Science and scholarship concern reality as it is independently of any particular individual, while ethics and religion, according to Kierkegaard, concern each particular individual in his particularity. There is no question of a person bringing his existence into conformity with the truths of, for example, mathematics, natural science, or history. So far as these truths concern reality as such, and so far as every individual must be understood to be part of that reality (i.e., so far as he is rational, a biological organism and occupies a particular spacio-temporal coordinate), his existence must be assumed a priori to be in conformity with these truths. Such conformity requires no effort on the part of the scholar or scientist, indeed, he could not avoid it, even if he wished.

Ethics and religion, however, are not merely descriptive, they are prescriptive. They tell us not merely how things are, but also how they ought to be, hence they place on us the responsibility of bringing our

¹⁰Emphasis added. The wording here is that of the Swenson-Lowrie translation (pp. 23-24). I have chosen this translation no merely because it is a little more readable than the Hongs' translation, but also because it is a little clearer. The Hongs translate "videnskabeligt Forskende" as "scientific researcher." This is, in fact, a literal translation but it is also, for the reasons given above (cf., Introduction, "The Problem of Translation"), unfortunately, misleading. The individual in question here is one who is enquiring about the truth of Christianity and is thus either a philosopher, a theologian or a historian, not a natural scientist. I have, for this reason, also made a slight alteration to the Swenson-Lowrie translation. That is, the Swenson-Lowrie translation reads ". . . service of science;" where I have ". . . service of scholarship." The Danish expression is "Videnskab" and should thus, for the reasons given above, be translated as 'scholarship.'

existence into conformity with them. To the extent that there are ethical or religious truths in the sense of eternally valid norms for human behavior (and this, it is important to appreciate, is not something that Kierkegaard ever doubted), then each of us has an interest¹¹ in determining what they are and subsequently bringing our existence into conformity with them. This is the reason Kierkegaard argues that ethical and religious knowledge are "essential knowledge [væsentlig Erkenden]" (CUP I, 197/SV VII, 165). That is, to the extent that this knowledge is prescriptive it is essentially related to the existence of the individual knower as such.¹²

It is this latter sort of interest which constitutes interest proper, for Kierkegaard.¹³ That is, despite the reference cited above to the interest (albeit impersonal interest) of the "inquiring, speculating and knowing [erkjendende] subject" (CUP I, 21/SV VII, 12) and similar references to the "enthusiasm [Begeistring]" of the "inquiring scholar [videnskabeligt Forskende]" (JP 3:2807/Pap. VII¹ A 182) and the "research scholar's

¹¹That is, we are interested in the technical sense of being formally involved with these truths, quite apart from the issue of whether we experience any subjective concern for them. To the extent, again, that there are ethical or religious truths, these truths place upon us the responsibility of bringing our existence into conformity with them, regardless of whether we experience any subjective concern for such conformity. A consequence of this is thus that one can be ethically or religiously guilty in two ways: first, for failing to have lived up to one's ethical or religious responsibilities (which, of course, may be interpreted as failing to have done all one could ethically or religiously) and second, for failing to have been concerned about these responsibilities.

¹²This is also part of the reason that Kierkegaard frequently uses the hyphenated expression 'ethical-religious.' That is, ethics and religion can be equated in that they are both essentially prescriptive.

¹³Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 106.

Chapter 5: Introduction to Part II

objective passion" (CUP I, 575/SV VII, 501), Kierkegaard refers, in other places, to systematic, or scientific, thought as "disinterested."¹⁴ It is, of course possible to assume that his views on this issue changed over time. Such a position would be difficult to sustain, however, because the dates of the various references to systematic knowledge, etc., as interested and as disinterested, do not themselves bear it out. That is, there are references of both sorts from 1842-43 to at least 1846, or the period of the publication of the Postscript.¹⁵

It is also possible to assume that Kierkegaard simply could not make up his mind on the issue of whether all knowledge was interested. If there were anything, however, about which he could not make up his mind, it appears to concern the issue of whether the impersonal interest or objective passion which he often describes as

¹⁴Cf. CUP I, 151/SV VII, 124; CUP I, 313/SV VII, 269; JP 3:2807/Pap. VII¹ A 182; JP 5:5621/Pap. IV B 1 and OAR, 150/NRF, 187.

¹⁵E.g.: "What knowing is without interest? It has interest in a third (for example, beauty, truth, etc.) which is not myself and therefore has no continuity..." (JP 2:2283/Pap. IV C 99 n.d. 1842-43); "[When reality is brought] into relation with ideality, this is an act of cognition. [I]nsofar as interest is involved, there is at most a third in which I am interested--for example, the truth. . . . [When ideality is brought] into relation with reality this is the ethical [and] that in which I am interested is myself" (JP 1:891/Pap. IV B 13, 18 n.d., 1842-43) and "the inquiring subject is indeed interested, but he is not infinitely, personally, impassionedly interested in his relation to this truth [my emphasis]" (CUP I, 21, 1846/SV VII, 11); in contrast to: "Doubt lies in interest and all systematic knowledge is disinterested [my italics]" (Pap. IV B 1 p. 149, n.d. 1842-43); "Abstraction is disinterested" (CUP I, 313/SV VII, 269), and: "The objectivity, the disinterestedness [my emphasis] with which the physiologist counts the pulse-beats and studies the nervous system has no relationship to ethical enthusiasm" (JP 3:2807/Pap. VII¹ A 182, n.d., 1846).

characterizing the scholar or scientist,¹⁶ really deserved the name "interest." What is clear, is that like the various kinds of knowledge I will examine in the following chapters, the context in which the expression 'interest' occurs appears to determine how it is applied by Kierkegaard; the more abstract, metaphysical or speculative the discussion, the more likely one is to find Kierkegaard acknowledging that even abstract thought is "interested" in an impersonal sense; whereas, the more concrete, ethical or religious the discussion, the more likely one is to find him characterizing abstract thought as "disinterested."

It is important, for the purposes of the present discussion, that we understand both why Kierkegaard would have considered all knowledge to be interested and why, despite this, he would frequently have referred to various types of knowledge as disinterested. Both have to do with his views on the nature of the knowing subject. Indeed, the role of impersonal or objective interest must be assumed, by Kierkegaard, in order for his claims concerning personal or subjective interest to have the weight that he clearly desires them to have.

Kierkegaard's views on the nature of consciousness necessitate that he reject the idea that knowledge could ever be purely objective or disinterested. It is thus not surprising to find that he claims that human knowledge is anthropomorphic "in the widest sense, not merely as an expression about God, but about all existence" (JP 2:2269/Pap. II A 526). That is, if the interests of the knowing subject help define what knowledge is, then the nature of this knowledge is, in some way, going to reflect the nature of the subject whose knowledge it is.

¹⁶Cf. CUP I, 21-22/SV VII, 11-12; CUP I, 575/SV VII, 501 and JP 3:2807/Pap. VII A 182.

Chapter 5: Introduction to Part II

Despite the fact, however, that all knowledge is interested, according to Kierkegaard, there are, again, two fundamentally different types of interest on his view: objective, or impersonal interest and subjective, or personal interest. The former may be understood to characterize human beings as members of a species--i.e., to characterize human consciousness in general--while the latter may be understood to characterize individuals as such. The proper objects of impersonal interest are, again, things not essentially related to the individual knower, as is the case with respect to scholarly, or scientific, knowledge. Kierkegaard's overwhelming concern, however, is with ethics and religion,¹⁷ hence the apparent lack of any essential relation between the objects of scholarship and science and the individual knower often leads him to refer to this knowledge as disinterested.¹⁸ Such "disinterested" knowledge is also referred to by Kierkegaard as "objective knowledge" (CUP I, 198/ SV VII, 165) and it is with this sort of knowledge that the present chapter is concerned.

As I explained in the introduction to this thesis, knowledge, on Kierkegaard's view, is the result of reality (realitet) having been brought into relation to ideality.¹⁹ That is, it is a representation of reality in the abstract or ideal categories of thought.²⁰ I am going to argue that Kierkegaard associates knowledge with certainty and that knowledge, on his view, is a justified, true mental

¹⁷Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 113 and 203; Malantschuk, "Das Verhältnis," op. cit. 55; Slotty, op. cit. 40, 60 and 73 and Hannay, op. cit. 10.

¹⁸Cf., JP 5:5621/Pap. IV B 1, 149 and CUP I, 135/SV VII, 124.

¹⁹Cf. Introduction, "The Project."

²⁰Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 105.

6. Objective Truth.

Truth, according to Kierkegaard, is an agreement between thought and being.¹ Such agreement may be established, however, in two ways. It may be the result of the accurate representation of reality in ideality (i.e., thought), or it may be the result of the accurate representation of ideality in reality (i.e., actuality). One would thus expect that there would be two senses in which 'truth' is used by Kierkegaard, and this is, in fact, the case. It is this distinction which is referred to in his claim that "[t]here is a difference between truth and truths" (PC, 206/SV XII, 190).

"[T]ruths," according to Kierkegaard, are the result of the accurate representation of being in thought. It is important to appreciate, however, that "being," for Kierkegaard, encompasses both ideal, or abstract, and actual entities. Hence truth, in the sense of "truths," can be defined as either an agreement between some ideality and thought, or as an agreement between some actuality and thought.² The first case, however, appears tautologous in that in this instance "[t]hought and being [Tænken og

¹Cf. Slotty's claim that "Kierkegaard has no objection to the abstract definition of truth as an agreement between thought and being" (Slotty, op. cit. 28). Cf. also, Hügli, op. cit. 78 and CUP I, 169/SV VII, 157 and CI, 247/SV XIII, 322.

²Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 78.

Væren]"³ according to Kierkegaard, "mean one and the same thing" (CUP I, 190/SV VII, 158). That is, the correspondence of the one to the other would appear "merely an abstract self identity" (CUP I, 190/SV VII, 158).⁴

"Objectively," explains Hügli, "truth refers to an agreement between thought and being. Ideality is only true to the extent that it has reality in itself; truth is, in the classical sense, an adaequatio intellectus ad rem."⁵ That is, the truth which, according to Kierkegaard, is an agreement between some ideality and thought is a "redoubling" (CUP I, 190/SV VII, 158), or "self identity" of ideality in thought, which, in this context may be understood to refer to an "a priori system of determinations for everything that is."⁶ This "redoubling" is accomplished in language, of which, according to Kierkegaard, all thought consists and which has the dual nature of being both ideality and an expression of ideality.⁷ Abstract or ideal being is expressed in language, which is itself abstract.⁸ Hence truth, in the

³The Hongs' translation has "thinking" where I have "thought." Both Danish expression in question is "Tænken," which is a noun and which is thus best translated as 'thought' (cf. CUP, Swenson-Lowrie, trans. 170).

⁴I have chosen the wording of the Swenson-Lowrie translation here because I believe it is a little clearer than the Hong translation. Cf. CUP I, 123/SV VII, 101.

⁵Hügli, op. cit. 199.

⁶P. M. Møller, Efterladte Skrifter (Posthumously Published Writings) (Copenhagen, 1843) vol. 2, 186. Møller was one of Kierkegaard's teachers and had a strong influence on the development of his thought (cf. Malantschuk, "Søren Kierkegaard og Poul M. Møller" (Søren Kierkegaard and Poul M. Møller), in Frihed og Eksistens, op. cit. 101-113, and Thulstrup, "Kommentar," op. cit. 130.

⁷Cf. CI, 247/SV XIII, 322 and JP 2:1159/Pap III A 37.

⁸Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 46.

sense of "truths," is a property of sentences or propositions.⁹ This is also the case when truth is construed as agreement between actuality and thought. That is, truth is not what is the case about the world, but the agreement between a particular expression, or proposition about the world, and what is the case. The fact, for example, of whether Caesar crossed the Rubicon is not a truth about Caesar, or about the past, it is rather the claim which accurately represents this fact which is true.¹⁰

Kierkegaard occasionally speaks as if the meaning of 'truth' were restricted to truth in the sense of "truths,"--i.e., as the property of propositions, or of thought, to the extent that this consists of propositions, as when he observes that "the trilogy--the beautiful, the good, the true--has been conceived and represented in the sphere of the true (namely as knowledge)" (CA, 111/SV IV, 379-80), or when he claims that the "truth" of the past is "a matter of knowledge [Erkjendlesens Sag]" (PF, 85/SV IV, 248).¹¹ One might thus be tempted to conclude that although Kierkegaard's ontology clearly makes two types of truth possible, he was not himself aware of this, but used 'truth' only in the abstract sense of "truths"--i.e., as a

⁹The expressions 'proposition' and 'mental representation' will be used interchangeably in the following discussion. Kierkegaard was not primarily a philosopher of language. It is thought, and not language as such, which is his primary interest.

¹⁰Contra Disse, op. cit. 41.

¹¹Cf. JP 5:5620/Pap. IV B 10a [Supp. XI^{III} pp. xxxvii-viii]. The rather confusing Danish reference is to the third tome of Vol. XI of the first edition of Kierkegaard's Papirer. These pages, although they exist in the table of contents of the second edition, have mysteriously either disappeared or been relocated so that not even Julia Watkin, the former Assistant Director of the Kierkegaard Library at the University of Copenhagen and an authority on such matters, knows where they are in the second edition.

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property of propositions. It appears, however, that this is not the case. Not only are there the aforementioned references to the difference between "truth" and "truths," Kierkegaard observes in Practice in Christianity, that "now all the expressions are formed according to the view that truth is cognition [Erkiendelsen], knowledge [Viden] . . . , whereas in original Christianity all the expressions were formed according to the view that truth is a [way of] being" (PC, 206/SV XII, 190). This latter sort of truth is the result of the agreement between ideality and reality when that agreement is established in reality--i.e., actuality--rather than in ideality--i.e., thought. 1

The truth which is a property of actuality rather than of mental representations or propositions, would appear to be restricted to ethics or religion. That is, ethical-religious truth, according to Kierkegaard, is the agreement between the ideality of ethical or religious prescriptions and the actuality of an individual's existence.¹² This truth is what Kierkegaard calls "essential truth" (CUP I, 199n./SV VII, 166n.) It is related to the essence of the individual's subjective existence and thus is also referred to by him as "subjective truth" (CUP I, 21/SV VII, 11).

The distinction between "truth" and "truths" is thus the distinction between objective truth and subjective truth. "The inquiring, speculating, knowing [erkiendende] subject . . . asks about the truth," according to Kierkegaard, "but not about the subjective truth" (CUP I, 21/SV VII, 11). It is thus a serious mistake to interpret

¹²Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 31. It is important to note at this point that, in keeping with the rather loose manner in which Kierkegaard is inclined to employ terms, he does occasionally refer to ethical or religious truths in the sense of their being the property of propositions, as is the case, for example, when he argues that "the proclaimer, too, certainly needs to have the truth said" (JY, 135/SV XII, 412). This issue will be treated more fully in chapter 12.

Kierkegaard's claim in the Postscript that "[t]ruth is [s]ubjectivity"¹³ to mean that he does not believe there is such a thing as objective truth. "In a mathematical proposition, for example," he argues, "the objectivity is given" (CUP I, 204/SV VII, 170). Although the truth of such a proposition is indifferent to the existence of the knowing subject, this indifference, Kierkegaard claims, "is precisely its objective validity [Gyldighed]" (CUP I, 193/SV VII, 161).

The way of objective reflection now leads to abstract thinking, to mathematics, to historical knowledge of various kinds, and always leads away from the subjective individual, whose existence becomes, from an objective point of view, altogether properly infinitely indifferent. (CUP I, 193/SV VII, 161)¹⁴

§6.1. Truth

The difficulty with respect to understanding Kierkegaard's views on the nature and significance of objective truth is that he is not particularly interested in it as such and so there are relatively few references to it in his works as compared to the numerous references to subjective truth. We are concerned at present, however, with objective knowledge and so I will restrict my examination of truth in this section to objective truth and postpone the examination of subjective truth until the chapter on subjective knowledge.

"Objectively understood," argues Kierkegaard

¹³The claim is part of the title of a section of the Postscript the full title of which is "Subjective Truth, Inwardness; Truth is Subjectivity" (CUP I, 189-251/SV VII, 157-211).

¹⁴Emphasis added.

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truth can signify: (1) historical truth, (2) philosophical truth. Viewed as historical truth, the truth must be established by a critical consideration of the various reports, etc., in short, in the same way as historical truth is ordinarily established. In the case of philosophical truth, the inquiry turns on the relation of a doctrine, historically given and verified, to the eternal truth. (CUP I, 21/SV VII, 11)

The above reference is specifically concerned with the question of the truth of Christianity, but it may justly be extended to refer to all types of objective truth. That is, objective truth can signify either (1) historical truths--i.e., the agreement between the past as it is represented in thought and the being of the past; or (2) philosophical truth--i.e., the agreement between a particular philosophical doctrine (e.g., Platonism), as it is represented in thought, and eternal being.

I argued above that 'thought' is sometimes used by Kierkegaard to refer to an "a priori system of determinations for everything that is." It is also occasionally used by him to refer to the thought of a particular individual. When the discussion concerns objective truth, however, it would appear that it is primarily the former which Kierkegaard has in mind. That is, truth is not a property of a given proposition in the mind of a particular knowing subject, it is a property of this proposition in general.

To say that thought agrees with being would appear, on Kierkegaard's view, to mean that if the reality represented were something determinate or static, then the representation of it in thought would have to have this same character. Both philosophical and historical reality, according to Kierkegaard, have such a fixed character, but while an agreement between philosophical reality and a

representation of it in thought is unproblematic,¹⁵ this is not, as we will see in the next section, the case with respect to historical reality.

Mental representations of what Leibniz called truths of reasoning have the character of unchangeableness according to Kierkegaard. We know, from Kierkegaard's journals from 1842-43,¹⁶ that he was particularly interested in the distinction made by Leibniz between truths of reasoning and truths of fact.¹⁷ "Truths of reasoning," argued Leibniz, "are necessary, and their opposite is impossible."¹⁸ Truths of reason are clearly equivalent to what was identified above as "philosophical truth." The claim, for example, that the validity of an argument is distinguishable from its soundness was first articulated by Aristotle,¹⁹ that is, it was "historically given," but it is not, in itself, a historical truth. That there is a

¹⁵One might argue that, to the extent that Kierkegaard associates thought with language, and to the extent that language, may be argued to be a social phenomenon and thus constantly evolving, no representation of abstract of philosophical reality in language could enjoy the same immutable character as the reality in question is purported to enjoy. Hügli argues, however, that "Kierkegaard decisively rejects such a conception [of language]: Language," he continues, is, according to Kierkegaard, "is not a human creation, but is given to humans by eternity [von Ewigkeit, i.e., God]" (Hügli, op. cit. 51; cf. JP 3:3281/Pap. III A 11 and CA, 47/SV IV 318).

¹⁶Cf. Pap. IV C and Thulstrup, "Kommentar," op. cit. 116.

¹⁷Leibniz, Monadology, Philosophical Writings, Leibniz, ed. G. H. R. Parkinson, trans. Mary Morris and G. H. R. Parkinson (London: J. M. Dent/Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle [Everyman], 1973) §33, 184.

¹⁸Ibid. 20.

¹⁹Aristotle, Prior Analytics, The Complete Works of Aristotle, The Revised Oxford Translation, 2 vols. Bollingen Series LXXXI.2, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 39-113.

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distinction between an argument's validity and its soundness is built into the definition of an argument (i.e., is part of its essence); thus the correspondence of the claim that there is such a distinction to reality is formally necessary. Such formal necessity means that this claim has always corresponded to reality and will always continue to correspond. Thus the proposition (or mental representation) that there is a difference between validity and soundness constitutes and adaequatio intellectus ad rem, or an agreement between reality and ideality.

§6.2. "Truth"

But while truths of reason are necessary, according to Leibniz, those of fact are contingent, which means that their opposite is formally possible. Lessing, Kierkegaard discovered, appropriated Leibniz' distinction and applied it to the problem of historical proofs for the truth of Christianity. That is, Lessing asserted that "accidental [zufällige] historical truths can never serve as proofs for necessary truths of reason."²⁰ Lessing argued that there was a broad gulf between these two kinds of truth and that the transition from the one to the other could be made only by a leap (Sprung), hence he concluded that there could be no historical proof of the truth of Christianity, or any other religion, for that matter. That is, religious truth, on Lessing's view, transcends temporal or phenomenal existence and thus belongs not to the realm of fact, as Leibniz expressed it, but to the realm of reason.

²⁰G. E. Lessing, Über den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft (On the Proof of Spirit and Its Power), Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts und andere Schriften (The Education of the Human Race and Other Writings) Universal-Bibliothek Nr. 8968 (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam Jun., 1976) 34.

Historical "proofs" may be given for historical truths (e.g., the preponderance of historical accounts of the person of Jesus may be taken as "proof" that such an individual did exist),²¹ but only arguments of a purely formal sort could function, on Lessing's view, as support for a claim made about the nature of God. Christianity proposes, however, to use purported facts about the historical person of Jesus to support claims about the eternal nature of God and Lessing argued that he simply could not make them appear do this. The gulf between these two types of truth was too broad, he protested, for him to be able to make that leap across.

I argued above that truth, according to Kierkegaard, was an agreement between reality, or being, and thought and that when the reality in question was something determinate or static that its representation in thought must have this same character. The determinacy of actuality, however, is of a different sort, according to Kierkegaard, than the determinacy of ideality. That is, the determinacy of the past is what Kierkegaard calls "unchangeableness" (Uforanderlighed) (PF, 76/SV IV, 240), thus an agreement, in thought, between thought and being when the reality in question is an historical actuality would appear to consist in a representation of that actuality which would have this same attribute of unchangeableness.

Establishing the correspondence of statements about actuality, whether the actuality in question is that of

²¹Lessing does not actually believe it is possible to prove that a particular statement represents a truth of fact in the sense that it is possible to prove that a particular statement represents a truth of reason. That is, he argues that "no historical truth can be demonstrated" (ibid. 34), but he acknowledges that it is possible for there to be more or less well-confirmed statements about the past when he observes that "the reports of [Christian] miracles and prophecies are as dependable as any historical truth can be" (ibid. 34).

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nature or of human events, to actuality itself is problematic. No amount of contemplation will reveal that a particular statement about actuality must correspond to reality because, unlike ideal entities, nothing actual is what it is through necessity.²² But if the correspondence of a statement about actuality to actuality cannot be definitively established, then it is uncertain in the formal sense. But if the correspondence of a particular statement to actuality is uncertain, then agreement between this statement and reality which, according to Kierkegaard, constitutes truth, "becomes a desideratum [something wanted] and everything is placed in the process of becoming [Vorden], because the empirical object is not finished, and the existing spirit is itself in the process of becoming. Thus truth is an approximating" (CUP I, 187/SV VII, 157).

Hügli observes, however, that

[t]he first argument, that the empirical object is not complete, is undoubtedly correct with respect to present actuality, which is still in the process of becoming [im Werden]; it is not correct, however, with respect to the past, which as Climacus stresses in the Fragments, "has happened the way it happened" and is thus "unchangeable."²³ The second argument [he continues], is certainly correct: The knower is in the process of becoming [im Werden]; this does not explain, however, why historical knowledge must be an approximation.²⁴

Knowledge of actuality is an approximation, according to Kierkegaard, because the correspondence of statements

²²It is important to remember that when Kierkegaard speaks of 'necessity,' the reference, for reasons given in the preceding chapter, is always to formal, or logical necessity, not to causal necessity.

²³PF, 77/SV IV, 240.

²⁴Hügli, op. cit. 87-88; cf. PF, 76-78/SV IV, 240-242.

about actuality to actuality itself can only approximately be established. This is the case both with statements about the past and with statements about the present. It is an approximation not because the knower does not have enough time to collect all the information necessary to make a definitive determination of the correspondence of the statement in question to the fact to which it refers. The difficulty concerns the relation of the data to the fact. No amount of data will establish, for example, that Caesar must have crossed the Rubicon, that no alternative course of action was possible and that hence no other interpretation of the data could be correct. There always remains at least the formal possibility, which is to say the possibility for thought, that the claim that he did cross the Rubicon is false. That is, it is conceivable that the claim is false, even if it is not actually or concretely false.

The categories of thought, because of their abstract nature, cannot, according to Kierkegaard, encompass concrete facts as such.²⁵ The categories of thought are, according to Kierkegaard, linguistic categories; hence thought may be understood to be an expression of reality. The difficulty is, as Hügli points out, that "whenever the individual is expressed, the expression is an assertion that it should not be individual, but general. The general, however, says nothing about the individual as an individual, but only something about the individual in general."²⁶ Thus where the reality in question is concrete,

²⁵Thus Slotty argues that, according to Kierkegaard, "to grasp something is to dissolve it into a possibility; but then I do not hold onto it as an actuality, but grasp it as something which it is not" (Slotty, op. cit. 54).

²⁶Hügli, op. cit. 84. Cf. Slotty's observation that, according to Kierkegaard, "we cannot grasp particular and contingent beings [Individualitäten und Zufälligkeiten des Universums] in their actuality" (Slotty, op. cit. 35). Cf.

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or actual, rather than abstract, no expression of it is going to capture it in its uniqueness, or particularity, and thus preclude the possibility that it is other than it is represented as being.²⁷

It is in this respect that one may understand the object as "not finished." That is, it is finished in itself, as Hügli rightly observes; it is just that it is not finished for thought.²⁸ It is always possible to collect more information about it and thus to get a more complete picture of it.

Hügli asserts, however, that:

Kierkegaard's approximation thesis rests on the claim that subject and object are in the process of becoming [im Werden]. This claim can only stand, however, if one abandons the Aristotelian assumption--that is, if the concept is not once and for all embodied in the object, but is constituted in the course of the historical development of the relation between subject and object.²⁹

Kierkegaard says himself that:

These two factors are inseparable, because if . . . the phenomenon were not understandable . . . only in and with the concept, and if the concept were not understandable . . . only in and with the phenomenon, then all knowledge would be impossible, inasmuch as in the first case the truth, and in the second case the actuality, would be lacking. (CI, 241-242/SV XIII, 318)

also CA 77-78/SV IV, 346-347; CA, 78-79n./SV IV, 347n.; JP 1:1057/Pap. X² A 328, and JP 1:896/Pap. IV C 96.

²⁷Thus Hügli argues that, according to Kierkegaard, "language does not express actuality, but produces something new" (Hügli, op. cit. 52-53).

²⁸Cf. note 35 below.

²⁹Hügli, op. cit. 280, note 59.

It is clear, however, from what was said above, that actuality is precisely missing when it is expressed in a proposition (i.e., language).³⁰ Language, argues Kierkegaard, is

an abstraction and always presents the abstract rather than the concrete [i.e., the actual]. Approaching something scientifically [naturvidenskabeligt] aesthetically, etc., how easily one is led into the conceit that he really knows something for which he has heard the word. It is the concrete intuition that is so easily lost here. (JP 3:2324/Pap. X² A 235)

Actuality is appreciated as such, to the extent that that is possible, not through language, but through concrete intuition. We saw in the preceding chapter, however, that "the only actuality there is for an existing individual," on Kierkegaard's view, "is his own" (CUP I, 316/SV VII, 271).³¹ Thus it would appear that Kierkegaard does, in fact, abandon Aristotle's assumption that the concept is embodied (verankert) in its object, to the extent that that object is an actuality other than the individual's own.

'Truth' is used by Kierkegaard, however, not merely in a strict sense, but in a looser sense as well. That is, it does not refer exclusively to an agreement between thought and being in the strict sense of the expression 'agreement,' but is also occasionally used to refer to approximate agreement, as is the case, for example when Kierkegaard argues that with respect to claims about

³⁰Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 52-53 and Slotty, op. cit. 54.

³¹Kierkegaard argues, in fact, that "Kant's deviation" was that he "brought actuality into relation to thinking, instead of referring actuality to the ethical" (CUP I, 328/SV VII, 282-283).

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empirical reality "truth is an approximating" (CUP I, 187/SV VII, 157). It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the "truth" of statements about actuality, to the extent that Kierkegaard uses this expression, is identified, on his view, with the "historical development of the relation between subject and object."³² Such a view is, in fact, consistent with Kierkegaard's claims, cited above, about how historical truth is established as well as with his observation in The Point of View for My Work as an Author, that "in relation to all temporal, earthly, worldly matters the crowd may have competency, and even decisive competency as a court of last resort [for determining the truth]" (POV, 110/SV XIII, 592).³³ That is, no single scholar or natural scientist can alone determine that a particular historical or scientific theory corresponds to the reality to which it refers. Theories in science and scholarship are always the product of the cooperative efforts of various individuals throughout the history of these disciplines and need, in order to continue to enjoy acceptance, to be continually reverified within the evolving standards of verification agreed on by practitioners in these disciplines.

This does not mean, however, that Kierkegaard is an idealist (or an anti-realist). Hügli is right to point out that Kierkegaard insists in the Fragments that the past "'has happened the way it happened' and is thus 'unchangeable'."³⁴ What is in the process of becoming (Vorden) is not the empirical object as such, but the

³²Hügli, op. cit. 280 note 59.

³³This is another aspect of what Kierkegaard refers to in his journals as the "anthropomorphism" of human knowledge.

³⁴Hügli, op. cit. 88; cf. PF, 76/SV IV, 240.

object as it is for thought.³⁵ This interpretation is supported not merely by Kierkegaard's views on the nature of the truth in question (i.e., that, as the property of propositions, or thought, it is abstract and thus cannot capture empirical reality--i.e., actuality--as such), but also by the fact that the expression for "becoming" here is not "Tilblivelse," the expression used by Kierkegaard in the Fragments to refer to the process of "coming to be," but "Vorden."³⁶ To become in the sense of at blive til is to undergo a change in being (Væren), according to Kierkegaard--i.e., to go from having been possible to being actual.³⁷ Past events have, according to Kierkegaard, already undergone such a transition. The "becoming" (vorden) which subsequently characterizes them--i.e., which characterizes them to the extent that they are objects of knowledge--concerns their essence (væsen) rather than their being (væren).³⁸ That is, it represents the determination

³⁵Cf. Kierkegaard's claim that "[a]lthough the world-historical is something past, as material for cognitive observation [erkiendende Betragtning] it is incomplete; it continually comes to be through new observation and research" (CUP I, 150/SV VII, 123; italics added).

³⁶Cf. chapter two, note 7.

³⁷Cf. PF, 73/SV IV, 237 and Hügli, op. cit. 66. That 'vorden' is used by Kierkegaard to refer to change in general--i.e., both substantial change, which is to say a change in being, and apparent change--is made clear in his reference to what he calls the "Vorden med nødvendighed" (a "becoming," or change, which is characterized by necessity) that characterizes the development of, for example, a plant as opposed to that of a human being (cf. CA, 21/SV IV, 294).

³⁸Cf. "As soon as someone who comes later believes the past (not the truth [my italics] of it, for that is a matter of cognition [Erkiendelsens Sag], which involves essence [Væsen] and not being [Væren], but believes that it was something present by having come to be [ved at være blevet til], then the uncertainty of coming to be is there" (PF, 85/SV IV, 248-249).

While Kierkegaard equates 'vorden' with Hegel's

of their essence for thought. As objects of knowledge, past events are no longer what they were--i.e., actualities. As objects of knowledge, these past actualities are transformed into intellectual constructions whose correspondence to actuality cannot definitively be established. They thus undergo a number of changes as the result of the efforts of the knowing subject to establish this correspondence.³⁹

The "becoming" which characterizes the knower, in this context, like that which characterizes the object of knowledge, is also referred to by Kierkegaard as "Vorden." That is, this becoming is not the transition from possibility to actuality, which, as we saw in the preceding chapter represented a kind of genesis or creation. It is rather the activity of the determination of the essence of past actualities.

"Werden," (CUP I, 80/SV VII, 62) he appears to reject the contention Hegel makes with respect to Werden--i.e., that it is an alternation between being and non-being (Sein und Nichts). Indeed, the alternation which, according to Kierkegaard is from non-being (Ikke-Væren) to being (Væren) is precisely "Tilblivelse" (PF, 73-75/SV IV, 236-239).

Hügli's failure to appreciate the difference between 'vorden' and 'tilblivelse' may stem from the fact that both expressions are translated into German as 'Werden.' That is, the section of the "Interlude" which is entitled "Tilblivelsen" (i.e., coming to be) in Danish appears in the German translations of the Fragments as "Das Werden" (cf., Søren Kierkegaard, Philosophische Bissen, Übers. mit Einl. u. Kommentar von Hans Rochol [Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1989] 72ff.; Søren Kierkegaard, Philosophische Brocken, Übers. von Emanuel Hirsch [Dusseldorf/Köln: Eugen Diederichs Verlag, 1967] 69ff. and Søren Kierkegaard, Philosophische Brocken, Übers. von Chr. Schrempf [Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1910] 67ff.).

³⁹These changes are not necessarily in the progressive sort--toward a more adequate representation of the actualities to which they refer--but may be of a regressive sort as well. We may, for example, be mistaken in our views that some of the works originally attributed to particular artists and writers (e.g., Shakespeare) were not actually by these individuals.

The difficulty with establishing the correspondence of statements of fact to the actuality to which they refer concerns, again, the inability of thought, with its abstract character, to capture concrete reality as such. There will always be a gap between the expression of an actuality in thought and that actuality as it is in itself because there is a logical gap between individuals and statements made about them (i.e., how they are expressed in thought), or as Hügli explains: "In all judgments about individuals, the predicate always encompasses more than the subject."⁴⁰ Thus the process, or activity, of the determination of the essence of past actualities for thought goes on interminably.⁴¹ It is for this reason that truth here, according to Kierkegaard, is "an approximating" (CUP I, 187/SV VII, 157).

⁴⁰Hügli, op. cit. 84.

⁴¹That a particular "knowing" subject may contingently halt this process--i.e., may simply rest satisfied with an approximation--has no effect upon the essence of the project. That is, truth, which is a criterion of knowledge on Kierkegaard's view, is only present when the knowing subject is certain of the correspondence of the representation in question to the reality to which it represents and certainty is only accessible when this correspondence has definitively been established.

7. Objective Justification

I stated in the introduction that objective knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, was a justified true mental representation. Kierkegaard's views on the nature of objective truth should now be relatively clear. What remains to be examined, before we turn to his views on objective knowledge, is his position on the nature of justification.

We saw, in the preceding section, that there were two senses in which a mental representation could be said to be "true," according to Kierkegaard, and that these senses were relative to the nature of the object of the representation. That is, there is truth in the strict sense which, as we saw, is the agreement of the representation in question with the reality represented, and then there is "truth" in the loose sense of approximate agreement. Mental representations are abstract objects, thus they can be understood to agree, in the strict sense, with the reality they represent, only when that reality is itself abstract. Truth in the strict sense is, therefore, restricted to mental representations of abstract or thought reality. A representation of concrete reality cannot, as we saw, "agree," in the strict sense, with that reality because, it will always be of a more general character. Such a representation is thus said, at best, to "approximate" an agreement between being and thought.

One might expect that, since there are two senses, according to Kierkegaard, in which mental representations may be understood to be true, there would be two senses in which these representations may be understood to be justified and this, as we will see, is precisely the case.

§7.1. Justification

I stated in the introduction that Kierkegaard associated knowledge in the strict sense with certainty in the sense of the objective necessity of the correspondence of the mental representation in question to reality, thus it is reasonable to assume that it is some sort of proof, or demonstration, of this correspondence which serves as the justification of mental representations on Kierkegaard's view. It would appear, however, that, as Hannay explains, that "Kierkegaard associates the word 'proof' with psychological rather than factual or logical certainty, i.e., with conviction, or certitude, without in any way confusing the former with the latter."¹ That is, Kierkegaard "considered a conviction to be higher than any reasons one might have for holding it. He believed that the essence of human beings was expressed in the activity of willing rather than thinking. It was thus irrelevant, on his view, how one came to have certainty concerning reality [Realitätsgewißheit], as long as one did come to have such certainty."² It is thus, as we will see, not actually a proof which justifies a particular mental representation.

Truth, in the preceding chapter, was understood to be independent of the thought of any particular individual. Justification, however, should be understood to refer to the appreciation of the knower of the truth of a particular mental representation. When the object of the representation in question is something abstract, then its justification may be understood to be equivalent to an

¹Hannay, op. cit. 138-139.

²Slotty, op. cit. 22.

insight on the part of the knower concerning the formal necessity of the correspondence of this representation to reality. This insight may, for lack of a better expression, be referred to as an "intuition."³ It is with some reluctance, however, that I use the expression 'intuition.' My reluctance stems, in part, from the fact that this expression has been used in various ways throughout the history of philosophy, hence it can be misleading, and partly from the fact that it occurs with conspicuous infrequency in Kierkegaard's works. Apart from three references to Schelling's concept of "intellectual intuition" (intellektuell Anschauung) in the Postscript,⁴ what few references there are to 'intuition' (intuition) in Kierkegaard's authorship occur very early. There appear to be fewer than a dozen occurrences of this expression in the entire Kierkegaard corpus, with none occurring later than 1844.⁵

It is possible that Kierkegaard abandoned this expression because he felt it was too laden with connotations from German idealism and, in particular, from Schelling. Kierkegaard is critical of Schelling's concept

³There is a strong connection in Kierkegaard's works between 'intuition' and 'intimation' (anelse) (cf. Malantschuk, Nøglebegreber, op. cit. 12-13).

⁴CUP I, 105/SV VII, 85; CUP I, 149-150n./SV VII, 123 and CUP I, 335/SV VII, 289-290.

⁵In addition to the aforementioned references in the Postscript, there is a reference to Schelling's concept of intellectual intuition (intellektuelle anskuelse) in The Concept of Anxiety, (SV IV, 283). The rest of the references are to 'intuition' and are found in the following works: EO I, 122/SV I, 102; CA, 152/SV IV, 418; BI, 32/SV XIII, 127; JP 1:117/Pap. I A 8, 4 and JP 2:1182, 36/Pap. II A 29, 28.

of "intellectual intuition,"⁶ hence he may have avoided the expression out of a fear that it would be misconstrued. I believe, however, that at least part of the reason he abandons it is that it becomes synonymous, in his authorship, with another expression, namely 'certainty' (vished) in the psychological sense. That is, something on the order of an insight into the essence of the object of knowledge is associated, by Kierkegaard, with certainty in the sense of subjective conviction. It is thus this insight, I will argue, which justifies the mental representations to which it is connected.⁷

'Intuition,' on Kierkegaard's view, refers to the appreciation of the essence of an object of knowledge, or of the nature of that object as a whole, rather than merely its disparate parts. He argues, for example that

[w]hen a person standing on a high point gazes out over a flat region and sees several roads running parallel to one another, he will, if he lacks intuition [Intuition], see only the roads, and the fields between them will seem to disappear, or he will see only the fields, and the roads will disappear; however, he who has an intuitive eye [det intuitive Blik] will see them together, will see the whole section as striped. (EO I, 122n./SV I, 101-102n.)

This ability to appreciate the essence of the object of knowledge, or to understand the manner in which its

⁶Cf. CUP I, 105/SV VII, 85 and Himmelstrup, "Terminologisk Register" (Glossary), Søren Kierkegaards Samlede Værker (Søren Kierkegaard's Collected Works), eds. A. B. Drachman, J. L. Heiberg and H. O. Lange (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1920-1936), vol. XV, 605-606.

⁷Cf. Hügli's claim that, according to Kierkegaard, "I grasp an object in knowledge: I have it in the form of ideality and that what is more, I feel certain that I have its reality in ideality, its being in thought" (Hügli, op. cit. 124; emphasis added).

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disparate parts compose a whole, is central to what Kierkegaard call "true knowledge."⁸ Such an insight into the essence of the object of knowledge makes the outward form of this object insignificant as is illustrated by Kierkegaard when he observes that "the image which the mind requires to fix its object--this and the externality conditioned by it--vanishes when true knowledge [sande Erkiendelse] appears" (JP 2:2262/Pap. II A 390). Thus it is appropriate, according to Kierkegaard, that "the great geniuses among poets (such as Ossian and Homer) are represented as blind. . . . for this would seem to indicate that what they saw when they sang the beauty of nature was not seen with an external eye but was revealed to their inward intuition [indre Intuition]" (JP 1:117/Pap. I A 8, 4). This "inward intuition" represents what Kierkegaard calls the "Archimedean point" which, when found, facilitates an understanding of this object that allows one to deduce its details.⁹

I stated above that intuition was associated by Kierkegaard with psychological certainty. Intuition, as we have seen, is characterized by him as an insight into the essence of its object. When the object in question is a mathematical proposition, then to stand in an intuitive relation to this proposition would mean that one would grasp its essence in such a way that one would be able to produce a proof of its truth at will. Kierkegaard argues, however, that a person who can prove the truth of a mathematical proposition when the variables are designated by the letters A, B and C, but not when they are designated by D, E and F, is unable to do so, not, as one would

⁸Cf. JP 2:2245/Pap. I A 111. Cf. also Hügli's claim that Kierkegaard's "appeal to an inner intuition is simply a consequence of [his] fundamental epistemological principles" (Hügli, op. cit. 240).

⁹Cf. JP 1:117/Pap. I A 8, 4.

expect, because he fails to stand in an "intuitive" relation to this proposition, but because he is missing certainty (mangler Visheden).¹⁰ A person who is uncertain as to the essence of a particular object, argues Kierkegaard, "becomes anxious" as soon as he hears this object described using terms which are unfamiliar. The person, for example, who is unable to prove the truth of a particular proposition in mathematics when he is required to use new letters to designate the variables, is unable to do this because he has only memorized the steps of the proof, rather than understood it--i.e., grasped its essence. To say that such an individual lacks certainty is thus to equate certainty with intuition. That is, it appears certainty is identified, by Kierkegaard, with just such a grasping of the essence of the object of knowledge that he refers to as an "intuition."

Certainty, in this sense, renders mental representations unalterable, on Kierkegaard's view, because it refers to the appreciation of the objective necessity of such correspondence, or of the formal impossibility--i.e., the impossibility for thought--that reality could be other than it is presented as being. This is seen clearly in his remark that "[p]roof is given for a mathematical proposition in such a way that no disproof is conceivable" (JP 2:2296/Pap. VII¹ A 215). That is, if no disproof were conceivable relative to a particular proposition, then there would be no chance that one would cease to believe that this proposition corresponded to reality. It would be

¹⁰Cf. CA, 140/SV IV, 406. The Hongs' translation has "certitude" here rather than "certainty." There is, however, as was explained in the introduction (cf. Introduction, "The Problem of Translation"), only one Danish expression (i.e., 'vished') for both 'certitude' and 'certainty.' The reference here, however, is clearly to what I identified in the introduction as psychological certainty rather than to certitude in the sense in which that expression is being used in this study.

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inconceivable, on Kierkegaard's view, that it did not so correspond.

Intuition is often interpreted as an insight into the essence of the object of knowledge which results from contact with that essence, or from an identification of the knower with this object. This is, in fact, a fair characterization of the manner in which Kierkegaard uses this expression. This can be seen in the association of intuition with acquaintance knowledge made by Kierkegaard in his reference to concrete intuition. That is, Kierkegaard argues that one is easily "led into the conceit that he really knows [kiender] [i.e., is acquainted with] something for which he has heard the word" (JP 3:2324/Pap. X² A 235), when it is "concrete intuition" which is required for such knowledge.¹¹

The difficulty is that since thought and being are distinguished, according to Kierkegaard, it becomes difficult to understand how such an identification of the knower with the object of knowledge would be possible. Kierkegaard expresses this difficulty himself when he asks: "[H]ow can true intuition enter in despite man's limited position" (JP 2:1182, p. 36/Pap. II A 29, 28).

Though Kierkegaard distinguishes between thought and being and thus makes the relation of the knower to reality in general problematic, there are portions of reality, on his view, to which one is immediately related and thus with respect to which intuition is possible. That is, one is immediately related to abstract reality through thought¹²

¹¹Cf. JP 3:2324/Pap. X² A 235. Cf. also Hügli's claim that, according to Kierkegaard, "one needs 'concrete intuition' in order to determine whether the ideality in question expresses the essence of reality" (Hügli, op. cit. 81).

¹²Cf. Holmer's claim that according to Kierkegaard, "ideas, thoughts, categories and principles are immediately possessed . . . in respect to their relation to the

and to one's particular ethical actuality through emotion or feeling.¹³ The former may thus be the object of what one might call intellectual intuition¹⁴ (keeping in mind, of course, how this use is distinguished from that of Schelling's "intellectual intuition") and the latter of what Kierkegaard refers to as "concrete intuition."

Both types of intuition provide a justification of knowledge which is causal in nature. That is, the contact of the knower with the object of knowledge is what makes an intuition concerning the nature of this object possible. It is precisely the reality in question which is the cause of the individual's certainty that his mental representation corresponds to it. It is thus reality itself which causes the knowledge to be justified.¹⁵

There is, however, a significant proportion of reality to which we cannot be immediately related and thus with respect to which intuition is impossible. Concrete intuition is restricted, according to Kierkegaard, to the ethical actuality of the subject whose intuition it is, hence it cannot justify mental representations of actuality in general. Yet there is, as we saw, a sense in which such representations may be said to be true on Kierkegaard's view. That is, they are said to be true, in a loose sense. There must thus be a sense in which this "truth" is

thinker they are in an immediate relation" (Holmer, "On Understanding Kierkegaard," op. cit. 45).

¹³Cf. Chapter two.

¹⁴This is presumably what Holmer means when he refers to Kierkegaard's "logical intuition" (Holmer, op. cit. 44).

¹⁵This does not mean Kierkegaard believes that all mental representations whose correspondence to reality may be appreciated by the knower as certain is immediately appreciated as certain. It means that, with some effort on the part of the knower, this correspondence can come to be recognized as such.

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appreciated as such, which is to say that there must be a sense in which mental representations of actuality may be said to be justified.

§7.2. "Justification"

Actuality, according to Kierkegaard, is equivalent to the realm of what Leibniz calls truths of fact. That is, while truths of reason are necessary, those of fact are contingent which means that mental representations of actuality are characterized by probability rather than certainty in the formal sense. Historical truth, for example, is established, according to Kierkegaard, by "a critical consideration of the various reports, etc." (CUP I, 21/SV VII, 11) about the past. That is, these reports may make the correspondence of a particular mental representation to the reality of the past appear more probable than others. If, for example, one has thirty-six historical documents which refer to Caesar's crossing the Rubicon and three which report that he did not cross it, or thirty-six documents which are consistent with such an event and three which are not, it would appear more probable that Caesar did cross the Rubicon than that he did not.

There are two difficulties, however, with such probabilities. The first of these difficulties concerns the fact that one can never be certain that one has succeeded in collecting a representative portion of such documents--i.e., one can never be certain that there does not lie hidden in some library, or cave, cellar, or attic, evidence which would tip the scales of probability in favor of the opposite conclusion. That is, what appears probable, based on the evidence actually available at any given point, may not be what is really probable based on

all the evidence potentially available. The historian must thus constantly be engaged in the search for new evidence in order to ensure that the available evidence can reasonably be construed as a representative sample.

