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
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Speculation's Despair: Kierkegaard's Prank on Hegel in *The Sickness Unto Death*

by

Linda Basilicato

B.A. State University of New York At Stony Brook. 1996

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

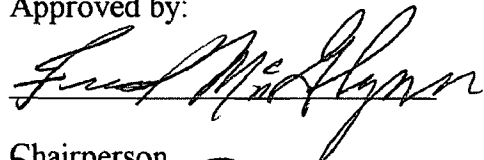
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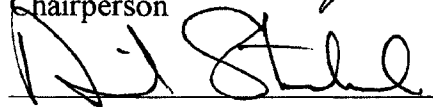
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Speculation's Despair: Kierkegaard's Prank on Hegel in *The Sickness Unto Death*.

Director: Fred McGlynn 

Soren Kierkegaard published only his religious works under his own name; the aesthetic works were all published under various pseudonyms. Kierkegaard describes anti-Climacus – the pseudonymous author of *The Sickness Unto Death* – as a "higher pseudonymity pointing out a higher ideal" and as "a Christian on an extraordinarily high level." Thus, for *Sickness* to be a success, it must do more than achieve a philosophical victory; it must also satisfy its Christian purpose of bringing the reader into authentic faith. *Sickness* attempts to do this through a strategic use of indirect communication which can only achieve its philosophical victory against Hegelian speculation through the Christian-existential edification of the reader.

Part One analyzes the psychological stages of despair as Kierkegaard objectively presents them to the reader of *The Sickness Unto Death*. This is done primarily through literary exegesis of three works of existential fiction: Richard Wright's "The Man Who Lived Underground," Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea*, and Andre Gide's *The Immoralist*. Part Two focuses on the strategic use of indirect communication behind the seemingly objective presentation of the stages of despair. This shift in focus from content to technique reveals how *Sickness* deceitfully communicates an objective content which can potentially inaugurate an individual subjective thinker by tricking him into that position. Through this trick, Kierkegaard hopes to simultaneously achieve both his religious goal of edification and his attack of Hegelian speculation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1

PART ONE

Portraits of Despair

Introduction

3

I. Confronting Despair: An Analysis of Richard Wright's "The Man Who Lived Underground"

7

II. Demonic Defiant Despair in Sartre's *Nausea*

19

III. Melancholy in Andre Gide's *The Immoralist*

33

PART TWO

Kierkegaard's Indirect Communication

Introduction

41

I. Speculation As Despair

43

II. Kierkegaard's Communicative Dilemma

48

A. Kierkegaard's Socrates

50

B. Socratic Method in *The Postscript*

52

C. Alciabiades' Existential Lesson

55

D. Kierkegaard's Socratically Artful Communication
58

III. Religious Communication in *Repetition*
61

A. The Category of the Ordeal
65

IV. Kierkegaard's Indirect Attack of Hegelian Speculation in *The Sickness Unto Death*
70

A. Kierkegaard's Unhappy Consciousness?
72

B. Kierkegaard's Prank On Hegel
75

C. Speculation as a Further Intensification of Demonic Defiant Despair
77

D. The Dialectical Importance of Melancholy
82

Conclusion
87

Introduction

Soren Kierkegaard published only his religious works under his own name; the aesthetic works were all published under various pseudonyms. Anti-Climacus, the pseudonymous author of *The Sickness Unto Death*, is a particularly interesting case in that Kierkegaard claims him to be a "higher pseudonymity pointing out a higher ideal" and a "Christian on an extraordinarily high level." Furthermore, Kierkegaard places himself somewhere in between the non-Christian Climacus (author of *Philosophical Fragments* and *The Concluding Unscientific Postscript*) and the highly Christian Anti-Climacus. Yet, Anti-Climacus is the author of an *aesthetic* work. This may be making too much of a small detail, given that Kierkegaard considered *all* of his work to be a part of his larger religious aim. Nevertheless, I maintain that Anti-Climacus serves to distinguish *The Sickness Unto Death* from Kierkegaard's other works. If this is true, the difference would have to manifest itself not in the philosophical rigor of the book, but rather, in its edifying potential – the key element of Christian communication.