The second difficulty with the expression of the correspondence of a mental representation to reality in terms of probability concerns the fact that even if this probability were more than apparent--i.e., even if it were based on all the evidence which could, in principle, be available, a probability is not a certainty. No matter how probable the correspondence of a mental representation to reality is, there always remains a possibility that it does not so correspond. No accumulation of evidence could thus ever provide more than psychological reinforcement of acceptance of such correspondence. To the extent an individual accepts that a particular mental representation corresponds to reality on the basis of the apparent probability of such correspondence "he fancies himself," according to Kierkegaard, "to have a certainty that can only be had in infinitude" (CUP I, 81/SV VII, 63).

I argued above that justification was equivalent to the appreciation of the knower of the truth of a given mental representation. According to Kierkegaard, however, truths of fact are only "approximate" truths. The justification of a mental representation of actuality must thus involve an appreciation of this approximate character. The justification of mental representations of actuality would appear to consist in the appreciation of the "knower" that the preponderance of available evidence relevant to the representation in question is consistent with that representation as well as that it is possible that more evidence could come to light that would not be consistent with it. This appreciation should not, however, engender a conviction in the mind of the knower that this representation must agree with the reality which is its

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object.¹⁶ The proper response, on Kierkegaard's view, to the appreciation that the preponderance of available evidence is consistent with a particular representation of reality is not that that representation must thus agree with reality, but that such agreement appears more probable than is the agreement of a representation which is inconsistent with this evidence.

The difficulty here is that probability, as Michael Polanyi pointed out, is objectively meaningless, to the extent that all it says objectively is that something either is, or is not, the case.¹⁷ It is, however, precisely such probabilities that are associated with knowledge in the loose sense. The question thus becomes: On what basis, or by what reasoning, do these probabilities become meaningful?

"A reason," observes Kierkegaard, "is a curious thing; if I regard it with all my passion, it develops into an enormous necessity that can set heaven and earth in motion; if I am devoid of passion, I look down upon it derisively" (EO I, 32-33/SV I, 17). The apparent probability that a particular mental representation corresponds to reality is interpreted by the "knower" as meaningful because he is not completely objective in his contemplation of this issue.¹⁸ That is, he is not entirely disinterested, nor could he be.

¹⁶Such a conclusion would, in fact, constitute a leap (spring) according to Kierkegaard, in that it would represent a transition from a conclusion about the essence (væsen) of its object--i.e., that it is probable based upon the available evidence--to the being (væren) of that object--i.e., that it is (er til) (cf. CUP I, 39n./SV VII, 27n.; CUP I, 342/SV VII, 296; Himmelstrup, op. cit. 697-699 and Malantschuk, Nøglebegreber, op. cit. 159-160).

¹⁷Cf. Michael Polanyi, Personal Knowledge (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962) 21.

¹⁸Cf. Marilyn Gaye Piety, "Kierkegaard on Rationality," Faith and Philosophy Vol 10 No. 3, July, 1993: 365-379.

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Consciousness, on Kierkegaard's view, as we saw in the preceding chapter, is interest. Thus the knower cannot help but be interested in--i.e., passionately engaged with--the object of his inquiry.

Justification in the loose sense is thus equivalent to the appreciation of the knower of the apparent probability of the correspondence of a particular mental representation to reality, combined with the appreciation that more evidence could come to light that would tip the scales of probability in favor of a competing representation. That is, the knower assumes that such probability is meaningful in the sense that it is viewed as supporting a representation with which it is associated, not in the sense that it is equivalent to certainty. The historian, for example, does not assume that a representation of the past whose correspondence to the past is highly probable must so correspond. She assumes rather that it is appropriate to construct other representations of the past on the foundation of such representations. That is, she assumes their provisional acceptance is warranted by their probability.¹⁹

¹⁹I am indebted, for this insight, to Ole Püschl, a Danish physician and member, since its inception, of my study group in Copenhagen. Dr. Püschl repeatedly tried to convince me that the medical profession was far less dogmatic than people outside the profession were inclined to think. He argued that diseases were diagnosed and treatments determined on probabilistic, rather than dogmatic, bases. He explained, for example, that a patient who complained of fatigue and a sore throat could very well have mononucleosis. A patient, he continued, whose symptoms persisted over an extended period of time was even more likely to have mono and, finally, a patient whose blood-test for mono came back positive was even more likely to have the illness. Such a patient, Dr. Püschl explained, would be treated as if he had mono because the combination of the symptoms would make it probable that he would respond positively to such treatment. That is, such a patient is treated by the physician as if he had mono because this is probably what he has. A good physician suspends judgment, however, concerning whether or not the

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It is for this reason that knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, is more properly characterized as a justified true mental representation than as a justified true belief. That is, to the extent that a belief is associated with a dogmatic claim about the nature of reality, it is an improper characterization of "knowledge" of actuality on Kierkegaard's view. "Knowledge" of actuality is only what one might call "provisional knowledge." It represents a judgment of the knower that the correspondence of a particular mental representation to reality is probable, not that it is certain. The "knower" interprets the correspondence of a particular representation as probable, while suspending judgment as to the actuality of its correspondence.²⁰

If, however, agreement between statements we make about actuality to actuality itself is problematic, there is, as we observed above, a portion of reality to which our relation, according to Kierkegaard is relatively unproblematic. If our relation to this portion of reality is relatively unproblematic then it would seem reasonable to expect that knowledge of it would be as well. Whether this is the case will become apparent in the next chapter.

patient actually has mono, because, as Dr. Püschl explained, there are always those few cases that do not respond to the treatment most commonly associated with their symptoms and which thus may require another kind of treatment. Even if the treatment were successful, the physician, according to Dr. Püschl, concludes not that the patient must have had mono after all, but rather that this was probably what he had.

²⁰This is not to say that no one ever concludes from the apparent probability of the correspondence of a particular mental representation to reality that this representation actually does so correspond, but only to point out that such a strong conclusion is unjustified and thus not knowledge on Kierkegaard's view.

8. Objective Immanent Metaphysical Knowledge.

Experience alone cannot yield knowledge according to Kierkegaard. Knowledge is possible, on his view, only if the knower is possessed of some species of innate ideas.¹ "The observer," explains Hügli, "brings the idea, the concept of the thing, or object, with him. The outward experience serves only to awaken the concept."² He argues, for example, that "if I know that Caesar was great, then I know what greatness is, and this is what I see" (SLW, 438/SV VI, 408).³ Greatness is an idea, or an ideal qualification and "[i]deality," argues Kierkegaard, "I know by myself,⁴ and if I do not know it myself, then I do not know it at all, and all the historical knowledge does not help (SLW, 438/SV VI, 408).⁵

¹Cf. Hügli: "Pure experience as the sum of individual observations does not yield knowledge. . . . Ideality, universality cannot be gotten from experience. It must rather be brought to experience" (Hügli, op. cit. 81).

²Ibid. 20.

³The emphasis here is mine. I have added it to help the reader appreciate that Kierkegaard is not claiming here that knowledge of Caesar's greatness, or lack thereof, is possible (we will see later, in fact, that such knowledge is not possible on Kierkegaard's view), but only describing some of the conditions which would be necessary in order for it to be possible.

⁴Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 49.

⁵The historical "knowledge" in question here is the testimony of others, both contemporaries of Caesar and subsequent "authorities," concerning Caesar's greatness. Some historical "knowledge" of the events of Caesar's life

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The difficulty, however, with knowledge claims relating to Caesar's greatness is that Caesar is a particular individual and the categories of thought, as we saw, are abstract, or general in nature and thus cannot capture individuals as such.⁶ Knowledge, in the strict sense, that Caesar was a great man requires more than an appreciation of the nature of the abstract quality of greatness, it requires the identification of a definitive correspondence of Caesar to this qualification and this, on Kierkegaard's view, is not possible. Such knowledge would require first that one could be certain that one's mental representation of Caesar corresponded to the actuality of this individual and second that one could be certain that this representation corresponded to the abstract qualification of greatness. But according to Kierkegaard, all mental representations of actuality are intellectual constructions whose correspondence to reality is uncertain.⁷ The inability of language, or thought, to capture actuality as it is in itself means that, no matter how well-defined, or well-confirmed, a particular statement about actuality may be, the possibility always remains that that actuality is, in fact, other than it is represented in the statement as being.

Statements of fact, according to Kierkegaard, do not preclude the possibility of their opposites because nothing

is, of course, necessary for any determination made concerning Caesar's greatness or lack thereof. The question of precisely how much of this latter sort of knowledge is required is an issue that will be addressed in the latter part of this chapter.

⁶Cf. chapter six, §6.2.

⁷Cf. chapter six, §6.2.

actual is what it is necessarily.⁸ Such statements can thus never definitively be determined to be true, or to agree, in their essence, with the facts to which they refer. If, however, one cannot definitively establish the correspondence of a particular proposition to the way the world is in itself, then such a proposition would appear to be excluded from the realm of knowledge claims. Such exclusion is indeed consistent with the strict sense in which Kierkegaard uses the expression 'knowledge.' It is inconsistent, however, as I explained in the introduction, with the way we ordinarily use language in that we often claim to have knowledge when we cannot definitively establish the correspondence of the beliefs in question to the reality to which they refer. Thus, in keeping with his desire not to alienate his reader through the development of a technical vocabulary which is at odds with ordinary language, one might reasonably expect to find that Kierkegaard occasionally relaxes the certainty criterion of knowledge and this, as we will see in the section entitled "Knowledge of Actuality," is precisely what he does. This relaxation is not arbitrary, I will argue, but is dependent on the nature and significance of the object of knowledge as well as on the context of the discussion in question.

We are concerned at present, however, not with actuality but with abstract reality. We know, by this point, that knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, is a representation of being in thought and that thus the relation of the knower to reality is mediated by this representation. There is, however, a large class of possible objects of knowledge to which the knower has an

⁸Of course, whatever is factually true precludes its opposite in some respect, even if not logically. It is for this reason that Kierkegaard argues that while truths of fact are not necessary (nødvendige), they are unchangeable (uforanderlige) (PF, 76-78/SV IV, 240-242).

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immediate relation. All the objects of what may be referred to as objective immanent metaphysical knowledge are ideas and thus essentially present in the mind of the knowing subject. That is, to the extent that that subject is a thinking being, all the ideas which fall under the heading of immanent metaphysical knowledge are, according to Kierkegaard, essentially present in his thought and need only be brought to consciousness. The knower may thus be understood to be immediately related to his ideas as such and to the extent that these ideas belong to the "a priori system of determinations for everything that is,"⁹ they may be appreciated as so belonging through a kind of intellectual intuition.

§8.1. Ontological and Mathematical Knowledge.

'Reality,' as we saw in Part I, is one of the most general expressions employed by Kierkegaard.¹⁰ It means everything that is, whether the being in question is ideal, as is the case with respect to concepts, or actual, as is the case with respect to everything that is temporally defined.¹¹ A large part of reality, according to

⁹Cf. chapter six, introduction.

¹⁰Cf. Introduction, "Kierkegaard's Terminology," and chapter one, §1.1.

¹¹Temporally defined means, in this context, that the thing in question occupies a particular spacio-temporal coordinate, or that it came to be (blev til) at some point, rather than that it is dialectical in relation to time (i.e., is in the process of coming to be). Nature, came to be at some point, according to Kierkegaard, but since the "becoming," or change (vorden) which have subsequently characterized it came about, according to Kierkegaard, through necessity (cf. CA 21/SV IV, 294 and note 31 above), nature does not have a history in the same sense that people have a history (cf. PF, 75-76/SV IV, 239).

Kierkegaard, is what one could call immanent metaphysical reality.¹² Because, as I explained above, this reality, according to Kierkegaard, is concerned with the relations among ideas it represents a realm of inquiry with respect to which our epistemological relation is relatively unproblematic. Knowledge of this reality is, on his view, obtained by something resembling Platonic "recollection."¹³ "With respect to all problems of immanence," argues Kierkegaard, "recollection applies; it exists altogether in every everyone [ethvert Menneske]" (JP 3:3606/Pap. V B 40:11).

The above reference to "recollection" may be confusing in that Kierkegaard clearly does not believe the knower has had any sort of existence prior to the one in which he finds himself in the present. "Recollection" is simply the expression he uses to refer to the process by which one can come to know something about reality on one's own (i.e., without the help of revelation).¹⁴ "Ideality," explains Hügli,

is always already there, but it is reality that first causes it to become apparent in its own medium, namely language. This means that, viewed subjectively, I both have ideality and do not have it and that I must thus appropriate, or make

¹²Cf. JP 3:3606/Pap. V B 40:11.

¹³Cf. Plato, Meno, The Dialogues of Plato, trans. B. Jowett, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953) vol. I, 249-301.

¹⁴What it is precisely that Kierkegaard means by "recollection [Erindring]" is discussed by both Emmanuel and Pojman in Kierkegaardiana, op. cit.

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conscious, what [in some sense] I already have.¹⁵

There is, according to Kierkegaard, a substantial part of reality with which reason is equipped to deal, even if it is not, on his view, sufficient in itself for coming to an understanding of all reality. This part of reality is, again, that which concerns the relations among ideas. Each of us, to the extent that he is rational, is, on Kierkegaard's view capable of attaining knowledge of these relations on his own. All that is required is that one care--i.e., will--to attain it. Other people may serve as teachers to the extent that they may assist us in the acquisition of this knowledge, but their role in this regard is no more than that of a Socratic "midwife."¹⁶

Some of what falls under the heading of immanent metaphysical reality has an essential relation to existence, or to what it means to exist, according to Kierkegaard, and thus will not be examined until part III. There is a part of reality, however, that is not only immanent, but also indifferent to what it means to exist. This is the reality that is the object of what he calls the sciences of "ontology" and "mathematics."¹⁷

§8.1.1. Ontology.

"The different sciences," argues Kierkegaard, "ought to be ordered according to the different ways they

¹⁵Hügli, op. cit. 47. This passage continues: "It is easy to see, from this formulation that the historical model for Kierkegaard's conception is the Platonic theory of recollections." Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 108 and JP 2:2557/Pap II A 301-302 and JP 2:2274/Pap III A 5.

¹⁶Cf. PF, 10/SV IV, 181.

¹⁷Cf. JP 1:197/Pap. IV C 100.

accentuate being [Væren]" (JP 1:197/Pap. IV C 100). These different sciences are divided by Kierkegaard into two groups. Ontology and mathematics form one group and "[e]xistential [s]cience [Existentiell-Videnskab]" forms the other (JP 1:197/Pap. IV C 100).

Existential science would appear to refer to the systematic examination of issues relating to human behavior such as one finds in psychology and ethics. We will examine the question of the possibility of knowledge in existential science in the next chapter as well as in part III. We are concerned now, however, with the sciences of ontology and mathematics.

"The definition of science which Aristotle gives," writes Kierkegaard, "is very important. The objects of science are things which can be in only one way. What is scientifically knowable is therefore the necessary, the eternal" (JP 2:2281/Pap. IV C 23). "The certainty," contends Kierkegaard, of the sciences of ontology and mathematics, "is absolute [but] by the same token these sciences are hypothetical" (JP 1:197/Pap. IV C 100).¹⁸ The certainty of these sciences is absolute, according to Kierkegaard, because "here thought and being are one" (JP 1:197/Pap. IV C 100). That is, these sciences are not concerned with being which transcends thought. They are concerned with the character of thought itself. They represent the investigation, in the abstract medium of thought, of thought objects. Since the medium of investigation, or expression, agrees in its essence with its objects, it can capture those objects in the way they are in themselves and thus preclude any uncertainty on the part of the knower as to whether this effort has been

¹⁸Cf. Holmer's claim that, according to Kierkegaard, "ideal knowledge, i.e., knowledge of conceived possible existence (such as logic and mathematics) is certain or at least in principle certain" (Holmer, op. cit. 46).

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successful.¹⁹

What precisely, the reader may ask, are these objects? Mathematical objects are not particularly difficult to identify as such, but what Kierkegaard means by "ontology" is far from clear. For this to become clear, we must turn to the works of Poul Martin Møller, Kierkegaard's teacher and friend. "Ontology," according to Møller, "is the study [Læren] of the eternal form of thought and being [Tilværelsen]." ²⁰ Gregor Malantschuk argues persuasively that ontology, according to Møller, is synonymous with logic and that Kierkegaard appropriated this view from Møller.²¹ Møller observes, however, that "ontology, like mathematics, contains a sum of hypothetical claims [Sætninger] which provide an a priori development of all the predicates which may be applied to anything that can exist. But knowledge that a thing actually exists [virkelig existerer]," he continues, "must be obtained in another way."²²

Kierkegaard expresses this situation with characteristic sarcasm when he observes that "[i]t is generally a difficult matter to want to demonstrate that something exists [er til]"--worse still for the brave souls who venture to do it, the difficulty is of such a kind that fame by no means awaits those who are preoccupied with it" (PF, 40/SV IV, 207), meaning, of course, that it is impossible to demonstrate, in the sense of to provide an objective proof, that anything exists and that anyone who

¹⁹Cf. Hügli's claim that "truth in abstract sciences is restricted to purely logical and necessary relations between idealities" (Hügli, op. cit. 79).

²⁰Møller, op. cit. vol. 3, 342.

²¹Cf. Malantschuk, "S. Kierkegaard og P. M. Møller," op. cit. 105.

²²Møller, op. cit. vol. 2, 186f.

tries to do it comes off looking a fool.²³

It is important to appreciate, in this context, that when Kierkegaard argues that it is impossible to demonstrate that anything exists (er til), he does not mean merely that it is impossible to demonstrate that anything has temporal or phenomenal existence (i.e., eksistens).²⁴ His claim is of much broader significance than that. What he means is that it is impossible to demonstrate that anything has a reality which transcends the reality of its idea. The idea of God, for example, has reality as an idea--i.e., it is a real idea.²⁵ The question of interest, however, is whether there is a God. Being which transcends idea being is, as we saw in Part I, variously referred to by Kierkegaard as 'realitet,' 'faktisk varen' and 'tilværelsen'²⁶ and should be understood to encompass everything that is, including those things which are temporally defined--i.e., which eksisterer--but not restricted to them.²⁷

It is impossible to demonstrate that something exists (er til), according to Kierkegaard, because such a proof

²³Cf. Slotty's claim that "Kierkegaard steadfastly maintains that reality cannot be proved, that it always requires a leap on our part" (Slotty, op. cit. 20).

²⁴The spelling given above is that of contemporary Danish. Kierkegaard spelling is 'existens.' The word also occasionally appears as 'existens' (i.e., without the final 't').

²⁵Cf. CUP I, 328/SV VII, 283.

²⁶Cf. chapter one, §1.1.

²⁷I am taking exception here to Himmelstrup's claim (op. cit., 571-572) that 'eksistens,' according to Kierkegaard, is equivalent to 'tilværelsen.' That Himmelstrup's equation of the two terms is mistaken will, I hope, become apparent below. Himmelstrup's association of 'tilværelsen' with 'eksistens' would appear, however, to provide an accurate description of the meaning of these terms for P. M. Møller.

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must proceed in one of two ways: either by assuming that the thing whose existence (tilværelsen) is to be demonstrated does not exist--in which case the "proof" involves a contradiction--or by assuming that the thing whose existence is to be demonstrated exists already--in which case the "proof" is a tautology. This problem is expressed by Kierkegaard in what he says concerning proofs for the existence of God.

When, for example, it is said: God must have all perfections, or the highest being must have all perfections, to be is also a perfection; ergo the highest being must be, or God must be--the whole movement is deceptive. That is, if in the first part of this statement God actually is not thought of as being, then the statement cannot come off at all. It will then run somewhat like this: A supreme being who, please note, does not exist [ikke er til], must be in possession of all perfections, among them also that of existing; ergo a supreme being who does not exist [ikke er til] does exist [er til]. . . . In the other case, the conclusion must be kept purely hypothetical: if a supreme being is assumed to be, this being must also be assumed to be in possession of all perfections; to be is a perfection, ergo this being must be--that is, if this being is assumed to be. By concluding within a hypothesis, one can surely never conclude from the hypothesis. . . . When the conclusion is finished, God's being [Væren] is just as hypothetical as it was. (CUP I, 334/SV VII, 288-289)

Thus, Kierkegaard argues:

I never reason in conclusion to existence [Tilværelsen], but I reason in conclusion from existence. For example, I do not demonstrate that a stone exists [er til], but that something which exists is a stone. The court of law does not demonstrate that a criminal exists but that the accused, who does indeed exist is a criminal.

(PF, 40/SV IV, 207)²⁸

This is the reason ontological and mathematical knowledge are hypothetical on Kierkegaard's view. That is, they determine what thought says about how things must be if they have a reality which transcends thought reality, but not that they are real in that way. It may be the case, for example, that the idea of God may include perfection, which, in this instance, means the idea of God and the idea of perfection are related to each other in such a way that, if there were a God, then he would have to be perfect. But logic alone could never compel one to accept that there was a God.

Ontology and mathematics are concerned with abstract, or ideal, being and, as Hügli expresses it: "Assertions about ideal being can be reduced to purely hypothetical conclusions of the form: 'If A, then B.' Whether A is the case or not remains uncertain, but if A, then necessarily B. The conclusion is necessary, but the premises are, and remain, hypotheses."²⁹ It is important to point out, however, that when Kierkegaard says that the sciences of ontology and mathematics are hypothetical, it would appear that he is referring to those sciences to the extent that they purport to describe reality as it is in itself. If we return to P. M. Møller's definition of ontology, however, we see that ontology describes not merely "Tilværelsen," but also thought. Logical principles, such as the

²⁸"Kierkegaard is of the opinion" explains Slotty, "that whenever one tries to prove the reality of a thing, the reality of this thing is always silently presupposed as part of the proof itself--i.e., that the proof, as such, is merely a fiction" (Slotty, op. cit. 20). "[T]his is the case," explains Hügli, "with respect to both 'the world of concrete sensuous reality' and that of 'thought'" (Hügli, op. cit. 70-71; cf. PF, 40/SV IV 207).

²⁹Hügli, op. cit. 89.

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principle of non-contradiction, do not necessarily purport to describe reality in itself; they may be interpreted simply as describing principles of thought.

Møller argues that "[i]t is certain that the sum of the angles of a triangle is 180,^o but this in no way implies that a triangle is given; but one knows something about actual being [virkelig Tilværelsen], only if one knows that it includes triangles, and this is not something that one learns in mathematics."³⁰ One might be tempted to interpret Møller's reference to "actual being" as a reference to empirical reality. That this is not what Møller means by "actual being" becomes clear in his observation that mathematics is an ideal sphere "in which strict proofs are given for purely hypothetical truths. But [that] when one makes claims [foredrager Læresætninger] regarding reality which transcends sense experience [det Oversandselige], one is no longer concerned merely with relations among ideas . . . rather one makes oneself out to know something about this reality itself."³¹ That is, "virkelig Tilværelsen" would appear equivalent, according to Møller, to "det Oversandselige."

"The assumption," explains Slotty, "that Kierkegaard had a low estimation of science, is erroneous."³² Knowledge of the objects of ontology and mathematics is "more certain," according to Kierkegaard, than sense knowledge (sandsning), although he observes that "it is usually stated the other way around," as when it is stated that some thing X is "as certain as it is certain that I hold this cane in my hand." This, he continues, "is a shabby certainty which even Greek skepticism could deprive one of"

³⁰Møller, op. cit. vol. 2, 181.

³¹Ibid. 181.

³²Slotty, op. cit. 38.

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(JP 4:4589/Pap. VI A 48).

Ontology, according to Møller, concerns, again, the eternal form of thought and being. To the extent, however, that ontology is interpreted merely to refer to the eternal form of thought, ontological knowledge is entirely unproblematic. If, for example; logical principles are interpreted to refer to the relations among ideas, then knowledge of these principles is unproblematic. That is, the agreement between thought and being that constitutes truth, according to Kierkegaard, would be a tautology, since here thought and being would "mean one and the same thing" (CUP I, 170/SV VII, 138). But if thought and being mean the same thing then the correspondence of the one to the other is objectively necessary. An appreciation of this necessity would amount to the insight into the nature of the object of knowledge which was referred to in the preceding chapter as a kind of intuition. That is, this intuition would be possible as the result of the fact that the mental representation in question would be immediately identified with its object and would thus preclude uncertainty relative to this object. It is this intuition which justifies the mental representation in question. A mental representation whose correspondence to reality is appreciated as objectively necessary is true and thus satisfies the definition of knowledge as a justified true mental representation. Ontological knowledge is thus justified true mental representations of the relations among ideas.³³ It is hypothetical only to the extent that it purports to extend beyond the relations among ideas to describe the relations among things in themselves.³⁴

³³Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 57 and 79.

³⁴"[Logical] deduction," explains Hügli, "can say no more than that the thing in question is possible, or conceivable; it cannot say whether it corresponds to actuality" (Hügli, op. cit. 28-29). It is in this sense

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The knowing subject does not, however, start with comprehensive objective immanent metaphysical knowledge. Though it is, in a sense, implicitly present in his consciousness, he must be interested in it, on Kierkegaard's view, in order to attain it in the sense that it becomes explicit for him. This knowledge usually begins with an unsubstantiated claim about the nature of abstract reality--i.e., a logical or mathematical claim--for which a proof must then be produced. Such proofs are constructed as the result of the decision, or will, of the knowing subject, to understand reality. The knower sets out to construct proofs in order to understand reality better and a successful proof is understood as such to the extent that it engenders the relevant intuition in the mind of the knower.³⁵

It is important to point out that such a distinction between proofs and the insights they engender does not mean that the proof becomes superfluous once it becomes associated with the insight. It may well be that, in the case of claims which are not obviously tautologous, the insight can be sustained only when attention is directed toward the proof. It is important to appreciate, however, that it is not the proof which justifies a mental representation, but rather when it is understood as such through the aforementioned insight.³⁶

No representation that has been established to cohere with the a priori system of determinations for everything

that "thought reality," as Slotty explains, "is . . . possibility" (Slotty, op. cit. 22).

³⁵Cf. CI, 32/SV XIII, 127.

³⁶Cf. chapter seven. This distinction is important to the extent that it is necessary to account for the fact that there is a difference between reading a proof and reading it with understanding. Cf. George Weaver, "Reading Proofs with Understanding," Theoria, vol. LIV (1988) 31-47.

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that is for thought could ever be found to fail to cohere with this system of determinations. That is, no representation whose correspondence to reality had been demonstrated to be objectively necessary could ever be found to fail to correspond to reality. The correspondence of these representations is not expressed in probabilistic terms, thus it is impossible that individual representations could be displaced by more probable ones. Ontological knowledge is fixed as such through intuition which represents what one could call the intersection of certainty as an objective phenomenon and psychological certainty as a subjective phenomenon.

Ontological knowledge is, again, not necessarily objective. That is, ontology, to the extent that it encompasses more than formal logic--i.e., to the extent that it includes the semantics of expressions like 'God' and 'perfection'--cannot be interpreted as entirely indifferent to existence because even the idea of God, as we shall see in part III, is significant, according to Kierkegaard, with respect to what it means to exist and it is precisely such significance which excludes it from the realm of what is properly objective knowledge on his view.

§8.1.2. Mathematics.

Mathematical knowledge is less problematic, according to Kierkegaard, than ontological knowledge. Mathematics, according to Møller, is never concerned with being in itself, but only with thought. The objects of mathematics are restricted to the rules which govern the relations among ideas. The question of whether these rules exist independently of thought is not, according to Møller, a

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mathematical one.³⁷ It is for this reason mathematical knowledge is essentially unproblematic on Kierkegaard's view. That is, mathematics, on his view, is not essentially significant with respect to what it means to exist.³⁸ It may be significant, but this significance could never be more than accidental.

Ontology, as we saw, if not restricted to the relations among ideas, but interpreted as extending to the way things are in themselves, is problematic in that one has no way, objectively, of knowing, the nature of the relations among things in themselves. Mathematics, however, to the extent that it is restricted to the relations among ideas, clearly satisfies the criterion for a science, articulated by Aristotle and affirmed by Kierkegaard. That is, the objects of mathematics are things which can be in only one way. Hence here, according to Kierkegaard, objective thinking may be considered to be in its rights.³⁹

Mathematical knowledge clearly satisfies the criteria of a justified true mental representation. That is, "[p]roof," argues Kierkegaard, "is given for a mathematical proposition in such a way that no disproof is conceivable" (JP 2:2296/Pap. VII¹ 215). The "proof" of the proposition, to the extent that it renders any disproof inconceivable establishes the objective necessity of the correspondence of the mental representation in question to reality. An appreciation of this necessity is equivalent to an intuition, or insight, concerning the essence of this proof. That is, it is equivalent to an appreciation of its coherence with the rest of the fundamental axioms of

³⁷Cf. Møller, op. cit. vol 2, 181.

³⁸Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 90.

³⁹Cf. CUP I, 70n./SV VII, 58n.

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mathematics and it is this appreciation which serves to justify it. The conclusions of mathematics, like those of ontology, are hypothetical only to the extent that they purport to refer to a reality which transcends that of thought. But this, as we have seen, is something they do not essentially do.

Though our epistemological relation to the truths of mathematics is less problematic, according to Kierkegaard, than our relation to any other sort of truth, he seldom writes about mathematical knowledge. This is not because he has any problem with it, but rather because he is not very interested in it. Kierkegaard's overwhelming concerns were ethics and religion. "All essential knowledge," he argues, "relates to existence [Existents]" and "only such knowledge as has an essential relation to existence is essential knowledge" (CUP I, 176/SV VII, 165).

9. Objective Knowledge of Actuality.

We saw in chapter six that since thought, according to Kierkegaard, was language, objective truth, on his view, was a property of language or of propositions. We also saw, however, that Kierkegaard was by no means an idealist.¹ To say that truth is a property of propositions is not to say that there is no reality independent of thought which is significant with respect to the truth values of particular propositions. Kierkegaard clearly believed there was such a reality. The question is: Precisely what sort of significance does this reality have relative to knowledge claims?

While knowledge of immanent metaphysical reality is expressed, according to Kierkegaard, in the disciplines of ontology and mathematics, knowledge of actuality is the objective of the humanities and the natural sciences. According to Kierkegaard, argues Holmer, "[t]here is no certain knowledge, no a priori synthetic knowledge of matters of fact and actuality."² I am going to argue that knowledge, in the strict sense is not possible, on Kierkegaard's view, with respect to any actuality other than one's own ethical actuality,³ and that, as we have seen, properly falls under the heading of subjective rather than objective knowledge. Despite this fact, however, we

¹Cf. Introduction, "Historical Background," and chapter one, §1.1.

²Holmer, op. cit. 46.

³Cf. Slotty, op. cit. 35.

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will see that there is a looser sense in which Kierkegaard uses the expression 'knowledge,' as is implied in the remark cited earlier that "in relation to all temporal, earthly and worldly matters the crowd may have competency, even decisive competency as a court of last resort" (POV, 110/SV XIII, 592).

Knowledge in the strict sense is associated, by Kierkegaard, with certainty in the sense of the necessity of the correspondence of a given mental representation to reality. The difficulty with mental representations of actuality, however, is that nothing actual is, according to Kierkegaard, what it is necessarily. But if nothing actual is what it is by necessity, then the correspondence of a mental representation to actuality can have no more than a contingent character. This means that proofs cannot be given for propositions in the humanities, or natural sciences, in such a way that no disproof is conceivable. The correspondence of mental representations of actuality to actuality may, however, be expressed in probabilistic terms--i.e., as more or less well-confirmed.

Knowledge, in the strict sense, is a justified true mental representation where the justification is associated with the appreciation of the knower of the correspondence of the mental representation in question to reality. That is, a representation is justified to the extent that it is appreciated as agreeing with reality. Mental representations of actuality cannot, unfortunately, be justified in the sense that the one can be certain of their correspondence to actuality. There is a sense, however, in which representations of actuality can be justified. If the correspondence of particular claims about actuality to actuality itself appears more or less probable,⁴ then the

⁴It is important at this point to explain that, for reasons given above (cf. chapter seven, §7.2.), the probabilities in question will always be spoken of as

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knower is going to be more or less inclined to accept that they do or do not so correspond. The foundation of this inclination is, as we saw in chapter seven, the passion or interest which, according to Kierkegaard, is the essence of the "knowing" subject. To argue, however, that this inclination is subjective, or passionate, is not equivalent to saying that it is entirely arbitrary; it is related, of course, to the degree of the apparent probability of the correspondence. A claim whose correspondence to reality appears highly probable is more likely to generate a conviction that it does so correspond than is a claim whose correspondence to reality appears less probable. The "justification" of such a representation is the appreciation of the "knower," not of the necessity of its correspondence to reality, but of the probability of this correspondence represented by the amount of data collected which is consistent with such correspondence and which would thus appear to support it.

§9.1. Empirical Knowledge.

Kierkegaard claims, in the Fragments, that "immediate sensation and immediate cognition [Erkjenden] cannot deceive" (PF, 81-82/SV IV, 244-45). Later, however, in the Postscript, he argues that "[t]he trustworthiness of sense perception is a deception. Greek skepticism," he continues, "has already adequately shown this, and modern idealism likewise" (CUP I, 316/SV VII, 271). This latter claim appears, at first, to be at odds with the former. There is an important difference, however, between these two references. In the first instance "sensation [Sandsning]" is qualified as "immediate [umiddlebare]" and in the second instance it is not qualified in this way.

"apparent."

"Immediate sensation" cannot deceive, because, it does not make any claims--i.e., draw any conclusions--about objective reality, whereas sensation in the second sense does. That is, immediate sensation and immediate cognition cannot deceive because there cannot be any question of the correctness of a sensation, or impression, in the immediate sense.⁵ Sensory states simply are what they are. It does not make sense to speak of a false sensory state. "Immediacy," argues Kierkegaard, "is just indeterminateness" (JC, 167/Pap. IV B 1, 146).⁶ The possibility of deception arises only when immediate sensation and knowing are determined by being brought into relation to something else.⁷ That is, error becomes possible only when immediate experience is mediated by reflection in thought,⁸ which is precisely what takes place when one makes knowledge claims based on sensation.

There is, according to Kierkegaard, an important distinction between sensory states themselves and our interpretations of their significance. Thought, according to Kierkegaard, is again language, thus our interpretations of the significance of our sensory states may be assumed, on his view, to involve language. An impression of color,

⁵Cf. Pap. IV B 1, 145-147 (if there is no reference to an English translation accompanying a reference to a Danish text, then no such translation exists); Cf. also Holmer's observation that "immediate and contemporaneous knowledge is a contradiction in language" (Holmer, op. cit. 44).

⁶Cf. CA, 37/SV IV, 308 where immediacy is referred to as "nothing [intet]"; Holmer, op. cit. 44 and Hügli, op. cit. 36.

⁷Pap. IV B 12.

⁸This is not to deny that a great deal of neurophysiological activity is required before there can be such a thing as immediate experience, but merely to distinguish such activity, to the extent that it is not conscious, from "thought."

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for example, simply is what it is before it is mediated by language. As an experience it has immediate validity (e.g., even if it is induced by drugs it is still an experience).⁹ At the level of belief, which is to say at the level where sensory experience is interpreted as presenting a world which transcends that of subjective experience, however, the situation is more problematic. An impression, as such, cannot be mistaken, but one can be mistaken in one's interpretation of its significance. One may, for example, interpret a particular sense experience as an impression of the color pink. It is possible, however, that one is mistaken in one's belief about how the expression 'pink' is used by most speakers of English. One may, for example, mistakenly believe that violet is a shade of pink and thus mistakenly conclude that an impression of the color violet is an impression of pink.

"The Greek skeptic," observes Kierkegaard, "does not deny the correctness of sensation and immediate cognition [Erkjendelsen], but says that error has an utterly different basis--[that] it comes from the conclusions I draw" (PF, 82/SV IV, 246). He continues in a note which begins on the same page as the above reference, that "[b]oth Plato and Aristotle emphasize that immediate sensation and immediate cognition [Erkjendelsen] cannot deceive," and that "[l]ater Descartes says, just as the Greek skeptics do, that error comes from the will, which is in too great a hurry to draw conclusions" (PF, 83/SV IV, 246-47). Thus when Kierkegaard says that "the trustworthiness of sense perception is a deception," he means that sense experience will support a variety of conclusions concerning its significance. That is, sense

⁹Cf. Holmer's observation that "sensations, just like ideas thoughts categories and principles, are immediately possessed and acquire a mediating function only when used to describe actuality" (Holmer, op. cit. 45).

experience underdetermines any conclusion concerning its objective significance. "If, for example," argues Kierkegaard,

sensation shows me in the distance a round object that close at hand is seen to be square or shows me a stick that looks broken in the water although it is straight when taken out, sensation has not deceived me, but I am first deceived when I conclude something about that stick or that object. (PF, 82-83/SV IV, 246)¹⁰

To turn to another example: I may infer, from a visual impression of a bird of a certain sort, that there is a goldfinch in the garden. I may not be close enough, however, to distinguish a real goldfinch from a stuffed one, a robot one, or a mutant bird of some other sort. If I move closer, I reduce the possibility of error. As in the former instance, however, I may also be mistaken about the proper use or application of the relevant expression--i.e., 'goldfinch.' I may only vaguely know what type of bird this expression applies to. If I take care to do a little research concerning this, I reduce the possibility of error. It is clear, however, that this possibility cannot be eliminated.

Sense experience itself does not deceive according to Kierkegaard. It is rather that the information provided by such experience is insufficient to determine the correspondence of conclusions about its objective significance to reality. It is clear that, for Kierkegaard, what is the case about the world transcends experience or perception. Knowledge of empirical reality is attempted, on his view, through an expression or a repetition of that reality in thought--i.e., language. The

¹⁰Cf. "The immediate perception of an object cannot deceive, but we deceive ourselves as soon as we want to say what that object is" (Hügli, op. cit. 86).

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difficulty is that the essence of language is ideality (JC, 168/Pap. IV B 1, [p. 147])¹¹ and ideality is qualitatively different from empirical reality.

"[A]ll knowledge," argues Kierkegaard, "is an annulment of, a removal from existence" (CUP I, 348/SV VII, 301).¹² "All knowledge about actuality [Virkelighed]," argues Kierkegaard, "is possibility" (CUP I, 316/SV VII, 271). That is, "[a]ll cognition of actuality," explains Holmer, "is a translation process, out of actual and factual being into possible and essential being."¹³ Knowledge, by taking its objects out of existence--i.e., by bringing empirical reality into relation with thought--transforms them from actualities to mental representations (forestillinger) which may, or may not, correspond to actuality. It is in this sense that they become possibilities. That is, they become mental constructs which may possibly correspond to the way the world is in itself.¹⁴

Knowledge, in the strict sense, according to Kierkegaard, is associated with certainty in both the formal and the psychological senses, but how is one to be certain that one has properly interpreted the significance of a particular sense impression--i.e., how is one to be certain that this interpretation corresponds to reality? Evidence for, and against, various conclusions must be weighed until the correspondence, or lack thereof, of a

¹¹Cf. CI, 247/SV VIII, 322; FT, 113/SV III, 159; JP 2:1590/Pap III A 37 and Hügli, op. cit. 47.

¹²The wording here comes from the Swenson-Lowrie translation which I have chosen in this instance because it makes the meaning of the passage clearer when it is quoted out of context.

¹³Holmer, op. cit. 44.

¹⁴Cf. Slotty, op. cit. 22.

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particular conclusion to reality may be determined. In what sense, however, could one be said to weigh evidence for and against a particular conclusion?

Kierkegaard was very interested in ancient skepticism.¹⁵ The Pyrrhonist maintained that whenever one attempted to determine the objective truth of a particular claim, careful application of the skeptical modes, or tropes,¹⁶ would reveal that the truth claims, which might be made on behalf of one's subjective impressions, would always be balanced by the possibility of conflicting impressions on the part of other subjects, and this balance was referred to by them as isostheneia.¹⁷

If, for example, one attempted to determine from one's subjective impression of warmth, whether it was actually, or objectively, warm, what one could be said to know was: 1.) that one had a subjective impression of warmth and 2.) that such impressions varied from subject to subject (e.g., individuals who are either feverish or who have just come in from the cold, often feel warm when others around them do not). What one does not know, in such an instance, is whether one ought to privilege one's own impression relative to those of other individuals. One does not even know whether one should privilege one's own impressions relative to those of other creatures.¹⁸ One may assume, for

¹⁵Cf. JP 1:42/Pap. IV C 50; JP 2:2280/Pap. IV A 198; JP 4:4589/Pap. VI A 48; Pap IV B 1, p. 148; Pap. IV B 2:14; Pap. IV B 10:17; Pap. IV B 13:3 and Pap. VI C 52 and Thulstrup, "Kommentar," op. cit. 165.

¹⁶Cf. Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, Vol. I (Cambridge, Mass: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1933) 21-107.

¹⁷This is, unfortunately, a simplification of the Pyrrhonist position. It will suffice, however, for the purposes of the present discussion.

¹⁸Cf. JP 1:42/Pap. IV C 50.

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example, that one's subjective impressions of temperature would often conflict with the impressions of cold-blooded creatures such as reptiles amphibians or insects.¹⁹

One may be tempted to argue that there must be some veridical sense experience, on Kierkegaard's view, or it would be impossible to recognize sense deception as such. Kierkegaard uses the example of the illusion created when a stick is placed in water, that the stick is broken, to demonstrate the thesis that error arises from the conclusions drawn on the basis of sense experience rather than from the experiences themselves. It would appear, however, that one could make this argument only if the impression of the stick when it was drawn out of the water were veridical. That is, it is commonly assumed that the skeptical argument from illusion undermines itself to the extent that it is dependent on veridical impressions against which illusions are distinguished as such. This is not, however, the sense in which Kierkegaard uses the argument. That is, what appears veridical, on Kierkegaard's view, is not a particular sense experience, but the principle of non-contradiction. That is, it would appear that two conflicting impressions of the same object (e.g., a stick) necessitate the conclusion in the mind of the subject whose impressions they are, that at least one of these impressions must be false. A stick, for example, cannot be both straight and broken, which is to say that it

¹⁹Cf., JP 1:42/Pap. IV C 50. The skeptical modes or tropes are actually considerably more complicated, than this presentation would suggest (cf., Sextus Empiricus, op. cit., as well as Gisela Striker's "The Ten Tropes of Aenesidemus," in The Skeptical Tradition, op. cit. 95-115.) This should be enough, however, to give the reader an indication of what is meant by isostheneia, and the relation that this has to Kierkegaard's statement that knowledge places everything in the "infinite indifference of equilibrium".

cannot be both straight and not straight. The assumption, however, that two conflicting impressions cannot both be true in no way necessitates the conclusion that they cannot both be false.

All that is needed, according to Kierkegaard, to cast doubt on the idea that sense experience could ever be veridical is a single occurrence of two conflicting experiences. That this is so is apparent in his remark that "it is easy to see that if all sense perception were not a fraud, there would be no illusion at all."²⁰ What Kierkegaard means when he says that all sense experience is a fraud is that we are inclined to believe we are immediately related to physical reality in sense experience even though we are not.²¹ Sense experience, according to Kierkegaard, as distinguished from "immediate experience," is, in a way, an interpretation of the reality we believe to lie behind it. It is only because it is an interpretation that it can be mistaken.

Despite Kierkegaard's claim that all sense perception is a "fraud," it would be a mistake, argues Slotty, "to call Kierkegaard a skeptic." That is, Kierkegaard "recognizes," Slotty continues, "that certain knowledge can develop from the unavoidable presuppositions of belief . . . , but this knowledge remains within a hypothesis."²²

But if certainty is the goal, in what sense could one be understood to have "finished" weighing the evidence for and against a particular conclusion about the objective significance of a given sense experience? To the extent

²⁰JP 5:5620/Pap. (1st ed.) IV B 10a (supplement XI³ p. xxxvii).

²¹Cf. Slotty's observation that, according to Kierkegaard, "certainty preceded skepticism" (Slotty, op. cit. 20).

²²Slotty, op. cit. 27.

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that there is such a thing as knowledge, in the strict sense, which relates to actuality, such knowledge is associated by Kierkegaard with isostheneia. That is, "[k]nowledge," he argues, "at its utmost . . . means precisely to place contrasting possibilities in equilibrium. To be able to do this is to have knowledge [være vidende] (WOL, 218/SV IX, 221).²³ "Knowledge," argues Kierkegaard, "is infinitely indifferent [It] is like an auctioneer who puts existence [Tilværelsen] on the block. The auctioneer then says 'ten dollars' (the value of the property)--but it means nothing; only after someone says 'I bid,' only then is the bid ten dollars (JP 2:2297/SV VIII¹ A 186).

"Kierkegaard merely means to stress here," explains Hügli, "that there is no necessary transition from knowledge to conviction, but that the relation of the knower here is active."²⁴ That is, left to itself, reflection would simply heap up data and contrast various interpretations of these data indefinitely.²⁵ Reflection, according to Kierkegaard, cannot be halted by itself. To ask reflection to stop itself, he argues, is like asking a

²³Cf. WOL, 218-221/SV IX, 221-24. The expression for knowledge, which for Kierkegaard, is exemplified in skeptical isostheneia is, in the context of Works of Love, always 'viden', never 'erkendelsen.' Kierkegaard argues, for example, that doubt and belief "are neither knowledge [Erkendelse] nor conclusion[s] from knowledge [Erkendelses-Slutning], but . . . choice[s] which make . . . [their] appearance . . . when knowledge [Viden] has placed . . . two mutually contrasting possibilities into balance" (WOL, 221/SV IX, 219). There is at least one reference, however, to the judgment that the contrasting possibilities constitute and equilibrium as "Erkendelsen," and that is in Philosophical Fragments (PF, 85/SV IV, 248).

²⁴Slotty, op. cit. 19-20.

²⁵Cf. CUP I, 112/SV VII, 91 and JP 2:1902/Pap. X⁴ A 439.

disease to devise its own cure.²⁶ It is only through an act of will that this process can be halted. The knower says "enough," and determines the contrasting possibilities to be equal, where reflection, left to itself, would heap up data interminably.

Such a judgment, or determination, is justified, according to Kierkegaard, by the fact that there is more to thought than reflection. Reflection is concerned with contrasting opposites, but consciousness, according to Kierkegaard, is that which brings the opposites of reflection into relation to one another in such a way that an understanding of them is possible. An individual is able to determine that the contrasting possibilities constitute an equilibrium because the possibility of conflicting sense experience, when reflected on--i.e., when combined with the conscious acceptance of the principle of noncontradiction--implies that reality itself must be independent of sense experience. The appreciation of this independence generates the intuition, or insight, that even if all actual experience happened to support a particular conclusion about objective reality, the weight of the experience would be counter-balanced by the recognition of the divide between sense experience and objective reality. That is, to the extent that such a divide is assumed, no amount of convergence of disparate sense data would be sufficient to outweigh the possibility that the reality to which these experiences refer is other than it is represented by them as being.