The purpose of this project is to reveal the way in which *Sickness* might achieve this edifying goal, thus justifying the distinction given to it by its author-editor, Soren Kierkegaard. This work is divided into two main parts. In Part One I lay out the content of *The Sickness Unto Death* in a straight forward analysis of the psychological stages of despair as they are objectively presented to the reader. To do this, I rely on literary exegesis of three works of existential fiction: Richard Wright's "The Man Who Lived Underground," Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea*, and Andre Gide's

The Immoralist. This is in preparation for Part Two where I consider *Sickness* in the context of Kierkegaard's insistence on the need for indirect communication. Through this shift in focus from content to technique I will argue how *Sickness* deceitfully communicates an objective content which can potentially inaugurate an individual subjective thinker by *tricking* him into that position. Given its forthright presentation and its lack of the obvious tricks, wit and irony which mark Kierkegaard's other works, *The Sickness Unto Death* may seem an odd choice for such an analysis. Nevertheless, I will show how *The Sickness Unto Death* may be Kierkegaard's best attempt at achieving his edifying religious aim through indirect means.

Part One

Introduction

Because Kierkegaard is attempting to redefine what is meant by "Christianity," care must be taken to avoid importing the many extant meanings of this term. This is especially important because he is railing against commonly held notions of Christianity which reduce it to perfunctory faith and mere morality rather than what it ought to be: the becoming of one's own self, "an individual human being, this specific individual human being, alone before God, *alone* in this prodigious strenuousness and this prodigious responsibility" (SUD 5 italics mine). In his journals, Kierkegaard writes that "they have changed Christianity, and have made it too much of a consolation, and forgotten that it is a demand upon man" (148). The most crucial element of genuine (i.e. Kierkegaardian) Christianity is that it is not something that can be easily attained, say by being raised in a Christian family, going to church, making Communion, being Baptized, etc. Kierkegaard writes:

It is very foolish and simply shows a lack of judgment as to what spirit is – along with a failure to appreciate that man is spirit and not merely animal – to think that faith and wisdom come that easily, that they come as a matter of course over the years like teeth, a beard etc. No, whatever a man may arrive at as a matter of course, whatever things may come as a matter of course – faith and wisdom are definitely not among them. As a matter of fact, from a spiritual point of view, a man does not arrive at anything as a matter of course over the years; this concept is precisely the uttermost opposite of spirit. (SUD 58)

The question this raises is: how then does one become a Christian, a single individual alone before God? *The Sickness Unto Death* attempts to answer this question,

describing the stages one goes through in becoming (or avoiding becoming) a Christian. Each of the psychological stages to be discussed – with the exception of the elusive authentic subjectivity – manifests itself in what Kierkegaard calls despair. The forms in which this condition manifests are described as a series of progressive stages which intensify the individual's despair as his awareness of that despair increases. However unpleasant this journey, Kierkegaard is clear that one can become a Christian – or a single individual – only by initially going deeper into despair (SUD 27).

From Kierkegaard's Christian perspective, despair is a universal sickness, the very defining feature of being human. This means that not knowing you are in despair is the same as being in despair. He writes, "not being in despair is not similar to not being sick, for not being sick cannot be the same as being sick, whereas not being in despair can be the very same as being in despair" (25). This is because there is no immediate or given health of the spirit as a default mode one falls back on in the absence of sickness. Rather, spirit must be cultivated. Anyone who has not cultivated spirit is therefore in despair, even and *especially* if he is unaware of being so.

Kierkegaard is distressed by all those around him who continue to throw away this potential to become an authentic self. This typically occurs by allowing it to be dissipated into this or that sorrow or pleasure. In this way, one

never becomes decisively and eternally conscious as spirit, as self, or, what amounts to the same thing, never becomes aware and in the deepest sense never gained the impression that there is a God and that 'he,' himself, his self, exists before this God – an infinite benefaction that is never gained except through despair. What wretchedness that so many go on living in this way, cheated of this most blessed of thoughts! What wretchedness that we are engrossed in or encourage the human throng to be engrossed in everything else [...] What wretchedness that they are lumped together and deceived instead of being split apart so that each individual may gain the

highest. (SUD 27)

To avoid this dissipation of the authentic self, and to begin cultivating one's spirit, Kierkegaard argues that one must relate to the self as a "positive third". He begins *The Sickness Unto Death* by defining the authentic self as "a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation" (SUD 13). This is not as confusing as it might seem upon first reading. For Kierkegaard, a "human being is a synthesis of the infinite and finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity" (13). Simply put, a human being, in being a synthesis, is a relation between two. But *this* relation is not the authentic self. The authentic self is that which relates itself to this relation that it is, in other words, a "positive third" (13). "Relating itself to itself *in the relation*" reflects Kierkegaard's position that one can achieve authentic subjectivity *only* by standing alone before God. Kierkegaard's perspective is clearly Christian in that, for him, if the relation that a being is is not self-established, then it must further relate itself to that which has established the entire relation, namely, God. It must also be noted that this authentic self is not given except as a *task* to be achieved; it is a continual striving. This task consists of confronting despair: the desire to be rid of oneself, an existing individual self created by God.