What does it mean, however, to say that knowledge is the placing of conflicting possibilities in equilibrium, or that to be able to do this is to have knowledge? This becomes clearer if we return to the definition of knowledge as a justified true mental representation. If, for example,

²⁶Cf. CUP I, 112/SV VII, 91.

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we start with the subjective impression of warmth, and conclude, from this impression, that it might actually be warm, our conclusion that it might be warm could be understood to be both justified and true. That is, the reality to which such a representation refers is not physical reality, but thought reality. The representation of reality as possibly warm does not make any claim one way or another about what the temperature actually is. It refers to the formal possibility--i.e., the possibility for thought--that it might actually be warm or it might not actually be warm. That the reality referred to in the interpretation that it might be warm is thought reality rather than actuality can be deduced from the fact that to the extent that temperature could be attributed to actuality, it would be determinate.²⁷ It cannot actually be the case that it might be warm--either it is warm or it is not warm. One can be certain that it might be warm because this certainty is nothing other than the recognition, or intuition, that the ontological split between thought and being means that thought can come no closer, in such an instance, to objective reality than to an account of what it might be like. The representation of reality as possibly warm is thus justified to the extent that its correspondence to the reality in question--i.e., thought reality--is appreciated by the knower as necessary and it is true in that it agrees in its essence with the reality to which it refers.

The conclusion that it might be warm would appear an odd candidate for knowledge to the extent that knowledge is

²⁷This would be the case even if there were substantial disagreement among various subjective impressions concerning what the temperature actually was. That is, to the extent that temperature may be attributed to reality in itself, it is unaffected by what could, at the extreme, be a complete lack of consensus of subjective impressions concerning what that temperature was.

associated with certainty and the conclusion that it might be warm expresses an uncertainty as to the actual temperature. There is, however, an important difference, for Kierkegaard, between uncertainty as such (e.g., the view that it might be warm) and certainty regarding uncertainty (e.g., the view that one could never be in a position to assert more than that it might be warm). The latter is, after all, certainty. Kierkegaard's position that subjectivity is essentially interest, or passion, means that the knower is not going to be able to rest content with an uncertainty because "the ultimate potentiation of every passion," according to Kierkegaard, "is always to will its own downfall" (PF, 37/SV IV, 204). The knower cannot rest with an uncertainty because an uncertainty leaves him to his own devices. But since the knower is himself passion and passion wills its own downfall, he must continually seek rest outside himself. That is, he must continually seek rest in contact with reality itself. One cannot rest with an uncertainty, on Kierkegaard's view, but one can rest with the conclusion--i.e., the certainty--that something is uncertain. "When a judge is uncertain," argues Kierkegaard for example,

he conducts an investigation, pursues every clue, and then pronounces judgment--that is, he comes to the conclusion: guilty or innocent; but now and then he dismisses the charge. Is then nothing accomplished by that judgment? Indeed, there is--the uncertainty is determined. He was uncertain as to how he should judge; now he is no longer uncertain, now his verdict is ready: he judges that he is uncertain. He rests in that for one cannot rest in an uncertainty, but one can rest when one has determined it.²⁸

One can determine the indeterminacy (i.e., for

²⁸Cf. JP 5:5620/Pap. (1st ed.) supplement XI³ p. xxxviii.

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thought), or be certain of the uncertainty, of the correspondence of a mental representation to reality through the appreciation of the relation of the data to the fact explained in chapter six. That is, no amount of data can preclude the possibility that an interpretation of the significance of a particular sensory experience corresponds to the real significance of that experience. No matter how much the margin of error may be reduced, it cannot be eliminated.

Kierkegaard's "skepticism" concerning the possibility of veridical sense experience is, in fact, over-determined by the arguments he gives in support of it. That is, one argument would have been sufficient, yet there are at least three arguments in his authorship that support it.

The first of these arguments was presented in chapter six. It is what one might call the argument from the essential incompatibility of thought and actuality. That is, all knowledge of actuality is an expression of it in thought. But thought is essentially abstract and thus cannot capture particular existing--i.e., actual--things in their particularity.²⁹

The second argument Kierkegaard offers against the possibility of veridical sense experience could be called the argument from the indeterminacy of language. That is, neither the set of speakers of any given language, nor the manner in which particular expressions are used by these speakers, is static. For a representation of empirical reality to correspond to the way that reality is in itself would thus be for the language which comprises the representation to cohere with the manner in which the relevant expressions are used by most speakers of that language. But such coherence can, of course, be expressed only in statistical terms, which is to say, to return to

²⁹Cf. chapter six, §6.2.

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Kierkegaard's language, that the truth of the representation in question can only approximately be established.

The third argument Kierkegaard uses against the possibility of veridical sense experience is "the argument from illusion." That is, since knowledge of empirical reality is a representation of that reality in thought, this representation must accord with the laws of thought, one of which is the principle of non-contradiction. The recognition that conflicting sense experiences are possible with respect to the same object thus leads to the conclusion that there can be no veridical sense experience.

The presupposition that there is a distinction between appearance and reality means that it is formally impossible to go behind appearances to find out what reality in itself is like. Strictly speaking, the only knowledge possible, on Kierkegaard's view, with respect to empirical reality is thus reducible to the justified true mental representation that sense experience underdetermines any conclusion made on its basis, or that the correspondence of such conclusions to actuality is uncertain. Knowledge that conclusions about the objective significance of sense experience are inherently uncertain is not, however, actually empirical knowledge. It is rather knowledge of the consequences, for thought, of the assumption that there is a split between reality in itself and reality as it is represented in sense experience. There is thus no empirical knowledge in the strict sense according to Kierkegaard.

It is possible, however, to speak of empirical knowledge in a looser sense. That is, to the extent that the correspondence of a mental representation of empirical

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reality to that reality appears probable,³⁰ it may be considered true in an approximate sense and to the extent that this truth is appreciated as such, the representation in question may be considered to be justified. Few people, however, ever consciously weigh evidence for and against the veridicality of particular sense impressions. We are too interested in our own sense experiences to be able systematically to adopt the disinterested stance relative to them that would be required to sustain skepticism concerning their veridicality. We take it for granted that sense experience provides us with a generally accurate picture of the reality which lies behind it.³¹

Simple empirical "knowledge" is distinguished, however, from "knowledge" of actuality as this knowledge is represented in scholarship and science. That is, while it may make little sense to say that we decide that it is cold outside on the basis of our subjective impression of coldness, it does, as we will see, make sense to say that we decide that a given scholarly or scientific theory provides the best available representation of the reality to which it purports to correspond.

§9.2. Scholarly and Scientific Knowledge.

The loose sense in which Kierkegaard uses the expression 'knowledge' is crucial to understanding his views concerning the nature of scholarly, or scientific, knowledge because it is only in this sense that scholarship

³⁰Cf. Holmer's claim that, according to Kierkegaard, "[e]mpirical knowledge . . . is only probable" (Holmer, op. cit. 46).

³¹It is for this reason that Kierkegaard argues "proficiency in doubting is not acquired in days and weeks" (FT, 6-7/SV III, 58).

or science can yield knowledge on his view. This is not an indictment of scholarship and science, on Kierkegaard's view,³² it is simply a defining characteristic of these disciplines that their conclusions will lack certainty.³³ Kierkegaard even praises science and scholarship.³⁴ What he objects to is the failure of scholars and scientists to appreciate the significance of their conclusions--i.e., that they lack certainty. That is, "he wants merely to emphasize the impossibility of absolute knowledge."³⁵ He has no objection, in principle, to the use of science and scholarship of the expression 'knowledge,' as long as scientists and scholars do not lose sight of the fact that what they have in terms of "knowledge" is, even at best, ultimately uncertain.

The failure of scientists and scholars to appreciate the uncertainty of their conclusions becomes an issue of real concern for Kierkegaard only when it begins to have religious ramifications. That is, it is a concern for him only when it begins to obscure what he believes is the position on the nature of, and relation between, faith and knowledge that is expressed in the New Testament. As long as the scholar, or scientist, is aware that his or her knowledge is based on the faith that reality is more or less transparent to the human understanding, such use of the expression 'knowledge' cannot represent a threat to what Kierkegaard believes is the Christian position on the relation between knowledge and faith.

³²Cf. Slotty, op. cit. 38.

³³Cf. Holmer, op. cit. 44.

³⁴Cf., JP 1:386/Pap. X³ 702 and JP 2:2288/Pap. VI B 40:5; JP 3:3368/Pap. II A 309 and CUP I, 55/SV VII, 42.

³⁵Slotty, op. cit. 20, cf. Hügli, op. cit. 148.

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We will see, however, in the sections below, that Kierkegaard's view of human nature--i.e., that subjectivity is interest--means that constant vigilance is required in order to sustain the appreciation of the scholar or scientist of the ultimate significance of his or her conclusions.

§9.2.1. Scholarship.

What is meant here by "scholarship" is work related to what are identified in English as the "humanities." To the extent that the interpretations of reality to which these disciplines give rise relate to actuality--i.e., to actual individuals, communities, languages, or works of art, etc.--their correspondence to this actuality can never be definitively established. It is possible, of course, simply to dismiss the idea that there could be such a thing as scholarly knowledge, on Kierkegaard's view. To do this would, however, be to do an injustice to the substance of Kierkegaard's thought because there are specific sorts of scholarship which are of great interest to him and which thus figure prominently in his authorship.

The failure to appreciate that the foundation of what one believes is one's knowledge of empirical reality has no objective support is significant with respect to every sort of "knowledge" that is related to empirical reality. It is particularly important, however, when the reality in question is presumed to have religious significance as is the case with such disciplines as history, psychology,³⁶ philosophy and, of course, theology. Historical

³⁶It is doubtful that Kierkegaard would have considered the disciplines of economics, political science and sociology, concerned as they are with human behavior, as distinct from those of either psychology or history.

scholarship figures prominently in Kierkegaard's authorship precisely because it is often presumed to have such significance, thus it is appropriate to begin an examination of scholarly knowledge with an examination of historical knowledge.

We saw in the preceding section that immediate sensation and immediate cognition could not deceive, according to Kierkegaard. The difficulty is that as long as one remains at the level immediacy, one cannot be said to have attained any knowledge of the phenomena in question. That is, without an appreciation of the meaning which these phenomena have in the broader context of one's experiences, or beliefs, they cannot have any cognitive significance. Historical knowledge is thus, like empirical knowledge. Kierkegaard, explains Slotty, however, "did not dispute the reality of historical knowledge,"³⁷ and would not have contested the possibility of a philosophy of history, but only of an absolute philosophy of history."³⁸ That is, there can be no absolute philosophy of history because "the interpretation of facts in a matter of belief."³⁹

What is distinctive about the historical, according to Kierkegaard, concerns how it is rather than what it is. That is, a historical fact is not like a truth of reason, it has not always and eternally been what it is. Facts about the past have become what they are by having come to pass--i.e., having come to be--and this is what gives them

³⁷Cf. Hannay, op. cit. 105.

³⁸Slotty, op. cit. 27; cf. PF, 99/SV IV, 262 and Hügli, op. cit. 148. The expression in parentheses is taken from Georg Brandes' book on Kierkegaard. Brandes argues, contrary to Slotty, there can be no philosophy of history on Kierkegaard's view (cf. Georg Brandes, Samlede Skrifter (Collected Writings) (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1899-1903), Andet Bind (Second Volume) 369-373.

³⁹Slotty, op. cit. 41.

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their distinctively historical character. The difficulty is that the manner in which something exists--i.e., whether it has eternal being or whether it has come to be at some point is not present to sensation.

This problem is most clearly expressed by Kierkegaard in the "Interlude" of the Fragments under the heading of "The Apprehension Of The Past [Opfattelsen af det Forbigaaende]" (PF, 79-86/SV IV, 242-249).

Immediate sensation and immediate cognition cannot deceive. This alone indicates that the historical cannot become an object of sense perception or immediate cognition, because the historical has in itself that very illusiveness that is the illusiveness of coming to be. In relation to the immediate, coming to be is an illusiveness whereby that which is most firm is made most dubious. For example, when the perceiver sees a star, the star becomes dubious for him the moment he seeks to become aware that it has come to be. It is just as if reflection removed the star from his senses. (PF, 81/SV IV, 244-245)

Kierkegaard observes that "[i]t is presumed . . . that there is knowledge of the past" (PF, 81/SV IV, 244). Hence his concern turns to the conditions which must be met in order for such knowledge to be possible. "The distinctively historical," argues Kierkegaard,

is perpetually the past (it is gone; whether it was years or days ago makes no difference), and as something bygone it has actuality, for it is certain and trustworthy that it occurred. But that it occurred is, in turn, precisely its uncertainty. Only in this contradiction between certainty and uncertainty, the discrimen [distinctive mark] of something that has come to be and thus also of the past, is the past understood. Understood in any other way, the apprehension has misunderstood itself (that it is apprehension) and its object (that "something of that kind" could become an object of apprehension. (PF, 79/SV IV, 242-43)

Since, observes Kierkegaard, everything historical has come to be, it cannot have been necessary. That is, coming to be, he argues, is a change and the necessary, insofar as "it is always related to itself and related to itself in the same way, ...cannot be changed at all" (PF, 74/SV IV, 237). But if the necessary cannot come to be, then everything which comes to be must do so freely. But this freedom, according to Kierkegaard, cannot be sensed or known (erkendt) immediately. "It might seem," observes Kierkegaard,

to be an inference from effect to cause when belief concludes: this exists [er til], ergo it came to be. But this is not entirely true, and even if it were, one must remember that cognitive inference [Erkendelsens Slutning] is from cause to effect or rather from ground to consequent I cannot immediately sense or know that what I immediately sense or know is an effect, for immediately it simply is. (PF, 84/SV IV, 247-48)

Only the presence of an event can be the object of immediate sensation or cognition, not the manner in which it has become present (PF, 81/SV IV, 244). Thus Kierkegaard concludes that belief (Tro) must be "the organ [Organet]" (PF, 81/SV IV, 245) through which a genuine grasp of the historical is attained. "There is an uncertainty," explains Hügli, "associated with every historical event in that I can never be certain whether what I immediately see is the result of a causally necessary process or of a free act. . . . I cannot see that an event is historical in the genuine sense; I can, at

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most, only believe it."⁴⁰ It is precisely the conclusion that the historical can be grasped as such only by faith that precludes knowledge that God became man--i.e., that the eternal became historical--in Christ. That is, that anything that is historical must, on Kierkegaard's view, be an object of faith and this includes, of course, God's purported historicity in the person of Christ.

We saw in Part I that nature, according to Kierkegaard, does not have a history. It is thus properly speaking human beings to which Kierkegaard refers when he refers to historical objects. We saw in the preceding chapter, however, that it is not possible, according to Kierkegaard, to prove that anything exists.⁴¹ One might conclude from this that he is skeptical as to the reality of the external world and, in particular, to the reality of other individuals. It is clear, however, that Kierkegaard is a realist.⁴² The impossibility of proving the existence of anything external to the knower was not essentially significant, for Kierkegaard, because he believed that we were naturally inclined to believe in the reality of things external to us⁴³ and, in particular, in the reality of other people. Indeed, he asserts that an "individual first of all begins his life with an ergo, with faith [Troen]" (WOL, 218/SV IX, 221). This faith may be expressed as the confidence of the knower that her relation to reality is such that it may be known by her and that thus her subjective inclination to accept sense perception as providing a generally accurate representation of empirical

⁴⁰Hügli, op. cit. 226, cf. Thulstrup, "Indledning," op. cit. XXXI

⁴¹Cf. chapter eight, §8.1.1.

⁴²Cf. Introduction, "Historical Background," and chapter one, §1.1.

⁴³Cf. Slotky, op. cit. 20.

reality, as well as her subjective inclination to extend the validity of the laws of thought to reality in itself, is objectively vindicated.

It is because, as Kierkegaard observes, "most people [de Fleste] . . . at every moment of their lives . . . live by virtue of an ergo, by . . . faith" (WOL, 218/SV IX, 221) in the sense that they never seriously question the reality of the external world, and in particular, the reality of other people, that he argues it is "nonsense" to demand of someone that he demonstrate that he exists (er til).⁴⁴ Kierkegaard contends, however, that "[t]he only historicity superior to proof is contemporary existence [Tilværelse]" (CUP I, 39/SV VII, 28).⁴⁵ But if it is impossible, according to Kierkegaard, to prove that anything exists, what role do proofs have with respect to knowledge of the past?

To claim that faith is the organ for the historical is, of course, not to claim that one is free to believe anything at all about the past. It was Kierkegaard's opinion, argues Slotty, that

the more developed a thinker was, the more possibilities he would discover that would make his knowledge hypothetical. He was convinced that the interpretation, or explication, of a fact would inevitably reveal that there was no absolute certainty [with respect to the proper interpretation of that fact], but only an assumption made on the basis of a choice. There is no evidence, however, that Kierkegaard considered such choices to be arbitrary.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Cf. CUP I, 39/SV VII, 28 and PC 204/SV XII, 188.

⁴⁵Emphasis added. Cf. Slotty's claim that while "Kierkegaard freely maintained that proof was necessary with respect to the existence of things in the past, it was superfluous with respect to the existence of things in the present" (Slotty, op. cit. 21).

⁴⁶Slotty, op. cit. 20.

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The past, according to Kierkegaard, is composed of a series of determinate events, each of which, at some point, "happened" (skete), or came to be (blev til). Through having come to be, each of these events must be understood to have, in one sense, annihilated the possibility through which this transition took place. That is, before Caesar crossed the Rubicon, it must have been possible for him to have decided otherwise--i.e., not to cross it. After he crossed it, however, that possibility no longer existed. That is, after he crossed it, it was no longer possible for him not to have crossed it. We must not, however, according to Kierkegaard, confuse the impossibility of changing the past with necessity and as a result, attribute necessity to historical events. We must, asserts Kierkegaard, despite the fact that it is not now possible for Caesar not to have crossed the Rubicon, believe that once it was possible for him not to cross it.

It would appear that insofar as the labor of the historian is directed toward a grasp [opfattelse] of the historical as such, it cannot issue in knowledge. That is, knowledge, argues Kierkegaard, concerns the truth of a thing,⁴⁷ and this is related to its essence [væsen], not to its being [væren]*--i.e., not to the manner in which it exists or has come to be.*⁴⁸ This is, however, not the only sort of labor in which the historian is engaged.

There are two sorts of tasks with which the historian is confronted. One concerns a grasp of the historical as such and the other concerns the determination of historical facts. With respect to the first task, the historian endeavors to understand the past as once having been

⁴⁷Cf. JP 5:5620/Pap. IV B 10a (Supp., XI³ pp. xxxvii-xxxviii).

⁴⁸Cf. PF, 85/SV IV, 248.

present. He does this because, as Kierkegaard points out:

Distance in time prompts a mental illusion just as distance in space prompts a sensory illusion. The contemporary does not see the necessity of that which comes into existence, but when centuries lie between the coming into existence and the viewer--then he sees the necessity, just as the person who at a distance sees something square as round. (PF, 79/SV IV, 243)

The labor of the historian is thus directed toward understanding the past as having been present in order to avoid this illusion and thus obtain a genuine grasp of the past in its historical quality. It is important for the historian to do this so that he will not confuse views concerning the essence of historical events with truths of reason and thus attribute to the former a necessity which, as truths of fact, they could not actually possess.

When, however, the historian is engaged in the determination of the essence (væsen) of historical events, he is not concerned with how they were--i.e., that they came to be--but with what they were. The proper task of the historian, in such an instance, is to determine the truth values of statements about the past--e.g., Caesar whether did, or did not, cross the Rubicon--and it is thus with respect to this activity that proofs can be offered for historical objects.⁴⁹

⁴⁹It is tempting to consider the question of whether Caesar was a great man to be one with which the historian would also be concerned. It is important to appreciate, however, that on Kierkegaard's view, even if the answer to such a question possesses a determinate truth value, knowledge of this truth value is not historical knowledge. That is, historical knowledge, on Kierkegaard's view, concerns the "palpably material" (SLW, 438/SV VI, 408) and thus is distinguished from knowledge of such ideal qualifications as greatness (SLW, 438/SV VI, 408). An historian may indeed be interested in the question of Caesar's greatness, but he is not interested in this question, on Kierkegaard's view, in his capacity as an

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A historical fact, as such, is an actuality (virkelighed). But an epistemological relation to actuality, argues Kierkegaard, is problematic. That is, all "knowledge" of actuality or empirical reality (Empirie)⁵⁰ is the result of that reality having been brought into relation to thought and, as we have seen, the categories of thought are linguistic categories which cannot, because of their abstract or general character, capture actuality in its particularity. Hence "[o]bservation [Betragtning] of the world historical," argues Kierkegaard, "is, as a cognitive act [Erkjendelses-Akt], an approximation" (CUP I, 149/SV VII, 122).⁵¹

The world-historical material is endless, and consequently the limit must in one way or another be arbitrary. Although the world-historical is something past, as material for cognitive observation [erkjendende Betragtning] it is incomplete; it continually comes to be through ever-new observation and research, which discover more and more or make rectifying discoveries. Just as the number of discoveries in the natural sciences is augmented by sharpening the instruments, so also in the world-historical when the critical quality of the observation is sharpened. (CUP I, 150/SV VII, 123)

But if the past, as an object of knowledge, is not finished--i.e., is indeterminate--historical knowledge, in the strict sense, like empirical knowledge in the strict sense, is reducible to a "determined" uncertainty. That is, "historical" knowledge, in the strict sense, is reducible to the justified, true mental representation of the correspondence of a theory about the past to the past

historian.

⁵⁰Cf. CUP I, 150/SV VII, 123.

⁵¹Cf. Slotky, op. cit. 23.

itself as uncertain. Such a representation expresses a necessary aspect of the relation of thought to actuality. The object of such a representation is, as we saw above, not actuality as such, but thought as it relates to actuality. Thus the agreement between thought and being which constitutes truth, on Kierkegaard's view, is, just as was the case with immanent metaphysical reality, the agreement between thought and itself.

The job of the historian involves more, however, than simply heaping up historical data. These data will often appear to tend in a particular direction, which is to say that they will appear to support particular interpretations of the past. This phenomenon is explicable in that there are historical facts in the form of past actualities, hence the more data a historian collects, the more these data, taken as a whole, will seem to support a particular conclusion about the essence of the fact in question. If Caesar really did cross the Rubicon, for example (and it seems relatively well confirmed that he did), the more data the historian collects relating to this event, the more these data will appear to support this interpretation of the past.

That is, the data collected by historians will be inclined to make the correctness of one interpretation of its objective significance appear more probable than others. This phenomenon is not inconsistent with Kierkegaard's association of knowledge with isostheneia. The correctness of a particular interpretation of the past is going to appear probable to a historian not because it is objectively more probable than every other interpretation, but because of his or her subjective inclination to assume that reality is transparent to the human understanding and thus that the data collected constitute a more or less accurate representation of the past. A consistent skeptic would, of course, contrast all

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the data he or she had collected with possibility of conflicting data and end with a suspension of judgment as to the objective significance of the data at hand. The historian fails to do this because he or she is not entirely objective.

Even if the probability in question were more than apparent, there is, again, a categorical difference between a probability and a certainty. Such probability is, in fact, as we saw above,⁵² objectively meaningless to the extent that all it says objectively is that something either was, or was not, the case.⁵³ It is, however, precisely on such probabilities that historical "knowledge," in the loose sense is constructed. The question thus becomes: On what basis, or by what reasoning, does the historian accept these probabilities as meaningful?

All the historian has in terms of knowledge, in the strict sense, according to Kierkegaard, is what was identified above as isostheneia, or an equilibrium of contrasting possibilities. That is, the only thing the historian has in terms of a justified true mental representation of the past is the appreciation that a particular historical event is, as an object of knowledge, indeterminate. Thus the only thing of which he can be certain is that he is uncertain as to which account of the past is true. Even this certainty, however, as we saw above, requires an expression of will, on Kierkegaard's view.⁵⁴

I explained above that the task of the scholar or scientist was not limited, however, to the mere collection

⁵²Cf. chapter seven, §7.2.

⁵³Cf. Polanyi, op. cit. 21.

⁵⁴Cf. chapter seven, §7.2. and Hannay, 125.

of data, but also included the development of interpretations of these data. The scholar or scientist is not merely allowed to subscribe to these interpretations, he is expected to subscribe to them, albeit on a provisional basis. That all scientific, or scholarly, "knowledge" is merely an approximation--i.e., probabilistic rather than certain--is, according to Kierkegaard, "no disparagement" of this sort of investigation,⁵⁵ it is simply a consequence of the kind of object under investigation. That is, it is simply a consequence of the effort to bring reality, or actuality, into relation to thought, which effort, as we saw above, is essentially problematic.

Kierkegaard is concerned, again, not to depart too far from ordinary language and so even though, technically, he considers that the correspondence of a mental representation of the past to reality is expressed only in terms of probability, he often speaks of scholarly or scientific "knowledge" (i.e., both 'viden' and 'erkendelsen') without either putting quotation marks around the expression or qualifying it as approximate.⁵⁶ As we find, for example in his claim in the Christian Discourses, that while the reader cannot "know [vide] that so and so many people have believed [i.e., in the truth of Christianity] . . . and have died for this faith," he can "know [veed]" that so and so many "were put to death for this faith . . . and that they asserted that they died for this faith" (CD, 241/SV X, 236). That is, this "knowledge" is clearly knowledge in only the loose sense.

"A reason," observes Kierkegaard, "is a curious thing; if I regard it with all my passion, it develops into an enormous necessity that can set heaven and earth in motion; if I am devoid of passion, I look down upon it derisively"

⁵⁵Cf. CUP I, 574-575/SV VII, 501.

⁵⁶Cf. Hannay, 105.

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(EO I, 32-33/SV I, 17). The apparent probability that a particular view about the essence of a past event corresponds to the past is interpreted by the historian as meaningful precisely because he is not completely objective in his contemplation of this issue. That is, he is not entirely disinterested, nor could he be. Consciousness, on Kierkegaard's view, as we saw in Part I, is interest, thus the historian cannot help but be interested in--i.e., passionately engaged with--the object of his inquiry. His passion is again not subjective passion in that it is not directed at himself, in his particularity, but is what Kierkegaard calls the "objective passion" (CUP I, 575/SV VII, 501) of the scholar. To say, however, that the inquiry of the historian is characterized by objective passion is not to say that it is an entirely objective inquiry. To the extent that it is passionate, is it subjective or interested. That is, "[u]nderstanding" as Hügli explains, is, according to Kierkegaard, "a subjective activity,"⁵⁷ even when the object of inquiry is not essentially subjective. It is a subjective activity because it is the activity of a subject. It is passionate or interested because this is the essence of the subject whose activity it is.

No matter how probable it appears that a particular conclusion about the past corresponds to the reality of the past, it is not possible to collect enough data to prove such correspondence.⁵⁸ The task of the historian, and indeed the task of any thinker, according to Kierkegaard, whether she is an historian or a natural scientist, is thus

⁵⁷Hügli, op. cit. 20.

⁵⁸Cf. Hügli's claim that, according to Kierkegaard, "[logical] deduction can demonstrate a thought necessity, but it can in no way prove historical actuality" (Hügli, op. cit. 28; cf. JP 2:2250 [pp. 520-521]/Pap. II C 44, p. 353).

to collect data and to develop provisional interpretations of these data, while suspending judgment concerning the actual correspondence of these interpretations to reality. Kierkegaard has no objection, in principle, to science and scholarship (except, that is, to the extent that it distracts one from ethical concerns).⁵⁹ He even praises them in his journals.⁶⁰ What he objects to is the failure of scientists and scholars to appreciate the provisional nature of their conclusions.

It is important, argues Kierkegaard, that the prospective knower avoid "illusory results" (CUP I, 81/SV VII, 62), whether in "sensate certainty," or "historical knowledge." The only thing that is certain, according to Kierkegaard, is that however impressive a set of data one might have, these data are always going to underdetermine conclusions about their objective significance. That is, however much one might be inclined in the direction of a particular conclusion, this subjective inclination does not preclude the possibility that an alternative interpretation of the data might be correct.

The impression made on the scholar, or scientist, by the nature of her data (i.e., the direction in which the data tend) is, again, often so strong that she is barely aware of having a subjective role in accepting this direction as meaningful. She does have such a role, however, according to Kierkegaard, even if she fails to notice it. This is what Kierkegaard means when he says knowledge "requires an expression of will" (JP 2:1094/Pap. I A 36).⁶¹ That is, knowledge, in the sense in which the expression is used by scholars and scientists, is the

⁵⁹Cf. JP 3:2807/Pap. VII A 182; JP 3:2824/Pap. XI¹ A 94 and Slotty, op. cit, 38.

⁶⁰Cf. JP 1:386/Pap. X³ 702 and JP 2:2286/Pap. VI B 40:5.

⁶¹Cf. Slotty, op. cit. 20.

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result of a decision (albeit, often an unconscious one) of the scholar, or scientist, to accept the direction in which her data are tending as significant. This is not the same thing, however, as allowing the scholar, or scientist, to accept approximate knowledge as certain, and indeed, few scientists would make such a claim. What the scientist is allowed to assent to, on Kierkegaard's view, is that her "knowledge" is meaningful, not that it is certain. Such provisional "knowledge" is meaningful to the scholar, or scientist, because it is part of the way she is constructed as a thinking organism that she is going to be irresistibly inclined to interpret probabilities as making significant statements about objective reality.

Kierkegaard is aware that the impression created in the historian by the direction in which a particular set of data is tending can be so great that we would seem to have little choice but to accept the data as conclusive and he is not, for the most part, concerned to preclude such acceptance. Indeed, he recognizes full well, unlike the Pyrrhonists to whom he is so indebted, that a life without beliefs is not possible. Kierkegaard's concern is rather to expose the nature of such acceptance, that is, that it is a choice, no matter how well-founded or reasonable it may appear relative to alternative choices.⁶²

"It holds true of all historical learning and knowledge [al Viden eller al Kundskab]," argues Kierkegaard, "that even at its maximum it is only an approximation" (CUP I, 574/SV VII, 501). Hence "[i]n historical knowledge, [the subject] . . . is continually moving in the sphere of approximation-knowledge, while with his supposed positivity he fancies himself to have . . . certainty" (CUP I, 81/SV VII, 62-63). One might well ask

⁶²That is, no matter how much the data in question may have made the correspondence of the belief in question to reality appear probable.

whether it is intrinsic to history as a discipline that it assume this positivity, which, according to Kierkegaard, is essentially a delusion. It would appear that the problem lies in the historian and not in the discipline as such. "The historian," according to Kierkegaard, "seeks to reach the greatest possible certainty [Vished] [I]t is . . . scientifically important for him to come as close to certainty as possible" (CUP I, 575/SV VII, 501). The difficulty is that the historian has, according to Kierkegaard, what one might call a propensity to assume this positivity.

Kierkegaard argues that,

[f]or a thinker there is no more horrible anguish than to have to live in the tension that while one is heaping up details it continually seems as if the thought, the conclusion, is about to appear. . . . This is the most dreadful tantalization of the intellectual! A thinker is literally in hell as long as he has not found certainty. (JP 3:2820/Pap. VII¹ A 200)

"For one continually feels the need," argues Kierkegaard, "to have something finished" (CUP I, 86/SV VII, 67).

The difficulty, however, is precisely that scholarship, as such, is never finished or complete. "Truth" in scholarship is identified with the "historical development of the relation between subject and object."⁶³ Truth in scholarship is not immutable as is the past itself, but is constantly in the process of becoming. Knowledge of this truth, however, is characterized by a kind of inertia which, although it resembles immutability in that it resists change, ultimately allows them to give way to theories whose correspondence to the past is

⁶³Hügli, op. cit. 280 note 59.

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considered even more probable, as such theories appear.⁶⁴
Thus Slotty argues:

One reason for the assumption that our knowledge of actuality is merely possibility, is . . . the fact that everything is in the process of becoming. This fact is more than enough to discredit knowledge, in that knowledge views things as finished. Even if we assume the reality of thought, the fact that everything is in the process of becoming makes dubious just what those things are.⁶⁵

The historical development of scholarship is not necessarily a development in the progressive sense, or in the sense that succeeding theories give increasingly adequate accounts of the reality to which they refer, because to the extent that they are interpreted by scholars to refer to actuality itself, it is impossible to tell whether one theory is, in fact, more adequate than another. If, on the other hand, scholarly theories are taken to refer to actuality as it is for thought, then either they are all false in the sense that they ascribe a determinate character to this actuality, or they are all true in the sense that they say no more than what might be the case, which is to say that they affirm the indeterminacy of actuality as it is for thought.

That historical scholarship does not necessarily develop in the progressive sense is not, however, a disparagement of this kind of scholarship, on Kierkegaard's view, it is simply a fact about the nature of scholarship given the presupposition that there is a difference between thought and being. The "historical development of the

⁶⁴This is presumably why Kierkegaard argues that "every historical fact is only a relative fact" (PF, 99/SV IV, 262).

⁶⁵Slotty, op. cit. 33-34.

relation between subject and object" that scholarship represents, is like a conversation intermittently characterized by greater and lesser profundity and which cannot thus properly be interpreted as uninterrupted progress toward truth. It is possible that scholarship is, in some sense, progressing toward truth, but this would be something we would have no way of knowing.⁶⁶

Each of the disciplines traditionally associated with what we call the humanities is problematic, on Kierkegaard's view, in the same way that history, as a discipline, is problematic. That is, each of these disciplines relates to actuality rather than ideality. Art, music and literature, for example, are problematic, according to Kierkegaard, to the extent that their objects are particular works of art, music or literature. That is, there is between a particular work of art, etc., and the general concept of beauty, a logical gap of the same sort that was discussed in the chapter on objective truth.⁶⁷ "The School of Athens," for example, is a particular painting which came to be at a particular point. But beauty, as such, is eternal, on Kierkegaard's view, and thus cannot be adequately instantiated in any particular historical object. There is, in fact, something paradoxical, on Kierkegaard's view, in the effort to attribute eternal and unchanging characteristics like beauty to particular existing (i.e., temporally defined) objects such as works of art.⁶⁸

⁶⁶Kierkegaard's concern with the nature of historical knowledge is no doubt a reaction to Martensen's claim that "direct, unambiguous Revelation can only be found in the realm of spirit, the realm of the Word, conscience and freedom or in history" (Martensen, Dogmatik, 17; emphasis added).

⁶⁷Cf. CUP I, 329/SV VII, 284

⁶⁸Cf. JP 3:3085/Pap. VI B 45.

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This does not mean, however, that there is no sense, according to Kierkegaard, in the systematic study of art, music or literature. It means that such disciplines can be considered to yield positive knowledge only if that expression is understood in a loose sense. That is, the only knowledge, in the strict sense, to which these disciplines can give rise is the negative knowledge that the correspondence of particular representations, or theories, to reality as it is in itself is uncertain.

I referred, in the preceding chapter, to a division Kierkegaard made between what he referred to as "the different sciences."⁶⁹ That is, ontology and mathematics were contrasted, by Kierkegaard, with "[e]xistential [s]cience" which, according to him, should accentuate existence or what it means to exist. Kierkegaard is indeed exceptionally preoccupied with human psychology and subjects this to a number of systematic treatments in works such as The Concept of Anxiety and The Sickness Unto Death. No discipline, however, which involves the study of human behavior, no matter how rigorous or systematic, can give rise to knowledge in the strict sense, because the "scientifically knowable,"⁷⁰ according to Kierkegaard, is "the necessary, the eternal" (JP 2:2281/Pap. IV C 23).

Sociology, political science, economics, and even philosophy, are thus problematic, according to Kierkegaard, in that they are concerned with human behavior (however much they might want to reduce this behavior to non-personal forces beyond the control of the individual's will) and human behavior, according to Kierkegaard, is essentially free and thus is not properly the object of scientific inquiry. That is, "the objects of science," he argues, "are things which can only be in a single way" (JP

⁶⁹Cf. chapter eight, §8.1.1.

⁷⁰Emphasis added.

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2:2281/Pap. IV C 23). But to say that human behavior is free is to say that, in a given instance, there are numerous possibilities, for action open to an individual.

The sociologist, political scientist or economist can try to explain why people live the way they do, elect particular public officials, or spend their money in particular ways, but the specific character of individual behavior is the responsibility of the individual whose behavior it is. Even if these scholars acknowledge that the correspondence of their theories to actuality is uncertain, they are ultimately only deluding themselves, according to Kierkegaard, if they believe there could be impersonal forces which did more than influence human behavior.

But if the humanities are widely acknowledged to be sciences in merely a soft sense, there is a whole body of disciplines--i.e., the natural sciences--which is presumed to satisfy more rigid standards of accuracy. It is thus to an examination of Kierkegaard's views on these sciences that I will now turn.

§9.2.2. Science.

As one might expect from what was said above about the priority of ethics and religion in Kierkegaard's thought, he wrote very infrequently about natural science. The scarcity of his references to science is interesting, however, since despite Brandes' claim that Kierkegaard developed a "hatred of nature," early in his career,⁷¹ there is evidence that he was attracted to the study of science,⁷²

⁷¹Brandes, op. cit. 368.

⁷²Cf. Kierkegaard's letter to the biologist P. W. Lund, whose brothers were married to two of Kierkegaard's sisters (LD, no. 3, pp. 41-47/Breve og Aktstykker, no. 3, pp. 32-

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and the references he does make to the natural sciences evince a sophisticated understanding of both the nature of scientific inquiry and the use to which such inquiry is inclined to be put by people who do not fully understand its nature.

Hannay argues that Kierkegaard "does not disparage science in itself as the investigation into nature."⁷³ The relative absence of references to natural science in his works probably stems from his belief that it represents a distraction from ethical concerns. "Why," asks Kierkegaard,

should I need to know about the afferent and efferent nerve impulses, about the circulation of blood, about the human being's microscopic condition in the womb. The ethical has enough for me. I wonder if I am not weakening my whole ethical impulse by becoming a natural scientist? I wonder if with all this diverse knowledge of analogies, of abnormalities of this and that, I do not lose more and more the impulse of the ethical I wonder if it is not a way of providing myself with a lot of sly evasions and excuses. I wonder if my gaze is not turned away from the most important thing by letting myself begin with physiology instead of assuming the whole of physiology, and saying: Begin. (JP 3:2807/Pap. VII A 183)⁷⁴

There are, however, even stronger observations to natural science in Kierkegaard's works. "What the race tends toward," he asserts, "is apparently the establishment of natural science in the place of religion" (JP

37).

⁷³Hannay, op. cit. 140.

⁷⁴Cf. Sloty's claim that Kierkegaard demanded "of every admirer of science that he understand himself ethically before devoting himself to his chosen scientific discipline" (Sloty, op. cit. 38).

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2:2821/Pap. X² A 362). Kierkegaard is not merely concerned about what he sees as the supplantation of theology by metaphysics. This is only the beginning of a development which, according to him, "will end with physics supplanting ethics" (JP 1:197/Pap. VII¹ A 15).

The difficulty, of course, is that 'natural science' is concerned with appearances, or with phenomena, whereas ethics and religion are concerned with noumena. This is not a condemnation of empirical science, it is simply a fact about the nature of such science. The problem first arises when the scientist, or the untrained person who does not fully understand the nature of empirical inquiry, confuses individuals with phenomena and thus mistakenly assumes that a phenomenal account of human behavior is an exhaustive account. Appearances, as we saw above, are associated, on Kierkegaard's view with probabilities, rather than certainties. But an account of human behavior in terms of probabilities leaves no room, according to Kierkegaard, for decision⁷⁵ wherein, he believes, the ethical resides.⁷⁶ Probabilities do no more than tend in

⁷⁵CF. SLW, 110/SV VI, 106; PC, 90/SV XII, 85 and PC, 98-103/SV XII, 382-386. 'Probability,' as we have seen, is closely associated by Kierkegaard with 'approximation.' That is, mental representations whose correspondence to reality are expressed in probabilistic terms are said to "approximate" agreement with reality. But an approximation, according to Kierkegaard, "has the curious quality of being able to continue as long as it pleases" (CUP I, 41/SV VII, 30) thus indefinitely postponing any decision that would be made on its basis (cf. CUP I, 37/SV VII, 26 and CUP I, 40n./SV VII, 29n.).

⁷⁶Cf., CUP I, 134-135/SV VII, 108-110; CUP I, 307n./SV VII, 263n.; CUP I, 338-342/SV VII, 293-296; JP 5:5804/Pap. A 41 and Pap. VII² B 235, 164-165. The last reference is not found in the Hong's' translation of the journals and papers, but may be found rather in Lowrie's translation of Kierkegaard's unpublished book on Adler--i.e., On Authority and Revelation: The Book on Adler, or a Cycle of Ethico-Religious Essays (New York: Harper and Row, 1966) 132.

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particular directions. Any halt to such tendencies, i.e., any conclusion about how to react to such tendencies, must, according to Kierkegaard, be established through an act of will, but the will, as such, is something of which empirical science can give no account. This is not to say that the will is essentially incompatible with empirical science, but merely that it is neither an object of observation nor an entity the existence of which is a necessary inference from observation. The will as the locus of moral activity is something which transcends empirical science as such, thus a conflict arises between ethics and science only when science is taken to give an exhaustive account of reality.

Such pretensions do not, however, inhere in the nature of science. Kierkegaard argues, in fact, that such pretensions are incompatible with all legitimate forms of systematic inquiry. "The quiet scholar [Videnskabsmand]," he argues,

does not disturb life; he is erotically preoccupied in his noble pursuit. If, however, a noisy scholar wants to force his way into the existence-spheres [Existents-Sphærerne] and to confuse what is there the life principle of the whole, the ethical, then as a scholar he is no faithful lover, then scholarship hands him over for comic treatment. (CUP I, 152/SV VII, 125)

This confusion is perhaps partly the result of the fact that science and scholarship, according to Kierkegaard, "have been the object of a popularization campaign" (JP 1:386/Pap. X³ A 702) so that untrained people have begun to draw mistaken conclusions on the basis of systematic inquiry as a result of the fact that they do not understand the true nature of such inquiry. It is thus reasonable for us to turn now to a consideration of just what this significance is.

The natural sciences resemble the humanities to the extent that they are concerned not merely with abstract objects, as were ontology and mathematics, on Kierkegaard's view, but with concrete objects. The situation with respect to the natural sciences, however, is equally problematic. It would appear at first to be less problematic in that freedom is not predicated of nature on Kierkegaard's view. Nature came to be, he argues, at some point,⁷⁷ but the changes which subsequently characterize it are understood, by him to come about through necessity, in the sense that they are determined by the essence of nature itself.⁷⁸ Thus the objects of scientific inquiry would appear to fit the criteria cited earlier that the objects of science, according to Kierkegaard, are things which can be in only one way.

Unfortunately, however, the fact that nature is assumed, by Kierkegaard, to have come to be at some point and to have what was referred to above as "oversandselig," or transcendent, reality, means that knowledge, in the strict sense, of nature is ultimately inaccessible to the scientist. The development of a plant, for example, is determined, according to Kierkegaard, by the essence of the plant itself⁷⁹ rather than by the character of thought. That, for example, deciduous trees lose their leaves in the fall may be a necessary consequence, according to Kierkegaard, of the essence of the trees whose leaves they are. This "necessity" is not, however, a necessity in the same sense that it is necessary, according to Kierkegaard, that the sum of the angles of a triangle is 180°. That is, the former "necessity," characterizes the essence of the

⁷⁷Cf. PF, 76/SV IV, 239.

⁷⁸Cf. PC, 246/SV XII, 224 and chapter six, note 31.

⁷⁹Cf. CA, 21/SV IV, 294; PF, 76/SV IV, 239 and Pap. IV B 111.

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thing in itself, not as is for thought. It is certainly conceivable that deciduous trees could fail to lose their leaves in the fall.⁸⁰ Truths of nature, although they may be "necessary" in themselves, cannot be necessary for thought, for nature is something which exists independently, on Kierkegaard's view, of thought.⁸¹ Truths of nature are a species of truths of fact and thus cannot, for the reasons given above, be transparent to the knowing subject.

Nature, according to Kierkegaard, was created by God. It could thus taken any number of different forms depending on what one could refer to as the whim of God. Nothing constrained God to create nature in a particular way or to give it a specific character. One cannot thus say that it has the specific character that it has by necessity. But if nature is what it is only contingently, then the correspondence of any mental representation to it must also be contingent. This means, of course, that one can never be certain, according to Kierkegaard, that a particular mental representation of nature corresponds to the reality of nature.

The scientist assumes, however, that sense impressions may be relied on to supply a more or less accurate representation of a substantial reality which lies behind them. We saw in the section on empirical knowledge that there is reason, on Kierkegaard's view to suspend judgment concerning the veridicality of sense impressions. Yet science is constructed substantially on the basis of such

⁸⁰There is actually a small number of trees, such as the pin oak, that lose their leaves in the spring with the emergence of the meristems.

⁸¹Cf. Hügli's claim that according to Kierkegaard, "natural law and real causes explain only changes in things that have at some point come into existence, not the coming into existence itself" (Hügli, op. cit. 272, note 32; cf. PF, 75/SV IV, 75).

impressions, thus if the status of these impressions is itself uncertain, the entire edifice of science is going to be unstable. That is, "[w]hen everything is explained by an X [e.g., the relation of sense impressions to objective reality] which is not [itself] explained, then, viewed as a whole, nothing at all is explained" (JP 3:2820/Pap. VII¹ A 200). It is for this reason Kierkegaard argues that "empirical knowledge [Empirie] is a perpetually self-repeating false sorites" (JP 2:2254/Pap. II A 247) and that "modern science and scholarship [Videnskab] . . . [are] dishonest" (JP 1:649/Pap. VIII² B 81).⁸²

Natural science is less problematic than the humanities to the extent that its objects are not endowed with a freedom which would preclude certainty concerning their character. It is just as problematic, however, to the extent that its objects are independently existing things to which we are related only through sense impressions. One might argue that the real object of scientific inquiry is not concrete reality, but laws, principles or forces, which, as abstract objects, are not subject to the difficulties associated with knowledge of actuality. Unfortunately, however, these abstract objects are not purely thought objects as were the objects of ontology, according to Kierkegaard, they are objects, which though abstract, are often assumed by the scientist to correspond to the way physical reality is in itself.

Even if the scientist is modest enough to restrict his account of physical reality to the way that reality is for us, rather than in itself, he is going to face the same sorts of problems as the historian in his efforts to determine just how reality is for us. That is, improvements in the instruments of observation will

⁸²Cf. JP 4:4878/Pap. X⁴ A 337 and CUP I, 81/SV VII, 62-63.

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continually facilitate new discoveries concerning how reality appears to people equipped with the faculties of reason and observation with which we are equipped.⁸³ Thus even if we assume that there are determinate physical laws, these laws, as objects of knowledge, are incomplete in the same way that the objects of historical knowledge are incomplete.

Like the historian, however, the scientist does not simply heap up data. To the extent that there really are physical laws, the data will tend in a particular direction. The process of collecting data would appear, however, to be an activity in which the scientist must continuously be engaged. That is, he would never possess a complete set of data, hence any conclusions he might draw concerning the significance of his data would, technically speaking, be premature

"All natural science," argues Kierkegaard,

like all modern scholarship is sophistical. Do an experiment using Socrates' simple question: 'Does natural science know something or does it not? It can answer neither Yes nor No, for the whole secret of it is that it is almost and as good as and not very far from and almost, just as if it knew something. (JP 3:2815/Pap. VII A 195)

The data collected by the natural scientist will often tend to support a particular interpretation of its significance. The process of collecting data would go on interminably, however, if the scientist maintained a purely objective, dispassionate or disinterested position relative to these data. No matter how much the data already collected would appear to support a particular interpretation, there would always be formal reasons for suspending judgment as to the correspondence of this

⁸³Cf. CUP I, 150/SV VII, 123 and SUD, 91/SV XI, 202.

interpretation to reality. No matter how probable it appears that a particular interpretation of a given phenomenon, or set of phenomena, corresponds to reality, there is always a chance that it does not. The more probable an interpretation appears, however, the less seriously the possibility that it might be mistaken is taken by the scientist. Eventually, the collection of data stops, not because there is enough data to prove that the theory in question corresponds to reality, in the sense of establishing the necessity of this correspondence, but because the scientist decides that the probability has become great enough to support at least the provisional acceptance of the theory.

I argued above,⁸⁴ that Hügli was right to point out that Kierkegaard's theory of "approximate knowledge" is sustainable only if one abandons the Aristotelian view that the concept is anchored in the object in favor of the view that it is the product of the continuing historical dialogue between subject and object. Indeed, concepts in natural science cannot be anchored in their objects, on Kierkegaard's view, because these objects (to the extent that they actually exist) are essentially inaccessible to the scientist according to Kierkegaard. All scientists have are impressions, not the substantial reality of nature itself.

It is for this reason "the crowd" of natural scientists can be considered to "have competency, and even decisive competency" (POV, 110/SV XIII, 592), according to Kierkegaard, for determining scientific truth. No individual scientist is competent to determine precisely which, among the multitude of interpretations of physical reality, is "correct." Such determinations are made by the community of scientists as a whole. This does not mean

⁸⁴Cf. chapter six, §6.2.

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that in order for a theory to be accepted by the scientific community, it must be accepted by every scientist in this community. It means rather that it must have most of the community behind it. Even after a theory has been accepted by the majority of scientists, it must be continually reverified as "improvements in the instruments of observation" mean that more, and potentially conflicting information comes to light.

Truths in the natural sciences, like truths in the humanities, are identified with the "historical development of the relation between subject and object."⁸⁵ The appreciation of the scientist that the preponderance of available empirical evidence is consistent with a particular theory combined with his appreciation that more evidence could come to light that would be inconsistent with this theory and which would thus cause him to abandon it in favor of a competing theory amounts to an appreciation of the "truth" of this theory. It is thus this appreciation which serves to justify the theory with which it is connected. The difficulty with this sort of knowledge is, again, that while truth here is an "approximating,"⁸⁶ any particular knowledge claim is going to be an approximation. "This is more than enough," observes Slotty, "to discredit knowledge."⁸⁷ That is, knowledge views things as finished when they are, in fact, in the process of becoming.

This is simply a fact, however, about all empirical knowledge. That is, there is nothing in principle wrong

⁸⁵Hügli, op. cit. 280, note 59.

⁸⁶Emphasis added. Cf. chapter six, §6.2.

⁸⁷Slotty, op. cit. 33-34.

with such knowledge on Kierkegaard's view.⁸⁸ Kierkegaard's main concern relates to the tendency of the knower to forget that the foundation of his knowledge is substantially subjective rather than purely objective as is often believed. That is, a scientist continually strives for objectivity, on Kierkegaard's view, yet a scientist

who is really enthusiastic about grasping and understanding, does not himself discern that he continually posits what he seeks to abrogate. He is enthusiastic about understanding everything else, but the fact that he himself is enthusiastic he does not come to understand, i.e., he does not conceptualize his own enthusiasm at the same time he is enthusiastic about conceptualizing everything else. (JP 3:2807/Pap. VII¹ A 182)

Such enthusiasm on the part of the scientist is, of course, essential if science is going to do more than heap up data interminably. It is merely the failure of the scientist to recognize its significance with which Kierkegaard has a quarrel. Scientists often pretend to be purely objective, or to base their conclusions entirely on observation. Yet no conclusion, according to Kierkegaard, could ever be based entirely on observation. "[T]he inspiration for scientific investigation," on his view, is always "an internal presupposition, the certainty of which seeks its corroboration in the observation" (SLW, 282/SV VI, 264).⁸⁹

It is natural, however, that one should be curious as to why the tendency of scientists, or lay people, to misinterpret the significance of scientific inquiry so concerned Kierkegaard since his overwhelming interests were

⁸⁸Cf. CUP I, 575/SV VII, 501; Slotty, op. cit. 20 and Hügli, op. cit. 148.

⁸⁹Cf. this with Polanyi's account of Einstein's development of the theory of relativity (Polanyi, op. cit. 9-11).

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ethics and religion, which, by his own admission, are essentially discontinuous with empirical science, and which would thus not appear threatened by what he believed was the misinterpretation of the significance of natural science. Kierkegaard's concern appears to have been the result of an appreciation that people often have difficulty keeping the phenomenal and noumenal realms sharply separated and that thus a mistake which might be relatively harmless in the one realm was likely to creep into the other where it could have devastating consequences. Nowhere is this more apparent, of course, than in the tendency to reduce psychology to a natural science, a tendency of which Kierkegaard was aware and about which he was very concerned.⁹⁰

Kierkegaard had no objection to the systematic study of human psychology. Indeed two of his most important books The Concept of Anxiety and The Sickness Unto Death represent such study. What is important, for Kierkegaard, is that one not reduce human behavior to a natural phenomenon like the development of a plant, that one not, in one's study of psychology, dispense with the ethical through the confusion of an ought with an is. "Along with the growing sensibleness," observes Kierkegaard,

there is an increase in a certain kind of knowledge about human nature [Menneske-Kundskab]: familiarity [Kiendskabet] with how we human beings are now or are at this time, a natural-scientific [naturvidenskabelig] statistical knowledge about the human moral state as a natural product, explained by the situation, the air currents . . . etc. Whether we human beings may have degenerated from generation to generation is of no concern to this kind of knowledge; it merely states accurately how we

⁹⁰Cf., e.g., JP 3:2808/Pap. VII¹ A 183; JP 3:2809/Pap. VII¹ A 186; JP 3:2813/Pap. VII¹ A 191 and JP 4:4267/Pap. VII¹ A 193.

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are. (JY, 157/SV XII, 431)

The reduction of a human being to a natural phenomenon is, however, fortunately not the only way to go about a systematic study of human behavior. "I am happy," writes Kierkegaard,

to acknowledge that Carus' book (Psyche) is excellent, and if he will give the qualitative its due, then I will gratefully take a few of his good psychological observations. At all decisive points he makes unqualified room for the miracle, for the creative power of God, for the absolute expression of worship, and says: This no one can grasp, no science, neither now nor ever. Then he communicates the interesting things he knows. But there must never be any proximity between these two categories; above all they must never be brought into proximity with each other. If that happens, I will not read or buy a single one of his psychological observations; it is too costly. (JP 3:2818/Pap. VII, A 198)

10. Conclusion to Part II

I argued in the preceding chapters that objective knowledge, in the strict sense, was associated by Kierkegaard with certainty. I also argued, however, that there was a looser sense in which he used the expression 'knowledge' and that it was associated, in this sense, not with certainty, but with probability. Knowledge in the strict sense is, as we saw in the preceding chapters, associated by Kierkegaard with the contact of the knower with the object of knowledge. That is, this knowledge pertains to ideas which are immanently present in consciousness. It is precisely the contact of knower with the object of a given mental representation that makes it possible for him to be certain that this representation agrees with reality. That is, the identification of the representation with its object means that the correspondence of the one to the other is necessary. This necessity is appreciated as such through a kind of insight or intellectual intuition which is the result of his having immersed himself in the contents of his consciousness.

Mental representations of actuality involve conceptualizations of experience and hence belong to the medium of abstraction, whereas experience itself is concrete. To the extent that there exists this discrepancy between the nature of the object of a given mental representation and the representation itself, the prospective knower will never be in a position to say that he or she has enough data in terms of experience--experience being construed here very broadly to include the reports of others about their experiences--to preclude the formal possibility that another representation might provide a more accurate expression of the reality in

question.

This point can be made even more strongly and, in fact, is made more strongly by Kierkegaard when he argues that "all knowledge is an abstraction which annuls existence by taking the objects of knowledge out of existence" (CUP I, 348/SV VII, 301). That is, any representation of actuality, to the extent that it is an intellectual construction and thus belongs to the medium of thought or ideality cannot, in itself, constitute an agreement with actuality. Thus, while ontological and mathematical knowledge are possible, on Kierkegaard's view, scholarly and scientific knowledge, in the strict sense or in the sense in which it is associated with certainty, is not possible.

I argued in the introduction to Part II that all knowledge was interested according to Kierkegaard. The role of interest in knowledge in the strict sense is apparent in the activity required of the knower for him to attain knowledge as such. The fact that the correspondence of a particular mental representation to reality is objectively certain does not mean that this correspondence is immediately apparent to the knowing subject. This subject is required to immerse himself in the contents of his consciousness in order to attain the insight into the essence of these contents which translates them from mere ideas into knowledge. Such immersion is, in turn, a result of an interest the knower takes in determining the essence of the contents of his consciousness and it is thus in this sense that even objective knowledge in the strict sense is interested on Kierkegaard's view.

The interest of the knower in reality is not restricted, however, to the reality which is immanently present in his consciousness. This interest extends, according to Kierkegaard, to what one could call the "real world." That is, Kierkegaard "is a realist--not only in

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the sense that he believes every object of thought to be real as an object of thought, but also in the more exact sense that there are other actualities than my own. Things in nature," according to Kierkegaard, "exist in their own way, and every other human being has his own existence in the same way that I have mine."¹ The interest of the knower thus extends to these things as well. The difficulty is that the contact of this subject with the object of knowledge that made insight into the essence of this object possible does not obtain in the case of objects which cannot be immediately identified with the knower as could his own ideas. The correspondence of a mental representation of actuality to the reality to which it refers can never definitively be established. That is, such correspondence can be established in only an approximate sense. Knowledge of actuality is thus procedural in that rather than being associated with the contact of the knower with the object of knowledge, as was the case with knowledge in the strict sense, it is associated with his efforts to calculate the probability of the correspondence of a particular mental representation to reality.

Knowledge in the loose sense is interested in the same sense that knowledge in the strict sense is interested. That is, it is the result of a particular kind of activity of the "knowing" subject, which means that this subject must take an interest in attaining such knowledge in order to initiate and sustain this activity. This "knowledge" is also interested, however, in another sense. That is, the probability of the correspondence of a mental representation to reality consists of the mass of data, collected by the scholar or scientist, that supports the knowledge claim, but, as we have seen, this mass of data is

¹Mackey, "The Loss of the World," op. cit. 274.

never complete, more data are constantly coming to light through improvements in "the methods of critical inquiry" or in "the instruments of observation" (CUP I, 150/SV VII, 123).² More or less arbitrary cut-off points have to be agreed on by scholars, or scientists,³ so that the process of the collection of data does not keep them from ever getting to the point of developing interpretations of these data. The process of the collection of data pertaining to the issue of the correspondence of a given mental representation to reality would, as we saw, continue interminably if the knower were not passionately engaged with the issue of determining the essence of the reality in question.

We are too passionately interested, on Kierkegaard's view, however, in the phenomena of our experience to be able to maintain a skeptical stance relative to the issue of their objective significance. We are inclined by nature to believe that our relation to reality is such that it may be known by us. We assume that sense experience provides us with a generally accurate representation of external reality and that the laws of thought may be extended to this reality as well, even though we are not in a position to prove the correctness of these assumptions.⁴

²These expressions come from the Swenson-Lowrie translation of the Postscript (134).

³A friend who is a biologist has informed that, for example, a statistical significance of 0.95 is acceptable in biology, whereas medicine requires a far higher rate of 0.99 or even 0.9999.

⁴Thus Slotty argues that Kierkegaard "merely wanted it irrefutably established that [the validity of] the highest principles of thought cannot be proven, that every science operates on the basis of a principle, or principles, which it merely assumes and cannot explain" (Slotty, op. cit. 18).

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Since truth is defined by Kierkegaard as a agreement between thought and being and actuality is assumed by him to be determinate, the truth of mental representations of actuality becomes, according to Kierkegaard, "a desideratum . . . an approximating" (CUP I, 189/SV VII, 157). To the extent that the justification of a mental representation is equivalent to a kind of intellectual intuition or insight concerning the truth of this representation in the sense of its correspondence to reality, the justification of knowledge of actuality is no less problematic than was its truth. That is, for the reasons given above, no such insight can be achieved, on Kierkegaard's view, relative to mental representations of actuality. Truth here is an approximating. Thus the justification of mental representations of actuality is equivalent to the appreciation of the knower of the apparent probability of the correspondence of a given representation to the reality to which it refers.

Ontological and mathematical knowledge, to the extent that they refer to relations among the knower's own ideas, are not problematic for Kierkegaard. The medium of the expression of these ideas coheres perfectly with the essence of the ideas themselves. The medium is abstract, but so are the ideas expressed, hence there can be no question of whether these ideas receive adequate expression. It is for this reason that Kierkegaard is able to claim that the certainty of these sciences is absolute.⁵

I argued in the introduction to the present work that Kierkegaard often spoke of scholarly or scientific knowledge without qualifying it as approximate and that he did this because of his desire not to alienate his reader through the introduction of a technical vocabulary that was at odds with "the daily speech and usage of language" (P,

⁵Cf. JP 1:197/Pap. IV C 100.

71/SV V, 45).⁶ That is, I argued that Kierkegaard wanted to speak to his readers, not at them and that he was thus wary of sticking exclusively to a technical vocabulary of his own invention. He does, however, as was noted above and as we have seen in the preceding chapters, have such a technical vocabulary and he often sprinkles these expressions throughout his texts where the same expressions also appear in their more mundane or everyday sense.⁷ This would appear the case with respect to 'knowledge.' That is, there is knowledge in the strict sense and then there is knowledge in the loose sense, which he often refers to as knowledge without qualifying it as approximate, and the reader is expected to determine which is referred to on the basis of the context in which the expression appears.

The reader might legitimately wonder, however, why Kierkegaard appears to have been relatively unconcerned with "correcting" ordinary language or bringing all the uses of 'knowledge' into conformity with the definition of knowledge in the strict sense. The obvious answer to this question is that scholarly and scientific knowledge, concerned as they are with the way the world is, or was, rather than how it ought to be, do not, in themselves, have any ethical or religious significance. Imprecision in the use of the expression 'knowledge' in the realm of objective inquiry does not have significant consequences for a thinker whose primary concerns are ethical and religious.

I believe, however, that there is another reason Kierkegaard is not concerned to "correct" such linguistic imprecision and that is that it reflects what is, for him, an essential aspect of human nature. Scholars and scientists are inclined to draw conclusions, even if only provisional ones, about the correspondence of particular

⁶Cf. Introduction, "The Project."

⁷Cf. Introduction, "Kierkegaard's Terminology."

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theories to reality because they cannot, on Kierkegaard's view, maintain an entirely objective, dispassionate or disinterested perspective relative to this issue. Strict objectivity will not even allow for the interpretation of data, let alone for claims concerning which among the various possible interpretations might correspond to reality. We are all, in fact, inclined to draw dogmatic conclusions on the basis of probabilistic evidence. Such evidence is indeed, as we have seen, meaningful for us in the sense that we interpret it as supporting the representation with which it is associated, only because we are, as observers, passionately interested in, or engaged with, the phenomena of observation. The nature of this engagement is determined, according to Kierkegaard, by the nature of consciousness itself.

The interest which properly characterizes the work of a scholar or scientist as such is what Kierkegaard calls impersonal interest⁸ and it is distinguished from personal or infinite interest, both in terms of its object and in terms of degree. This is a recurrent theme of the Postscript where scholarship is disparaged not in itself, but because its methodology and criteria for truth, while consistent with the interest of the scholar or scientist in the objects of scholarly or scientific enquiry, are inconsistent with the interest which properly characterizes the inquirer when the object of inquiry is not descriptive of reality in general, but prescriptive of the inquirer's own existence.⁹ That all scholarly and scientific knowledge is only "approximate knowledge," according to Kierkegaard, is not a criticism of scholarship or science. The difficulty is rather that "an approximation," according to Kierkegaard, "is too little to build an eternal happiness

⁸Cf. chapter five.

⁹Cf. Slotky, op. cit. 31 and 38.

on" (CUP I, 23/SV VII, 12).

"[T]he inquiring subject [i.e., scholar or scientist] . . . is indeed interested," argues Kierkegaard, "but [he] is not infinitely, personally, impassionedly interested," (CUP I, 21/SV VII, 11), nor, according to Kierkegaard, would it be appropriate for him to be so interested. When the object of knowledge is descriptive of reality rather than prescriptive the interest of the subject should, according to Kierkegaard, be of an impersonal sort. Let the inquiring subject, argues Kierkegaard

labor with restless zeal, let him even shorten his life in the enthusiastic service of science and scholarship; let the speculative thinker spare neither time nor diligence--they are nevertheless not infinitely, personally, impassionedly interested. On the contrary, they do not want to be. (CUP I, 21/SV VII, 12)

There is, according to Kierkegaard, nothing wrong with the imprecision which characterizes our use of the expression 'knowledge.' This imprecision reflects, as I explained above, what is, for Kierkegaard, an essential aspect of our nature as knowers.

It is, of course, possible for one to become confused and thus to become too interested in, or passionately engaged with, a particular object of inquiry such as when a scientist or scholar lets this issue of his self-image or reputation become entangled with his professional activity, or when one confusedly assumes that the conclusions of critical theological scholarship--e.g., philological scholarship--could be decisive for faith.¹⁰ The former sort of confusion is, however, merely comic according to Kierkegaard. It is the latter confusion in which he is primarily interested. The claim that philological

¹⁰Cf. CUP I, 25/SV VII, 15.

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scholarship issues in knowledge may represent an imprecision in the use of the expression 'knowledge,' but it is not a mistaken claim as long as "knowledge" is understood here in the loose sense. The claim, however, that critical theological scholarship issues in religious knowledge does not represent a linguistic imprecision, on Kierkegaard's view, but is rather erroneous. That is, religion, like ethics, is essentially concerned with the existence of the individual knower and must thus, by definition, be approached from an entirely different direction--i.e., subjectively rather than objectively.

There is, however, a certain moralistic tone to Kierkegaard's discussion of scholarly and scientific "knowledge" that would seem to fail to cohere with the fact that such "knowledge" cannot have more than accidental ethical or religious significance on his view. Kierkegaard is clearly more tolerant of the failure of the historian, or natural scientist, to appreciate the provisional character of his knowledge, than he is of the same failure on the part of an individual whose area of inquiry is ethics or religion, but there is, nonetheless, often a tone of moral condemnation even with respect to the former. This is curious considering that historical, or scientific, truth would appear to be of such a radically different sort from ethical, or religious, truth, on Kierkegaard's view, that knowledge of these respective truths would have essentially nothing to do with each other. Why wax moralistic in relation to a failure--i.e., the failure of the historian or the natural scientist to appreciate the provisional nature of his conclusions--that would not appear to have any moral, or ethical, significance?

The answer is very likely that while historical and scientific truth are of a radically different sort, for Kierkegaard, from ethical and religious truth, our relations to these two sorts of truth are, on his view,

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often remarkably similar. It would appear that Kierkegaard is concerned that we may form bad habits in one realm of inquiry that we may then carry over into the other, where the significance of such habits is much greater, without being aware that we are doing so.

PART III: SUBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE

11. Introduction to Part III

I argued in the introduction to this thesis, as well as in the introduction to Part I, that Kierkegaard's main quarrel with his philosophical contemporaries concerned their claim to the possibility of absolute knowledge. "He was content," observes Slotty, "to have convinced himself that there was no such thing as presuppositionless knowledge [in philosophy] and proceeded hurriedly to demonstrate the impossibility of such knowledge in other spheres."¹

Kierkegaard was not particularly interested in objective knowledge. It was rather subjective, or ethical-religious knowledge that was his main concern.² "Ethical-religious realities," observes Slotty, "presuppose themselves and knowledge of these realities is attained, according to Kierkegaard, by means which conform to laws unique to these realities."³ It is thus with this reality and the means by which, according to Kierkegaard, one can attain knowledge of it, that we will be concerned in the next few chapters.

We saw in chapter five that all knowledge, to the extent that it is interested, on Kierkegaard's view, has a subjective element. We also saw, however, that according to Kierkegaard, there are two fundamentally different types

¹Slotty, op. cit. 22.

²Ibid. 40. Cf. Harald Høffding, Kierkegaard som Filosof (Kierkegaard as Philosopher) (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1919) 59.

³Ibid. 40; cf. Deuser's claim that, "the inner perspective has its own being and demands, therefore, an epistemology of its own" (Deuser, op. cit. 105-106).

of interest: the first where the object of interest is some third thing such as beauty or truth, which is not the knower, and the second where the object of interest is the knower himself.⁴ These two types of interest are, in turn, associated by Kierkegaard, with two distinct types of knowledge. We looked at the first type of knowledge in the chapter entitled "Objective Knowledge." This knowledge was found to include immanent metaphysical knowledge and knowledge of actuality of the scholarly and scientific sort. The former, as we saw, was associated by Kierkegaard with certainty, while the latter was associated with probability.

The difficulty with Kierkegaard's views on the nature of objective knowledge is that while there are two distinct types of objective knowledge on his view, he seldom qualifies the expression 'knowledge' to indicate which type of knowledge is at issue. The failure, however, to appreciate that there are two sorts of objective knowledge--i.e., knowledge in the strict sense and knowledge in the loose sense--according to Kierkegaard, and that each relates to specific sorts of objects, has made it difficult to understand the substance of Kierkegaard's epistemology. This situation is made even more problematic, however, by the fact that objective knowledge is not the only kind of knowledge according to Kierkegaard. That is, knowledge in general, according to Kierkegaard, includes not merely objective knowledge but also subjective knowledge which, to complicate matters even further, may be subdivided into subjective knowledge proper and pseudo-knowledge. This means that when the reader encounters the expression 'knowledge' in one of Kierkegaard's texts, there are at

⁴Cf. chapter five and Hügli, *op. cit.* 106.

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least four distinct types of knowledge it may refer to⁵ and it is up to him to figure out which is at issue.

I have not, so far, drawn much attention to the various Danish expressions that are used by Kierkegaard to refer to knowledge. This is because the distinctions made by him between the two Danish expressions normally translated into English as 'knowledge' of the propositional sort--i.e., 'erkendelse' and 'viden'⁶--are relative to the context in which they occur.⁷ That is, Kierkegaard does not appear to make any general systematic distinctions between these expressions. Much of the confusion, however, surrounding the efforts of various philosophers to determine the substance of Kierkegaard's epistemology is a direct result of the fact that Kierkegaard's discussion of what he calls subjective, or essential, knowledge often involves reference to acquaintance knowledge (i.e., kendskab) which it is nearly impossible to distinguish as such in translation. To avoid confusion, I will thus, from this point on, indicate the Danish term in question, when quoting Kierkegaard on knowledge, if this term would not normally be translated as knowledge in the propositional sense.

I will turn now to an examination of subjective knowledge or knowledge where the object of interest is the subject himself. It is important to appreciate, however, that this knowledge is not distinguished from objective knowledge in the way one might think. That is, while some sorts of subjective knowledge, will have a relation to the individual knower such that, if this knower were different,

⁵We will see, toward the end of this chapter, that there are actually five kinds of knowledge, or "knowledge" according to Kierkegaard.

⁶Cf. Politikens Filosofi Leksikon, op. cit. 16.

⁷Cf. Introduction, "Kierkegaard's Terminology."

so would the content of the knowledge be different, this does not mean that subjective knowledge is subjectivist. I will examine this issue more fully once I have identified some specific sorts of subjective knowledge, but it is particularly important to appreciate that there is, for Kierkegaard, a single ethical-religious reality in the sense that there is a single set of eternally valid norms for human behavior and one God who requires of every human being that he actualize these norms in his existence. That is, Kierkegaard is not an ethical or religious relativist. Kierkegaard, as Slotty observes, "was personally convinced of the truth of Christianity. That cannot be denied."⁸ There is, for Kierkegaard, a single ethical-religious reality--i.e., Christianity--it is just that the way to knowledge of this reality is through the individual, by attention to one's subjective experience, rather than away from the individual, by becoming objective.⁹

Subjective knowledge proper, I will argue, like objective immanent metaphysical knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, is characterized by an immediate relation between the knower and the object of knowledge. That is, subjective knowledge proper, on Kierkegaard's view, involves contact with, or participation with, the reality in question. Subjective knowledge is, however, just as was objective knowledge in the strict sense and objective knowledge in the loose sense, restricted by Kierkegaard to particular sorts of objects. Only these sorts of objects

⁸Slotty, op. cit. 63; cf. Kierkegaard's observation in Fear and Trembling that "[i]f a human being did not have an eternal consciousness, if underlying everything there were only a wild fermenting power that writhing in dark passions produced everything, be it significant or insignificant, . . . what would life be then but despair? . . . But precisely for that reason it is not so" (FT, 15/SV III, 68).

⁹Cf. JP 4:4555/Pap. X² A 401, p. 28.

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are known in this way and they are known in this way because their nature is specifically suited to this type of knowing.

There are again, as we saw in Part II, two types, or aspects, of reality to which the knower has an immediate relation according to Kierkegaard. The first of these is thought. That is, the knower is immediately related to his own ideas as such.¹⁰ The second aspect of reality to which the knower has an immediate relation is, again, his own ethical actuality. As one might thus expect, subjective knowledge can be divided into two sorts: knowledge of ideality, or thought reality, and knowledge of actuality. The first sort of knowledge falls, just as it did in the above chapter on objective knowledge, under the heading of immanent metaphysical knowledge, although the subheadings, rather than "ontological knowledge" and "mathematical knowledge," will be "knowledge of God," "self-knowledge" and "ethical-religious knowledge."

While objective knowledge of immanent metaphysical reality involved the participation of the knower in the reality in question, objective knowledge of actuality could not, on Kierkegaard's view, involve such participation. Not all knowledge which relates to actuality, however, is of the scholarly or scientific sort according to Kierkegaard. That is, there is actuality in general, according to Kierkegaard (which is, for the knower, an abstraction) and then there is the actuality of the knower's own existence (which is, for him something concrete),

Scholarly or scientific knowledge--i.e., objective knowledge of actuality--is again, according to Kierkegaard,

¹⁰Cf. Holmer, *op. cit.* 45.

possibility.¹¹ But possibility is the opposite of actuality, on Kierkegaard's view; hence "[t]he only actuality there is for an existing person," he argues, "is his own ethical actuality" (CUP I, 316/SV VII, 271). To express this situation in what are perhaps the simplest terms, we can say that one can be oneself, but one cannot be the forces or laws that give actuality in general its specific character. The difference in our relation to the various aspects of reality or, more particularly, actuality, is what separates objective knowledge, on Kierkegaard's view, from subjective or existential knowledge, and why the character of the latter is distinguished from that of the former.

As I explained in the introduction to this thesis, knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, is a representation of reality in thought. Even subjective knowledge is a representation of the reality in question. What distinguishes this knowledge from objective knowledge is not its nature as a representation but how it arises and the manner in which it is related to the individual knower. That is, while objective knowledge is essentially descriptive, subjective knowledge is essentially prescriptive. Subjective knowledge proper is not merely the product of the observation of reality in general; it is the product of the participation of the knower in that reality. To the extent, however, that the "knowledge" in question is distinguished from such participation, it is not properly knowledge on Kierkegaard's view. There is thus a distinction, according to Kierkegaard, between what I will call subjective knowledge proper and pseudo-knowledge. The approbation and disapprobation which these designations imply is deliberate. That is, what was

¹¹Cf. CUP I, 316/SV VII, 271; Holmer, op. cit. and Slotty, op. cit. 54.

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identified in the discussion of objective knowledge as knowledge in the loose sense is no worse, according to Kierkegaard, than knowledge in the strict sense. It is distinguished from the latter simply by the nature of its objects. It is not, however, the objects of pseudo-knowledge that give it this determination, but the failure of the "knower" to exhibit the proper relation to the mental representation in question.¹² Objective knowledge has no essential ethical or religious significance according to Kierkegaard, hence the value-neutral determinations of "strict" and "loose." Subjective knowledge does have such significance, however, hence the value-laden determinations of "proper" and "pseudo."

There is, again, no knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, which is the product of purely objective, disinterested, or dispassionate inquiry. "Just to make the celebrated distinction between what one understands and what one does not understand," he argues, "requires passion" (FT, 42n./SV III, 93n). Passion, for Kierkegaard, is what stimulates, as well as sustains, inquiry of any sort, whether the inquiry is directed toward some truth which is completely independent of the inquirer, or whether it is directed toward a truth which is essentially related to the inquirer. Even the inquiry directed toward the attainment of objective knowledge, in either the strict or the loose sense, is an activity of the inquirer. That is, reality, according to Kierkegaard, does not simply imprint itself on the intellect of a passive observer. Even the most objective inquiry, as we saw, to the extent that it results in knowledge, rather than a skeptical epoche, has a subjective element. The difference between objective and subjective knowledge, on Kierkegaard's view, is that while both are the product of activity on the part of the knower,

¹²Cf. Hannay, op. cit. 140.

the activity in question is of two sorts. The activity of the inquirer after objective knowledge is consciously directed away from himself and toward some object which exists independently of, and without an essential relation to, himself. The activity associated with subjective knowledge, on the other hand, is directed toward the experience of the individual knower as such.

Subjective knowledge concerns what is true for the knower both in terms of what his experience, as such, is like--i.e., what it is like to have experiences of a certain sort--and in terms of what it should be like--i.e., not what it should be like to have experiences of a certain sort, but rather what sorts of experiences the individual ought to have, or what sort of things the individual ought to do. Subjective knowledge is thus both descriptive and prescriptive of subjective experience. Subjective knowledge, like objective knowledge, is, however, still a representation of the reality in question. That is, mental representations of what it is like to have certain sorts of experiences, as well as of what sorts of experiences one ought to have, is a representation of these experiences in thought and hence is distinguished from the experiences themselves.¹³ Subjectivity itself can be treated abstractly, according to Kierkegaard, and this is what, in fact, is done when subjective experience becomes the object of a mental representation, as we will see in the pages which follow. But subjectivity treated in this way--i.e., merely as the object of a mental representation--is distinguishable from subjectivity itself, as Kierkegaard explains when he says that "[a]bstract subjectivity is just as uncertain and lacks inwardness to the same degree as

¹³Compare this with Kierkegaard's claim about knowledge (viden) of an ordeal. "[A]s soon as knowledge enters, the resilience of the ordeal is impaired and the category is actually another category" (R, 210/SV III, 244).

abstract objectivity" (CA, 141/SV IV, 407).¹⁴

I argued in chapter seven that a mental representation was true when it agreed with the reality to which it referred and was justified, according to Kierkegaard, by a kind of insight, or intuition, concerning this agreement. We will see in the following chapter, that subjective knowledge, viewed independently of the participation of the "knower" in the reality to which it refers--i.e., pseudo-knowledge-- is neither justified nor true.

But if pseudo-knowledge lacks both justification and truth, in what sense can it be considered knowledge? The answer to this question concerns, again, the manner in which Kierkegaard manipulates the various senses in which the relevant expressions are used in ordinary communication. We will see that, just as was the case with objective knowledge, there are, in this context, two senses in which the expression 'truth' is used by Kierkegaard and two senses in which subjective knowledge (or "knowledge") may said to be "justified."

Before I proceed to an examination of subjective knowledge, I must set out a few questions to which I will return at the end of this chapter. I have already explained that subjective and objective knowledge have different sorts of objects according to Kierkegaard. This does not necessarily mean, however, that objective knowledge of the objects which, according to Kierkegaard, properly belong to subjective knowledge is impossible; hence the first question we must address concerns whether such knowledge is possible and if so, whether it is what Kierkegaard would call knowledge in the strict sense or whether it is merely approximate knowledge. If objective knowledge of the objects of subjective knowledge is possible, we must address the issue of what advantage,

¹⁴Emphasis added.

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according to Kierkegaard, if any, is to be had in a subjective knowledge of them. Finally, we must decide whether is it appropriate to subsume Kierkegaard's views on subjective knowledge under the general heading of his "epistemology."

12. Subjective Truth

Truth, as we saw in the chapter on objective truth, is defined by Kierkegaard as an agreement between thought and being.¹ This agreement may, again, be established in two ways. That is, it may be the result of the accurate representation of being in thought, or it may be the result of the accurate representation of thought in being. There are thus two senses in which the expression 'truth' is used by Kierkegaard. This is the distinction, referred to above, as that between "truth" and "truths."²

That is, "objectively," explains Hügli

truth is an agreement between thought and being. Ideality is true only to the extent that it has reality in itself. Truth is--in the classical sense--an adaequatio intellectus ad rem. Subjectively, the relation is reversed. Ethics is not concerned with expressing reality in ideality. The individual is only in the truth to the extent that he has ideality in himself. Truth in the subjective sense could thus be designated as an adaequatio rei ad intellectum.³

"Truths," according to Kierkegaard, are the result of the accurate representation of being in thought, whether the being in question is ideal, as is the case with immanent metaphysical truths, or whether it is actual, as is the case with, for example, scholarly and scientific truths. "Truth," according to Kierkegaard, is the accurate

¹Cf. CUP I, 169/SV VII, 157; CI, 247/SV XIII, 322; Sloty, op. cit. 28 and Hügli, op. cit. 78.

²Cf. chapter six, introduction.

³Hügli, op. cit. 199-200.

representation of thought in being--i.e., actuality.⁴ It is this latter sort of truth to which Kierkegaard refers when he observes that "now all expressions are formed according to the view that truth is cognition [Erkjendelsen], knowledge [Viden], whereas in original Christianity all the expressions were formed according to the view that truth is a [way of] being" (PC, 206/SV XII, 190).

§12.1. Truth

This truth, which is a property of actuality rather than of mental representations, is again restricted, according to Kierkegaard, to aspects of reality that are essentially related to the individual knower as such, which as we saw, is the case with ethics and religion. Ethics and religion are essentially prescriptive, thus ethical and religious truth is an agreement between the ideality of ethical and religious prescriptions and the actuality of the individual's existence.⁵ This truth, as we saw, is referred to by Kierkegaard as "essential truth" (CUP I, 199n./SV VII, 166n.) because it is related to the essence of an individual's existence as such--i.e., as an individual rather than as a human being in general--and is thus also referred to by him as "subjective truth" (CUP I, 21/SV VII, 11).

Subjective truth, according to Kierkegaard, is a manner of existing.⁶ It is an existence which instantiates

⁴Thus Hannay argues, that "in Kierkegaard we have the idea that the sensible world can itself come to bear the imprint of an ideal, even though the 'source' of that ideal remains ineradicably transcendent" (Hannay, op. cit. 257).

⁵Cf. chapter six, introduction.

⁶Cf. Benjamin Daise, "The will to truth in Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments," Philosophy of

the moral law. It is for this reason Kierkegaard argues that Christianity demands not that one know the truth, but rather that one "be the truth" (PC, 205/SV XII, 189). To be the truth in this way is thus to manifest in one's being--i.e., existence--the agreement between thought and being that was identified above as truth. Unlike objective truth, however, subjective truth is not the correspondence, in an external sense, of the existence of the knower to his mental representation of ethical-religious ideality. It is the assent of this subject to the substance of ethical-religious prescriptions as such which represents a genuine correspondence of his existence to these prescriptions.⁷ That is, subjective truth is the result of a conscious effort of this individual to bring his existence into conformity with these prescriptions.⁸

"[A]ctuality," argues Kierkegaard, "is not the external action but an interiority in which the individual annuls possibility and identifies himself with what is thought in order to exist in it" (CUP I, 339/SV VII, 293). Ethical, or religious prescriptions are thus actualized by an individual, not in the sense that his "historical externality" (CUP I, 576/SV VII, 501) is made to correspond to them, but in the sense that he has truly willed such correspondence. To "agree" with the substance of ethical or religious prescriptions is to make a conscious, or

Religion 31 (1992): 1-12 and Jeremy Walker, "Ethical Beliefs: A Theory of Truth Without Truth Values," Thought Vol. LV (1980): 295-305.

⁷Cf. Hügli's observation that what he refers to as "external actuality" is not under the control of the individual and that "it is unethical to be concerned about something which does not depend upon the ethical itself. So what remains in the end [i.e., as a candidate for ethical action] is simply the intention, the will, to want to act" (Hügli, op. cit. 216).

⁸Cf. Daise, op. cit. 5-7.

inward, effort to bring one's existence into conformity with these prescriptions. Accidental conformity--i.e., mere external correspondence--does not qualify as agreement in the sense that the individual cannot be said to have assented to these prescriptions as such.

I argued in chapter six that, strictly speaking, truth was equivalent to an agreement between ideality and reality in the sense of the formal necessity of the correspondence of the one to the other. Such formal necessity is what one could call objective necessity. There is another kind of necessity, however, that one could refer to as subjective necessity. That is, it is necessary, as we saw in Part I, for an individual to bring his existence into conformity with the substance of ethical-religious prescriptions in order for him to attain genuine existence.⁹

Kierkegaard argues, however, that

[h]ere it is not forgotten, even for a single moment that the subject is existing and that existence is a becoming [en Vorden], and that truth as the identity of thought and being is therefore a chimera of abstraction and truly only a longing of creation,¹⁰ not because the truth is not an identity, but because the knower is an existing person and the truth cannot be an identity for him, as long as he exists. (CUP I, 196/SV VII, 164)¹¹

⁹Cf. Hügli's claim that, according to Kierkegaard, "a human being is only human to the extent that he acts ethically" (Hügli, op. cit. 204).

¹⁰Cf. Romans 8:19.

¹¹Cf. Slotty's observation that according to Kierkegaard, "truth, for an existing subject, cannot be appropriated once and for all in the eternity of pure being. There is no absolute continuity. Truth, for an existing subject, consists merely in the passionate anticipation of eternity, in an approach [to eternity]" (Slotty, op. cit. 38).

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That is, there is, for Kierkegaard only one individual whose life is truly a synthesis of thought and being, or of infinitude and finitude, eternality and temporality, etc., and that is Christ. "No human being," argues Kierkegaard, "With the exception of Christ, is the truth. In relation to every other person, the truth is something infinitely higher than his being" (PC, 204/SV XII, 188).¹²

What Kierkegaard means when he says that no human being is the truth is that no human being is in "absolute possession [absolut Besiddelse]" (SV XI, 85-86) of the truth. The difficulty is that the knowing subject is, as a relation between thought and being (i.e., an interesse), or as the relation's relating itself to itself "constantly striving . . . is striving infinitely, is constantly in the process of becoming [Vorden]" (CUP I, 91/SV VII, 72).¹³ "Truth," argues Kierkegaard, "is for the particular individual, only as he produces it in action" (CA, 138/SV IV, 405).¹⁴ This means that every action of an individual must "produce" truth, if his existence is to be an expression of the truth. To the extent, however, that one has never finished acting, one can never be said to have fully succeeded in bringing one's existence into conformity with the ideal ethical-religious prescriptions, or to have produced truth in the sense of having fully conformed the actuality of one's being with the ideality of one's mental

¹²Cf. OAR, 143-144/NRF, 178.

¹³I have altered the translation here slightly. The Hongs' translation has "continually" in both instances in which I have "constantly." The Danish expression is "bestandigt," the preferred translations of which are "constantly" (Ferrall-Gundm. Repp., op. cit. 31) and "continuously" (cf., Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit. vol. 1, 103).

¹⁴Cf. Slotty, op. cit. 39 and Hügli, op. cit. 228.

representations of these prescriptions as such.¹⁵

Subjective truth is thus like the self in that at every moment that the knower exists (er til) he is in the process of becoming (vorden) and to that extent is potentiality (dynamis) rather than actuality. That is, subjective truth, like the self, does not actually exist (er ikke virkelig til), but is simply that which ought to come to be (skal blive til).¹⁶ Thus Kierkegaard can argue that "what is Christian," (i.e., what Christianity is, or what it means to be a Christian) is never concluded but always "has the future open and can still become what it ought to be" (P, 60/SV V, 38)¹⁷ That is, as long as an individual exists, he has the future open and although his existence is not a complete expression of the truth, it can still become this--i.e., it can still become what it ought to be. The task of an individual is thus to perfect himself, to make his life an expression of ethical-religious truth, which task is never completed as long as he exists.

We saw in the chapter on objective truth that Kierkegaard used the expression 'truth' in that context in both a strict and a loose sense and that truth in this

¹⁵Cf. Høffding, op. cit. 60 and 63.

¹⁶Cf. chapter three; SUD, 29-30/SV XI, 142; Pap. V B, 60 and CA, 138/SV IV, 405.

¹⁷Emphasis added. I have altered McDonald's translation slightly. McDonald has "anything" where I have "what ought to be." The Danish is, however, "hvad det skal være," which translates literally as "what it ought to be." McDonald's translation is unfortunate not merely because it is incorrect and thus misleading in the context of the work in which it appears, but also because it obscures the otherwise obvious reference to the self from The Sickness Unto Death (cf., SUD, 29-30/SV XI, 142).

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latter sense was referred to by him as an approximating.¹⁸ It appears, however, that there is a sense in which even subjective truth proper, to the extent that it is expressed in the life of an individual, may be understood to be an approximating.¹⁹ That is, Kierkegaard argues that

[t]he being of truth is the redoubling of truth within yourself, within me, within him, that your life, my life, his life expresses the truth approximately in the striving for it, that your life, my life, his life is approximately the being of the truth in the striving for it, just as the truth was in Christ a life, for he was the truth. (PC, 205/SV XII, 189)²⁰

Only Christ's life, according to Kierkegaard, expresses subjective truth in an absolute sense. Even if an individual is successful in bringing his existence into conformity with ethical or religious prescriptions, his existence, as a whole, can no more than approximate this truth. The sense in which one can approximate ethical or religious truth differs, however, according to Kierkegaard, from the sense in which knowledge in the loose sense is defined by him as an approximation. In both instances truth, in an absolute sense, may be defined as a desideratum. In the latter case, however, the subject has no guarantee that the apparent probability of the correspondence of a mental representation to reality is objectively vindicated in the sense that the more probable the correspondence appears, the closer one is to its absolute determination. That is, an increase in the probability of the correspondence brings one no closer to

¹⁸Cf., e.g., CUP I, 187/SV VII, 157; CUP I, 23-24/SV VII, 12; CUP I, 30/SV VII, 19 and CUP I, 81/SV VII, 62-63.

¹⁹Cf. OAR, 143-144/NRF, 178.

²⁰Emphasis added.

establishing genuine correspondence. It is for this reason that an approximation, according to Kierkegaard, "has the curious quality of being able to continue as long as it pleases" (CUP I, 41/SV VII, 30). That is, it can keep going indefinitely because it can never actually get closer to what one could refer to as its destination.

To approximate ethical and religious truth in the sense identified above is, however, precisely to "approach" it. This can be seen if we look at the Danish expression which Kierkegaard uses to refer to this sort of approximation. That is, the expression in question is not 'approximation,' the expression used by Kierkegaard in the context of his discussion of approximate knowledge,²¹ but 'tilnærmelse.'²² 'Tilnærmelse' is a compound composed of two words 'nærmelse,' which translates literally as "the act or movement, to approach, to come closer to,"²³ and the preposition 'til,' which translates as 'to.'²⁴ 'Tilnærmelse' may thus be translated into English as either 'approximation' or as 'approach,'²⁵ and it is clearly the latter that Kierkegaard had in mind. That is, it was customary in theological circles in Copenhagen in the mid-nineteenth century to speak of 'tilnærmelse til Gud' (approaching God). J. P. Mynster, the Bishop of Zealand

²¹Cf. note 18 above.

²²Cf., e.g., JY, 208/SV XII, 474 and PC, 205/SV XII, 189.

²³Cf. Ferrall-Gudm. Repp., op. cit. 218; Molbech, op. cit. Anden Deel, 223 and Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit. vol. II, 34.

²⁴Cf. Ferrall-Gudm. Repp., op. cit. 327; Molbech, op. cit. Anden Deel, 1178-1182 and Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit., vol. II, 586-587.

²⁵Cf. Ferrall-Gudm. Repp., op. cit. 329; Molbech, op. cit., Anden Deel, 1200 and Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit. vol. II, 599.

during most of Kierkegaard's adult life, argued, for example that "Tilnærmelsen til Gud kan ikke finde Sted uden Betragtning af Gud [One cannot approach God without the contemplation of God]."²⁶ One approaches ethical or religious truth, according to Kierkegaard, "in the striving for it,"²⁷ in a sense in which one cannot, on his view, approach objective truth through probability.

§12.2. "Truth"

Just as was the case with objective knowledge, there are two senses in which Kierkegaard uses the expression 'truth' in the context of subjective knowledge. That is, there is truth in the sense of an agreement between some ethical or religious prescription and the existence of a particular knower, and then there is "truth" in the sense in which the life of Christ, according to Kierkegaard, expresses such agreement,²⁸ or in the sense that eternally valid norms for human behavior may be referred to independently of their expression in the life of a particular knowing subject. Unlike objective "truth," however, which was distinguished from truth in the strict sense by the fact that it was concerned with different objects, subjective "truth" refers to the same ethical-religious ideality which, when actualized by the knowing subject, constitutes subjective truth proper.

²⁶J. P. Mynster, Blandede Skrifter (Miscellaneous Writings), 3 vols. (Copenhagen, 1852), Første Bind, 49.

²⁷Cf. EUD, 306/SV V, 89; CUP I, 457/SV VII, 397 and SUD, 41-42/SV XI, 153.

²⁸Cf., e.g., PC, 203/SV XII, 187 and PC, 205/SV XII, 189.

Kierkegaard was not, again, a subjectivist.²⁹ His claim that "[t]ruth [is] subjectivity" (CUP I, 189ff./SV VII, 157ff.) is not meant by him to refer to truth in general, but is made rather in the context of his examination of a specific kind of object of knowledge--i.e., an object that is essentially related to the existence of the individual knower as such.³⁰ This does not mean, however, that while Kierkegaard believed there was objective truth in ontology, mathematics, scholarship and science, etc., he was a subjectivist with respect to ethical and religious truth, where he says, for example, that "only the truth that builds up is truth for you" (CUP

²⁹Cf., e.g., FT 15/SV III, 68; CA, 105/SV IV, 374 and Slotky, op. cit. 63.