Kierkegaard writes, "to despair over oneself, in despair to will to be rid of oneself – this is the formula for all despair" (SUD 20). But once one begins confronting despair, that despair intensifies, repeatedly finding new ways to rid the self of the burden of the self. *The Sickness Unto Death* maps out the progression of the stages of despair. It begins with despair that does not know it is despair

("unconscious despair") and then moves on to the several forms of conscious despair, discussing how each stage yields the next. These stages are: "despair of weakness," which, as it intensifies becomes first, "despair over the earthly", and then, "despair about the eternal". If this despair intensifies, it becomes "defiant despair," which may go even further by becoming demonic defiant despair.

Individual journeys through this typology are likely to be messy and to vary greatly from person to person. Kierkegaard points out that each individual journey will vary from others and that "actual life is too complex merely to point out abstract contrasts such as that between a despair that is completely unaware of being so and a despair that is completely aware of being so. Very often the person in despair probably has a dim idea of his own state, although here again the nuances are myriad" (SUD 48). In order to capture these nuances and illuminate Kierkegaard's psychology, I will rely primarily upon the use of literary analysis. Exploring how one "relates to oneself" through the life-contexts provided by literature will lend an even greater perspicuity to Kierkegaard's insights into human psychology. Kierkegaard supplements his philosophical approach with numerous anecdotes that elaborate his more abstract psychological points; Kierkegaard, however, is not a novelist, and it will be more effective to take his somewhat literary approach a step further by doing a Kierkegaardian psychoanalysis of the characters created by more capable existential novelists. To do this, I will analyze three works of existential fiction: Richard Wright's "The Man Who Lived Underground", Sartre's *Nausea*, and Andre Gide's *The Immoralist*.

A. Confronting Despair: "The Man Who Lived Underground"

Kierkegaard argues that "despair must be considered primarily within the category of consciousness" (SUD 29). Even though despair is a universal sickness, most people are not conscious of being in this state. But because Kierkegaard wishes to hold responsible each unaware individual for continually throwing away his or her spirit, he is careful to maintain that all despair is conscious even if one cannot be said to be conscious of himself (SUD 29). But it is an individual's level of self-consciousness, the extent to which he relates to the relation he is, that indicates his degree of spirit. Kierkegaard writes:

Consciousness – that is self-consciousness – is decisive with regard to the self; the more consciousness the more self; the more consciousness, the more will; the more will, the more self. A person who has not will at all is not a self; but the more will he has, the more self-consciousness he has also. (SUD 29)

Also important is how self-consciousness, or confrontation with despair, intensifies the despair. Kierkegaard writes: "the ever increasing intensity of despair depends upon the degree of consciousness or is proportionate to its increase: the greater the degree of consciousness, the more intensive the despair" (SUD 42). Taking on this task of the authentic self then is not exactly an exercise in pleasure. And, indeed, as my analysis of the existential protagonists will show, the journey of increased self-awareness is marked by torment and frustration. Still, Kierkegaard argues that there is no greater joy than that experienced by one in the faith relation, but there no way to "this infinite benefaction except through despair" (SUD 27).

How does such a journey of self-consciousness begin? How does one begin to increase his self-awareness? Kierkegaard argues that this can occur simply out of one's

"deep nature", or else, can grow out of one's painful experiences (SUD 26). As a result of painful or bitter experiences, one may think she is consciously despairing; but this early stage of conscious despair is only a minimal awareness that Kierkegaard calls "despairing over the earthly" or "despairing over earthly things" (SUD 50-60). This is a very low level of awareness and can be more accurately characterized as suffering than despair because it does not actively come from within but is a mere succumbing to external forces. However, this suffering or despairing "over" can be a useful place from which to begin developing a deeper awareness of despair, but only if the suffering person can make the move from despairing *over* particular problems to a despair *of* existence itself. Suffering has an advantage over happiness in this regard because, presumably, if one is happy then there is no impetus to look deeper to confront one's despair. Hence, Kierkegaard claims that "for despair, the most cherished and desirable place to live is in the heart of happiness" (SUD 24). This does not mean, however, that authentic individuals are miserable; on the contrary, Kierkegaard claims that there is no greater joy for one than resolving despair through faith, and that the authentic individual may best be characterized as one who has "laughter at his side".