³⁰Robert L. Perkins argues against the interpretation of Kierkegaard as a subjectivist in his article "Kierkegaard, A Kind of Epistemologist" (History of European Ideas, Vol. 12, No. 1 [1990] 7-18). Unfortunately, however, part of his argument turns on the translation of "Sandheden er Subjektiviteten" as "the truth is the subjectivity" (my emphasis) rather than as "truth is subjectivity." "It is important," argues Perkins, "to add the definite articles, for they at least delay the jump to a hasty conclusion" (18). Perkins is quite correct in his observation that Kierkegaard's claim that truth is subjectivity is often misinterpreted. He is also correct in his observation that the Danish "Sandheden er Subjektiviteten" includes two definite articles in enclitic form. The definite article is, however, often used in Danish to create abstract nouns (cf., Introduction, note. 46). That this is the manner in which the definite articles are being used in the reference to "truth is subjectivity" is further borne out by the fact that in at least one instance in the section which follows the heading "Truth is Subjectivity," "Sandheden," (i.e., 'truth,' or 'the truth,' as Perkins would have it) is preceded by the demonstrative pronoun "hiin" (CUP I, 191-192/SV VII, 159; cf., Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit. vol. I, 541). That is, if Perkins were correct, this reference to 'truth' would be preceded by both a demonstrative pronoun and a definite article.

I, 252/SV VII, 213).³¹ That is, "[t]his," he contends, "is an essential predicate in relation to truth as inwardness [i.e., subjective truth],³² whereby its decisive qualification as upbuilding "for you,"³³ that is, for the subject, is its essential difference from all objective knowledge, inasmuch as the subjectivity becomes a sign of the truth" (CUP I, 252-253/SV VII, 213).³⁴ That subjectivity becomes "a sign of the truth" here is not in the least mysterious. It is a formal consequence of the fact that there are two ways thought and being may be understood, according to Kierkegaard, to agree with each other. Subjectivity does not become a sign of truth in general, but only when the truth in question is of the subjective sort. That is, when the knowledge in question is prescriptive, then that the existence of the knower represents an actualization of these prescriptions becomes a sign of the truth. Such agreement between the ideality of ethical and religious prescriptions and the existence of the individual knower is the result of his having willed to bring his existence into conformity with these prescriptions, and it is upbuilding, according to Kierkegaard, because these prescriptions represent what one could call "the good."³⁵

Kierkegaard's claim that truth is subjectivity means no more than that subjective truth is subjectivity, or that when "truth" is prescriptive of an individual's existence,

³¹Cf. E/O II, 354/SV II, 318

³²Emphasis added.

³³These quotation marks are omitted in the Hongs' translation.

³⁴Cf. CUP I, 199n./SV VII, 166n.

³⁵Cf. JP 5:5620/Pap. IV (1st ed.) B 10a (Supp. XI³ pp. xxxvii-xxxviii).

the substance of the prescription ought to be expressed in that existence, not that Christianity may be "true" for one individual and Buddhism, for example, true for another.³⁶ There is, according to Kierkegaard, one genuine set of ethical-religious prescriptions which when actualized by the knowing subject, constitutes truth in the subjective sense.³⁷ He never tries to defend this view, however, or to develop criteria for determining the "truth" in the sense of the objective truth of Christianity. He fails to do this because he believes it is formally impossible,³⁸ and that thus "the first one to come up with the idea of defending Christianity in Christendom is de facto a Judas No. 2: he too betrays with a kiss, except that his treason is the treason of stupidity" (SUD, 87/SV XI, 198).

Subjective "truth," however, to the extent that it is

³⁶Cf. OAR, 168-169/NRF, 206 and Slotky, op. cit. 62. This point may seem to be at odds with Kierkegaard's claim in the Postscript that one may "pray in truth to God" even when "worshiping an idol" so long as one "prays with all the passion of infinity" (CUP I, 201/SV VII, 168). The point of this example, however, is precisely that prayer concerns how one relates to God--i.e., that one relates passionately and inwardly--not whether it is the true God to whom one is related (the latter question belongs to the domain of philosophy and theology, rather than that of prayer). Kierkegaard is able to make the transition from the fact that one is, in truth, praying--i.e., one is passionately and inwardly related to whatever deity it is to which one happens formally to be praying--to the claim that it is thus to the true God that one prays because that the God of the Christian religion was the true God is not something which is ever questioned by Kierkegaard and indeed not something which Kierkegaard anticipated that any of his readers would have questioned. That is, Kierkegaard's concern throughout the Postscript was not whether Christianity was true, but rather whether he was a true Christian. That Christianity was true was not questioned, thus to pray in truth is necessarily to pray to the true God. Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 159.

³⁷Cf. chapter eleven.

³⁸Cf. chapter eight, §8.1.1.

not expressed in the existence of the knower, is positive only to the extent that it represents the potential for such expression. Kierkegaard argues, for example, that "God gives a spirit of power, and of love and of self-control, such as is necessary in order to know what is the good... and in order to maintain constancy" (EUD, 360/SV V, 135). Kierkegaard observes, for example that

[i]n the knowledge that contemplation and reflection are the distance of eternity away from time and actuality, there is indeed a truth: the knower can understand that truth, but he cannot understand himself. It is certain that without this knowledge a person's [et Menneskes] life is more or less thoughtless. But it is also certain that this knowledge, because it is in a spurious eternity before the imagination, develops double-mindedness if it is not slowly and honestly earned by the will's purity. (POH, 116/SV VIII, 175-176)³⁹

That is, it is possible really to come to "know" subjective "truth" in the sense that ethics and religion may be the objects of mere contemplation. Kierkegaard argues, for example, that

If we imagine a youth well instructed in the truth, then we can in no way deny that he knows the truth, and yet it will certainly be with him, as it has been with others before him, that becoming older he learns something quite different The youth doubtless knows the truth, but he is ignorant, without experience concerning the relationship of reality to the entire environment within which the truth ought to [skal] appear. (GOS, 147/SV VIII, 382)

"[O]bjective knowledge of the truth of Christianity, or of

³⁹I have altered this translation slightly. Steere translates "Erkiendelsen" as recognition. Thus all three references to "knowledge" in this passage appear as "recognition" in the Steere translation.

its truths, is," thus "precisely untruth" (CUP I, 224/SV VII, 188). Thus it is possible to refer to the above youth as "knowing" truth in the sense of "truths." According to Kierkegaard, however, to fail to express Christian "truths" in one's existence is to transform Christianity, which is essentially a way of life, into a way of speaking (talemaade), which is," he argues, "what it wants least of all to be."⁴⁰ That is, to fail to express Christian truth in one's existence is to relegate to the realm of abstraction something which by its very nature demands to be made concrete.

Objective "truth" was, as we saw, something with respect to which the crowd, according to Kierkegaard, was considered to have competency, "even decisive competency" (POV, 110/SV XIII, 592). This is not, however, the case with subjective "truth." "There is a view of life," observes Kierkegaard, "which conceives that where the crowd is, there also is the truth, and that in truth itself there is need of having the crowd on its side."⁴¹ There is another

⁴⁰Cf. JY, 159/SV XII, 431-432. The Hongs translate "Talemaade" as "platitudes." 'Platitude' is listed as an acceptable translation of 'talemaade' in contemporary Danish to English dictionaries (cf., Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit. vol. 2, 562). It was not an acceptable translation of this expression, however, in the first half of the nineteenth century. "Talemaade" was defined then simply as a "mode of expression or phrase" (Ferrall-Gudm. Repp., op. cit. 324). The translation of 'talemaade' as "platitude" is somewhat misleading to the extent that 'platitude' has pejorative connotations (cf., Webster's New International Dictionary, op. cit. vol. 2. 1885) and the emphasis here is clearly on the distinction between saying and doing, rather than on the substance of what is said. That is, the point here is that Christian truth is a way of life, rather than a property of propositions, thus I believe that "mode of expression" or "phrase" convey more accurately the substance of the above remark.

⁴¹This is where Kierkegaard inserts the note which reads ". . . in relation to temporal, earthly, worldly matters the crowd may have competency"

Chapter 12: Subjective Truth

view of life," he continues however, "which conceives that wherever there is a crowd there is untruth" (POV, 110/SV XIII, 592). This "other view" is precisely that of ethics and religion, according to Kierkegaard.⁴² That is, ethics and religion are concerned with the essence of the individual knower's existence--i.e., with the manner in which this individual ought to exist and no collection of individuals, according to Kierkegaard, can have significance with respect to determining what the character of the individual's existence ought to be like.⁴³

⁴²Cf. POV, 110ff./SV XIII, 592ff.

⁴³Cf. POV, 110ff./SV XIII, 592ff; CUP I, 546/SV VII, 476; SUD, 34/SV XI, 147 and FT, 86/SV III, 134.

13. Subjective Justification

Subjective knowledge differs from objective knowledge in the strict sense not merely in that it is concerned with objects essentially related to the existence of the individual knower as such, but also in the sense that it cannot, according to Kierkegaard, as a mental representation, be true. But if subjective knowledge cannot, as a mental representation, be true, can it be justified?

I argued in the introduction that Kierkegaard associated knowledge in the strict sense with certainty in the sense of the necessity of the correspondence of the mental representation in question to reality. The justification of this knowledge turned out to be a kind of insight into this necessity which was possible as a result of the fact that the knower was immediately related to the reality in question. This insight was, in turn, equivalent to psychological certainty. That is, it was the contact of the knower with the reality in question, or reality itself, which caused the representation of it to be justified. When, however, contact with the reality to which a mental representation referred was not possible, as was the case, for example, when the object of that representation was some actuality other than the knower's own ethical actuality, a causal relationship between reality and the mental representation in question was not possible.

Subjective knowledge proper, like ontological and metaphysical knowledge, is characterized, according to Kierkegaard, by a causal account of justification, while pseudo knowledge, as we will see, like knowledge in the

loose sense, is not so characterized. There are thus, just as was the case with objective knowledge, two senses in which subjective knowledge may be "justified" and these senses correspond to the two senses of subjective truth detailed in the preceding chapter. Unlike objective knowledge, however, the two senses in which subjective knowledge may be justified do not correspond to the nature of the object of knowledge--i.e., whether that object is some actuality or some ideality--but to the nature of the individual's relation to the knowledge as such.

§13.1. Justification

Just as was the case with knowledge in the strict sense, it is, I will argue, a kind of insight, or intuition, of the knower into the essence of the object of a given mental representation which serves, on Kierkegaard's view, to justify this representation. This insight is again the product of the contact of the knower with the object of the representation, or from an identification of the knower with that object. Such contact is equivalent to an immediate relation between the knower and the object of knowledge. Subjective knowledge is thus unlike objective knowledge in that such a relation is possible with respect to all the objects of subjective knowledge, not just those objects whose essence is ideal rather than actual.

Subjective knowledge is again defined by Kierkegaard as ethical and religious knowledge.¹ Objective knowledge, as we saw was essentially descriptive of reality while subjective knowledge was essentially prescriptive. To be immediately related to the objects of subjective knowledge

¹Cf. CUP I, 197-198/SV VII, 165.

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would thus appear equivalent to living according to the substance of ethical-religious prescriptions. That is, to bring the actuality of one's existence into conformity with these prescriptions would be to come into contact with ethical and religious ideality. It is this contact which amounts to the agreement between thought and being (or adaequatio rei ad intellectum) that was defined by Kierkegaard as truth.

I stated in the introduction that subjective knowledge proper was associated with psychological certainty concerning the correspondence of a given mental representation to reality and that this certainty was inexorably intertwined with the correspondence of the reality of the knower's existence to the this representation. This latter correspondence is prerequisite to subjective knowledge proper in the sense that an insight into the essence of the object of a given mental representation that serves to justify it is only possible, as we saw in chapter seven, if the knower is immediately related to this object. While such a relation was objectively necessary in the case of objective knowledge in the strict sense, it is what one could call only subjectively necessary with respect to subjective knowledge.

Subjective knowledge is, again, ethical-religious knowledge. That is, subjective knowledge is related to the existence of the knower in the sense that it prescribes the manner in which this individual ought to exist. Since the object of subjective knowledge is ethical-religious ideality, an appreciation of the correspondence of a representation of this ideality to reality is, I will argue, equivalent to an appreciation of the necessity of the correspondence of one existence to the substance of this representation.

In what sense, however, can the correspondence of the

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knower's existence to the ideality of ethical and religious prescriptions be understood to be necessary? The obvious answer to this question is that it is necessary for him to attain eternal blessedness which, according to Kierkegaard, Christianity offers to those who are properly related to it.² Even if this were the case, however, and such a claim is extremely problematic to the extent that it would make eternal blessedness appear something the individual would have to earn, such necessity would appear only hypothetical. That is, if one were interested in eternal blessedness, then it would be necessary for one to bring one's existence into conformity with ethical-religious ideality. If one were not interested in such blessedness, however, then such conformity would not be necessary.

It is, of course, possible to argue that everyone, according to Kierkegaard, is in fact interested in his eternal blessedness (i.e., everyone has an interest in his own eternal blessedness), quite apart from the issue of whether he experiences any genuine subjective concern for it,³ just as he claims that everyone is in despair, whether he knows it or not.⁴ There is, however, another way the necessity of the conformity of an individual's existence to ethical-religious ideality can be accounted for. That is, such conformity, as I explained in the preceding chapter, is necessary, according to Kierkegaard, for the individual to exist in a genuine sense.

²Cf., CUP I, 16f./SV VII, 7f.

³Cf. Slotty, op. cit. 40 and Hannay, op. cit. 44, 176 and 193.

⁴Cf., SUD, 23/SV XI, 137.

Every human being, on Kierkegaard's view, has an "eternally established essence" (CUP I, 583/SV VII, 508).⁵ According to Kierkegaard's interpretation of Christianity, however, no one actually exists according to this essence. That is, everyone is a sinner, but sin was not part of this essence.⁶ "'To exist' [at existere]," argues Kierkegaard,

generally signifies only that by having come to be [ved at være blevet til] the individual does exist [er til] and is becoming [er i Vorden]; now it signifies that by having come to be, he has become [er bleven] a sinner. 'To exist' generally is not a more sharply defining predicate but is the form of all more sharply defining predicates; one does not become something [qualitative] by coming to be, but now to come to be is to become a sinner. . . . [That is], [b]y coming to be the individual becomes another person, or in the instant he ought to come to be he becomes another person by coming to be, because otherwise the category of sin is placed within immanence. (CUP I, 583/SV VII,

⁵The Hongs translate "evigt anlagte Væsen" as "the being intended for eternity." The expression 'to intend' was not, however, an acceptable translation of 'at anlægge' in the first part of the nineteenth century. Ferral-Gudm. Repp., for example, defines 'at anlægge' as "to found, establish, construct," (Ferral-Gudm., Repp. op. cit. 16) and these are in fact the preferred translations even today (cf., Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit. vol. I, 47). 'Being' is an acceptable translation of "Væsen," but 'essence' was the preferred translation in the first half of the nineteenth century (cf. Ferral-Gudm. Repp., op. cit. 370) and remains so even today (cf., Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit. vol. II, 840); more importantly, however, it is in the sense of essence that the expression is most often used by Kierkegaard (cf. Himmelstrup, op. cit. 767).

⁶It should be remembered that Kierkegaard was not an apologist for Christianity. That is, he offers no justification for the claim that everyone is a sinner. He simply assumes that this is one of the basic tenets of Christianity and that as the overwhelming majority of his readers would have professed to have been Christians, it is unlikely that many would have found this claim contentious.

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That is, God, according to Kierkegaard, has a plan for each individual. The difficulty is that no one's life actually represents the fulfillment of this plan. Thus it is not this plan which comes to be in the existence of the individual.⁸ "Every human being," argues Kierkegaard, "is a psychical-physical synthesis intended to be spirit" (SUD, 43/SV XI, 156). That is, God's plan for the individual is that he should be spirit. "But what is spirit? Spirit is the self" (SUD, 13/SV XI, 127). To fail to exist according to God's plan, which is to say, to fail to realize in one's

⁷I have altered the translation here slightly. The Hongs' translation has "is to come into existence" where I have "ought to come to be." The expression that is translated as "is" by the Hongs and "ought" by me is "skal" which should properly be translated as 'ought' (cf. Ferrall-Gudm. Repp., op. cit. 288 and Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit. vol. II, 360-361).

I would like here to point out an ambiguity in the Danish text. The passage that I have translated as "in the instant he ought to come to be, he becomes another person by coming to be," may also be translated as "in the instant he ought to come to be, he continues to become someone else." How one translates this passage depends on where one believes the commas should be placed in the original text. The original Danish text unfortunately includes no commas whatsoever. If one believes the commas should be placed as follows: "i det Nu han skal blive til, bliver han, ved at blive til, en Anden," then the Hongs' translation with the above modification is correct. If, however, the commas are placed as follows: "i det Nu han skal blive til, bliver han ved, at blive til en Anden," then the alternative translation given above is correct--i.e., 'at blive ved' means to continue (cf. Ferrall-Gudm. Repp., op. cit. 37; Molbech, op. cit. Første Deel, 202 and Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit. vol. I, 127). The Hongs' translation may be interpreted to refer either to biological birth or to spiritual rebirth (which, as we shall see, plays an important part in Kierkegaard thought), whereas the alternative translation could only be interpreted to refer to the latter.

⁸Cf. PF, 73/SV IV, 236-237.

existence the synthesis of the finite and the infinite, or of the temporal and the eternal as that synthesis is expressed by bringing one's particular, finite, temporal existence into conformity with universal, infinite, eternal ethical-religious ideality is, according to Kierkegaard, to fail to have a self, or to fail to exist in a genuine sense.⁹ Such an individual fails, on Kierkegaard's view, to become actual in the technical sense.¹⁰

Actuality (virkeligheden), according to Kierkegaard, ethically speaking, is ideality.¹¹ It is the ideality of ethical-religious prescriptions as they are concretely expressed in the life of the individual knowing subject. To fail to express this ideality in one's existence is to fail, in an essential sense, to achieve actuality. "I know of no one," argues Kierkegaard, "of whom it is in the strictest sense true that his life has achieved actuality. There is a deceptive appearance, but on closer inspection hundreds of illusions are discernible, with the result that he does not exist altogether personally, that actuality cannot get hold of him altogether personally" (JP 3:3217/Pap. X¹ A 628).

Actuality, in this sense, is the "unity of possibility and necessity" (SUD, 36/SV XI, 149). That is, the self, according to Kierkegaard, cannot become anything whatever, but is limited by God's plan for it. Actuality, on Kierkegaard's view, or actually to become a self, is to become what, according to the divine plan, it is necessary for one to become if one is to become anything at all. "To become oneself," according to Kierkegaard, is a movement

⁹Cf. Part I and CUP I, 346/SV VII, 300.

¹⁰Cf. CUP I, 319/SV VII, 274 and JP 3:3217/Pap. X¹ A 628.

¹¹Cf. CUP I, 325/SV VII, 280.

within necessity.¹² That is, it is the free appropriation of that self which it has been eternally determined one ought to become, or the actualization of that self which it is necessary for one to actualize, in order actually to exist.¹³

To exist (at existere), as a human being, argues Kierkegaard, is "not to be [være] in the same sense as a potato is Human existence," he continues, "has [the] idea, or ideality [Idee] in itself" (CUP I, 331/SV VII, 285). To fail to instantiate ethical-religious ideality in one's existence is thus to fail to have authentic human existence,¹⁴ or to fail to become actual. But it is precisely such authentic human existence which is constitutive of the self. To fail to instantiate ethical-religious ideality is to fail to have a self. It is thus necessary that the existence of the knower correspond to ethical-religious ideality, for that individual to exist in a genuine sense.

The justification of objective knowledge in the strict sense was, I argued, equivalent to an insight of the knower into the necessity of the correspondence of thought to being. The justification of subjective knowledge proper is just the reverse. It is equivalent to an insight of the knower into the necessity of the correspondence of being--i.e., the actuality of his existence--to thought--i.e., to ethical or religious ideality. The necessity in question, however, is not objective, but subjective. That is, such correspondence is not objectively necessary; it is rather

¹²Cf. SUD, 36/SV XI, 149.

¹³Cf. Hügli's contention that, "I can will, freely to will, what I must do [was ich notwendigerweise tun muß]. My freedom, according to Kierkegaard, consists in this and only in this" (Hügli, op. cit. 175, emphasis added).

¹⁴Cf. CUP I, 346/SV VII, 300.

subjectively necessary in the sense that it is necessary in order for the knower to achieve authentic existence.

The knower's insight into this necessity is, however, just as was the insight which justified objective knowledge, possible only to the extent that he is immediately related to the object of knowledge. The object of subjective knowledge is, of course, subjective truth, which is again a conformity of the knower's existence with ethical-religious ideality. As this conformity is something to which he is immediately related,¹⁵ its necessity becomes apparent to him with the conformity itself.¹⁶ That is, the knower becomes aware, to the extent that his existence expresses truth in the subjective sense, that such expression is necessary if he is to exist as an authentic human being. To exist as an authentic human being, or to achieve actuality, is something, according to Kierkegaard, in which every individual is essentially interested.

Ethical-religious prescriptions express a necessity: thou shalt!¹⁷ That is, one does not, according to Kierkegaard, as a human being, have the option of existing in the same sense that a potato exists. To express subjective truth is to come to know this, or to attain an insight into the necessity of the correspondence of one's existence to ethical-religious ideality. Thus Kierkegaard argues that "knowing [at vide] the truth follows of itself

¹⁵Cf. chapter two.

¹⁶The inseparability of religious knowledge and experience is a recurrent theme of Kierkegaard's unpublished book on Adler, where he argues, for example that "it is easy to demonstrate that he does not have a clear concept of Christian revelation--we conclude, therefore, that he has not had a revelation" (NRF, 209-210). Cf. OAR, 41/NRF, 50-51 and OAR, 46-47/NRF, 56.

¹⁷Cf. the varying emphasis put on this phrase in Works of Love.

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from being the truth" (PC, 205/SV XII, 189),¹⁸ and that "nobody knows [veed] more of the truth than what he is of the truth" (PC, 205-206/SV XII, 189).¹⁹ That is, the insight into the necessity of expressing ethical-religious ideality in one's existence is a product of that expression, or of one's immediate relation to this truth. This is the "concrete intuition" (JP 3:2324/Pap X² A 235) that was referred to earlier.²⁰ and it is this intuition which justifies the mental representation with which it is associated.²¹ Thus the individual's action of bringing his existence into conformity with ethical-religious ideality generates "a self-certainty which, instead of depending upon some conclusive evidence or argument . . . is immediately available in a self-guaranteeing form: that of a performative product of the agent's own independent decision."²² That is, the insight concerning the necessity of bringing one's existence into conformity with one's mental representation of ethical-religious ideality is equivalent to certainty concerning the correspondence of this representation to reality. The contact with the reality of ethical, or religious, ideality, established as a result of the knower having brought his existence into conformity with this ideality, is the cause of his

¹⁸I have altered the Hongs' translation slightly. The Hongs have "entirely of itself accompanies," where I have "follows of itself." The latter is a less literal translation but it is, I believe, significantly more readable. Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 228.

¹⁹Cf. Hügli's claim that according to Kierkegaard, "[s]ubjective truth does not exist because I know it; I know this truth because it is me" (Hügli, op. cit. 228).

²⁰Cf. chapter seven, §7.1.

²¹Cf. Jeremy Walker's discussion of what he refers to as "pragmatic proofs" (Walker, op. cit. 302-304).

²²Hannay, op. cit. 46.

certainty concerning this correspondence. It is thus the experience of the individual of this contact, or ethical-religious ideality itself, which causes the mental representation in question to be justified. "Such experience has cogency, of course," observes Slotty, "only for the individual whose experience it is . . . and even for this individual, the resultant certainty remains a certainty of belief."²³

We saw in the preceding chapter, however, subjective truth, according to Kierkegaard, is something one approaches, but not something one ever completely expresses. There is thus, for Kierkegaard, a sense in which the certainty associated with subjective knowledge proper is problematic. That is, it is contingent on the individual being in a particular state.²⁴ One can be certain of the substance of ethical-religious ideality only to the extent that one's existence expresses this ideality. There is thus a sense in which the certainty of subjective knowledge "has within itself the dialectic of uncertainty" (CUP I, 55/SV VII, 41). That is, if the existence of the individual falls short of ethical or religious ideality for even an instant, his insight into the essence of this ideality vanishes.

A representation ethical-religious ideality in thought, cannot thus be justified in itself, but can be justified only to the extent that it is conjoined with the prescribed way of life. The task of bringing his existence

²³Slotty, op. cit. 64. Cf. Hannay's suggestion that "Kierkegaard considered some states of mind, for example those fortified by a life-view, to be self-confirming in the sense of providing their own forms of justification, and not only not in need of further justification, but as belonging to a 'proof-game' for which any other kind of confirmation, e.g., empirical proof or disproof, is irrelevant" (Hannay, op. cit. 139).

²⁴Cf. CUP I, 52/SV VII, 39.

into conformity with this prescribed way of life persists, however, as a task as long as the individual lives. Thus Slotty argues that, according to Kierkegaard, "only in eternity can there be eternal [i.e., absolute] certainty. Existence must be content with a militant certainty."²⁵

§13.2. "Justification"

I argued above that there are, according to Kierkegaard, two sorts of subjective knowledge. That is, there is subjective knowledge proper and pseudo-knowledge. There are thus two senses in which subjective knowledge may be justified. Subjective knowledge is, again, essentially prescriptive. Pseudo-knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, is thus objective "knowledge" of something essentially related to the existence of the individual knowing subject in the sense that it is prescriptive of this existence. That is, pseudo-knowledge is a mental representation of a prescription the substance of which is not actualized in the existence of the "knower." This, according to Kierkegaard, is what is often referred to in discussions of "Christian knowledge."²⁶

We saw, in the case of objective knowledge, that if a causal relationship between the object of knowledge and one's mental representation of that object were not possible then there might be another way such a mental representation could be justified. That is, objective knowledge of actuality was justified to the extent that the knower was said to appreciate that the correspondence of a particular mental representation to reality was probable in

²⁵Slotty, op. cit. 56.

²⁶Cf. CUP I, 215/SV VII, 180; PC, 206/SV XII, 190 and JP 2:2303/Pap. XI² A 191.

the sense that the preponderance of available evidence was consistent with this representation, as well as that new evidence could come to light which would be inconsistent with it and which would then tip the scales of probability in favor of a competing representation. It is precisely such an impression of probability which serves, I will argue, to "justify" pseudo-knowledge on Kierkegaard's view.

Pseudo-knowledge may take two forms. That is, the object of pseudo-knowledge may be the correspondence of the existence of the "knower" to ethical or religious ideality, or it may be the correspondence of a mental representation of this ideality to what one could call the reality--i.e., realitet--of this ideality. What distinguishes pseudo-knowledge from subjective knowledge proper is that in this instance the required correspondence is lacking. Such an individual, according to Kierkegaard, cannot even know that his existence fails to correspond the ethical-religious ideality. That is, there is an important sense, for Kierkegaard, in which one could be said to know the status of one's relation to ethical or religious ideality only if one were properly related to it--i.e., if one's existence were an expression of this ideality.²⁷

To fail to bring one's existence into conformity with ethical or religious ideality is to be distinguished from this ideality in a sense which precludes the insight into its essence which would otherwise justify a mental representation of it. To fail to actualize ethical or religious ideality in one's existence is to fail to agree with that with which it is necessary to agree in order to achieve authentic existence. Since, as we saw, no one can fail, according to Kierkegaard, to be interested in attaining such existence, to fail to attain it, or more

²⁷Cf. Kierkegaard's claim that the truth is index sui et falsi (PF, 50/SV IV, 217) (cf., also JP 2:1340/Pap. V B 5:8 and PF, 46-47/SV IV, 213-214).

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properly, to fail to strive to attain it, must be to be ignorant of the fact that one does not already have it. Thus neither the individual who mistakenly believes--i.e., is subjectively convinced--that his existence corresponds to this ideality, nor the individual who would openly acknowledge that his existence fails so to correspond can fully appreciate either the substance of this ideality, or their status relative to it.²⁸

The difference, according to Kierkegaard, between subjective knowledge proper and pseudo-knowledge is that with the former, all the efforts of the knower are concentrated, not on the substance of the object of knowledge, but on the nature of his relation to this object, whereas with the latter, at least some of the knower's activity consists in a contemplation of the object as such, or of his mental representation of this object and whether this representation corresponds to reality. "Let us," argues Kierkegaard, "take the knowledge of God as an example. Objectively, what is reflected upon is that this is the true God; subjectively, that the individual relates himself to a something in such a way that his relation is in truth a God-relation" (CUP I, 199/SV VII, 166).

Christianity, for reasons which need not be gone into here, is the paradigm of subjective truth according to Kierkegaard, thus it is with respect to Christianity that the difficulty in endeavoring to justify subjective knowledge through reference to probability is discussed by Kierkegaard. There are two ways, according to Kierkegaard, in which one can relate oneself objectively to the truth of Christianity. The first is referred to by him as "[t]he [h]istorical [p]oint of [v]iew" (CUP I, 23-49/SV VII, 12-

²⁸Cf. Hannay's claim that, according to Kierkegaard, "genuine identification of the moral (and the true) can only occur in a properly moral practice" (Hannay, op. cit. 16).

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37) and the second is "[t]he [s]peculative [p]oint of [v]iew" (CUP I, 50-57/SV VII, 37-43). From the speculative point of view, the objective, according to Kierkegaard, is to come to an appreciation of Christianity as "the eternal thought" (CUP I, 50/SV VII, 50). That is, from the speculative point of view, one endeavors to appreciate Christianity as ethical religious ideality--one compares a mental representation of this ideality with a mental representation of Christianity to see if the one corresponds to the other. Part of the difficulty with such an activity, according to Kierkegaard, concerns the fact that intrinsic to Christianity is the claim that any mental representation one would have of ethical or religious ideality would, as a mental representation, fail to correspond to the reality of this ideality.

This is, however, not a difficulty which concerns us here. What is relevant to the present discussion is that, from the speculative point of view, the knower compares one mental representation with another. This means that the agreement between thought and being defined by Kierkegaard as truth, becomes, just as was the case with objective immanent metaphysical knowledge, the abstract self-identity of thought. There is no sense, from this perspective in which one could argue that the correspondence of the one representation to the other could be construed as probable.

This is, in fact, precisely the situation of the knower relative to the issue of the correspondence of a mental representation of ethical ideality--to the extent that this can be distinguished from religious or Christian ideality--to the reality of this ideality. That is, any effort to establish such correspondence will always be an effort to establish the correspondence of one abstract, or ideal, object to another. Christianity, however, according to Kierkegaard, has a historical dimension that the moral

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law, as such, does not. Thus when Christianity is considered from this perspective--i.e., when the knower endeavors to establish the correspondence of a mental representation of Christianity to the reality of Christianity as a historical phenomenon, probability emerges as a candidate for the justification of religious knowledge. "If," argues Kierkegaard,

Christianity is viewed as a historical document, the important thing is to obtain a completely reliable report of what the Christian doctrine really is. If the inquiring subject were infinitely interested in his relation to this truth, he would here despair at once, because nothing is easier to perceive than this, that with regard to the historical the greatest certainty is only an approximation. (CUP I, 23/SV VII, 12)

"When," continues Kierkegaard "the truth of Christianity is asked about historically, or what is and what is not Christian truth, Holy Scripture immediately presents itself as a crucial document. Therefore, the historical point of view focuses first upon the Bible" (CUP I, 23/SV VII, 13). "If Scripture," he continues,

is viewed as the secure stronghold that decides what is Christian and what is not, then the important thing is to secure Scripture historically-critically. Here the canonicity of particular books is dealt with, their authenticity and integrity, the author's axiomaticity, and a dogmatic guarantee is posited. (CUP I, 24/SV VII, 13-14)

The difficulty, of course, is that this guarantee cannot be absolute, but rests merely on the probability of the authenticity of particular passages from Scripture. That is, certainty, for reasons give in chapter seven, is not accessible with respect to the issue of the

correspondence of a particular mental representation to the reality of the past. The closest one can come to proving such correspondence is to establish its apparent probability.

The appreciation of the apparent probability of the correspondence of a given mental representation to reality could serve, according to Kierkegaard, to justify knowledge in the loose sense--i.e., scholarly and scientific knowledge--precisely because the correspondence of such representations to reality was inherently uncertain. This is not, however, the case with respect to subjective knowledge. Probability does not preclude the possibility that one could be mistaken as to the substance of the object with which it is connected. When, however, that object is essentially prescriptive, and thus imposes a responsibility on the knower to conform his existence to the substance of the prescriptions, there cannot be any possibility that the knower is mistaken as to this substance. That is, such a possibility would negate the prescriptive nature of the object of knowledge in that one could not be made responsible for doing something one did not fully appreciate one ought to have done.

To the extent that the "justification" of pseudo-knowledge is understood to be the impression of the "knower" that the correspondence of the mental representation in question to reality is probable, this "knowledge," according to Kierkegaard, is "justified" in the same pejorative sense in which it was said to be knowledge--i.e., it is not really justified at all.²⁹

²⁹I have not made reference here to the arguments Kierkegaard actually uses in the Postscript against any significance that probability could have with respect to establishing the truth of Christianity. That is, Kierkegaard argues that probability, or approximation, with respect to matters related to the truth of Christianity such as whether or not a particular part of the biblical canon was actually inspired, or whether the church, as a

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spiritual entity has actually existed since the time Christ, is impossible to attain (cf. CUP I 23-49/SV VII, 12-37). My argument has been that even if it were possible to attain probability of this sort, the appreciation of this probability would fall short, for the reasons given above, of justifying the mental representation with which it was associated.

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Ontological and mathematical knowledge, as we saw in chapter eight, belong, according to Kierkegaard, to the realm of immanent metaphysical knowledge. There is, however, some immanent metaphysical knowledge which appears, at least immediately to be more problematic than ontological and mathematical knowledge. That is, immanent metaphysical knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, includes not merely ontological and mathematical knowledge but also such knowledge as that there is a God and that one has an immortal soul. The difficulty with this knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, does not essentially have to do with the substance of it as a mental representation, but with the fact that people are unwilling to let it "get control of their minds" (JP 3:3606/Pap. V B 40:11). It is, however, precisely the potential of this knowledge to "get control" of the subject which distinguishes it from objective immanent metaphysical knowledge which is indifferent to the existence of the individual knower as such.

§14.1. Knowledge of God.

Kierkegaard is widely believed to belong to a skeptical tradition which would appear to preclude any claim to religious knowledge.¹ As early as 1835, however, there is

¹Cf., e.g., Popkin's "Kierkegaard and Scepticism," op. cit. and Terrence Penelhum, "Skepticism and Fideism," The

a reference in his journals to the possibility of such knowledge² and in 1840 there is another reference, this one to his plans for developing a "speculative Christian epistemology [Erkiendelseslære]." ³ The reader might be tempted to conclude that these remarks were written by Kierkegaard before his thoughts were developed to the point where such knowledge would have been precluded. We will see, however, that the concern with, and references to, religious knowledge continue throughout Kierkegaard's authorship, and that the above conclusion is thus impossible to sustain. Christensen argues that Kierkegaard "emphasizes that God is present in human consciousness"⁴ and Kierkegaard does indeed refer to human beings as having an "eternal consciousness" which he associates with a love of God.⁵

It would appear Kierkegaard believes that the idea that there is a God, is built into the contents of human consciousness. Precisely how this is so is something he does not address explicitly. It may be assumed to be part

Skeptical Tradition, op. cit. 287-318.

²"I can indeed conceive of a philosophy after Christianity," writes Kierkegaard, "or after one has become a Christian, but then it would be a Christian philosophy. Then the relationship would not be one of philosophy to Christianity but of Christianity to Christian knowledge [christlige Erkiendelse] or, if one insists, Christian philosophy" (JP 3:3245/Pap. I A 94).

³"Everything Is New In Christ. This will be my position for a speculative Christian Epistemology [Erkiendelseslære]. (New not merely insofar as it is different but also as the relationship of the renewed, the rejuvenated, to the obsolescent, the obsolete)" (JP 2:2277/Pap. III A 211).

⁴Christensen, op. cit. 59.

⁵Cf., e.g., FT 48/SV III, 98.

of the way consciousness itself is constructed.⁶ It might be associated with the individual's appreciation that his is a finite or limited, rather than infinite or unlimited, form of rationality. It might be roughly equivalent to a kind of Schleiermachian feeling of absolute dependence. There may, in fact, be a number of ways in which the idea that there is a God may be understood to be part of the contents of an individual's consciousness. What is important, in this context, is not accounting for the presence of this idea among the contents of the consciousness of the knowing subject, but providing an account of how the mere idea that there is a God is translated, according to Kierkegaard, into knowledge that there is a God. We saw in Part II of this thesis that, according to Kierkegaard, it was not possible to prove objectively that there was a God, so it is reasonable to ask in what this knowledge consists and how it is one attains it?

"One does not have faith," argues Kierkegaard, "that the god is [er til], eternally understood, even though one assumes [antager] that the god is. This is [an] improper use of language. Socrates did not have faith that there was a God [at guden var til]. What he knew about the god he attained by recollection" (PF, 87/SV IV, 250).⁷ This reference to recollection recurs in Kierkegaard's journals where he observes that both proving that there is a God, and being convinced of this by proofs, are "equally fantastic,"

⁶Cf. SUD, 13/SV XI, 127-128; PF, 87/SV IV, 250 and SV XII, 285.

⁷I have altered the translation slightly. The Hongs' translate "er til" as "exists," but but such a translation, for the reasons given above (cf. chapter two and chapter eight, §8.1.1.), is misleading.

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for just as no one has ever proven it [i.e., that there is a God], so has there never been an atheist, even though there certainly have been many who have been unwilling to let what they knew (that there was a God [Guden]) get control of their minds.... With respect to the existence [Tilværelsen] of God, immortality, etc., in short with respect to all problems of immanence, recollection applies; it exists altogether in everyone [ethvert Menneske] only he does not know it. (JP 3:3606/Pap. V B 40:11.)

The question is, how does recollection work according to Kierkegaard? The doctrine of recollection, according to Plato, is that all knowledge is implicitly part of the contents of the consciousness of the knowing subject. The subject is understood to have had of other lives during which he attained knowledge of all there was to know. This implicit knowledge may thus be made explicit to consciousness, the theory goes, through the process of recollection.⁸ It is clear, however, that Kierkegaard is not attributing multiple lives to the knower, thus it is reasonable to ask in what sense he is using the expression 'recollection.'⁹

Meno's slave comes to know something about geometry as a result of having recollected it, but he is also able to demonstrate what he knows¹⁰ in a way that one is not, on Kierkegaard's view, able to demonstrate that there is a God. What is important here is that the apparent lack of the objective demonstrability of the correspondence of the idea that there is a God to reality does not appear, on

⁸Both the above articulation of the substance of Plato's doctrine of recollection, and the question of whether it is actually appropriate to attribute the theory to Plato at all, are problematic. These are not, however, issues with which the present essay is concerned.

⁹Cf. chapter eight, §8.1.

¹⁰Cf. Meno, op. cit.

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Kierkegaard's view, to deprive the knower of certainty regarding this correspondence.

Knowledge that there is a God is obtained, according to Kierkegaard, by willing to be convinced of this, which is accomplished, on his view, by allowing oneself to be immersed in the idea that there is a God.¹¹ Kierkegaard argues, however, that this God the idea of which is part of the contents of consciousness "is not a name but a concept" (PF, 41/SV IV, 208). The certainty of the knower that his belief that there is such a God corresponds to reality, is thus possible because the reality in question is conceptual reality. That is, the agreement here between thought and being that constitutes truth, according to Kierkegaard, is, just as was the case with ontological and mathematical knowledge, a tautology which means that the correspondence of the mental representation in question to reality is necessary.

The reality in question, however, is mere conceptual reality which means that objectively, all we can be said to know is that the idea of God has reality as an idea. When Kierkegaard argues, however, that one assumes that there is a God he means more than that one assumes that the idea that there is a God has reality as an idea. Slotty claims, for example, that even though Kierkegaard acknowledges that "how one is oneself has an essential influence on one's mental representation of God . . . he felt he was presented with religious realities which existed independently of this subjective contribution."¹² This view is supported by Kierkegaard's assertion that "[e]very human life is religiously designed [lagt religiøst an]," and that "[t]o want to deny this confuses everything" (CA, 105/SV IV,

¹¹Cf. JP 3:3606/Pap. V B 40:11.

¹²Slotty, op. cit. 63.

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374).¹³

Kierkegaard does not believe that God is a product of human thought, or that knowledge that there is a God is equivalent to the appreciation that the idea of God has reality as an idea. "The philosophers think," argues Kierkegaard

that all knowledge, yes, even the existence [Tilværelse] of the deity, is something man [Menneskeheden] himself produces and that revelation can be referred to only in a figurative sense in somewhat the same sense as one may say that rain falls down from heaven, since rain is nothing but earth-produced mist; but they forget to keep the metaphor, that in the beginning God separated the waters of the heaven and of the earth and that there is something higher than the atmosphere. (JP 2:2266/Pap. II A 523.)

That is, the idea that there is a God was placed among the contents of the consciousness of the knower was put there, according to Kierkegaard, by God himself. The difficulty is that the presence of the idea in the individual's consciousness says nothing about how it came to be there.

What is important in this context is that the idea that there is a God is not, on Kierkegaard's view, as were the ideas associated with objective immanent metaphysical knowledge, indifferent to the existence of the individual knower. It is, at this point, far from apparent what sort of significance the mere idea that there is a God can have for what it means to exist. That it is significant, however, is implied in Kierkegaard's observation that "there have been many who have been unwilling to let what they knew [i.e., that there was a God] get control of their minds" (JP 3:3606/Pap. V B 40:11). It is in this reference to the potential that the idea that there is a God has to

¹³Cf., e.g., FT 15/SV III, 68; CA, 105/SV IV, 374

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get control of the mind of the knower that we will find the key to understanding how the mere idea that there is a God is translated, according to Kierkegaard, into knowledge.

I argued, in the introduction to this thesis, that knowledge, on Kierkegaard's view, was a justified true mental representation and that it was associated with certainty. Objective immanent metaphysical knowledge, as we saw, was associated with certainty in the sense of the appreciation of the knower of the objective necessity of the correspondence of a given mental representation to reality. Subjective immanent metaphysical knowledge is also associated with certainty. To the extent, however, that all subjective knowledge is understood by Kierkegaard to be essentially prescriptive, the certainty of the knower that a given mental representation corresponds to reality will, as I explained above, be inexorably intertwined with his appreciation of the subjective necessity of the correspondence of the reality--i.e., actuality--of his existence to this mental representation.

"The thought of God's existence [Tilværelsen]," according to Kierkegaard, "when it is posited as such for the individual's freedom, has an omnipresence [and] [t]o live in beautiful intimate companionship with this conception [Forestilling] truly requires inwardness" (CA, 140/SV IV, 406). That is, the thought that there is a God, i.e., an omnipotent, omniscient creator of the universe, brings with it an impression of obligation relative to this God. That the god in question is an idea (forestilling) is unimportant to the extent that it engenders an impression of duty or obligation of which the knowing subject cannot rid himself.

To have the impression that one has a duty to God is equivalent to the impression of the subjective necessity of bringing one's existence into conformity with the divine will. That is, to have the impression that one has a duty

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to God is to have an impression of the subjective necessity of the correspondence of the reality--i.e., actuality--of one's existence to one's mental representation of the substance of this will.

A duty is essentially subjective in that it prescribes the character of the existence of the knowing subject. This can be seen, Kierkegaard argues, even in the language we use to talk about duties. "I never say of a man," he argues, "He is doing duty or duties; but I say: He is doing his duty; I say: I am doing my duty, do your duty" (EO II, 263/SV II, 236). "Everyone has his duty," observes Hügli, "and no one can tell another person what his duty is. this is what makes each person an individual."¹⁴ But to say that a duty is essentially subjective is to argue that it is necessarily related to the subject's appreciation of it as such. That is, not to appreciate that one has a duty of a particular sort, in this context, is not to have a such a duty in that one can only be made responsible for fulfilling a duty that one appreciated as such.¹⁵ By the same logic, to have an impression of an obligation of a particular sort is equivalent to being obligated in this way. That is, to the extent that one cannot rid oneself of this impression, one will experience a feeling of approbation, or disapprobation, depending on whether one has succeeded, or failed, to realize the substance of what

¹⁴Hügli, op. cit. 156.

¹⁵Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 155. It is, of course, possible to make people legally responsible for things which they may not have known they were responsible for on the grounds that they ought to have known. The issue in this context, however, is not that of the responsibility one may have to make sure that one is sufficiently well-informed concerning one's obligations, but rather of the responsibility one has, according to Kierkegaard, not to flee from one's knowledge of these obligations, or not to deceive oneself concerning the substance of one's duty to God and one's fellow human being.

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one believed to be one's duty. To be unable to rid oneself of the impression of an obligation of a particular sort is, in fact, to justify the feeling of approbation or disapprobation associated with one's success or failure to realize this obligation. That is, to have realized the substance of what one believed to be one's duty is to have done what one believed one ought to have done and thus to merit approbation, whereas to fail to do what one believed one ought to have done is to merit disapprobation.

We saw in chapter seven that there were two senses, according to Kierkegaard, in which a mental representation of objective reality could be justified. When, as was the case with respect to objective immanent metaphysical knowledge, the knower was understood to be immediately related to the reality to which a given mental representation referred, the justification of this representation was equivalent to the appreciation of the knower of the objective necessity of its correspondence to reality. This necessity was, as we saw, associated with the inconceivability that the representation in question could fail to correspond to reality. The justification of a mental representation of actuality was associated, however, with an appreciation of the apparent probability of its correspondence to reality. To claim, however, that the correspondence of a given mental representation to reality is probable is to acknowledge, at the same time, that it is possible--i.e., conceivable--that it does not so correspond.

The question we must address now concerns the nature of the subjective conviction that one has a duty to God. That is, is this feeling the result of the appreciation of the necessity of the correspondence of the mental representation in question to reality, or is it the result of the impression of the probability of such correspondence? Kierkegaard's answer to this question must

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be that it is the former. That is, to conceive of not having such a duty--i.e., of there not being a God, for the idea of God implies the duty in question--would be equivalent to conceiving one's existence as devoid of this impression of duty, or actually to rid oneself of this impression in the activity of conceiving of one's existence without it and this, on Kierkegaard's view, is impossible. That is, the individual must, on Kierkegaard's view, always possess an impression of this responsibility¹⁶ even if he is engaged in the activity of obscuring it from himself, or of calculating "exactly what he needs to keep safely in the state in which his consciousness does not disturbingly awaken" (JY, 117/SV XII, 398).

To be unable to rid oneself of the impression that one has a duty to God thus means that subjectively, one really does have such a duty, and that the correspondence of the mental representation that one has a duty to God to reality is subjectively necessary. The appreciation of this necessity is equivalent to psychological certainty in the same sense that the appreciation of the objective necessity of the correspondence of a given mental representation to reality was equivalent to such certainty. That the necessity in question is subjective is entirely in order in that the knowledge with which it is associated is subjective knowledge.

To be certain, in this way, that one has a duty to God is to be certain that there is a God, or to be certain that this idea corresponds to reality in the sense that it is inconceivable that it does not so correspond. This is presumably what Kierkegaard means when he says: "I do not believe that there is a God, but I know it" (JP 3:3085/Pap.

¹⁶Cf., e.g., SE 34/SV XII, 323 and JP 1:230/Pap. X⁴ A 247.

VI B 45).¹⁷ That is, I know there is a God in that, I am convinced I have a duty to this God the idea of which is part of the contents of my consciousness. We are certain that the mental representation that there is a God, whom we have a duty to obey, corresponds to reality because we are immediately related to the reality of this duty, and thus of this God, through our impression of sacred responsibility.

Knowledge that there is a God would thus appear equivalent to the justified true mental representation that there is a God in the sense that the knower is certain that he has an obligation relative to the idea of God which is part of the contents of his consciousness, which is to say that the mental representation that he has such a duty is justified by his appreciation of the truth of this representation in the sense of the necessity of its correspondence to reality.

The difficulty with this account of the nature of the knowledge that there is a God, is that it would appear to make truth the property of the mental representation that there is a God, whereas I have argued that subjective truth cannot be a property of a mental representation as such, but is the property of the existence of the knower. That is, the agreement in question between thought and being which constitutes truth, on Kierkegaard's view, must ultimately be established in being--i.e., in the conformity of the existence of the knower to his mental representation that he has a duty to God. If the subject does not bring his existence into conformity with this mental representation, then he can be said to "disagree" with it.

It is because the knowledge that there is a God is inexorably intertwined with the subjective impression that one has a duty to God that it properly belongs to the realm

¹⁷Emphasis added.

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of subjective knowledge on Kierkegaard's view. That is, knowledge that there is a God is indistinguishable from the knower's impression that there is something God wants from him and is thus essentially related to his existence as such. It might be argued that what God wants is not so clear. According to Kierkegaard, however, not only are we always aware, to some degree or another, that we have a religious duty, we are always aware, to some degree or another, of in what this duty consists. That is, the Socratic principle, argues Kierkegaard, that one does not knowingly do wrong is correct in that "sin has its roots in the will [Villien], not in knowledge [Erkjendelsen] and this corruption of the will affects the individual's consciousness" (SUD, 95/SV XI, 206).¹⁸ This corruption of the will affects the individual's consciousness, according to Kierkegaard, in that it facilitates the dialectic of self-deception. Self-deception may, in turn, be carried out on such a scale that it becomes difficult to distinguish whether the individual in question did, in fact, know what he ought to have done.¹⁹

"Every person," argues Kierkegaard, "always knows the truth a good deal farther out than he expresses it existentially" (JP 1:230/Pap. X⁴ A 247). One's failure to express in one's existence what one "knows," according to Kierkegaard, at some level, one ought to express, is not due to an inadequate in one's mental representation of the substance of this duty, but to a weakness of will.²⁰ Kierkegaard is compelled to assume one "knows" one's

¹⁸I have altered the Hongs' translation slightly. That is, the Hongs have translated "Villien" as "willing" and "Erkjendelsen" as "knowing." It is clear, however, that both expressions are nouns from the fact that they are both capitalized in the original text.

¹⁹Cf. SUD, 88-89/SV XI, 199-200.

²⁰Cf. JP 1:230/Pap. X⁴ A 247.

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religious duty in the sense that one has an adequate mental representation of this duty because this is the only way one can be held responsible for doing it.

Subjective truth, however, as we saw, cannot be a property of a mental representation. To the extent that the knowledge that there is a God is inexorably intertwined with the impression that one has a duty to God, this knowledge is prescriptive and the truth to which it relates must be instantiated in the existence of the knower as a result of his having brought his existence into conformity with his mental representation of this duty. But if truth, in this context, is equivalent to the conformity of the existence of the knower to his mental representation of his duty to God, in what sense can he be said to "know[] the truth a good deal further out than [he] expresses it existentially"? That is, it appears it is necessary, in this context, to retain a conception of truth which is the property of a mental representation itself, rather than of the existence of the knower, if he is not to contradict himself.

Truth is, again, an agreement between thought and being, or between ideality and reality. There is a sense, however, in this context, in which one can speak of degrees of agreement. That is, the knower can be understood to establish an agreement between thought and being not merely in the sense that he brings his existence into complete conformity with the mental representation in question, but also in the sense that he can be said to approximate (tilnærme)²¹ such conformity through the acceptance that he ought to feel guilty whenever he failed to establish complete conformity. The acceptance that he ought to feel guilty if he failed to establish such conformity is an act

²¹Cf. chapter twelve, §12.1. for this significance of this expression.

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of the knowing subject. That is, such acceptance represents the cancelled possibility of self-deception in the sense that while it is not possible, on Kierkegaard's view, to fail to appreciate that one becomes guilty to the extent that one fails to behave in the way one believes one ought to have behaved, it is possible to reject that one ought to feel guilty to the extent that one can endeavor to deceive oneself with respect to one's guilt.²²

One is said to be certain of the correspondence of one's mental representation that there is a God to reality to the extent that one appreciates the subjective necessity of the correspondence of the reality--i.e., actuality--of one's existence to God's laws. This appreciation must, however, be a product of the latter correspondence.²³ That is, one cannot be said to appreciate that the necessity of bringing one's existence into conformity with God's law if one fails to do this. The acceptance, however, that one ought to feel guilty for failing to establish such conformity constitutes just such an agreement between reality and thought which was defined by Kierkegaard as truth. That is, to accept that one ought to feel guilty for failing to bring one's existence into conformity with one's religious duty is to agree with the reality of this duty. The acceptance that one ought to feel guilty for failing to actualize one's religious duty is thus the first step down the path of the actualization of this duty.

That the agreement between being and thought which constitutes subjective truth admits of degrees in a sense

²²Cf. Hannay's contention that "the purpose of the [i.e., Kierkegaard's] psychological works is to offer an account of human life and its interests in which even the apparently most rational denials of a transcendent source of personal value are to be interpreted as an expression of a deep-seated dread, of fear of the very notion itself" (Hannay, op. cit. 169).

²³Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 228.

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in which the agreement between thought and being which constitutes objective truth does not will turn out to be essential for understanding the nature of the former on Kierkegaard's view. That is, there is an important sense, as we will see, in which one is never entirely successful in bringing one's existence into conformity with ethical-religious ideality. This does not mean, however, that the degree to which one expresses truth is a matter of indifference according to Kierkegaard. To come no closer, for example, to an expression of subjective truth than to accept that one ought to feel guilty for failing to conform one's existence to ethical-religious ideality is precisely to condemn oneself. That is, it is, according to Kierkegaard, "most terrible of all that one should have known everything, and not have begun to do the least" (CS, 18/SV V, 188). For "[t]he point," according to Kierkegaard, "is that where there is a deficiency in knowledge the truth does not, after all, become a charge against one's character, but where knowledge is present, then the truth becomes criminal" (JP 4:4237/Pap. XI² A 85).

I mentioned above that, according to Kierkegaard, not only is an individual assumed to know he has a duty to God, he is assumed to know in what precisely this duty consists. This duty will turn out to be indistinguishable from his ethical duty. Before preceding, however, to an examination of the nature of one's ethical-religious duty, according to Kierkegaard, we must look briefly at another type of immanent metaphysical knowledge which, according to Kierkegaard, is essentially related to the existence of the knowing subject.

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§14.2. Self knowledge.

Part of immanent metaphysical reality, according to Kierkegaard, concerns the nature of the knower himself. The self, however, as an object of knowledge, is not entirely unproblematic. A human being has, again, what Kierkegaard refers to as an "eternally established essence [evigt anlagte Væsen]" (CUP I, 583/SV VII, 508), but his existence, as we saw, is not actually according to this essence.²⁴ What does not characterize his existence essentially, but only accidentally, would not, according to Kierkegaard, appear an object of knowledge. Sin, as we saw, is considered, by Kierkegaard, to be a contingent characteristic of human existence. That is, it does not belong to the eternally established essence of the individual knower, but was something he appropriated through a free action. It is for this reason he maintains that "a person [Mennesket] has to learn what sin is by a revelation from God" (SUD, 95/SV XI, 206).²⁵

But if one cannot, according to Kierkegaard, know one is a sinner, there are other things one can know about oneself. Or, more precisely, there are things that one is not merely able to know, but which, in a sense, one is assumed already to know. One knows, for example, that one has a soul. Knowledge that one has a soul appears, on Kierkegaard's view, to be similar in essence to the knowledge that there is a God. That one has a soul--i.e., that there is such a thing as a soul which adheres to one's being--can be no more capable of objective demonstration than that there is a God.

It would appear that the idea that he has a soul, like

²⁴Cf. chapter thirteen, §13.1.

²⁵This, as we will presently see, is one of the differences between sin and guilt.

the idea that there is a God, is a part of the contents of the consciousness of the knower. Knowledge that one has a soul appears, however, to be somewhat different, according to Kierkegaard, from the knowledge that there is a God. That is, the soul, on his view, is one half of the synthesis which comprises the knower. The Danish word for 'soul,' 'sjæl'²⁶ is similar in meaning to the English 'intellect.'²⁷ Knowledge that one has a soul is thus like knowledge that there is a God to the extent that the correspondence of the mental representation that one has a soul to reality is not established through an objective demonstration, but is the result of the subject's immersing himself in the contents of his consciousness. Certainty of this correspondence derives, again, from the tautological character of the representation. The tautology in question is, however, of a different sort than that associated with the belief that there is a God. That is, the correspondence of the idea that there is a God to reality was tautological because the reality in question was, in the first instance, merely thought reality.²⁸ The reality of the soul is also immediately only thought reality, but in this instance it is not a particular thought reality, it is the subject's own reality as a thinking being. That the idea that he exists [er til] as a thinking being could fail

²⁶Kierkegaard actually spells 'sjæl' with an 'e' instead of the standard 'æ' (cf. Watkin op. cit. 89).

²⁷Cf. Ferrall-Gudm. Repp., op. cit. 279; Molbech, op. cit. Anden Deel, 720-724 and Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit. vol. II, 322.

²⁸I do not mean here to imply that the reality to which the mental representation that there is a God corresponds is not thought reality, but rather that it is a very particular kind of thought reality which has a significance, or consequences, for the individual knowing subject which mere thought reality--e.g., the reality of the idea that there are unicorns--does not have and that it thus transcends mere thought reality in this sense.

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to correspond to reality is inconceivable. Indeed, to try to conceive it is to involve the subject in a self-contradiction. Such correspondence is thus necessary according to the rules of thought.

Self-knowledge in this context, however, is not restricted to the knowledge that one exists as a thinking being. Knowledge of "immortality" is also considered by Kierkegaard to belong to the realm of immanent metaphysical knowledge.²⁹ That idea that the soul, or intellect, is immortal may be part of the contents of the consciousness of the subject to the extent that he is inclined to associate generation and destruction with physical, or tangible, being. The correspondence of the mental representation that the soul is immortal to reality is necessary in the sense that the individual cannot conceive of himself as not existing as a thinking being. Every such effort is doomed in the sense that he must use thought in order to conceive its own non-being, but to the extent that he is using thought he is affirming his existence as a thinking being. The reality to which the mental representation that the soul is immortal corresponds is thought reality. The correspondence in question is thus nothing other than the self-identity of the individual's inability to conceive of himself as not existing as a thinking being.

Just as was the case, however, with the idea that there was a God, the idea that one has a soul is not obviously significant with respect to what it means to exist. That is, to the extent that this idea appears equivalent to the idea that one exists as a thinking being, it would not appear to impose any responsibilities on the knower--i.e., it would not appear prescriptive in the way

²⁹Cf. Hannay's claim that "Kierkegaard's despairer proper is one who in some sense knows . . . that death is not the end" (Hannay, op. cit. 33).

I argued all subjective knowledge was. Yet Kierkegaard argues that the thought of the soul's immortality "possesses and weightiness in its consequences, a responsibility in the acceptance of it which perhaps will transform the whole of life in a way that is feared" (CA, 139/SV IV, 405-406).³⁰ It is only when the idea that there is a God is brought into relation to the idea that one has a soul that this latter knowledge has a prescriptive dimension.

The knowledge that there is a God is again inexorably intertwined with the impression that one has a duty relative to God. The full import of this becomes clear, however, only when it is brought into relation to the idea that one has a soul.³¹ That is, the necessity of bringing one's existence into conformity with God's law is apparent in the formulation: "thou shalt!" The failure to live up to this demand is, according to Kierkegaard, the failure to exist according to one's eternally established essence which, as we saw in the preceding chapter, is, in an important sense, to fail to exist at all. This perspective is, however, as we will presently see, more ethical than it is religious, to the extent, that is, that these two can be distinguished according to Kierkegaard. The idea that one has an immortal soul, which when brought into relation to the knowledge that there is a God means, in fact, more than that if one fails to bring one's existence into conformity with God's law, then one will have failed to exist in an authentic sense, it means that one will be subject to God's

³⁰I have altered the Hongs' translation here slightly. The Hongs have "recreate" where I have "transform." The Danish expression in question is 'omskabe,' which is more properly translated as 'remodel' (cf. Ferrall-Gudm. Repp., op. cit. 223). 'Remodel' is somewhat awkward, however, in this context, thus I have chosen "transform," which I believe preserves the sense of 'remodel.'

³¹Cf. CA, 138-139/SV IV, 405-406.

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eternal disapprobation. That is, the idea that one has a soul, combined with the knowledge that there is a God, means that to fail to live according to God's command is to be consigned to eternal damnation.³²

Certainty that the mental representation that one has an immortal soul corresponds to reality is thus, just as was the case with the certainty that one's mental representation that there was a God corresponded to reality, inexorably intertwined with an appreciation of the subjective necessity of the correspondence of the reality--i.e., actuality--of one's existence to God's law. To the extent that this knowledge is essentially subjective, according to Kierkegaard, the truth with which it is associated is something which must be expressed in the existence of the knower. Just as was the case, however, with the knowledge that there was a God, the agreement here between reality and ideality, or between being and thought, which is defined by Kierkegaard as truth admits of degrees. That is, such agreement is not linked to the absolute conformity of the knower to his mental representation of the substance of God's law, but may also be approximated (tilnærmet) in the sense that he accepts that the failure to establish such conformity means that one ought to be consigned to eternal damnation. To accept that one ought to be consigned to eternal damnation is to agree with the substance of God's law. Such acceptance is thus the first step down the path of the actualization of this law.

Kierkegaard rarely refers, however, to the necessity of obeying God's will in order to avoid eternal damnation. It is primarily the necessity of such obedience for the positive objective of attaining authentic human existence, or becoming a self, with which he is concerned. Such an

³²Cf. POH, 127/SV VIII, 183; CD, 230/SV X, 224; CD, 292/SV X, 298 and JP 2:1638/Pap. VI B 35:25.

objective belongs, however, to what Kierkegaard calls the ethical-religious sphere.

§14.3. Ethical-Religious Knowledge

"Kierkegaard's psychology," argues Hannay, "flatly acknowledges the reality of ethics and attempts no scientific explanation of it."³³ Immanent metaphysical knowledge thus encompasses, according to Kierkegaard, not merely ontological and mathematical knowledge, knowledge that there is a God and knowledge that one has a soul which is immortal, it also encompassed knowledge of eternally valid norms for human behavior.³⁴ To the extent that these norms are eternally valid, they are essentially the same, according to Kierkegaard, in both Paganism and Christianity.³⁵ It is for this reason Socrates is such an important figure for Kierkegaard. That is, Socrates is the paradigm of the ethical individual, according to Kierkegaard, in that although he "was a thinking person, . . . he placed all other knowledge in the sphere of indifference and infinitely accentuated ethical knowledge, which relates itself to the existing subject infinitely interested in existence" (CUP I, 317/SV VII, 272).

There are, however, according to Kierkegaard, two conceptions of ethics in that it is possible to consider these norms independently of the specific significance they receive when placed in relation to Christianity. Ethics considered in this way, he argues "points to ideality as a task and presumes that everyone possesses the requisite

³³Hannay, op. cit. 160.

³⁴Cf. Malantschuk, Nøglebegreber, op. cit. 44-45 and Hannay, op. cit. 158.

³⁵Cf. CA, 20-21/SV IV, 293.

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conditions" (CA, 16/SV IV, 288).³⁶ This view of ethics founders, however, according to Kierkegaard, on the individual's sinfulness. That is, ethics, according to Kierkegaard, or what one could call the moral law, demands that the knower be perfect, yet he cannot live up to this demand.³⁷ That is, while "speculative philosophy breaks down when it believes that, with the help of thought, it can deduce historical actuality from ideality, ethics breaks down when it believes it can actualize ideality through action."³⁸ Dogmatics comes to the aid of ethics, however, with the introduction of the concept of hereditary sin. Thus religious ethics, or "the new ethics[,] presupposes dogmatics and with it hereditary sin, . . . while at the same time it sets ideality as the task" (CA, 20/SV IV, 293).³⁹ It is in this way that ethical duty becomes inseparable for Kierkegaard from religious duty. That is, ethical duty becomes religious duty.⁴⁰

"[E]thically," argues Kierkegaard, "the individual is simply and solely interested infinitely in his own

³⁶Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 218.

³⁷Cf. Hannay's observation that Kierkegaard's "objection to traditional ethics [is] that it finds no real place for sin; that it assumes that persons are naturally capable of realizing whatever ideality reason dictates, and fails to appreciate that the significance of sin is its denial of this assumption" (Hannay, op. cit. 170).

³⁸Hügli, op. cit. 222. Cf. FT, 98-99/SV III, 146 and Slotty, op. cit. 69.

³⁹I have altered the Hongs' translation slightly. The Danish reads "Den nye Ethik forudsætter Dogmatik og med den Arvesynden, . . ." The Hongs have mistakenly attached "og med den Arvesynden [and with it hereditary sin]" to the next clause of the sentence.

⁴⁰Cf., e.g., CUP I, 137/SV VII, 111; CUP I, 294/SV VII, 252; CUP, 307/SV VII, 263 and Hügli, op. cit. 150.

actuality" (CUP I, 324/SV VII, 278)⁴¹ and this actuality is, in turn, his infinite inward interest in existing according to ethical ideality.⁴² To live ethically is thus to strive to bring one's existence into conformity with eternally valid ethical norms. Or, as Hügli expresses it: "The meaning of ethical action consists solely in my efforts to infuse my life with ideality."⁴³ To instantiate these norms, according to Kierkegaard, is to become actual, or to become "disclosed before God" (CUP I, 58/SV VII, 130) and to become disclosed before God in this way is equivalent, according to Kierkegaard, to becoming "a whole human being" (CUP I, 346/SV VII, 300).⁴⁴

The ethical is, however, not merely a doing, it is also a knowing that is related to a doing.⁴⁵ That is, in order to be able to do the good one must know what the good is.⁴⁶ A mental representation of eternally valid ethical norms must thus be assumed, by Kierkegaard, to be part of the contents of the consciousness of the knowing subject in the same way that the idea that there was a God, etc., was part of these contents. "[T]here is no question," explains Hannay, "of 'teaching' the distinction between good and bad, for this comes of itself with the positing of

⁴¹Cf. CUP I, 319/SV VII, 274.

⁴²Cf. CUP I, 325/SV VII, 280.

⁴³Hügli, op. cit. 229. Cf. ibid. 182.

⁴⁴The idea of God, as well as the individual's relationship to God is so essentially related, according to Kierkegaard, to what it means to be a human being that he argues that "to do away with God is to cease to be human" (CD, 38/SV X, 40).

⁴⁵Cf., CUP I, 160-161/SV VII, 132.

⁴⁶Cf. EUD, 361-362/SV V, 136; Hügli, op. cit. 230 and Hannay's observation that it is assumed throughout [Purity of Heart] that the reader has a correct theoretical notion of what he aspires to" (Hannay, op. cit. 228).

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spirit."⁴⁷ The consciousness of the knower must be assumed to be essentially characterized by an impression that he has a duty to God as well as by an impression of in precisely what this duty consists.⁴⁸

Thus Kierkegaard argues that "the thing which a person [et Menneske] ought to do is always easy to understand . . . infinitely easy to understand" (JP 3:2874/Pap. X³ A 169). That is, it is easy to understand in that it is indistinguishable from one's subjective impression of what one ought to do. If this were not the case then the ethical would be only hypothetically valid. That is, if one knew what one ought to do, then one would be responsible for doing it. Whereas if one did not know what one ought to do, then one would not be responsible for doing it. But one is always responsible for behaving ethically, according to Kierkegaard, because "[t]he ethical," he argues, is "the absolute" (CUP I, 142/SV VII, 116). "The most limited poor creature," argues Kierkegaard, "cannot truthfully deny being able to understand this requirement" (SE, 35/SV XII, 323).⁴⁹

The correspondence of one's mental representation of one's ethical, or religious, duty to the reality of this duty is necessary in that the possibility that there could be a discrepancy between one's subjective impression of one's duty and the reality of that duty is self-contradictory. That is, if one's impression of one's ethical duty failed to correspond to the reality of that

⁴⁷Hannay, op. cit. 227.

⁴⁸Kierkegaard is careful to explain, however, that the fact that the individual has, so to speak, his teleology in himself in the sense that it is built into the contents of his consciousness, does not mean the individual "is sufficient unto himself [er det centrale]" (EO II, 274/SV II, 246).

⁴⁹Cf. JY, 118/SV XII, 398 and SV X, 173.

duty, there could be no question of this reality because where the impression would be inadequate, one would not be held accountable. One is responsible for doing only what one knows one ought to do.⁵⁰

To argue, however, that the consciousness of the knower is essentially characterized by an impression of the substance of his ethical-religious duty is not equivalent to arguing that this duty can never be obscure. That is, it is possible to deceive oneself with respect to this duty. To the extent that the consciousness of the knower is essentially characterized by an impression of his ethical-religious duty, self-deception cannot consist in willed ignorance of it, but must consist in the efforts of this subject to deceive himself with respect to whether he has succeeded in fulfilling it. One may be said, for example, to possess a mental representation of one's duty to relate in a particular way to the people with whom one comes into contact and yet to obscure the substance of this duty to the extent that one endeavors to view oneself as having fulfilled it when, in fact, one has not.⁵¹

Just as was the case, however, with the knowledge that there was a God, a mental representation of the substance of one's ethical, or religious, duty, viewed independently of its actualization, cannot be said to be true. That is, to the extent that this knowledge is essentially prescriptive, the agreement between the mental representation in question and reality which is defined by Kierkegaard as truth, consists not in the correspondence of this representation to reality, but in the subject's having brought his existence into conformity with the substance of the prescriptions. That is, a person, explains Hügli, "is only in the truth to the extent that he has ideality in

⁵⁰Cf. JP 4:4237/Pap. XI² A 85.

⁵¹Cf. JY, 157-158/SV XII, 430-432.

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himself."⁵²

Just as was the case, however, with the knowledge that there was a God and the knowledge that one had a soul which was immortal, it is possible here to speak of degrees of agreement. That is, to agree that one is responsible for behaving in a certain way is not merely equivalent to behaving in this way. It is also, in a sense, equivalent to the acceptance that one ought to behave in this way in the sense that one accepts the guilt which is consequent upon one's failure to do this. That is, to accept guilt is to acknowledge that one failed to act as one ought to have done. To accept one's guilt is thus to agree with the substance of ethical-religious ideality in the sense that one brings one's existence into conformity with that ideality in this act of acceptance.

It is only after the existence of the knower can itself be identified with ethical-religious ideality that he can genuinely be said to have knowledge of this ideality. That is, his certainty that his representation of this ideality corresponds to reality is equivalent to his appreciation of the subjective necessity of the correspondence of his existence to the substance of this representation. This appreciation, however, is a direct result of his decision to accept that he is guilty when he fails to bring his existence into conformity with it.⁵³ Thus his certainty that his mental representation of ethical-religious ideality corresponds to reality is, once again, "a performative product of [his] . . . decision" to accept this guilt.⁵⁴

⁵²Hügli, op. cit. 200.

⁵³It is for this reason Hügli argues: "The ethical telos cannot be known objectively" (Hügli, op. cit. 123).

⁵⁴Hannay, op. cit. 46. It is for this reason Hügli argues that, according to Kierkegaard, "the ethical is not an object of knowledge, but of the will" (Hügli, op. cit.

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Living ethically-religiously requires more, however, than knowledge of the ethical-religious ideality. That is, the knowing subject has, again, what Kierkegaard refers to as a "lower nature"⁵⁵ that sees this knowledge as a threat and which is thus inclined in the direction away from recognizing it as such. To live ethically-religiously involves a certain self-control which is essentially related to a different sort of self-knowledge than that which belongs under the heading of immanent metaphysical knowledge.

161).

⁵⁵Cf., SUD, 94/SV XI, 205 (cf., also chapter two and chapter fifteen).

15. Subjective Knowledge of Actuality

Existence, according to Kierkegaard, like consciousness, is an inter-esse between ideality and actuality.¹ Until now, this situation has made knowledge of actuality impossible except in the loose sense. That is, knowledge is the result of the contemplation of reality and contemplation is an activity of thought, the medium of which is ideality. This, as we saw, posed no problem for ontological and mathematical knowledge since the objects of such knowledge were idealities. When, however, the object of contemplation was actuality, because our relation to actuality, according to Kierkegaard, was mediated by thought, the closest we could come to an appreciation of that actuality as such was to approximate it through a representation of it in ideality.

We cannot even know what Kierkegaard refers to as our "historical externality" (CUP I, 574/SV VII, 501), except in the loose sense. The only actuality to which we may have an immediate relation, according to Kierkegaard, is our own individual ethical actuality.² But an immediate relation of this sort has a different kind of cognitive significance than that of the relations mediated by thought. The relation itself is not a cognitive one, but it generates knowledge and this knowledge is distinct from objective knowledge. That is, objective knowledge is obtained by abstracting from one's subjective experience, or by directing one's attention not toward oneself, but

¹Cf. chapter two; CUP I, 329/SV VII, 284 and Hügli, op. cit. 57.

²Cf. CUP, 576/SV VII, 501.

toward an object which has no essential relation to one's own existence, while subjective knowledge is the result of attention being directed toward one's subjective experience as such.

Subjective knowledge of actuality is problematic in a way that differs, however, from the way in which objective knowledge of actuality was problematic. That is, subjective knowledge of actuality, according to Kierkegaard, appears to follow directly from experience; hence it would not appear particularly difficult to attain. Any difficulty associated with this knowledge would thus appear related to sustaining it rather than attaining it.

§15.1. Self-Knowledge

Kierkegaard argues that "[i]nsofar as the ethical could be said to have a knowledge in itself, it is 'self-knowledge'" (JP 1:653/Pap. VIII² B 85:30). We saw in the preceding chapter that self-knowledge consists in part in the knowledge that one has a soul. Kierkegaard argues, however, that "[t]hat to know what a human soul is, . . . is still a long way from beginning to gain one's soul in patience" (EUD, 172/SV IV, 65), and that "if a person is to gain his soul, then he certainly must know [kjende] it before he begins," but that "this knowing [Erkjenden] would still be only . . . the condition for being able to gain his soul in patience" (EUD, 173/SV IV, 66). It is the latter, however, which constitutes the ethical development of the knowing subject. That is, to acquire one's soul is synonymous with bringing the actuality of one's existence into conformity with ethical religious ideality.

I argued in the preceding chapter, however, that in order for the knower to be able to bring his existence into

conformity with the eternally valid ethical norms he had to have a great deal more self-knowledge than that which belongs, according to Kierkegaard, to the realm of immanent metaphysical knowledge. That is, human beings, according to Kierkegaard, have a "lower nature" which is resistant to accepting these norms as such and which thus represents an obstacle to the objective of attaining such conformity. "[T]he lower level of conception [Forestillingskreds], argues Kierkegaard,

and the pact between earthly passions and illusion are very difficult to shake loose. Just when one [man] has understood the truth best of all, the old ideas suddenly pop up again. The infinite, the eternal, and therefore the true are so foreign to humans [Mennesket] by nature that it is with [them] as with the dog which can indeed learn to walk upright but still always prefers to walk on all fours. (WOL, 229-230/SV IX, 233)

We saw in Part I that all coming to be, according to Kierkegaard, is a suffering and we now know that the coming to be with which he was primarily concerned was that of the self. The self comes to be as the result of the efforts of an individual to bring his existence into conformity with eternally valid ethical norms. That is, to become a self is to actualize ethical ideality in one's existence. Kierkegaard argues, however, that only through suffering can the eternal come together with the temporal.³ Part of this suffering concerns the fact that the purely animal aspect, or lower nature, of human beings is, in a sense, sacrificed to the higher nature in this synthesis. "To serve the idea," argues Kierkegaard, "is to be tortured, to be martyred . . . --otherwise the idea cannot be brought

³Cf. JP 4:4712/Pap. XI¹ A 377 and JP 2:1447/Pap. XI² A 130.

out of the synthesis which a human being [Mennesket] is, since in one sense he is a human-animal [Dyre-Mennesket]" (JP 4:3834/Pap. XI¹ A 271). That is, to accept eternally valid ethical norms as such is to subordinate one's will to these norms, to endeavor to live according to these norms even when one's natural inclination is opposed to them. It is for this reason Kierkegaard argues that "everyone [ethvert Menneske] is more or less afraid of the truth; and this is being human for the truth is related to being 'spirit'--and this is very hard for flesh and blood [kjød og Blod]. . . Between a human being [Mennesket] and the truth lies dying to the world--this, you see, is why we are all more or less afraid" (Pap. XI³ A 614).

But if one is assumed, on Kierkegaard's view, to know the truth, the question becomes: How does one avoid acting on this knowledge without becoming guilty in one's own eyes? We have in fact already seen the answer to this question, but it will perhaps help to look at it again. "When one has understood something," observes Kierkegaard, "there is a long time to wait before an action follows, or before the translation of it into action" (SE, 135/SV XII, 400) and this, according to Kierkegaard, is precisely the problem. That is, it is this delay, according to Kierkegaard, which provides the lower nature with an opportunity to keep the individual from doing something he would rather avoid. "If a person," argues Kierkegaard,

does not do what is right at the very second he knows it--then first of all knowledge⁴ simmers down. Next comes the question of how the will appraises what is known. The will is dialectical and has under it the entire lower nature of man, if this does not agree with what is known, then it does not necessarily follow that the will goes out and does the opposite of what knowledge understood (presumably such strong opposites are

⁴Cf. chapter two, note 20.

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rare); rather the will allows some time to elapse, an interim called: "We shall look at it tomorrow." During all this, knowledge becomes more and more obscure, and the lower nature gains the upper hand more and more; alas, for the good must be done immediately, as soon as it is known, but the lower nature's power lies in stretching things out. The will gradually comes to have no objection to this development, but almost looks the other way. And when knowledge has become duly obscured, knowledge and the will can better understand each other; eventually, they agree completely, for now knowledge has come over to the side of the will and admits that what it wants is absolutely right. And this is how perhaps the great majority of men live; they work gradually at eclipsing their ethical and ethical-religious knowledge which would lead them out into decisions and conclusions that their lower nature does not much care for. (SUD, 94/SV XI, 205)⁵

⁵All emphasis here has been added. The Hongs have, unfortunately, misunderstood part of the above passage. That is, the Hongs' translation reads: "Willing [which should, again, be "the will"] is dialectical and has under it the entire lower nature of man. If willing does not agree with what is known," continues the translation, "it does not necessarily follow . . ." etc., etc. The difficulty, however, is that it is "the entire lower nature of man" which is the subject of this second sentence and not the will. This distinction is important because the dialectical character of the will, according to Kierkegaard, is precisely that it has under it not merely the entire lower nature of man, but his higher nature as well. The will is thus not destined to serve the lower nature of man in the way that it does above (or else the individual could not be responsible for allowing it to do this), but can actually bring this lower nature under the control of his higher nature.

The passage which is translated by the Hongs as: "Gradually, willing's objection to this development lessens; it almost appears to be in collusion," appears in Danish as: "Saa smaat har Villien ikke noget mod, at dette skeer, den seer næsten igennem Fingre dermed," which translates literally as "The will gradually comes to have nothing against that this happens, it almost looks through its fingers therewith." To look through one's fingers, in this way is an obvious reference to the practice of children who, by putting their hands in front of their faces, pretend that they do not see what is in front of them, even though there is enough space between their

What the individual must thus do, if there is going to be any hope of his being able to bring his existence into conformity with ethical ideality, is to gain knowledge of both his higher nature and his animal, or lower, nature so he learns to use the one against the other. This task is specific to each individual as such not merely because it is prerequisite to genuine ethical development but because people vary in respect of how these two aspects of their nature are inclined to manifest themselves. Some people may find that their lower nature is inclined to manifest itself with particular force or frequency, whereas other people may find that their lower nature manifests itself relatively infrequently and with comparatively little force. That is, some people, observes Kierkegaard, may be "structured more eternally" (JP 2:1123/Pap VIII¹ A 649).

What is important in this context, however, is not whether one is structured more or less eternally, but that everyone, according to Kierkegaard, is required to become a self, or to make his life an expression of ethical-religious ideality. To succeed in this task, however, one must learn to know oneself so one will be able to develop a strategy for realizing one's ethical-religious duty which will be particularly suited to that duty as it relates to oneself. "Human frailty," explains Hannay, "does not vanish [even] at the touch of a positive decision; the kinds of pressure which postpone a decision usually also contrive once it is made, to delay its consumption."⁶ It is

fingers that they are quite able to see. Thus, to the extent that the will "looks through its fingers," at the activity of the lower nature of man in stretching things out, it is, in fact, aware of what is going on and is thus actually and not merely apparently in collusion with this lower nature.

⁶Hannay, op. cit. 206.

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for this reason Kierkegaard argues that "[t]he law for the development of the self with respect to knowing, insofar as it is the case that the self becomes itself, is that the increase in knowledge corresponds to the increase of self-knowledge, that the more the self knows, the more it knows itself" (SUD, 31/SV XI, 145).

The reason, according to Kierkegaard, that the only actuality there is for an individual is his own ethical actuality is that this is the only actuality to which he is immediately related. That is, it is this relation that makes genuine self-knowledge, or self-knowledge proper, possible. This means, however, that self-knowledge in the propositional sense begins with acquaintance knowledge. There is, of course, a sense in which all propositional knowledge may be said to begin with acquaintance knowledge. This becomes an issue of significance, however, only with respect to subjective knowledge, or in particular, with respect to subjective knowledge of actuality, because it is only here that the English translations of the Danish expressions for acquaintance knowledge (i.e., kendskab), and for 'know' in the sense of be acquainted with (i.e., kende) as 'knowledge' and 'know' respectively cause problems in relation to determining the substance of Kierkegaard's epistemology.

Kierkegaard claims, for example, that "ethical knowledge is not simply contemplation, . . . [i]t is a collecting oneself [Besiddelse] which is itself an action" (EO II, 258/SV II, 232)⁷ may make it appear that he equates knowing and doing and, indeed, Kierkegaard has been interpreted this way.⁸ What is important to appreciate, however, is that the "knowledge" in question is "Kjendskab" rather than 'erkendelsen' or 'viden.' That is, truly

⁷Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 177.

⁸Cf. Emmanuel, op. cit. 139.

"knowing" oneself in the sense of being acquainted with oneself, cannot be separated, according to Kierkegaard, from a certain kind of activity, but this "knowledge" is distinct from propositional knowledge. What is important, in this context, is that one appreciate that while self-knowledge of the acquaintance sort is prerequisite to self-knowledge of the propositional sort, Kierkegaard never conflates the two. Though, as we have seen, genuine subjective knowledge of the propositional sort can enjoy its status as such only when it is conjoined with a particular activity on the part of the knowing subject, it is still, as knowledge, a mental representation and thus distinguished from that activity.

A mental representation which corresponds to the actuality of the knowing subject is, crucial, however, on Kierkegaard's view, if that subject is going to be able to express ethical ideality in his existence, or to become a self. That is, what Kierkegaard calls the "law for the development of the self with respect to knowledge insofar as it is the case that the self becomes itself is that the increase of knowledge corresponds to the increase of self-knowledge" (SUD, 31/SV XI, 145), that is, knowledge of the propositional sort. The same is true with respect to Kierkegaard's claim that "[t]here is only one kind of knowledge that brings a person completely to himself--self-knowledge; this is what it means to be sober, sheer transparency" (JY, 105/SV XII, 387). That is, it is necessary for the knower to have a correct mental representation of himself so he may be prepared in advance for situations which may represent a potential for conflict between his higher and his lower nature. That is, he must know that in certain situations his lower nature is inclined to represent a threat to his goal of bringing his existence into conformity with ethical-religious ideality and he must know that it is inclined to represent a threat

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in X manner and that the best way to counter this threat is Y.⁹

"Let us imagine," for example,

a pilot, and assume that he has passed every examination with distinction, but that he had not as yet been to sea. Imagine him in a storm. He knows everything he has to do, but he has not known before how terror grips . . . he has not known [vidste] how the blood rushes to the head when one tries to make calculations at such a moment. (CS, 35-36/SV V, 199-200)

After this pilot has actually piloted a ship through a storm, his knowledge of sailing will have increased. That is, his knowledge will no longer be purely theoretical, but will be practical as well. He will have a better mental representation of what is involved in piloting a ship in that he will know what to expect, not merely in terms of what is required of him technically, but in terms of his subjective response to the storm and the obstacle that it may represent to his fulfilling what is required of him technically. He will then be able to factor in his fear as he does the height of the waves and speed of the wind and eventually, be able to develop a strategy for managing it. When he has done this, that is, learned to anticipate and control his fear, he will have acquired the skill of piloting a ship through a storm. He will then know how to pilot a ship in a way that can be learned only by experience. He will know how to "apply his knowledge" (CS, 36/SV V, 200).

Such knowledge is often called "skill knowledge" and distinguished from propositional knowledge as such. This

⁹Cf. Hannay's observation that according to Kierkegaard, "the (Christian) ethical way of life remains 'seriously deficient' without 'adequate knowledge of human life, and sympathy for its interests'" (Hannay, op. cit. 169). Cf. Pap. V B 53, 29, p. 119.

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skill knowledge is, however, directly related to, or is a direct consequence of, the fact the individual in question has acquired a mental representation of what is required to pilot a ship through a storm that can be gained only as the result of having had that experience. That is, he now knows not merely that one must do X or Y in order successfully to pilot a ship through a storm, but he knows that he must do X and Y and Z. That is, he has developed a mental representation of what to expect from himself in terms of his subjective response to danger and how to bring this under control.

The theoretical knowledge that was imparted to the pilot during his training is related to the actual experience of piloting a ship in a manner analogous to the relation between the drawing of a landscape and the actual landscape it depicts. "The sketch cannot be as big as the country," argues Kierkegaard, "but on that account it also becomes all the easier for the observer to scan the outlines of that country. And yet it may well happen to the observer, if he were suddenly set down in the actual country [i hiint Lands Virkelighed] where the many, many miles really are valid, that he would be unable to recognize [kjende] the country, . . . to find his way about in it" (POH, 114-15/SV VIII, 174).

Such an observer, like the pilot above, may learn, however, from the experience of having to find his way about in the country in question so that his mental representation of this country receives a new dimension. He would still possess a mental representation of the country as it appeared in the drawing and hence be able to identify it from a distance, but he would also possess a mental representation, gained by experience, of how the details represented in the drawing, appear to one who is right in the middle of the country depicted and hence he would in future be able to find his way about in it.

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"[T]he actual country," however, in which we are all, according to Kierkegaard, "suddenly set down," is existence. That is, the philosophers, according to Kierkegaard, sketch existence, or make outlines of it which simplify it to a certain extent. The philosopher's categories, are abstract or general in nature, but existence is full of unique situations and it is these situations we, as individuals, are expected to navigate, according to Kierkegaard, and we learn this, on his view, by coming to know ourselves.¹⁰

The question now is whether this increase in knowledge, gained by experience is separable from the experience itself, or whether it is the case that "[w]herever the subjective is of importance in knowledge" knowing and doing are equivalent? Or, to put it another way: Is it proper to say that knowledge here is equivalent to a particular skill, or that knowing how to pilot a ship through a storm, or knowing how to find one's way around in a country, just means being able to do these things.

It would appear that while experience of the sort described above results in an increase in the knowledge to which it is related, knowing and doing cannot themselves be identified. "[T]he genius," argues Kierkegaard,

differs from everyone else [ethvert andet Menneske] only in that he consciously begins within his historical presuppositions just as primitively as Adam did. Every time a genius is born, existence is, as it were, put to a test, because he traverses and experiences all that is past, until he catches up with himself. Therefore the knowledge the genius has of the past is entirely different from that offered in world historical surveys. (CA, 104-05/SV IV, 374)

¹⁰Cf. CUP, 310-311/SV VII, 266.

Kierkegaard does not mean here that the genius has actually experienced past events, but that he has become acquainted with every passion and emotion in a manner equally intense to that of any historical personage and that hence his mental representations of historical figures are informed by his appreciation of the nature of the experiences of those individuals. In short, he can project himself imaginatively into the situation of Caesar or Napoleon, or any other historical figure one might want to name and is thus able to form a better mental representation of these individuals, or of the past in general, than are ordinary people. It is for this reason Kierkegaard argues that knowing is related to imagination.¹¹

¹¹Cf. "When all is said and done, whatever feeling, knowing and willing a person has depends upon what imagination he has, upon how that person reflects himself" (SUD, 31/SV XI, 144). It is important to note here that Kierkegaard does not say that the knowledge that the genius has of the past is better than that which is offered in world historical surveys. In a sense, of course, it is better because the genius is concerned not merely with historical facts but with the nature of the experience of the historical individuals and this is as important to understanding the past as such--i.e., to understanding past events as having come about through human agency--as is knowledge of the events themselves. The reader will remember that the historian, on Kierkegaard's view, is concerned not merely with determining historical fact, but also with understanding how historical events came about, which is to say that he is concerned to understand those events as the result of human decision. The difficulty is that the genius can no more be certain that his imaginative reconstruction of the experience of Caesar precisely reduplicates the experience of Caesar himself than the historian can be certain that Caesar's decision to cross the Rubicon was made in freedom rather than simply determined by a myriad of other factors acting upon him as causes. Thus when Kierkegaard says that the genius possesses a knowledge of the past that is quite different from that offered in world historical surveys, this "knowledge," as it is attributed to the genius should be understood in the same loose sense in which, according to Kierkegaard, it is claimed to be represented in world historical surveys.

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That the subjective is of importance with respect to the "knowledge" that the genius has of the past does not necessarily mean that knowing, according to Kierkegaard, can be equated with doing. The difficulty with equating knowing with doing, according to Kierkegaard, is that this would amount to an equation of thought with being and this, as we saw, is a move to which Kierkegaard has strong objections.¹² The essence [væsen] of human beings, on his view, is an inter-esse, or a being-between these two realms. But if such a division between thought and being, or between thought and action, is essential to human beings, then knowledge, to the extent that it retains any cognitive significance, cannot ever be straightforwardly equated with action.

"In our age," observes Kierkegaard, "it is believed that knowledge settles everything, and that if one [man] only acquires a knowledge of the truth, the more briefly and the more quickly the better, one [man] is helped. But to exist and to know are two different things" (CUP I, 297/SV VII, 255).¹³ If we look again at the two references with which I began this section we will see that they were not used by Kierkegaard to support a theory concerning the nature of knowledge which would represent an alternative to that described in the chapter on objective knowledge, but to emphasize the difference between knowing and existing or between knowing and doing. "Alas," observes Kierkegaard,

¹²Cf. Introduction, "Historical Background," and chapter one, §1.1.

¹³The wording here is from the Swenson-Lowrie translation of the Postscript (264). I have chosen this translation because it is more accurate than the Hongs--i.e., the Hongs have "existing" and "knowing," but the Danish expressions 'at existere' and 'at vide,' are both infinitives.

contemplation [Betrachtung] and the moment of contemplation, in spite of all their clarity, readily conceal a deception; because the moment of contemplation [involves] a foreshortening that is necessary in order that the contemplation might take place. It [i.e., contemplation] must foreshorten time a good deal. Indeed, it must actually call the senses and thoughts away from time in order that they may complete themselves in a spurious eternal well roundedness. It is here as when an artist sketches a country. The sketch cannot be as big as the country, . . . but on that account is also becomes all the easier for the observer to scan the outlines of that country. And yet it may well happen to the observer, if he were suddenly set down in the actual country, . . . that he would be unable to find his way about in it. . . . His knowledge has indeed been a sense deception. What was there in air-tight fashion, pressed together in the completeness of contemplation, shall now be stretched out at its full length. (POH, 114-15/SV VIII, 174)

But the knowledge which is enriched by the experience of the observer, though it is richer, fuller, or more complete than that with which he started, is still the result, according to Kierkegaard, of his reflection on that experience and its relation to the knowledge with which he started; hence it is distinguished from experience as such.

If we look again at the example of the pilot who must, for the first time, navigate a ship through a storm, we see that, again, the example was not used by Kierkegaard with the aim of developing or defending a theory of knowledge where knowing and doing are identified. The difficulty with the pilot, according to Kierkegaard, is that he "had no conception [Forestilling] of the change that takes place in the knower when he has to apply his knowledge" (CS, 36/SV V, 200).¹⁴ The knowledge that the pilot gains by actually navigating a ship through a storm enriches his

¹⁴Emphasis added.

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original mental representation of how one pilots a ship through a storm in a way that is tremendously important. That is, he becomes acquainted with himself in the sense that he experiences how he is inclined to react in such situations so that his resultant mental representation is not of how one is to pilot a ship through a storm, but of how he is to do it. He can now anticipate the manner in which his subjective response to the storm--i.e., fear--may represent an obstacle to effective navigation of the ship and hence develop a strategy for coping with that fear in order to keep it from controlling him. It is clear, however, that the self-knowledge he has gained from this experience does not eliminate the possibility that fear will again gain the upper hand and the persistence of this possibility shows that knowing is always distinguished from doing.

The self-knowledge which relates to the skill of piloting a ship, or of finding one's way around in a landscape, may not appear immediately to have ethical significance, but all self-knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, is ultimately ethical knowledge.¹⁵ The pilot of a ship is responsible, in a storm, for the lives of the passengers and crew. If he had not taken care to learn through experience how he is inclined to react to danger, he might find himself responsible for the injury or death of the individuals for whose welfare he is responsible.