But before one can resolve despair through faith, he must first become conscious of his despair, which again, means that his despair will intensify. Suffering is conducive to this process because if a person already thinks he is happy he would not want to be corrected, for this would ruin his happiness. The false happiness is based on the "sensate-physical" and is determined by what is pleasurable in the the physical realm; it is not judged by the-level of spirit involved. The suffering person, then, is at

an advantage in arriving at the spiritual secret of his existence, because despair, the universal sickness, always lies beneath each and every pleasure and pain, so "when the enchantment of illusion is over, when existence begins to totter, then despair, too, immediately appears" (SUD 44). However, most people, even in their suffering, are unable to perceive the true nature of their despair and talk only of each particular cause of pain. But for Kierkegaard, "in itself, to lose the things of this world is not to despair" (SUD 51).

How then does one make the transition from despair over this or that particular thing or event to a despair of existence itself? Kierkegaard argues that if one despairs over some earthly loss or cause of suffering with infinite passion, that infinite passion changes that lost thing into the world *in toto*. While it is not possible to actually lose every worldly thing, a person may, as a result of his suffering, come to infinitely magnify the particular pains suffered and despair over the earthly *in toto*. Once this occurs there is an essential advancement in consciousness, making despair over the earthly "a dialectical expression for the next form of despair," moving the person from "despair in weakness" to "despair *over* his weakness, where the object of despair is no longer some particular earthly thing but becomes instead a despair over having a self, over having to *be* a self. With this advancement comes an increased awareness of oneself as an individual existing self. Richard Wright's "The Man who Lived Underground" shows clearly how suffering over one's particular life circumstances can yield the next stage of despair – the more abstract, existential despair of existence itself.

The story begins with Daniel's thinking "I've got to hide" (36). He is a black

man running from the police and from a conviction for a crime he did not commit. At the beginning of the story, Daniels is merely suffering ; he is despairing *over* his situation – *over* being a black man, *over* being falsely accused, *over* his choice to either climb into the sewer or surrender. But this sends him on a journey he may not have otherwise achieved, through a place in which, and from which, he *cannot* hide.

Daniels, escaping through the sewers, finds a room he refers to as a cave throughout the story. It is under the city, but provides access to certain buildings. He hears music, follows the sound and peers through an opening in the wall into a church where people are holding hymn books and singing. He has the impulse to laugh, indicating the absurdity of the scene for him, but then immediately feels guilty, asking, "would God strike him dead for that?" (38). Thus, he does have some sort of faith in God, yet it is precisely this facile faith he is suddenly beginning to question. This is indicated by his dismissal of his fear of God which follows a vague feeling that these people should not be singing and should instead, "stand unrepentant and yield no quarter in singing and praying, yet *he* had run away from the police, had pleaded with them to believe in *his* innocence" (41). Here, Wright draws a parallel between the "god" of the church go-ers and the law. Before the law, Daniels is not an individual but is one "nigger" interchangeable with any other. Similarly, the people in the church are "groveling and begging for something they cannot get" because they are not standing individually before God. In *Sickness* Kierkegaard writes, "what wretchedness that people are lumped together and deceived instead of being split apart so that each may attain the highest" (27). For Kierkegaard, this is the condition of most religious people, but Daniels, in making the connection between racist law and

God sees the parallel: if the law cannot recognize him as an individual because it sees him merely as his race, how can God recognize the individuals of the human throng of church go-ers? This realization helps Daniels to increase his self-consciousness by helping him progress beyond his given facile faith.

Living underground in isolation further encourages Daniels along this path. While underground he stands before neither God nor the law. Solitude is crucial in confronting despair because it provides the self reflective space necessary for this task by eliminating most of the outlets we use to disseminate the self. Additionally, if particular problems are going to lead one to despair of existence, solitude is crucial, because otherwise the suffering person's circumstances could change, inviting him back into life, into what Kierkegaard calls immediacy" where the individual will, once again, be deluded by his false happiness. He says this person of immediacy, when faced with suffering, "despairs and faints" like an animal "playing dead" (SUD 46). It is merely a defense mechanism, for when conditions are pleasurable again he will "begin where he left off; a self he was not, and a self he did not become" (SUD 52). Daniels, because he is living underground, does not have this opportunity to slip back into his former life. His experiences have sent him on his way toward a conscious experience of despair of.

To indicate this awakening Wright plays with the meaning of lightness and darkness, reversing their meanings by contrasting "blinding light", "dead sunshine", "obscene sunshine" – light that obscures – with a darkness that illuminates. The actual lack of light underground causes Daniels to begin losing a sense of time. By the time he has set up a lamp, he has left behind so much of what was once a part of his life

that he no longer "has time". He decorates the walls of his cave with gold watches he has stolen from a safe, but "he does not attempt to set them at any given hour, for there was no time for him now" (50). His concept of money has also changed; he uses stolen glue to wallpaper the "cave" with stolen hundred dollar bills. Moreover, the way in which Daniels justifies theft itself is a further indication of the effects of his isolation. He justifies his actions on his own terms, making up his own ethical rules. When stealing the money, he is fully aware that it is not about wanting the money; rather, what entices him is that he can do it without getting caught. Daniels, acting as if his own reasons are the only ones justifiable, despises and pities the man he watches stealing from the same safe out of desire to spend the money. Daniels does not even feel that he is stealing, "for the cleaver, the radio, the money, and the typewriter were all on the same level of value, all meant the same thing to him. They were the serious toys of the men who lived in the dead world of sunshine and rain he had left, the world that had condemned him, branded him guilty" (55). He now has his very own "ethics" and can justify anything he wishes. He didn't steal the money, "he had simply picked it up, just as man would pick up firewood in a forest. And that was how the aboveground now seemed to him, a wild forest filled with death" (56). He has created from himself his own world. Doing so leads him to a further realization that "maybe anything's right .. yet, if the world as men had made it was right, then anything else was right, any act a man took to satisfy himself, murder, theft, torture" (56).

With this realization, he straightens with a start. He realizes that the world could have been any other way. Suddenly, he is not afraid of anything *in particular*, but of himself and of whatever as of yet nameless thing he might do. He has moved

from despair over to despair of. Anxious, he turns on the radio, to "control" (lose?) himself. He knows then that he can neither stay nor leave, he cannot escape what he has faced. He falls asleep dreaming he has awoken to armed policemen. Here he fully understands his concrete situation: he is a black man living under racist law. In his next dream, a dream of "protection," he is dead. This is a dream of protection because if he could die, he could be rid of himself. But for Kierkegaard, this is what death *cannot* do; it cannot cure one of despair because despair is of the eternal. Only in faith can one resolve the dilemma of despair.

At this point, Daniels is now beginning to lose himself. He not only fails to find himself standing before God, he is standing before no one but himself. As a result of this isolation he is also losing a coherent world within which to live. The negative effect of Daniels' solitude becomes apparent when he encounters someone in a hallway, thinking "he could walk past the man, as though he were a ghost" (63). He no longer has a grasp on who he is in actuality. His isolation even causes him to forget his name several times as well. He has become invisible: he cannot remember his name, and he is acting unseen, leaving others to take the blame for his actions. After wallpapering the cave he starts laughing, feeling he had "triumphed over the world aboveground. *He was free!*" (64). It is ironic, then, that his next thought is: "If only people could see this! He wanted to run from his cave and yell his discovery to the world" (64). What is the meaning of this kind of freedom of the self?

Kierkegaard argues that both possibility and necessity are equally necessary to becoming a self. Thus, necessity's despair is to lack possibility and vice versa, and infinity's despair is to lack finitude and vice versa (SUD 30-35). Living underground,

by subtracting the necessity from Daniels' existence, also robs him of possibility, of a particular possible future and thereby robs him of his actuality, which, for Kierkegaard is a synthesis of the necessary and the possible (SUD 36). Daniels begins passing the time in momentary pleasures and games that have no real significance, each one haphazardly leading to the next. At the same time he is gaining his individual existence, he is losing it, fast.