The ethical significance of the latter example is even less obvious, yet it too, according to Kierkegaard, has ethical significance. Finding oneself in an unfamiliar landscape can be confusing and disorienting. If one allowed such confusion to get the upper hand, one might never find one's way about. If the country were large and

¹⁵Cf. Hügli's claim that "there is no analysis of the factual, in Kierkegaard, that is not also concerned with the ethical and the religious" (Hügli, op. cit. 185).

one were not alone, one might find oneself with injuries or even deaths on one's hands. This may seem unlikely but what is important is that this possibility, no matter how apparently remote, points out the potential ethical significance of all self-knowledge. The less one knows oneself the less responsible one can be and the more one knows oneself, the more responsible one can be. One's animal nature might incline one to flee in the face of danger, or to cling to others for support or protection, but if one knows oneself to the extent that one can anticipate such a response to danger then one can, so to speak, head it off, or at least bring it under control.

The real country, however, in which we are expected to be able to find our way about, or the real storm that we are asked to come through, is again that of existence itself. That is, existence itself is fraught with dangers and threats to our efforts to instantiate ethical ideality. We must learn this landscape, or learn specifically where these threats and dangers lie, if we are to be able to find our way about in existence, or to become ourselves. To come to know the landscape of existence, however, means nothing other than to come to know ourselves, because this again is all we can ever, according to Kierkegaard, come to know, in a genuine sense, of existence--i.e., actuality.

The ethical significance of self-knowledge becomes clear if we turn to another sort of example. Say one is asked in a crisis to help an acquaintance. This person has been slandered and seeks one's support to help quell the damaging rumors that have begun to circulate about him. Assume that one knows the slander, and thus the rumors, to be untrue. One is unsure, however, concerning the extent to which these rumors have spread. Perhaps, one says to oneself, they have spread so widely that I, if I speak out now in support of this person, will simply be tarred, so to speak, with the same brush so that all my help will be to

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no avail. It is best, one may thus say to oneself, first to wait, to find out the precise nature of the rumors and the precise extent to which they have spread before speaking out in support of this person. It is best, after all, to be prepared in order to launch the most effective defense. I will look at this issue tomorrow, tomorrow I will give it my full attention. So one promises to help one's acquaintance and really intends to help, but precious time passes during which further and perhaps irreparable damage is done to his reputation.

To know oneself, Kierkegaard would argue, would be immediately to recognize that the original hesitation did not, in fact, stem from the desire to make the aid to one's friend optimally effective, but from a fear of making oneself vulnerable to injury. The desire to protect oneself is a natural animal instinct and thus belongs to "the synthesis which a human being is, since in one sense he is a human-animal" (JP 4:3834/Pap. XI¹ A 271). The person who truly knows himself, however, will know this and will not be taken in by the efforts of his lower, i.e., animal, nature to dress up this natural, but nonetheless thoroughly unethical, desire to avoid potential injury to his own reputation as genuine concern for his friend. The person who truly knows himself will react with disdain, and even self-disgust at the efforts of his lower nature to dress up an unethical impulse in an ethical guise. He will dismiss the impulse as what it is, a diversion of the lower nature designed to ward off potential danger, and he will act. He will act because he knows that to come to the aid of someone in need, to respond immediately to a request for help, is what the moral law demands.

A person who knows himself, knows his own animal nature and how it is inclined to present itself, knows when he has failed to act ethically and knows when he has been successful. Such knowledge is possible, again, because to

the extent that all self-knowledge has ethical significance, it is always accompanied by an experience of self-approbation or disapprobation, or by the feeling of guilt or innocence. It is, as we have seen, not possible, on Kierkegaard's view, for the knower to fail to appreciate that he becomes guilty when he fails to bring his existence into conformity with his mental representation of ethical-religious ideality.¹⁶ It is possible, however, for him to deceive himself with respect to his guilt. A person thus knows himself, knows his own animal nature and how it is inclined to represent a threat to his actualization of his ethical-religious duty, in that he knows the extent to which he has failed to act ethically to the extent that he accepts the guilt which is consequent upon this failure.

The knower's acceptance, for example, of the guilt which is consequent upon his failure to come to the aid of an acquaintance who is being slandered does not merely give rise to knowledge of what he ought to do in such a situation, it gives rise to knowledge of what he ought to have done. To know, however, what one ought to have done is to know what one did in the sense that it is to know that one did not do what one ought to have done. A person who accepts that he is guilty for failing to act ethically thus forms a mental representation of how his higher nature is inclined to give in to his lower nature and this representation is, in turn, justified by the insight he gains, through this acceptance, into the subjective necessity of the subordination of his lower to his higher nature.

To know oneself in the sense of knowing both one's higher nature and one's animal, or lower, nature and how these are inclined to relate to each other is to know that the latter is inclined to represent a threat to the

¹⁶Cf. chapter two.

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objective of bringing one's existence into conformity with ethical-religious ideality.¹⁷ That is, to know how these two natures are inclined to relate to each other is to know that one has a certain tendency to self-deception. Self-deception, observes Walker, however, "cannot be corrected by right information . . . it is the self-deceiver's will that requires purification. For he has a will to obscurity of vision, and hence to ignorance about himself."¹⁸ Thus to know oneself in the sense of to know that one has a certain tendency to self-deception is to know that no matter how successful, in one sense, one may have been in living up to the eternally valid ethical norms, one has failed to realize ethical ideality in the sense that one's will has not been pure. To equate self-knowledge, however, with knowledge of oneself as guilty brings us back to the realm of ethical-religious knowledge or, more specifically, to the realm of Christian knowledge.

§15.2. Christian Knowledge

Ethics, according to Kierkegaard, is an "ideal science [ideal Videnskab] (CA, 16/SV IV, 287). That is, "[e]thics," he argues, "points to ideality as a task and assumes that everyone possesses the conditions [i.e., the conditions requisite for achieving ideality]" (CA, 16/SV IV, 288).¹⁹ "Ethics," argues Kierkegaard, "has nothing at all to do with the possibility of sin" (CA, 20/SV IV,

¹⁷Thus Kierkegaard refers to the individual as engaged in a "constant struggle [bestandige Strid]" with himself (OAR, 174/NRF, 215).

¹⁸Walker, op. cit. 300.

¹⁹Cf. chapter fourteen, §14.3; FT, 98-99/SV III, 146; Hügli, op. cit. 222 and Slotty, op. cit. 69.

295).²⁰ That is, what was referred to above as the first ethics becomes "shipwrecked," according to Kierkegaard, "on the sinfulness of the . . . individual" (CA, 20/SV IV, 293). This first ethics needs the help of dogmatics in order to give a satisfactory account of the individual's failure to live up to the demands of the moral law. The difference, however, between guilt-consciousness and sin-consciousness is decisive. That is, "[i]n the totality of guilt-consciousness," argues Kierkegaard, "existence asserts itself as strongly as possible within immanence, but the consciousness of sin is the break [i.e., with immanence]" (CUP I, 583/SV VII, 508). "Guilt-consciousness," continues Kierkegaard,

is a transformation of the subject within the subject himself.²¹ The consciousness of sin, however, is a transformation of the subject himself, which shows that outside the individual there must be the power that makes clear to him that he has become a person other than he was by coming to be, that he has become a sinner. This power is the god in time. (CUP I, 584/SV VII, 509)²²

That is, to be in sin is, according to Kierkegaard, to be essentially outside the truth--i.e., ethical-religious

²⁰I have altered the Hongs' translation slightly for the purposes of clarity.

²¹Cf. SUD, 95/SV XI, 206; PF, 14/SV IV, 184 and JP 1:651/Pap. VIII² B 83.

²²Cf. PF, 9-22/SV IV, 179-191. I have altered the translation here slightly. That is, the Hongs' translation refers to a "change" of the subject where I have "transformation" of the subject. The Danish expression in question is "Forandring" which does indeed refer to a change. To render it as 'change' in the above passage is awkward, however, to the extent that it makes it appear that one subject is being replaced with another which is emphatically not what is happening in the first instance.

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truth as the truth rather than as a truth among other truths. To be outside the truth in this way, argues Kierkegaard in the Fragments, is to be unable to come to understand it, or to become properly related to it on one's own, because if this were possible, then in an important sense, one could not be said to be essentially outside it. To be essentially outside the truth (i.e., to be sinful), according to Kierkegaard, is to need assistance in order to gain a proper understanding of the truth, or to be put into the proper relation to it. Such assistance, he argues, can come only from the truth itself. That is, if one cannot come to the truth on one's own, then the truth must come to one.²³

This is the decisive difference between guilt consciousness and sin-consciousness according to Kierkegaard. To understand oneself as sinful--i.e., as outside the truth--is inseparable from understanding the truth as such, in that sin is what separates, or differentiates, one from the truth. If the individual is essentially ignorant of the truth, then the truth can be called "the unknown" (PF, 46/SV IV, 214). Thus Kierkegaard argues that

if a human being is to come truly to know something about the unknown (the god) [i.e., the truth], he must first come to know that it is different from him, absolutely different from him. The understanding cannot come to know this by itself (since, as we have seen it is a contradiction); if it is going to come to know this, it must come to know this from the god . . . Just to come to know that the god is different, a person [Mennesket] needs the god and then comes to know that the god is absolutely different from him. But if the god is absolutely different from a human being, this can have its basis not in that which man owes to the god (for to that extent they are akin), but in that which

²³Cf. PF, 14/SV IV, 184.

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he owes to himself or in that which he himself has committed. What then is the difference? Indeed, what else but sin. (PF, 46-47/SV IV, 214)

Thus Kierkegaard argues that one cannot come to understand oneself as sinful on one's own, but that "Christianity very consistently assumes that neither paganism, nor the natural man [det naturlige Mennesket] knows what sin is; in fact, it assumes that there has to be a revelation from God to show what sin is" (SUD, 89/SV XI, 201).

One does not, according to Kierkegaard, come to know (vide)--i.e., to have the correct mental representation--that sin is the difference between himself and God, or himself and the truth, as the result of his own efforts to understand this difference. One comes to know this as a result of having been transformed²⁴ in a manner that makes such a mental representation possible. Such a transformation, according to Kierkegaard, can be brought about only by God himself. Thus he argues that the truth "is a snare: you cannot get it without being caught yourself; you cannot get the truth by catching it yourself but only by its catching you" (JP 4:4886/Pap. XI¹ A 355).

An individual cannot, again, come to the truth on his own because this would amount to his being essentially in possession of it. It is thus the truth which must come to the individual, or the eternal ethical-religious truth which must, of itself, come together with the temporal--i.e., come to be in time. Such an intersection of the temporal and the eternal is referred to by Kierkegaard as a paradox.²⁵ It is not, however, primarily the synthesis

²⁴Cf., e.g., EUD 303/SV V, 86; CS, 22-23/SV V, 191; CUP I, 423/SV VII, 367; CUP I, 387/SV VII, 335-336 and JP 3:3109/Pap. X³ A 609.

²⁵Cf. JP 3:3085/Pap. VI B 45; CUP I, 271/SV VII, 229-230; CUP I, 208/SV VII, 174 and PF, 58-59/SV IV, 223-225.

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of the opposing elements of temporality and eternity in the person of God in time which presents an obstacle to the understanding on Kierkegaard's view (the subject himself, as we saw in Part I of this thesis, is defined by Kierkegaard as such a synthesis);²⁶ it is rather that the individual's own eternal consciousness, or understanding of the truth is supposed first to come be--i.e., to have a historical point of departure²⁷--through his relation to this paradox. The resistance of the individual to this proposition is made clearer when it is remembered that the knowledge in question--i.e., knowledge of eternal ethical-religious truth--is essentially prescriptive. That is, what the individual comes to know is not that he must conform the actuality of his existence to ethical-religious ideality, because this is something which, according to Kierkegaard, he is assumed to know already, what he is supposed to come to know, as a result of his encounter with God in time, is that he is incapable of doing what he is eternally responsible for doing in order to exist in a genuine sense. "The task of ethics," explains Hügli,

cannot be completed even if it is conceived as an eternal striving. It is a task at which the individual inevitably fails because, if subjectivity is only truth as long as it expresses the eternal in actuality, then this would appear to mean that as long as it has this as a goal, it is untruth.²⁸

Such a proposition is indeed offensive, and the individual quite naturally rebels against it. It is self-

²⁶Cf. chapter three.

²⁷Cf. PF, 58/SV IV, 224.

²⁸Hügli, op. cit. 218. Cf. Slotty's claim "sin becomes apparent in [one's] striving to actualize the ethical" (Slotty, op. cit. 70).

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contradictory to propose that one could be eternally responsible for doing something one is incapable of doing. To the extent that this is the message of the god in time²⁹ the individual will be unable to get this message "into [his] head" (PF, 53/SV IV, 219), so to speak. But if what Kierkegaard calls the paradox of Christianity cannot be grasped intellectually

[h]ow, then, does the learner come to an understanding with this paradox It occurs when the understanding and the paradox happily encounter each other in the moment, when the understanding steps aside and the paradox gives itself, and the third something in which this occurs (for it does not occur through the understanding which is discharged, or through the paradox, which gives itself--consequently in something), is that happy passion to which we shall now give a name We shall call it faith. (PF, 59/SV IV, 224)

To learn the truth, argues Kierkegaard, is thus to become a believer. That is, the learner becomes a believer when, after having surrendered his reason to the paradox, he receives the condition for understanding the truth.³⁰ "This condition, [i.e., faith], what," asks Kierkegaard "does it condition? His understanding of the eternal" (PF, 64/SV IV, 228).³¹

One might legitimately wonder, however, why the belief that one was a sinner would be referred to by Kierkegaard as a "happy passion." The answer is that sin is only half of that in which one is expected to believe as a Christian.

²⁹Kierkegaard uses the expression "the god" with a lower case 'g' throughout the Fragments.

³⁰Thus Wisdo argues that "Kierkegaard's analysis of faith appeals to non-epistemic factors; namely Grace and will" (Wisdo, op. cit. 100).

³¹Cf. Hannay, op. cit. 128.

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Grace is the other half and grace marks the deliverance of the individual from the impression of guilt which is omnipresent in human consciousness according to Kierkegaard. It is for this reason Kierkegaard argues that "the hope of the life-giving Spirit is against the hope of the understanding" (SE, 82/SV XII, 366). That is, the individual can understand guilt, what he cannot understand is that, in the eyes of the eternal, he is forgiven.³²

The only "eternal," in this context, that is immanently present in his understanding is that of the moral law and its demand as absolute. To the individual, the forgiveness of sins is thus "the absurd" (JP 2:1215/Pap. VIII¹ A 663).³³ "The absurd," explains Slotty however, "is not synonymous with nonsense."³⁴ The forgiveness of sins is absurd in the sense that, from the perspective of the sinner--i.e., from the human perspective--it seems impossible,³⁵ not in the sense that it is inherently irrational.³⁶ "[W]hen the believer has faith," argues Kierkegaard, "the absurd is not the absurd--faith transforms it. . . . The passion of faith [Troens Lidenskab] is the only thing capable of mastering the absurd rightly understood" (JP 1:10/Pap. X⁶ B 79). That is,

³²Cf. CUP I, 225-226/SV VII, 189-190.

³³Cf. CUP I, 225/SV VII, 189.

³⁴Slotty, op. cit. 57.

³⁵Cf. FT, 46-47/SV III, 97.

³⁶Cf. Julia Watkin's assertion in the introduction to "Nutidens Religiøse Forvirring" (The Contemporary Religious Confusion), that "Climacus made it clear in the Postscript that to "believe against the understanding," far from encouraging an irrational faith, was a defence against it. [That is], the individual must first, with the help of the understanding, distinguish between "nonsense" and "the incomprehensible [det Uforstaaelig]," "the absurd" (NRF, 19). Cf. also JP 3:3076/Pap. IV A 62 and Malantschuk, "Das Verhältnis," op. cit. 55.

the passion of faith can transform the absurd because this passion is precisely the encounter of the individual with the infinite. The individual "understands" the forgiveness of sins to the extent that he encounters God's love in the passion of faith. And "love," argues Kierkegaard, "hides a multitude of sins" (EUD, 78/SV III, 295).

The individual who has encountered--i.e., become acquainted with--God's love is thus able to form a mental representation of himself as a sinner and of his sins as forgiven of whose correspondence to reality he is certain.³⁷ That is, this individual is understood, by Kierkegaard, to be immediately related to the reality of God's love in this encounter.³⁸ Since the reality of God's love is presumably that his sins are forgiven, he is understood to appreciate this through an insight into the essence of the reality of this love made possible by his immediate relation to it. This forgiveness is not something objective, but is essentially subjective in that it is equivalent to the subject's own appreciation of his sins as forgiven, which appreciation he gains in his encounter with God's infinite love. That is, the forgiveness of sins, according to Kierkegaard, is not something which awaits one in eternity. "The forgiveness of sins," he argues, "means to be helped temporally" (JP 2:1123/Pap. VIII¹ A 649). For one's sins to be forgiven means nothing other than to escape the feeling of guilt which is omnipresent in human consciousness

³⁷I am thus taking exception to Daise's claim that truth, in the context of the Fragments "does not have any epistemological significance" (Daise, op. cit. 2).

³⁸Cf. Slotty's observation that, according to Kierkegaard, "Christ is the only past actuality that can continue to be present to anyone whatever" (Slotty, op. cit. 70) and Hügli's observation that, "[i]n belief in Christ, the individual has the eternal in time, present in every moment" (Hügli, op. cit. 223).

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according to Kierkegaard.³⁹

I argued, however, in chapter thirteen, that since all subjective knowledge was essentially prescriptive, certainty that a given mental representation corresponded to reality was equivalent to an appreciation of the subjective necessity of the correspondence of one's existence to this representation. Thus the certainty that his sins are forgiven that is a product of the knower's immediate relation to the reality of God's love in the passion of faith must be equivalent to his appreciation of the subjective necessity of conforming his existence to the mental representation that his sins are forgiven through faith in this forgiveness.⁴⁰ To the extent, however, that the knowledge in question is essentially subjective, the truth to which it is related cannot be a property of a mental representation, but must be instantiated in the existence of the knower. This truth is the knower's acceptance that his sins are forgiven. That is, such acceptance, to the extent that it represents the cancelled possibility of despair of the forgiveness of sins, is an act of the knower which thus represents his having brought his existence into conformity with ethical-religious ideality.⁴¹

³⁹Thus Hannay argues that, according to Kierkegaard, the truth of Christianity is "appropriated in feeling" rather than in thought (Hannay, op. cit. 173). Cf. JP 2:2249/Pap. X¹ A 526.

⁴⁰Thus Slotty argues: "Under the stress of responsibility to God--i.e., through God--a conviction comes into being" (Slotty, op. cit. 70).

⁴¹Thus Hügli argues, "I could no more receive certainty concerning my [true] determination without the free act of belief, than I could receive certainty that I could swim without risking going into the water" (Hügli, op. cit. 132).

The knowledge that his sins are forgiven is contingent on the knower being in the passion of faith. As soon as "the enthusiasm of faith" (CA, 27/SV IV, 300) disappears, argues Kierkegaard, the lower-nature, or "cunning prudence," will assert itself by endeavoring to engage the knower in the dialectic of self-deception in order to "escape the knowledge of sin" (CA, 27/SV IV, 300). That is, one can know one's sins are forgiven in the sense that one has a mental representation of such forgiveness of whose correspondence to reality one is certain, only while one is in the passion of faith, or in contact with God's infinite love. "Just as understanding," explains Slotty, is acquired only through belief, so [according to Kierkegaard], is deeper understanding reserved for the knowledge of faith."⁴² The passion of faith, however, is something one cannot sustain indefinitely, but is something at which one can only repeatedly arrive.⁴³

Faith is what Kierkegaard calls "the daring venture." Before a person has made this venture, argues Kierkegaard, "he can understand it only as lunacy...and when he has ventured it, he is no longer the same person" (CUP I, 423/SV VII, 367). "[T]he individual," according to Kierkegaard, "first becomes infinitized by the . . . venture" (CUP I, 423/SV VII, 367). That is, the individual first comes into contact with God's infinite love, or first comes to feel "in kinship with God" (SUD, 120n./SV XI, 230n.) in faith.

"Everything Is New In Christ," observes Kierkegaard, "this will be my position for a speculative Christian epistemology" (JP 2:2277/Pap. III A 211). Kierkegaard refers to what he calls "the certainty of faith" (CUP I, 55/SV VII, 41). But if faith is the daring venture, it

⁴²Slotty, op. cit. 59.

⁴³Cf., CUP I, 81/SV VII, 63.

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would appear problematic to argue that one could attain certainty as a result. That is, Kierkegaard argues, that "[t]o venture is the correlative of uncertainty, as soon as there is certainty venturing stops" (CUP I, 424/SV VII, 368). It is clear, however, from the following remark, that the certainty which threatens faith is an objective, rather than a subjective, or psychological phenomenon.⁴⁴ That is, if the knowing subject "gains certainty and definiteness," argues Kierkegaard, "then he cannot possibly venture everything, because then he ventures nothing, even if he gives up everything" (CUP I, 424/SV VII, 368). The certainty of faith is accessible, however, only in the moment of faith and thus cannot represent a threat to faith itself. The instant one ceases to believe--i.e., ceases to be in the passion of faith--the certainty vanishes and to renew faith is a venture in precisely the same sense in which it was the first time. Thus the "certainty of faith," according to Kierkegaard, "at every moment has within itself the dialectic of uncertainty" (CUP I, 55/SV VII, 41) not merely in the sense that the object of faith appears objectively uncertain, but in also in the sense that faith itself is difficult to sustain.

The certainty of faith, however, is in no sense arbitrary. That is, it is a necessary consequence of the believer's contact with God's infinite love in the moment of faith. Every moment of faith is characterized by certainty. Indeed, this certainty is, in a sense, indistinguishable from faith.⁴⁵ The difficulty is that

⁴⁴I.e., something on the order of the description of certainty as "a relational property of statements or propositions" (C. D. Rollins, "Certainty," Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 8 vols., ed. Paul Edwards [New York: The MacMillan Company and the Free Press] vol. 2, 67).

⁴⁵Cf. Slotty's observation that Kierkegaard "strongly emphasized the certainty [Selbstgewisheit] of belief" (Slotty, op. cit. 70).

every moment of the subject's existence is not characterized by faith. We saw above that one attains knowledge of the forgiveness of sins in the moment of faith. What we need to look at now is the issue of whether there is any other sort of knowledge associated by Kierkegaard with faith.

Immanent religious knowledge is not the only sort of religious knowledge according to Kierkegaard, there is also transcendent religious knowledge. All specifically Christian knowledge is of this latter sort. This knowledge is the product of revelation, and the specific revelation with which Kierkegaard is concerned can be expressed as an encounter with Christ, or contemporaneity with Christ, as Kierkegaard expresses it in the Fragments.⁴⁶ "Christ is the truth" (PC, 205/SV XII, 189), according to Kierkegaard, hence to "know" Christ is to "know" the truth.

The reader will notice, however, that 'know' is in quotation marks here. I have done this because it appears that in almost every instance where Kierkegaard refers to "knowledge" of Christ, the Danish expression is either 'kendskab' or some form of the verb 'kende,' rather than 'erkendelsen' or 'viden' or their associated verbs.⁴⁷ There is even one place where Kierkegaard alters the then current Danish translation of the New Testament by replacing the expression 'know' (kiende), in connection with the truth of Christianity, with 'experience' (erfarer). The reference is from his papers where he quotes John 7:17 as "If anyone's will is to do my father's will, he shall experience [erfarer] whether the teaching is from God or on

⁴⁶Cf. PF, 70-71/SV IV, 233-234 and PF, 104-106/SV IV, 266-268.

⁴⁷Cf., e.g., EUD, 325-326/SV V, 105 and PF, 68/SV IV, 231.

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my own authority" (JP 2:1881/Pap. X³ A 455).⁴⁸ This substitution is important and provides us with a key to understanding an early journal entry where Kierkegaard asserts that "[t]he historical anticipation of and also the position in human consciousness [Bevidsthed]⁴⁹ corresponding to the Christian 'Credo ut intelligam' [I believe in order that I might understand] is the ancient Nihil est in intellectus quod non antea fuerit in sensu [There is nothing in the intellect that has not previously been in the senses]" (JP 2:1098/Pap. II A, 194). That is, one meets Christ in the moment of faith. This meeting is what is meant by "knowledge" of Christ, hence acquaintance knowledge of Christ precedes genuine Christian knowledge in the propositional sense. To know--i.e., kende--Christ is an experience which, as such, is related to the intellect in the same way that sense experience is related to the intellect. Experience belongs, according to Kierkegaard, to the realm of existence, or actuality, hence it cannot, in itself, be equivalent to knowledge (which is why, according to Kierkegaard, it cannot be deceptive),⁵⁰ but

⁴⁸I have altered the translation here slightly because the Hongs' translation does not take account of Kierkegaard's substitution of the expression 'erfarer' for 'kiende.' That is, the Hongs' translation reads: "he shall know" (my emphasis) (cf. Wisdo, op. cit. 110).

The greek term in question is gnosetai which is related to the noun gnosis. In another reference from Kierkegaard's journals and papers he translates the expression for know in the inscription over the oracle at Delphi gnothi seauton as "kiende" which supports the view that Kierkegaard considered gnosis to be knowledge of the substantive rather than the representational, or propositional sort.

⁴⁹I have altered the Hongs' translation of "Bevidsthed" from 'knowledge' to 'consciousness.' The former is not an acceptable translation of 'bevidsthed' (cf. Ferrall-Gudm. Repp., op. cit. 33; Molbech, op. cit., Første Deel, 177 and Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit. vol I, 112).

⁵⁰Cf. chapter nine, §9.1.

becomes knowledge, or a candidate for knowledge, only when it is brought into relation to ideality in the intellect. Hence Christian knowledge, in the propositional sense, is a consequence of, rather than equivalent to, Christian experience.⁵¹ "Knowing the truth," argues Kierkegaard, "follows of itself from being the truth" (PC, 205/SV XII, 189). It is not actually equivalent to being the truth.⁵²

If knowledge of the truth follows from being the truth, this knowledge must be distinguished from the truth itself, or from this way of being. To argue, however, that this knowledge is distinguished from the activity which makes it possible does not mean that it may be separated from this activity. Specifically Christian knowledge, like all subjective knowledge, is essentially prescriptive. That is, it is impossible to separate it from a certain way of life. "The being of [this] truth," argues Kierkegaard, "is not the direct redoubling of being in relation to thinking, which give only thought-being . . . [It] is the redoubling of truth within yourself, within me, within him, so that your life, my life, his life . . . is approximately [Tilnærmelsesvis] the being of the truth in the striving for it" (PC, 205/SV XII, 189).

Kierkegaard's assertion that specifically Christian knowledge, or knowledge of the truth of Christianity, cannot be separated from a certain way of life may lead one to believe Christian knowledge and action are equivalent. This, however, is not the case. "That essential knowing is essentially related to existence," argues Kierkegaard,

does not, however, signify the above-mentioned identity which abstract thought [Abstraktionen] postulates between thinking and being, nor does it signify that the knowledge is objectively

⁵¹Contra Emmanuel, op. cit. 139.

⁵²Emphasis added.

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related to some real thing [noget Tilværende] as its object, but it means that knowledge relates to the knower, who is essentially an existing person [en Existerende], and that all essential knowing is, therefore, essentially related to existence [Existens] and to existing. (CUP I, 197/SV VII, 165)⁵³

It is still possible to argue that while Christian knowledge may initially be a result of Christian experience, once it has been attained, it determines, for the knower, appropriate Christian behavior such that, from that point on, Christian experience, in terms of right action, is either indistinguishable from Christian knowledge, or follows immediately and unproblematically from that knowledge. If this were the case, then knowing the good would become indistinguishable from doing the good. To know the good, on Kierkegaard's view, however, is not necessarily to do it, even when the good in question is of the specifically Christian sort, and this becomes apparent if we look at the entirety of the two references with which I began the previous section. "What fair weather is to the sailor [i.e., to the pilot who must navigate a ship through a storm]," argues Kierkegaard,

that for the ordinary person is what it is to live at the same pace with others and with the race, but the moment of decision, the dangerous moment of reflection when he takes himself out of the environment to be alone before God, to become

⁵³I have altered the Hong's translation slightly. The Hongs have "abstract identity between thinking and being" where I have "identity which abstract thought postulates between thinking and being." The Danish is "Abstraktionens Identitet mellem Tænken og Væren," "Abstraktionen" translates literally as 'abstraction' and is thus a noun rather than an adjective (that it is a noun can also be seen from the fact that it is capitalized). I have also changed the Hongs' "something existent" to "some real thing" for reasons give above (cf. chapter one, §1.1. and chapter two).

a sinner, this is the stillness that upsets the customary order like a storm at sea. He knew [veed] all this, knew [veed] what would happen to him, but he did not know [vidste ikke] how the heart beats when help from others and guidance from others, and the standards and abstraction afforded by others, vanishes in the stillness; he did not know [vidste ikke] the trembling of the soul, when it is too late to shout for human aid, since no one can hear him: in short, he had no idea [Forestilling] of how the knower is changed when he needs to apply his knowledge. (CS, 36/SV V, 200)⁵⁴

The knowledge referred to here is clearly not acquaintance knowledge--i.e., kendskab. That it is propositional knowledge, or a mental representation (forestilling) of reality, is apparent from both the Danish expressions used and the reference to mental representation in the last sentence. That is, the ideality of even specifically Christian knowledge is distinguished here from the actuality of Christian existence. The relation of Christian knowledge to right action is expressed even more clearly, however, in the other reference. "Perhaps," begins Kierkegaard,

the double-minded one had a knowledge [Erkiendelse] of the Good. . . . Alas, contemplation [Betragtning] and the moment of contemplation, in spite of all their clarity, readily conceal a deception; because the moment of contemplation has something in common with the falsified eternity. It is a foreshortening that is necessary in order that the contemplation might take place. It must foreshorten time a good deal. Indeed, it must actually call the senses and thoughts away from time in order that they might complete themselves in a spurious eternal well-roundedness. It is here as when an

⁵⁴Emphasis added. I have altered the translation here slightly. The last sentence of the Swenson translation has "he had no idea of how knowledge (my emphasis) is changed." This reference agrees, however, with the earlier reference and should thus read as it does above.

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artist sketches a country. The sketch cannot be as big as the country, . . . but on that account it also becomes all the easier for the observer to scan the outlines of that country. And yet it may well happen to the observer, if suddenly he were set down in the actual country where the many, many miles are valid, that he would be unable to recognize the country, . . . to find his way about in it. So it will be with the double-minded person. His knowledge [Erkjendelse] has indeed been a sense deception. What was there, in air-tight fashion pressed together in the completeness of contemplation, shall now be stretched out at its full length. (POH, 114-15/SV VIII, 173-174)

There are two things which are important to appreciate with respect to the above quotation. The first is that the individual described "had a knowledge of the Good." The problem was not an inadequacy in the individual's mental representation of "the Good," but an inadequacy in his character. The second thing it is important to appreciate is that such an inadequacy in character, or "double-mindedness" is not restricted, according to Kierkegaard, to certain sorts of people, it is an expression of sin, which is universal. We are all double-minded, on his view, and living as a Christian means striving to purge ourselves of this double-mindedness or to purify our wills.⁵⁵

It is for this reason Kierkegaard asserts that the life of a Christian only approaches (tilnærmer) the truth. Only in Christ, according to Kierkegaard, are truth and existence combined in such a way that they are indistinguishable from each other. "The being of truth," argues Kierkegaard,

is the redoubling of truth within yourself,
within me, within him, [so] that your life, my

⁵⁵This is, in fact the theme of Kierkegaard's Purity of Heart. Cf. CUP I, 488/SV VII, 424; GOS, 226-227/SV VIII, 289; GOS, 132/SV VIII, 394 and WOL, 162/SV IX, 162.

life, his life approaches truth in the striving for it, that your life, my life, his life approaches the being of the truth in the striving for it, just as the truth was in Christ a life,⁵⁶ for he was the truth. (PC, 205/SV XII, 189)⁵⁷

Knowledge of the truth of Christianity would thus appear equivalent to knowledge that Christianity "is not a doctrine," but "a believing and a very particular kind of existing [Existeren] corresponding to it" (JP 2:1880/Pap. X³ A 454).⁵⁸ Or as Daise explains: "To give assent to the god's having come into existence, . . . is to accept that way of life as the model for one's own and to see this model as authoritative."⁵⁹ But while there is clearly such a thing as Christian knowledge in this sense, according to Kierkegaard,⁶⁰ he argues that Christian truth, or the truth of Christianity, when viewed merely as knowledge--i.e., when considered in its ideality, or as a mental representation viewed in abstraction from any existential situation, or from behavior that is directed by the subject of contemplation toward its actualization--is untruth.⁶¹ One can see, argues Kierkegaard,

what a monstrous mistake it is, almost the greatest possible, to didacticize Christianity and how altered Christianity has become through

⁵⁶Cf. Daise, op. cit. 6.

⁵⁷Emphasis added. I have altered the Hongs' translation slightly by replacing the phrases which included the expression 'approximately' with "approaches" (cf. chapter twelve, §12.1.).

⁵⁸Cf. Wisdo, op. cit. 97.

⁵⁹Daise, op. cit. 9.

⁶⁰Cf., e.g., JP 1:653 (p. 289)/Pap VIII² B 85, 29 and Hügli, op. cit. 169.

⁶¹Cf. PC, 206/SV XII, 190.

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this continual didacticizing is seen in this, that now all expressions are formed according to the view that truth is cognition [Erkjendelsen], knowledge [Viden] (now one speaks continually of comprehending, speculating, observing, etc.), whereas in original Christianity all the expressions were formed according to the view that truth is [sic] a [way of] being. (PC, 206/SV XII, 190)

Christian knowledge is possible as something which follows from Christian experience and it is reasonable to assume that it was this knowledge to which Kierkegaard referred when he said he could conceive of a specifically Christian epistemology, which development he asserted could be undertaken only after one had become a Christian.⁶²

We have already seen that Christian knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, may be understood to include the appreciation of the believer that his sins are forgiven. To the extent that this knowledge is indistinguishable from the appreciation that God is love, the latter too may be understood to be known by the believer in the moment of faith. To these two sorts of Christian knowledge we may now add the knowledge that Christianity itself is neither the doctrine that one's sins have been forgiven nor the doctrine that God is love, but that it is a way of life. That is, Christianity is the process of an individual's striving to bring his existence into conformity with ethical-religious ideality, which is characterized by his belief that the activity itself is pleasing to God and that God does not hold his failure to establish such conformity, in an absolute sense, against him.

The individual whose life may be characterized in this way expresses Christian truth in an "approximate" sense and to the extent that he expresses this truth he may be said to be in contact with it. To the extent, however, that the

⁶²Cf. JP 2:2277/Pap. III A 211.

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knowledge in question is essentially subjective, the knower's certainty of the correspondence of the mental representation in question to reality is inexorably intertwined with his appreciation of the necessity of the correspondence of the reality--i.e., actuality--of his existence to the mental representation. That is, the knower's certainty that his mental representation of Christian truth corresponds to reality is equivalent to his appreciation of the subjective necessity of the correspondence of his existence to this mental representation and this latter appreciation is received by him with his belief in Christ. That is, belief in Christ transforms guilt-consciousness into sin-consciousness which transformation is equivalent to the revelation of the subjective necessity of making one's life an expression of Christian truth in order to obtain authentic human existence.

The truth in question, however, is like all subjective truth, not a property of a mental representation that Christianity is a way of life, but a property of the existence of the knower to the extent that this existence is an actualization of the particular way of being as it is represented in thought.

There may be a great deal more which may be placed under the heading of Christian knowledge according to Kierkegaard. Whatever Christian knowledge consists of, however, it cannot include a knowledge that God came to be in the person of Christ, because all knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, is again, either of the eternal, which excludes the temporal, or it is merely of the historical. No knowledge can have for its object that the eternal came into existence.⁶³ There is no evidence that Kierkegaard ever abandons the Leibnizian distinction between truths of

⁶³Cf. PF, 62/SV IV, 227.

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reason and truths of fact.

It is possible, of course, to speak of the "truths" of Christianity in the sense in which "truths" were distinguished from "truth" above.⁶⁴ Even Kierkegaard refers to the "truths [as distinguished from "truth"] of Christianity" (CUP I, 224/SV VII, 188). Knowledge of Christian truths on his view, may be characterized as a mental representation that God is love, or that it is God's will that one relate oneself lovingly to one's neighbor. One cannot know, however, even when meeting Christ, how Christ came to be there. Just as one must believe in the historicity of the people and events around one,⁶⁵ so must one believe in the historicity of Christ, or in the historicity of God in Christ.

There is a reference to knowledge (viden) of Christ in The Sickness Unto Death,⁶⁶ but the context of this reference makes it clear that it is not a reference to knowledge that Christ was God. That is, this knowledge is later referred to as a representation (i.e., Forestilling) which exists in the knowing subject to a greater or lesser degree. "[T]he greater the conception [Forestilling] of Christ," argues Kierkegaard, "the more self" (SUD, 113/SV XI, 223). That is, the more complete the mental representation one has of this individual one believes to be God--i.e. the more complete a mental representation one has of what ethical-religious ideality would look like if it were expressed in the life of a particular individual⁶⁷--the more self one

⁶⁴Cf. chapter six, introduction.

⁶⁵Cf. chapter nine, §9.2.1.

⁶⁶Cf. SUD, 113/SVXI, 223.

⁶⁷That is, Christ's life, according to Kierkegaard, is essentially eternal truth which has come to be in time (cf. Hannay, op. cit. 87). It is because Christ's life is essentially eternal truth, however, that everyone can be contemporary with it according to Kierkegaard (cf. PC 64/SV

has.

Specifically Christian knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, is either knowledge of eternal truth, or it is historical knowledge, not knowledge that the eternal became temporal. The knowledge, for example, that one is a sinner and that one's sins have been forgiven is historical knowledge. That is, sin is not part of an individual's eternally established essence, according to Kierkegaard, but was freely appropriated at some point by the sinner. To the extent that the believer was not always a sinner his sins cannot for all eternity have been forgiven. Both the subject's mental representation of himself as a sinner and his representation of his sins as forgiven relate to what was referred to above as truths of fact. Knowledge that there is a God is, on the other hand, knowledge of eternal truth.⁶⁸ There may be more to specifically Christian knowledge than what has been identified above as falling under this heading. Whatever else it includes, however, Christian knowledge, it appears, cannot include knowledge that God became man.⁶⁹

Kierkegaard does refer to "knowledge of the paradox" in his journals where he argues, in a draft of the Postscript, that "Christian knowledge is not knowledge of the Paradox, but knowledge of it in passion and the knowledge of the wise that it can only be known in passion" (CUP II, 50/Pap. VI B 40:26). If what is meant here by "paradox" is that one's sins are forgiven, then the meaning of the above reference is already clear. If, however,

XII, 61).

⁶⁸Cf. chapter fourteen, §14.1.

⁶⁹Cf. Kierkegaard's claim in his unpublished book on Adler that "[e]ven if thought might think that it could assimilate the doctrine, yet the way in which it came into the world it cannot assimilate" (OAR, 107/NRF, 141).

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"paradox" is meant here to refer to the claim that God became man in the person of Christ, then it would appear, however, that what he means by this is that "[o]bjective knowledge about the truth, or truths, of Christianity is precisely untruth. To know a creed by rote," argues Kierkegaard, "is paganism because Christianity is inwardness" (CUP I, 224/SV VII, 189).

That is, Christian knowledge proper is not "knowledge," in the approximate sense, of what has historically been referred to as Christian doctrine, or more specifically, "knowledge" in the approximate sense, that the proposition that God became man in the person of Christ is part of this doctrine, it is this mental representation, or this "knowledge" in the sense of an "objective uncertainty held fast through an appropriation with the most passionate inwardness" (CUP I, 203/SV VII, 170) as well as the wise person's knowledge (i.e., insight) that the only way that one can properly relate to this "knowledge" is subjectively--i.e., in the passion of faith.

The above account of this reference may seem contrived. What makes it compelling, however, is that it is consistent with all other references to knowledge that appear in the Postscript, as well as Kierkegaard's authorship as a whole, while there is nothing in that authorship which would support an interpretation of this passage as a reference to propositional knowledge in the strict sense.⁷⁰

Kierkegaard never explicitly develops a Christian epistemology because, though knowledge figures prominently in his authorship, it is not knowledge, even of the Christian sort, which is his primary interest. He argues, for example, that even "the knowledge that contemplation

⁷⁰It is very likely the ambiguity of this reference which caused Kierkegaard to omit it from the final version of the Postscript.

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and reflection are the distance of eternity away from time and actuality because, [as knowledge] it exists in a spurious eternity before the imagination, develops double-mindedness, if it is not slowly and honestly earned by the will's purity" (POH, 116-17/SV VIII, 175). Christianity, on Kierkegaard's view, is essentially oriented toward the will rather than toward knowledge in the sense of specific mental representations,⁷¹ hence it is the will, or human psychology, that primarily interests him. Willing, according to Kierkegaard, is a more basic activity than knowing and this is part of the reason it is so significant with respect to issues in epistemology.⁷²

Kierkegaard is concerned with the difficulties involved in being a Christian, or in trying to live a Christian life. He observes, for example, that

[j]ust when one has understood [forstaaet] the truth best of all, the old ideas suddenly pop up again. The infinite, the eternal, and therefore the true are so foreign to humans by nature that it is with [them] as with the dog which can indeed learn to walk upright but still always prefers to walk on all fours. (WOL, 229-30/SV IX, 233)

There is indeed Christian knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, in the sense that there are mental representations of the "truths" of Christianity, but to possess this knowledge is not to be a Christian. "If the

⁷¹Cf., e.g., JP 6:6966/Pap. XI² A 436; JP 2:1202/Pap. III C 16; JP 4: 4953/Pap. XI² A 86 and SUD, 90/SV XI, 201 and Nügli, op. cit. 210 and 161.

⁷²That is, knowledge is always the result of willing. One has to will to know even what one is inherently capable of knowing without any assistance. This is true not merely with respect to scholarly or scientific knowledge, but also with respect to "knowledge" of immanent metaphysical truths, although it is less apparent with respect to the latter.

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rights of knowledge are to be given their due," he argues, "we must venture out into life, out upon the ocean, and scream in the hope that God will hear . . . only then does knowledge acquire its official registration" (JP 2:2279/Pap. III A, 145). "Here in the world of knowledge," argues Kierkegaard, "there rests upon man [Mennesket] a curse (blessing) which bids him eat his bread in the sweat of his brow" (JP 2:2274/Pap. III A 5).⁷³

A "completely human life," according to Kierkegaard, is not merely one of knowledge,⁷⁴ because the medium of knowledge is thought, or ideality, whereas a human being is an interesse between thought and being, or between ideality and reality. A completely human life consists of action as well as thought and to be really complete the action in question should represent the efforts of the individual to bring the actuality of his existence into conformity with ethical ideality.

To bring being into relation to thought such that thought is made to conform to being, that is, to accurately reproduce or represent it, is the activity of knowledge, according to Kierkegaard. Even specifically Christian knowledge has this character. That is, it is the result of an effort to bring the actuality of Christian experience into relation to thought, or to represent that experience in the categories of thought. But the medium of thought is ideality, hence the categories of thought are ideal categories, which means that Christian knowledge is an

⁷³Cf. Kierkegaard's observation in Fear and Trembling that "[t]here is a knowledge that presumptuously wants to introduce into the world of spirit the same law of indifference under which the external world sighs. It believes that it is enough to know what is great--no other work is needed. But for this reason it does not get nourishment [Brød]; it perishes of hunger while everything changes to Gold" (FT, 27-28/SV III, 80).

⁷⁴Cf. JP 5:5100/Pap. I A 75.

idealized representation of Christian experience. This idealized representation of Christian experience is important, however because once possessed, the efforts of the knower must be directed to a reduplication of that ideality in actuality.⁷⁵ To bring thought into relation to reality or, more specifically, actuality, such that actuality is made to conform to ethical-religious ideality as it is represented in thought, is ethical-religious activity.⁷⁶ Hence the activity of the Christian is directed toward a repetition of Christian experience.⁷⁷ This is what Kierkegaard means when he observes that "Christian experience rather than reason [Fornuft] seeks its corroboration in other experience" (JP 2:2251/Pap. II C 46).

Only by successfully willing to do the good, i.e., to bring the actuality of his existence into conformity with the ethical-religious ideality can an individual overcome the contradiction inherent in human existence (i.e., that a human being is composed of the apparently incompatible elements of temporality and eternity, actuality and ideality, etc.).⁷⁸ Such success is, however, always only momentary because each new instant renews the demand that the ideality be actualized in time. "Eternity," explains Hügli, "is the telos that should be present in existence, but because it can only be present in the moment

⁷⁵"I certainly do not deny," observes Kierkegaard, "that I still accept an imperative of knowledge [Erkendelsens Imperativ] and that through it people [Menneskene] may be influenced, but then it must come alive in me, and this is what I now recognize as the most important of all" (JP 5:5100/Pap. I A 75).

⁷⁶Cf. Hannay, op. cit. 67 and Hügli, op. cit. 111 and 203.

⁷⁷Cf. CA, 18n./SV IV, 289-291n.

⁷⁸Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 133 and 200.

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[momentweise], it is never fully present, but belongs in part to the future."⁷⁹ It is for this reason that the self, according to Kierkegaard, "does not actually exist [er ikke virkelig til] [but] is simply that which ought to come to be" (SUD, 30/SV XI, 142). That is, the distinction, according to Kierkegaard, between "truth and truths . . . is recognizable in the distinction made between way and final decision, which is reached at the end, the result" (PC, 206/SV XII, 190). Certainly in one sense the individual has a goal toward which he strives--i.e., to actualize the ideal of Christian existence. In another sense, that "the existing subjective thinker is continually striving does not mean, however, that in a finite sense he has a goal toward which he is striving, where he would be finished when he reached it. No, he is striving infinitely, is continually in the process of becoming [Vorden]" (CUP I, 91/SV VII, 72).⁸⁰

Only Christ's life, according to Kierkegaard, was an expression of the truth in an absolute sense.⁸¹ That is, the self which each of us is to become, according to Kierkegaard, the self which is an expression of our eternally established essence, is morally perfect. Christ, argues Kierkegaard, "himself had to express the truth with his own life, himself had to portray what it is to be the truth, and as truly human he had consequently this something else as his task--to accomplish this himself absolutely" (PC, 181-182/SV XII, 169).⁸² That is, a fully

⁷⁹Hügli, op. cit. 213. Cf. OAR, 175-178/NRF, 216-219.

⁸⁰Cf. CUP I, 80/SV VII, 62 and CUP I, 453-454/SV VII, 394.

⁸¹Cf. SV XII, 284 and OAR, 143-144/NRF, 178.

⁸²I have altered the Hongs' translation slightly. The Hongs have "to accomplish this himself" where I have "to accomplish this completely himself." The Danish is: "selv saaledes at fuldkomme det," which translates literally as

human life, according to Kierkegaard, is an expression of moral perfection.⁸³ This objective cannot be separated from being a person, or a self, properly speaking.⁸⁴ It is precisely this demand, however, for moral perfection, or the equation of a genuine synthesis of the opposing elements which compose the self with such moral perfection, which makes Christian knowledge problematic.

To meet Christ, according to Kierkegaard, in the passion of faith, is to come to know that God is love and that Christian truth is a way of living rather than a set of propositions. That is, to meet Christ in the moment of faith is to come into contact with the reality of God's love. The knower is said to be certain that the resultant mental representation that God is love corresponds to reality because he has, according to Kierkegaard, the "certainty that can only be had in infinitude" (CUP I, 81/SV VII, 63), i.e., the certainty of faith (CUP I, 55/SV VII, 41).⁸⁵ The difficulty, however, is that faith is not something which one can attain once and for all. That is, the infinite passion of faith, or the contact established through faith with God's infinite love, cannot be indefinitely sustained. This infinitude, according to Kierkegaard, is something in which one cannot, as an existing individual, rest but to which one can only

"himself thus to perfect (at fuldkomme) it" (cf. Ferrall-Gudm. Repp. op. cit. 101 and Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit. vol. I, 417-418). The Hongs' translation includes no reference to Christ's obligation to make his life a perfect (fuldkommen) or absolute expression of the truth. This reference is important, however, in that it is in this respect that only Christ is the truth. That is, only Christ's life comes closer than an approximate (tilnærmelsesvis) expression of the truth.

⁸³Cf. CUP I, 346/SV VII, 300.

⁸⁴Cf. Daise, op. cit. 5.

⁸⁵Cf. WOL, 86/SV IX, 103-104 and Slotky, op. cit. 60.

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continually arrive.⁸⁶

The difficulty is that all specifically Christian knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, as distinguished from other sorts of subjective knowledge, has its foundation in the knowing subject's belief in Christ. The certainty of faith, as we saw, is no more arbitrary on Kierkegaard's view, than the certainty associated with objective knowledge. That is, the former certainty, like the latter, is the result of the contact of the knower with the substance of the reality in question. It is just that the contact in the former instance is problematic in a sense in which the contact in the latter instance is not. That is, the knower is by definition immediately related to the reality of his ideas as such whereas he is, to the extent that he is defined as a sinner, essentially separated from ethical-religious reality. Contact with the latter reality must thus be established through the joint efforts of God, in the person of Christ, and the individual himself.⁸⁷

The difficulty is that part of the individual is strongly resistant to establishing contact with ethical-religious reality because the truth, according to Kierkegaard, is that "to become a Christian is to become unhappy for this life" (KAUC, 189/SV XIV, 226). Everyone has an interest in authentic human existence, according to Kierkegaard.⁸⁸ The difficulty is that to the extent that such existence is equivalent to the actualization of ethical-religious ideality, to become a Christian means to

⁸⁶Cf. CUP I, 81/SV VII, 83.

⁸⁷That is, Christ supplies the condition for understanding the truth and the believer accepts this condition through the surrender of his worldly understanding. Cf. PF, 54/SV IV, 220; PF 64/SV IV, 228-229; Thulstrup, "kommentar," op. cit. 181 and Wisdo, op. cit. 100.

⁸⁸Cf. Slotky, op. cit. 40 and Hannay, op. cit. 335.

sacrifice one's animal, or lower, nature with all its drives and desires, to the interest of one's higher nature.⁸⁹ The lower nature is strongly resistant, however, to being sacrificed in this way and thus always represents a threat to the maintenance of Christian faith. Even the believer, according to Kierkegaard, eventually "relapses to the low level of the worldly, to his customary speech and way of thinking" (EUD, 300/SV V, 84)⁹⁰ and must thus continually renew his faith. It is for this reason Kierkegaard argues that "[f]aith certainly requires an expression of will, and yet in another sense than when, for example, I must say that all knowledge [Erkjendelse] requires an expression of will" (JP 2:1094/Pap. I A 36).

Though Christian knowledge is possible as a result of the contact of the knowing subject with God's infinite love, as that contact is established through his belief in Christ, "only in his strongest moment," argues Kierkegaard,

can a human being understand that what is present weakly enough in his strongest moment [i.e., Christian truth] was far more strongly present in every moment [of Christ's life], but in the next moment he cannot understand it and therefore he must believe and hold fast in faith so that his life does not become confused by understanding at one time and not understanding at another time. (WOL, 108/SV IX, 99)⁹¹

⁸⁹Cf. JP 4:4872//Pap. X³ A 614 and JP 4:4885/Pap. XI¹ 352.

⁹⁰I have altered this translation slightly. The Hongs have "ordinary conversation" where I have chosen to stick with Swenson's "customary speech." The Danish is "sædvanlig Tale." 'Sædvanlig' should properly be translated as "customary" (Ferrall-Gudm. Repp. 320), and "Tale," is best translated, in this context, as 'speech' (cf. Ferrall-Gudm. Repp. 324 and Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit., vol. II, 560).

⁹¹It is important to point out in this context that there is an ambiguity in a portion of this passage which I have not quoted. The passage refers to the idea that

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Christ was the fulfillment of the law. It begins as follows: "Every Christian believes this and believingly appropriates it for himself, but no one has known this except for the law and Him who was the fulfilling of the law." The Danish expression that is translated here by the Hongs as "except for" is "uden" which was properly be translated as "without" in the mid nineteenth century (cf. Ferrall-Gudm. Repp., op. cit. 343) and for which this is still the preferred translation (cf. Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit. vol. II, 681). The Danish word that is normally translated into English as 'except' is 'undtagen' (cf. Ferral-Gudm. Repp. op. cit. 353 and Vinterberg-Bodelsen, op. cit. vol. II, 734).

16. Conclusion to Part III

I would like to return now to the questions I put forward in the introduction to Part III. The first of these questions concerned whether it is possible for the objects of subjective knowledge to be objects of objective knowledge as well. The answer, as we have seen is yes and no. That is, objective "knowledge" of things essentially related to subjective experience is what I identified as pseudo-knowledge. It bears only the faintest resemblance to subjective knowledge proper in that it fails to satisfy even one of the criteria for knowledge in that it is neither justified, nor true. That is, the certainty of the knower that a given mental representation corresponds to reality is a consequence of his contact with the object of this representation which is a result of his having brought his existence into conformity with it. Pseudo-knowledge, or objective "knowledge" of things which can properly be known only subjectively, according to Kierkegaard, is precisely a mental representation viewed in abstraction from any relation it might have to the existence of the individual whose representation it is. That is, it is a mental representation considered independently of the contact, or lack thereof, of the "knower" with the reality to which it is related. Since the intuition, or insight, into the essence of the object of a mental representation which serves to justify it, is possible only to the extent that the knower is in contact with that object, a mental representation viewed independently of such contact cannot be said to be justified.

Subjective truth, as we saw, is not, according to Kierkegaard, the property of a mental representation, but

the property of the existence of the knower. Pseudo-knowledge, or objective "knowledge" of things which can properly be known only subjectively, according to Kierkegaard, is precisely a mental representation viewed in abstraction from any relation which it might have to the existence of the knower. To the extent, however, that subjective truth consists, according to Kierkegaard, in a particular kind of relation between such a mental representation and the existence of the individual whose representation it is, pseudo-knowledge cannot be said to be true. Subjective knowledge proper cannot, according to Kierkegaard, be separated from the efforts of the knower to bring the actuality of his or her existence into conformity with the mental representation in question. It is for this reason Kierkegaard contends that "objective knowledge about the truth or truths of Christianity, is precisely untruth" (CUP I, 224/SV VII, 188).

The relation of subjective to objective knowledge should now be clear. Both concern aspects of the reality with which the individual knower is faced. It is neither possible, nor desirable, on Kierkegaard's view, to live a life informed entirely with knowledge of one or the other sort. Objective reality can be the object only of objective knowledge. That is, there cannot be any discrepancy between objective reality and the knower's existence, thus there can be no question of this subject bringing his existence into conformity with this reality. Neither ontological knowledge, nor mathematical knowledge nor any other knowledge that belongs to what Kierkegaard calls immanent metaphysical knowledge, is essentially related to the existence of the individual knowing subject and the same is true with respect to scholarly and scientific knowledge. Objective knowledge of these sorts is appropriate, and indeed the only sort of knowledge possible with respect to certain kinds of objects, because these objects are what they are independently of the experience of any particular individual. this is not true,

however, as we have seen, with respect to knowledge which is essentially related to such experience.

The final question concerns whether one ought to subsume subjective knowledge under the general heading of Kierkegaard's "epistemology ". This is not an easy question to answer because of the differences, already detailed, between objective and subjective knowledge. There are, however, some similarities. Both types of knowledge are interested, although they are distinguished according to the nature of the object of interest. That is, insofar as objective knowledge is associated with interest, the object of interest is not the essence of the knower himself, but something which is assumed to have an independent existence. The interest which is associated, however, with subjective knowledge is precisely the interest of the knower in his essence as such. That is, this interest is his interest in attaining authentic human existence in the sense of becoming a self. Subjective knowledge proper, like objective knowledge in the strict sense, is a mental representation of whose correspondence to reality the knower is understood to be certain and it is also, like the latter, concerned with truth, even if it cannot, in itself, be true.

I argued, in the introduction, that Kierkegaard's epistemology was both procedural and substantive. Subjective knowledge proper is substantive rather than procedural. That is, ethical-religious knowledge proper is the result of the contact of the knowing subject with ethical-religious reality to the extent that that reality is built into the contents of his consciousness in the form of a mental representation and to the extent that he has brought the reality--i.e., actuality--of his existence into conformity with this mental representation.

To instantiate ethical-religious reality in this way, is, according to Kierkegaard, to be in two places at once. That is, to instantiate ethical-religious ideality is to be at once both actual and ideal. It is to be an identity of

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subject and object--i.e., an identity of the knowing subject and the ethical-religious ideality which is the object of his mental representation.¹ According to Kierkegaard, however, no one is ever entirely successful in actualizing ethical-religious ideality or in being in two places at once in this way. "When he is closest to being in two places at the same time, he is in passion; but passion," he continues, "is only momentary" (CUP I, 199/SV VII, 167). This passion is the knower's personal interest in his own ethical actuality,² and it is this passion, or interest, which is the means through which contact with ethical-religious reality is established.³

Pseudo-knowledge, it appears, is procedural just as knowledge in the loose sense is procedural. One may have a "correct" mental representation of ethical-religious reality, yet not have knowledge to the extent that one's existence does not constitute a reduplication of the substance of this representation.⁴ We saw above that such a reduplication admits of degree⁵ and that even the acceptance of guilt for failing to actualize ethical-religious ideality amounts, according to Kierkegaard, to an actualization of that ideality to the extent that it represents the annihilation of the possibility of self-deception concerning one's guilt. To the extent, however, that an individual does deceive himself in this respect, his "knowledge," instead of involving contact with ethical-

¹Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 200.

²Cf. CUP I, 324/SV VII, 278 and Hügli, op. cit. 106.

³Cf. Hügli, op. cit. 200.

⁴Cf. EUD, 173/SV IV, 66 and JP 1:656/Pap. VIII² B 88.

⁵Cf. Hannay's claim that "[c]learly there is room for a range of levels of moral consciousness even after the ethical course has been chosen" (Hannay, op. cit. 208).

religious reality as did subjective knowledge proper, involves, or is associated with, the process of self-deception and may thus be described as procedural "knowledge."⁶

There is another respect, however, in which a mental representation of something essentially prescriptive may be considered independently of the existence of the individual knower. That is, one may be objectively preoccupied with determining the essence of ethical-religious ideality as such. That is, one's effort to determine the precise nature of norms which are eternally valid for human behavior, may not be directed inward, in an effort to avoid deceiving oneself relative to the issue of whether one's behavior instantiates such norms, but may be directed outward in an effort, in effect, to read the essence of these norms in world history which, of course, Kierkegaard repeatedly argues, is impossible.⁷ Pseudo-knowledge of this sort relates to what is referred to in Danish as 'sædelighed.' That is, this "knowledge" refers to a mental representation of culturally and historically established--rather than eternally valid--norms for human behavior. "Knowledge" of these norms is thus attained in the same way that scholarly and scientific knowledge is attained--i.e., through the collection of data pertaining to such norms and the calculation of the apparent probability of the correspondence of a particular mental representation of these norms to reality.

Pseudo-knowledge fails to be substantive, or to consist in contact with the reality to which it is related

⁶It is important to point out, however, that Kierkegaard apparently did not believe in the possibility of complete self-deception. He asserts, for example, in his unpublished book on Adler that "cowardly and soft [bløddagtige] religious people [are] conscious that at bottom their religiosity is a hypocritical made-up [opsmindet] thing" (OAR, 158-159/NRF, 196).

⁷Cf. SV IV, 295; CUP I, 152/SV VII, 125 and CUP I, 157/SV VII, 129.

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precisely because the "knower," in this instance, lacks infinite, personal, passionate interest in this reality.⁸ Pseudo-knowledge is distinguished from knowledge in the loose sense, however, in that while a "disinterested" perspective relative to the latter is quite proper, according to Kierkegaard, such a relation to the objects of subjective knowledge is precisely improper.⁹ "The assumption," argues Hannay, "is that individual human beings do indeed have this interest, and furthermore . . . that it is fitting that they should have it even if there are those, even a majority, who claim that they do not."¹⁰ The knower is defined by Kierkegaard, as interest both in the sense of the interest he has and the interest he takes in attaining authentic existence in the sense in which this existence is equivalent to an instantiation of ethical-religious ideality. To fail to be interested in such existence is thus, according to Kierkegaard, to fail to be both what one essentially is and what one essentially ought to be.

I argued in the introduction to this thesis that knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, was a justified true mental representation and that subjective knowledge proper was thus problematic in that it could not in itself--i.e., as a mental representation--be true. There is another respect, however, in which subjective knowledge is problematic. Truth, according to Kierkegaard, is an agreement between thought and being. The difficulty is that the agreement between the individual knower and ethical-religious reality which constitutes subjective

⁸Cf. CUP I, 21/SV VII, 11.

⁹Cf. Hannay's claim that Climacus assumes there is an "objective basis" for an individual's interest in an eternal happiness (Hannay, op. cit. 193).

¹⁰Hannay, op. cit. 44.

truth proper, on Kierkegaard's view, admits of degrees and indeed must admit of degrees if Kierkegaard is not to contradict himself. That is, Kierkegaard argues that living ethically-religiously means endeavoring to bring one's existence into conformity with eternally valid ethical-religious norms, yet he argues that no one except Christ is ever entirely successful in this endeavor.¹¹ But to express truth is to be in contact with it and if this contact is necessary to secure knowledge of these truths as such, in what sense can one be understood to be in contact with a truth the expression of which one only approaches (tilnærmer), and in what sense can such contact be said to yield knowledge?

In what sense can one be only partly in contact with something? It might appear immediately that contact is something which either obtains or fails to obtain. There is a sense, however, in which one can be said to be partly in contact with something. To correspond with someone, for example, is to be in contact with that person, although such contact is of a lesser sort than that which characterizes a normal conversation. Kierkegaard argues, however, that to express ethical-religious truth only partly is to approach (tilnærmes) it, hence the analogy which will be most helpful is one which incorporates this aspect of subjective truth. This, I believe, can be found in the experience of approaching the ocean. As one approaches the ocean one becomes gradually surrounded by the sight, the smell, the sound and even the feel of it. That is, at the edge of the ocean, where the waves meet the shore, there is a fine mist thrown off by these waves. To approach the ocean is to feel this mist on one's face and to feel it thus, cool and wet like the ocean itself, is to know something of that reality stretched out before one. To approach ethical-religious truth is to be in contact

¹¹Cf., 204/SV XII, 188; Slotky, op. cit. 38 and chapter twelve, §12.1.

Chapter 16: Conclusion to Part III

with it in this sense. But this too is a kind of contact which yields, in turn, a kind of knowledge even if such knowledge is only "in part."¹²

¹²I Corinthians 13:12.

CONCLUSION

I stated in the introduction to this thesis that I would argue that there were actually several kinds of knowledge according to Kierkegaard, and that the various kinds of knowledge he delineated could be divided into two basic groups: "objective knowledge" and "subjective knowledge." I argued further that objective knowledge could be subdivided into knowledge in the strict sense and "approximate knowledge," or knowledge in a looser sense, and that subjective knowledge could be subdivided into subjective knowledge proper and pseudo-knowledge.

Knowledge in general, I argued, could be defined as a justified true mental representation where the precise meaning of 'justified' and 'true' was relative to both the nature of the object of knowledge and the context in which the knowing (or "knowing") took place. Truth, as we saw, was defined by Kierkegaard as the agreement of reality with thought or of thought with reality. We also saw, however, that it was possible to speak of truth and "truth," or of truth in both an absolute and a relative sense.

Justification, in the strict sense, was identified as an insight into the essence of the object of knowledge made possible by the contact of the knower with that object. This insight was in turn defined as the appreciation of the knower of the correspondence of the mental representation in question to reality and thus as equivalent to certainty concerning this correspondence. Contact with the object of knowledge was, however, not always possible. There was thus also a loose sense in which a mental representation could be said to be justified. "Justification," in this sense was equivalent to the impression of the knower that

the correspondence of the mental representation in question to reality was probable.

Subjective knowledge proper was distinguished from objective knowledge in the strict sense in that it was essentially prescriptive rather than descriptive. That is, the certainty of the knower that a given mental representation corresponded to reality could not properly be separated from the correspondence of the reality in question--i.e., the existence of the knower--to the mental representation. It was, in fact, this latter correspondence which constituted subject truth. That is, subjective truth, as we saw, was not a property of a mental representation, as was objective truth, but was a property of the existence of the knower.

Objective knowledge in the strict sense was a justified, true mental representation, while objective knowledge in the loose sense was a "justified," "true" mental representation. Subjective knowledge proper turned out to be a justified mental representation which was neither true nor false. It was not false because it was associated with the way of life it prescribed, but neither was it true in that the truth in question was precisely this way of life rather than a property of the mental representation as such.

Each of the above types of knowledge was related, as we saw, to specific sorts of objects and represented a legitimate way these objects could be known. Each of these types of knowledge is distinguished in this respect from pseudo-knowledge. Pseudo-knowledge, like objective knowledge in the loose sense, was associated with probability rather than certainty. The appreciation of the apparent probability of the correspondence of a given mental representation to reality was acceptable, however, as a justification of knowledge in the loose sense, precisely because the correspondence of such

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representations to reality was inherently uncertain. This was not the case, however, with subjective knowledge. That is, there is for Kierkegaard one determinate ethical-religious truth--i.e., Christianity--which means that certainty is accessible with respect to every object of subjective knowledge and that thus probability, or the impression that the correspondence of a given mental representation of ethical religious reality to that reality was probable, could not serve to justify this representation. The truth to which pseudo-knowledge related was a property of reality, or of the existence of the knower, rather than of the knowledge itself thus, like subjective knowledge proper, it could not, as a mental representation, be said to be true. Pseudo-knowledge thus turned out to be a mental representation that was neither justified nor true.

I stated in the introduction that I would argue that Kierkegaard's epistemology was both substantive and procedural. Objective knowledge in the strict sense was substantive in that it was associated with the contact of the knower with the object of knowledge which, as we saw, turned out to be the relations among the subject's own ideas. Subjective knowledge proper was also associated with the contact of the knower with the object of knowledge, though this contact was never established in an absolute sense.

Objective knowledge in the loose sense was procedural in that it was associated with the calculation of the "knower" of the probability of the correspondence of a given mental representation to reality. Pseudo-knowledge was procedural in the same sense, but was distinguished from objective knowledge in the loose sense in that while in the former instance such calculation was the best, indeed the only, way of attempting to establish the correspondence of a given mental representation to reality,

in the latter instance it represented a threat to the establishment of such correspondence.

I argued in the introduction to this thesis that the variety of uses Kierkegaard made of the expression 'knowledge' did not represent an equivocation on his part as to its meaning, but that each of the senses in which he used this expression served an important purpose within his authorship as a whole. That is, Kierkegaard's objective in detailing the various senses in which the expression knowledge is used in everyday contexts was to show that there was no sense in which Christian knowledge could be understood to be superior to Christian faith.¹

It might have been easier for scholars to determine the substance of Kierkegaard's thought if he had chosen a different term to designate each of the various types of knowledge referred to in his works. Technical terminology of this sort would, however, represent a substantial departure from ordinary language and would thus have made his work inaccessible to anyone who was not himself a scholar. It is, of course, not unusual for philosophers to eschew a popular readership. Nothing could have been further, however, from Kierkegaard's own authorial intentions. His epistemology is, as I believe I have shown, quite sophisticated, but his message, again, was essentially a religious rather than a scholarly one.

Each type of knowledge referred to in Kierkegaard's works represents the clarification of a way the expression is used in everyday contexts. When we say, for example, that we know the sum of the interior angles of a triangle is 180° what we mean by "know" differs somewhat from what we mean by this same expression when we say we know what causes mononucleosis, and surely neither of these senses of 'know' gives a satisfactory account of what is meant by

¹Cf. Slotty, op. cit. 43.

this expression when we say we know we have failed to behave as we ought to have done. Nor, finally, will the last sense give an adequate account of what is meant by statements like: I know I ought to have done X, but I don't care.

I argued in the introduction that Kierkegaard's interest in epistemology was very likely a result of what he believed was an essential confusion concerning the nature of, and relation between, knowledge and belief in the thought of the then prominent Danish theologian, Hans Lassen Martensen. That is, much of Kierkegaard's authorship is clearly directed at Martensen in an effort to bring this issue to his attention.² Kierkegaard's primary objection, however, to the philosophy of both Hegel and Martensen related, as we saw, to their contention concerning the possibility of absolute knowledge.

I argued in the introduction that Kierkegaard rejected the Hegelian doctrine of the identity of thought and being.³ It would appear that this rejection stemmed from his preoccupation with ethics and his appreciation that an identification of thought with being would do away with ethics. Ethics is, for Kierkegaard, one of the most important "problems" of philosophy.⁴ "There can be no ethics," explains Hügli, however, "in a monistic system [Identitäts System]. All ethical thought leads necessarily to dualism."⁵ "The metaphysical decision between monism and dualism is," he argues "is fundamentally an ethical decision. If the meaning of life consists in action, then

²Cf. JP 1:707/Pap. X¹ A 685; R. Nielsen, op. cit.; Barfod, op. cit. 419; Slotty, op. cit. 41; Christensen, op. cit. and Horn, op. cit. 261-268.

³Cf. Introduction, "Historical Background."

⁴Cf. Malantschuk, "Das Verhältnis," op. cit. 55.

⁵Hügli, op. cit. 114.

there can be no monism."⁶

Kierkegaard's dualism meant, however, that there could be no such thing as absolute knowledge in the sense of knowledge which had no presuppositions.⁷ That is, all knowledge, on his view, was ultimately based on the assumption that reality as such lies within the grasp of the understanding. This does not mean, however, that Kierkegaard was guilty of the same conflation of knowledge and belief which characterizes Martensen's thought when he claims that the foundation of dogmatics is both Christian faith⁸ and immediate religious knowledge.⁹ There is a difference, according to Kierkegaard, between knowledge and the belief, or faith, on which it is based. Belief in the power of reason to attain knowledge of the external world is more fundamental, according to Kierkegaard, than is skepticism concerning the possibility of such knowledge. That is, this belief characterizes human beings immediately and it is upon this belief that the edifice of human knowledge is thus constructed. Knowledge itself is distinguished, however, from the belief on which it is based in that while the latter, according to Kierkegaard, is immediate, the former is. That is, knowledge, on his view, is a representation of reality in thought and is thus a mediation of reality, or of the experience of the individual whose knowledge it is.

Kierkegaard's criticisms of the substance of

⁶Ibid. 113.

⁷Slotty argues that Kierkegaard's reason for denying the possibility of presuppositionless knowledge is that Christianity precludes the possibility of such knowledge by the simple fact that "it claims the divine revealed itself in the world in the person of Christ [in ihm]. (Slotty, op. cit. 49, emphasis added).

⁸Martensen, Dogmatik, op. cit. 6.

⁹Ibid. 12-13.

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Martensen's thought are not restricted, however, to the latter's contention that there is such a thing as immediate knowledge. Kierkegaard also persistently emphasizes that even the faith that Martensen alternatively argues is the foundation of Christian dogmatics, cannot be immediate. Christian faith represents an immediate relation to ethical religious truth in the sense that it represents the contact of the knower with this truth, but it is a contact that does not characterize the individual immediately, but only to the extent that he has deliberately and with, as we saw, great struggle, brought his relation into conformity with this truth.

There is a difference, as we saw, on Kierkegaard's view, between belief in the power of the understanding to grasp objective reality and belief in the truth of Christianity. That is, there is a difference between belief in general and faith, or belief in the "wholly eminent sense" (PF, 87/SV IV, 250).¹⁰ That is, while the former can be said to characterize the knower immediately, on Kierkegaard's view, the latter is possible only as the result of a transformation of the knower. "Kierkegaard," explains Hügli, "made the claim of Empedocles, that like was only understood by like, the fundamental principle of his epistemology."¹¹ "According to Kierkegaard," explains Slotty,

conviction concerning the truth of Christianity comes from God--i.e., one learns this truth from God himself. With this the circle is closed. Presuppositionless knowledge is also impossible from the side of the knowing subject in that the subject must be in the same condition as the

¹⁰Cf. Thulstrup, "Indledning," op. cit. XXX and "Kommentar," op. cit. 200.

¹¹Hügli, op. cit. 233. Cf. EO I, 236/SV I, 210; CUP I, 52/SV VII, 39 and WOL, 32-33/SV IX, 20.

object of knowledge.¹²

Christ gives the individual the condition for understanding ethical-religious truth and the individual receives this condition to the extent that he endeavors to accept this truth. This task, as we saw, however, can never be said to be completed. As long as the individual lives he will have this task as his goal. As long as he lives his contact with the reality of God's love will be threatened by the resistance of his lower nature to avoid the burden of responsibility that such contact imposes. "Even rebirth," explains Slotty, "does not elevate one above the human condition."¹³

Christian knowledge cannot, on Kierkegaard's view, legitimately be viewed independently of the faith upon which it is based. Christian faith is what one could call the wellspring of Christian knowledge and thus occupies a more fundamental position in the schema of Christian existence. Mental representations of ethical-religious reality cannot, as we saw be said to be justified when separated from the contact of the individual whose representations they are with the reality to which they refer. Not only, however, is the justification of such representations dependent upon the contact of the individual with the reality of God's love, which contact is established through faith in this love, truth in this context is indistinguishable from such contact. That is, it is only the existence of the believer as such--i.e., his faith--which can be said to be true. The efforts of the believer must thus be directed toward the maintenance of belief in God's infinite love, rather than toward the contemplation of the mental representation of this love.

¹²Slotty, op. cit. 71.

¹³Slotty, op. cit. 59. Cf. Hannay, op. cit. 206.

That latter, according to Kierkegaard, represents "the beginning of the dissolution of Christian belief."¹⁴

We are now in a position to resolve the dispute to which I referred in the introduction to this thesis between Steven Emmanuel and Louis Pojman concerning whether it is possible, according to Kierkegaard, to have propositional knowledge that God became man, as well as to answer the related question of whether Christian knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, is equivalent to skill knowledge in the sense that it means nothing other than the ability to lead a certain kind of life. We are also finally in a position to be able to counter the more general charge, made by Pojman, that Kierkegaard's position on this issue was inherently irrational.

Let us begin with the first issue. Pojman argues that propositional knowledge that God became man is possible according to Kierkegaard. Emmanuel argues, however, that such a claim is inconsistent with both Kierkegaard's secular epistemology and with his "epistemology based entirely on Christian terms."¹⁵ We can see now that Emmanuel is correct in his claim that Kierkegaard's epistemology precludes the possibility of knowledge that God became man, and that Pojman is correct in his claim that there is such a thing as Christian knowledge--i.e., propositional knowledge--which follows from Christian experience. It is also clear, however, that Emmanuel is not correct to the extent that he claims Christian knowledge is equivalent to a certain kind of action and that Pojman is not correct in his claim that the knowledge to which Christian experience gives rise is equivalent to, or indeed even includes, propositional knowledge that God

¹⁴Slotty, op. cit. 43.

¹⁵Emmanuel, op. cit. 79 (cf., JP 3:3245/Pap. I A 94).

became man.¹⁶

Knowledge (i.e., erkendelsen), on Kierkegaard's view, is, as we saw, the result of reality being brought into relation to ideality.¹⁷ While knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, is the result of reality having been brought into relation to the abstract categories of thought, truth, on his view, is an "agreement" between thought and reality.¹⁸ Hence truth can be defined as either an agreement between some ideality and thought, or as an agreement between some actuality and thought.

According to Kierkegaard, again, all thought consists of language.¹⁹ Hence when the agreement, which constitutes truth, between reality and ideality is established in thought, truth becomes a property of sentences or propositions. The activity of knowledge, as we saw, is precisely the bringing of reality, whether that reality is ideal or actual, into relation to thought; thus all knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, would appear to be propositional. This is the case whether truth is construed as an agreement between ideality and thought, as in the case of mathematics, or whether it is construed as an agreement between actuality and thought, as in the case of historical scholarship. That is, truth is not what is the case about the world, but an agreement between a particular expression, or proposition, about the world and what is the case. The truth of whether Caesar crossed the Rubicon, for example, is the property of a proposition relating to this event, not of Caesar, or of the past.

The traditional interpretation of Kierkegaard is that

¹⁶Cf. chapter fifteen.

¹⁷Cf. Introduction, "The Project."

¹⁸Cf., chapter six, introduction and §6.1.

¹⁹Cf., chapter six, introduction.

it is not possible to know that God became man because this claim represents a combination of the mutually exclusive categories of eternal and historical truth. This is, as is well known, Kierkegaard's position in the Fragments where he argues that "all knowledge is either knowledge of the eternal, which excludes the temporal and the historical as inconsequential, or it is purely historical knowledge, . . . no knowledge," he continues, "can have as its object the absurdity that the eternal [i.e., God] is the historical" (PF 62/SV IV, 227). This is one aspect of what Kierkegaard refers to as the "paradox of Christianity."²⁰ Christianity is not alone, however, according to Kierkegaard, in exhibiting this paradoxical character. "[T]he paradox always arises," he argues, "by the joining of existing and eternal truths" (JP 3:3085/Pap. VI B 45). "I do not believe," he continues, "that God exists [er til] (the eternal), but I know it; whereas I believe that God has existed [har været til] (the historical). . . . [E]ven from the Greek point of view," he argues, "the eternal truth, by being for an existing person, becomes an object of faith and a paradox" (JP 3:3085/Pap. VI B 45).

Pojman is correct when he argues that Kierkegaard believes "he is serving a doctrine that is objectively true but can only be appropriated subjectively with the help of God."²¹ The question is whether he is correct in his claim that it is Kierkegaard's view that this doctrine (i.e., that God became man) can be known to be true. Pojman argues that, according to Kierkegaard, "[d]ivine law and order prevails in the world of spirit, so that seekers after truth and righteousness gradually approach their

²⁰This is, as we have seen, only part of what Kierkegaard means by the expression the "paradox of Christianity" (cf. chapter fifteen, §15.2.).

²¹Pojman, op cit. 151 (emphasis added).

object,"²² and that "[i]f this is true, it would appear that not only can we be assured of finding immanent truth, we should also be granted revelatory truth."²³ Such a seeker after truth, continues Pojman, "should finally have the truth manifested to him, and--presuming Christianity is true--should come to see that the doctrine of the absolute paradox is the truth."²⁴ There is also no question that Kierkegaard claims that "knowing [at vide] the truth follows of itself from being the truth" (PC, 205/SV XII, 189) and, further, that since the knowledge in question is distinguished from a way of being, that it is a representation, in thought, of that way of being, and that it is thus of the propositional sort. The question is: What is the proposition? "Christianity," argues Kierkegaard, "is not a doctrine" (JP 2:1880/Pap. X³ A 454) it is a way of life, a way of being or existing.²⁵

The truth which, according to Kierkegaard, is the property of sentences, is the expression of reality in thought and this, again, according to Kierkegaard, is the activity of knowledge (i.e., erkendelsen). This is entirely in order because knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, is, in its essence descriptive. Ethics and religion, on the other hand are, according to Kierkegaard, essentially prescriptive. This means that while ethical, or religious, "knowledge" may be possible in the sense that an abstract representation of the prescriptions, or the prescribed way of life, is possible, "[a]ll Christian knowing [Erkjenden]," according to Kierkegaard, "is not

²²Ibid. 149.

²³Ibid. 149.

²⁴Ibid. 149.

²⁵Cf., e.g., JP 2:1880/Pap. X³ A 454: PC, 204ff./SV XII, 188ff. and CUP I, 379-380/SV VII, 328.

what it is²⁶ when it is separated from its situation. A situation," he continues, "(namely actuality, or to express that which is known in actuality) is the conditio sine qua non for ethical knowing" (JP 1:978/Pap. X¹ 610).

Kierkegaard argues that "[i]f a person does not become what he understands, then he does not understand it" (JP 4:4540/Pap VII¹ A 72). "The claim," explains Hügli,

that he does not understand it does not mean that he understands it in the general, intellectual sense, but not in the genuine, existential sense. It refers rather to understanding in general because the failure to appropriate what one understands . . . affects not merely the form of understanding, but the content as well. One has the word instead of the thing, the abstract instead of the concrete;²⁷ one knows [kennt] the explanation without, however, having understood what it is that is being explained.²⁸

Ethical, or religious, truth is not the property of abstract representations of what is the case ethically or religiously; it is the reduplication of what is "known" in the existence of the knower. It is the agreement between the ideality of ethical, or religious, prescriptions and the actuality of the knower's existence.²⁹ The truth of Christianity is not, according to Kierkegaard, a property of the proposition that God became man, it is a way of being which was the very life of Christ.³⁰ "Thus Christ is the truth," argues Kierkegaard, "in the sense that to be

²⁶Emphasis added.

²⁷Cf. JP 3:2324/Pap. X² A 235.

²⁸Hügli, op. cit. 242. Cf. CA, 40/SV IV, 312 and SUD, 90/SV XI, 201-202.

²⁹Cf. R, 149/SV III, 189; SV IV, 289-290 note, and Hügli, op. cit. 111 and 203.

³⁰Cf. Wisdo, op. cit. 101.

the truth is the only true explanation of what the truth is" (PC, 205/SV XII, 189).

The "knowledge" which follows as a matter of course from being the truth is the abstract representation of that way of being in thought. Thus Christian "knowledge," in this context, is still knowledge of ideality rather than actuality. The "knower" can propose that truth is a way of being, but the statement itself is neither true nor false. It is not false because it is uttered by a "knower" (i.e., one whose existence has the prescribed character), and it is not true because the truth in question cannot be the property of a statement. This truth cannot be found abstractly, but only concretely in the life of the individual.³¹ Thus Kierkegaard argues that "Christian experience [Erfaring], rather than reason, seeks its corroboration in other experience" (JP 2:2251/Pap. II C 46).

Kierkegaard does occasionally refer, however, to knowledge of Christ, as in the Fragments where the believer is said to "know" Christ "as he was known" (PF, 68/SV IV, 231). This would appear to support Pojman's claim that knowledge of the truth of the proposition that this particular individual is God is possible. If we turn to the original text, however, it becomes clear that this is not what Kierkegaard meant. That is, the expression here is "kjende" and not 'erkiende' or 'vide' as one would expect to find if the knowledge in question were of the propositional sort. To know something, or someone, in the sense of 'kjende,' is to be acquainted with it.

Pojman rightly points out that there is a strong

³¹It is for this reason I have placed 'knowledge' or 'know' here in quotation marks. That is, ethical or religious knowledge shares with objective--i.e., descriptive--knowledge its abstract character, but it departs from the traditional view of knowledge in that it cannot, as an abstraction, be said to be true.

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relation between acquaintance knowledge and propositional knowledge. That is, he argues "[i]f I claim to know Professor Emmanuel, I must be able to give some description of him."³² Such acquaintance is clearly not equivalent, however, to propositional knowledge of that person, animal or thing. If I am acquainted with Prof. Emmanuel, for example, I will undoubtedly be able to give a description of him. I may claim, for example, that he is soft-spoken and kind. I may, however, be mistaken in my assessment of his character. He may only appear this way to me because I have seen him only a few times when he was relaxed and in a particularly good mood. My acquaintance knowledge can, of course, be translated into propositions about Prof. Emmanuel. This does not mean, however, that acquaintance knowledge and propositional knowledge are coextensive, or that I have exhaustive propositional knowledge of Prof. Emmanuel because I am acquainted with him.

The same thing is clearly true, on Kierkegaard's view, of Christ. If we were acquainted with the historical individual, then there would be much we could say about him. We could say that this man we had met was God. The question is, could we know whether this statement were true? It would appear that, according to Kierkegaard, we could not. That is, knowledge about Christ, to the extent that he is a particular person, is historical knowledge,³³ whereas knowledge of God, on his view, is eternal knowledge in the sense that it is knowledge of eternal ethical-religious truth.

One could legitimately argue, however, that when Kierkegaard refers to the believer "knowing" Christ as he was known, the acquaintance in question is not with the historical person of Jesus, but with the eternal ethical-

³²Pojman, op. cit. 150.

³³Cf. PF, 59/SV IV, 225.

religious truth which this person was purported to embody. This latter sort of acquaintance is, in fact, clearly what Kierkegaard had in mind in the Fragments when he argued that one who is genuinely contemporary with "the god" in time "is not that by virtue of immediate contemporaneity" (PF, 67/SV IV, 231). To be contemporary with Christ in the genuine sense is not to meet him on the street, but to meet him in faith. The believer believes that the eternal ethical-religious truth was once exemplified in the life of a particular individual and this belief, argues Kierkegaard, conditions his understanding of the eternal³⁴ in the sense that it reveals to him the necessity of his bringing his life into conformity with it. The knowledge which is consequent upon acquaintance with Christ is thus knowledge of eternal ethical-religious truth, not knowledge that this truth had an historical point of departure. What is problematic about Christian knowledge, on Kierkegaard's view, is not that its object is at once temporal and eternal, but that its object, which is itself eternal, can only properly be understood--i.e., known--as a consequence of the belief that it was once historical.

Emmanuel argues that the claim that propositional knowledge of Christ's divinity is possible not only goes against Kierkegaard's secular epistemology, but also against traditional Christian doctrine that this must be an object of faith and thus that it is an unlikely view for Kierkegaard to hold. Pojman counters, however, that, on the contrary, nothing "could be more Christian than to hold that the believer knows that God became man in Jesus Christ? The Gospel of John," he continues, "certainly holds this position."³⁵ Pojman then cites passages from John that he believes substantiate this view.

³⁴Cf. PF, 64/SV IV, 228 and Hannay, op. cit. 128.

³⁵Ibid. 149.

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It is not my intention to argue that the position that Pojman claims may be found in the Gospel of John cannot, in fact, be found there, but to argue that there is good reason to believe Kierkegaard did not interpret John in this way. Pojman cites John 7:17 as a reference to the possibility of propositional knowledge of Christ's divinity. "If any man's will is to do his [i.e., God's] will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority."³⁶ When Kierkegaard quotes this passage, however, he translates it as: "If any man's will is to do the will of God he shall experience [erfarer] whether the teaching is from God or on my own authority" (JP 2:1881/Pap. X¹ A 455).³⁷ And this reference supports his observation, cited earlier, that "Christian experience [Erfaring] rather than reason seeks its corroboration in other experience" (JP 2:2251/Pap. II C 46). It would appear that Kierkegaard considers 'erfare' and 'kjende,' or 'experience' and 'know' in the sense of 'be acquainted with,' to be roughly equivalent since the authorized translation of the New Testament of his day used "kjende" rather than 'erfarer,'³⁸ and Kierkegaard, does not acknowledge, when quoting this passage, either that he has altered the existing translation, or that there is anything problematic with this translation.

It appears that Kierkegaard considers that either 'kjende' or 'erfare' are acceptable translations of the

³⁶This is the wording, which differs slightly from the wording of Pojman's reference, is that of the Revised Standard Version.

³⁷Cf. chapter fifteen, note 25.

³⁸Cf. Vor Herres og Frelses Jesu Christi Nye Testament, ved Kong Frederik den Siettes christelig Omsorg (Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ's New Testament, with King Frederik the Sixth's Christian Care) (Copenhagen, 1833).

various verb forms associated with 'gnosis.' That is, the Greek expression that is translated as "know" at John 7:17 is 'gnosetai,' and Kierkegaard also translates the inscription over the oracle at Delphi, "gnothi seauton" as "know, [i.e., kjende] yourself" (JP 5:5100/Pap. I A 75, p. 56). But if Kierkegaard considers either 'erfare' or 'kjende' to be appropriate translations of the various verb forms associated with 'gnosis,' then the passages from the New Testament that Pojman cites cannot serve to discredit Emmanuel's argument that propositional knowledge of Christ's divinity would be inconsistent, in Kierkegaard's mind, with the Christianity of the New Testament because in every instance where Pojman cites a reference to knowledge of Christ's divinity in John, the Greek expression in question is one of the verb forms associated with 'gnosis.'

Kierkegaard does indeed, as Pojman observes, "hold to propositional knowledge of [at least some] metaphysical truths,"³⁹ these propositions do not appear to include the claim that God became man. One who believes in the divinity of this individual Christ (for this, again, is not something which, according to Kierkegaard, one can know) and thus endeavors to bring his life into line with Christ's teachings, can come to represent the kind of life Christ prescribes in thought and, to the extent that his life actualizes these prescriptions, the "knowledge" in question may be said to be of the truth, although it cannot, in itself, be true.

I argued in the introduction to this thesis that, according to Kierkegaard, all knowledge was ultimately based on belief. That is, all knowledge as we saw, was on his view either based on the belief of the knower that his relation to objective reality was such that that reality could come to be known by him, or it was based on his

³⁹Pojman, op. cit. 151.

CONCLUSION

belief in Christ. Such a view does not, however, make him an enemy either of rationality or of speculative thought as such.⁴⁰ Kierkegaard's position would indeed be irrational if he set up our situation as knowers such that Christ's divinity did not belong to the class of possible objects of knowledge, and then claimed that we could know it despite this. This is, as we have seen, however, not what he does.

Kierkegaard's position on the issue of his purported antipathy for systematic, or speculative thought is best summed up by himself in a remark from the Postscript. "I should add a word here," he explains

in case anyone misunderstands a number of my remarks, in order to make clear that he is the one who wants to misunderstand me, whereas I am not at fault. Honor be to speculative thought, praised be everyone who is truly occupied with it. To deny the value of speculative thought . . . would, in my eyes be to prostitute oneself and would be especially foolish for one whose life in large part and at its humble best is devoted to its service, and especially foolish for one who admires the Greeks. After all, he must know that Aristotle, when discussing what happiness is, lodges the highest happiness in thinking, mindful of the eternal gods' blissful pastime of thinking. Furthermore, he must have both a conception of and a respect for the dauntless enthusiasm of the scholar, his perseverance in the service of the idea. But for the speculating thinker the question of his eternal happiness cannot come up at all, precisely because his task consists in going away from himself more and more and becoming objective and in that way disappearing from himself and becoming the gazing power of speculative thought. I am well acquainted with all this. But note that the blessed gods, those grand prototypes for the speculative thinker, were not in the least concerned about their eternal happiness. Therefore, the issue never arose in paganism. But to deal with Christianity in the same way

⁴⁰Cf. FT, 33-34/SV III, 85; Slotky, op. cit. 38 and Hügli, op. cit. 143.

leads only to confusion.⁴¹ Since a human being is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, the speculative happiness that a speculator can enjoy will be an illusion, because he wants to be exclusively eternal within time. Therein lies the speculator's untruth [i.e., not in the activity of speculation itself, but in the association of this activity with the highest human happiness].⁴² Higher therefore, than that happiness is the impassioned, infinite interest in one's personal eternal happiness. It is higher precisely because it is truer, because it definitely expresses the synthesis. (CUP I, 55-56/SV VII, 42)⁴³

What Kierkegaard objected to was not speculative thought as such, but the assumption which often characterized speculative thinkers, that the truth of Christianity could be known objectively.⁴⁴ "For Kierkegaard," as Slotty explains,

the point was not to grasp Christianity speculatively, to inquire after the foundation of its possibility, to mediate its intellectual contradictions [Gedankengegensätze]. The point was rather to make clear what it meant to believe . . . and, in particular, to make clear that belief could only be experienced as an act of will, as an often painful decision and as a certainty that one would have to fight continually to preserve.⁴⁵

⁴¹Cf. Slotty, 38-39 and 57.

⁴²Cf. JP, 1:896/Pap. IV C 96.

⁴³Emphasis added; cf. Slotty, op. cit. 40.

⁴⁴Cf. Slotty's claim that "what Kierkegaard protested with all his might was that one could become objectively, or speculatively convinced of the truth of Christianity" (Slotty, op. cit. 57).

⁴⁵Slotty, op. cit. 43.

SIGLA

AN	<u>Armed Neutrality.</u>
C	<u>The Crisis in the life of an Actress.</u>
CA	<u>The Concept of Anxiety.</u>
CD	<u>Christian Discourses.</u>
CI	<u>The Concept of Irony.</u>
CS	<u>Thoughts on Crucial Situations in Human Life.</u>
CUP I	<u>Concluding Unscientific Postscript, vol. I.</u>
CUP II	<u>Concluding Unscientific Postscript, vol. II.</u>
ED	<u>Edifying Discourses.</u>
EO I	<u>Either/Or, vol. I.</u>
EO II	<u>Either/Or, vol. II.</u>
EUD	<u>Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses.</u>
FSE	<u>For Self-Examination.</u>
FT	<u>Fear and Trembling.</u>
GOS	<u>The Gospel of Suffering.</u>
JC	<u>Johannes Climacus.</u>
JFY	<u>Judge for Yourself.</u>
JP	<u>Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers.</u>
KAUC	<u>Kierkegaard's Attack Upon Christendom.</u>
LD	<u>Letters and Documents.</u>
NRF	<u>Nutidens Religiøse Forvirring. Bogen om Adler</u> (The Contemporary Religious Confusion. The Book on Adler).
OAR	<u>On Authority and Revelation, The Book on Adler.</u>
P	<u>Prefaces: Light Reading for Certain Classes as the</u> <u>Occasion May Require.</u>
PC	<u>Practice in Christianity.</u>
PF	<u>Philosophical Fragments.</u>
POH	<u>Purity of Heart.</u>
PV	<u>The Point of View for My Work as an Author.</u>
R	<u>Repetition.</u>
SLW	<u>Stages on Life's Way.</u>
SUD	<u>The Sickness Unto Death.</u>
TA	<u>Two Ages: the Age of Revolution and the Present</u> <u>Age. A Literary Review.</u>

UDVS Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits
WOL Works of Love.

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