In Kierkegaardian terms this is an example of infinitizing possibility without the finite necessity that could bring him back to himself. Kierkegaard says that as possibility becomes greater and greater more and more becomes possible, because nothing becomes actual – being on a path seems to limit possibility, but really it enhances it because more becomes actualizable. When everything seems possible, this is the "point at which the abyss swallows the self. It takes time for each possibility to become actuality" (SUD 36). Without commitment to any particular path, with too much possibility, actuality grows shorter and everything becomes more momentary. Thus Daniels lacks freedom, which must always be actual.

An interesting question comes up at this point: does Daniels fail to do this because of his inadequate understanding of God? Or, to put it another way, does he *misunderstand* freedom or has he been denied it? There is some evidence that he does, through his understanding of Jesus, achieve something very close to Kierkegaardian faith. It begins with his realization about Christian guilt whereby everyone is guilty just for being alive:

Their search for a happiness they could never find made them feel that they had committed some *dreadful offense* which they could not remember or understand. Why was this sense of guilt so seemingly

innate so easy to come by, to think, to feel, so *very physical*? It seemed that when one felt this guilt one was retracing in one's feelings a faint pattern designed long before; it seemed that one was always trying to remember a gigantic shock that had left a haunting impression upon one's body which one could not forget or shake off, but which had been forgotten by the conscious mind, creating in one's life a state of eternal anxiety. (71)

This is why Daniels, shortly after his realization about the nature of guilt and sin, is able to feel joy as he watches a boy get beaten for stealing a radio, for "perhaps it would bring to the boy the secret of his existence – a guilt that cannot be eliminated" (73). For Kierkegaard, even though despair is a sickness, it would still be "the worst misfortune never to have had that sickness: it is a true godsend to get it, even if it is the most dangerous of illnesses, if one does not want to be cured of it" (SUD 25). And it is this awareness of total guilt that we see in Daniels, that is the highest expression of existential pathos; it results in the highest subjectivity because it comes from the greatest tension, that between total guilt and total eternal happiness. If it were guilt over this or that, then one could comfort oneself that there is always someone more guilty. Any religion, then, that is primarily about morality, about making one feel guilty over this or that particular "sin" will inhibit the achievement of subjectivity. Daniels has arrived at this Kierkegaardian understanding of guilt as both our inherent, inescapable separation from God, but *also* our inherent, inescapable *connection* to God. Recall, the authentic self is the "relation's relating itself to itself *in the relation*" (SUD13), meaning the utmost subjectivity we can achieve is not an isolated "I", but an "I" that exists before God.

Traditional Christianity, in contrast to Daniels, misunderstands the truly Christian meaning of guilt and sin. It does, according to Kierkegaard, rightly

understand sin to be a position, a state, through the notion of hereditary sin. But then it makes a mistake; it is right in establishing sin in a way that makes it impossible to eliminate, but then it, "by means of the Atonement wants to eliminate sin as completely as if it were drowned in the sea." But the solution is not to be rid of sin in this way; this would collapse the gulf between God and man and undermine the existence of the individual self. More precisely, it leads to passivity by encouraging one to just go along with the others. Sin becomes not a category of individuality which would provide one with the task of authenticity, but an anemic understanding of faith, where if one just believes in God everything will be okay; in the meantime, one need only float along with conventional morality and customs. Thus, sin, which ought to be a category of individuality, is "as lost as if it were drowned in the sea" (SUD 101). This is achieved through the idea of the atonement, which even though it implies judgment, does not do so at the individual level; Christianity establishes sin (the gulf) only to effectively eliminate it. Kierkegaard writes:

A judgment! Of course, we men have learned, and experience teaches us, that when there is a mutiny on a ship or in an army there are so many who are guilty that punishment has to be abandoned, and when it is the public, the esteemed, cultured public, or a people, then there is not only no crime [...] then it is god's will [...] and the conclusion is that it will be exactly like this in eternity. Therefore, let us just stick together and make sure that the clergy preach this way. And should there happen to be an individual who dares to speak otherwise, an individual foolish enough to make his own life concerned and accountable in fear and trembling, and then in addition makes himself a nuisance to others – then let us protect ourselves by regarding him as mad or, if necessary by putting him to death. If any of us do, then there is no wrong [...] it is just a matter of continuing to be many, a good majority who stick together; if we do that, then we are protected against the judgment of eternity. (SUD 123-124)

Daniels' experiences have led him to a similar realization about how one must relate to

God. Why then does he fail?

Daniles tries desperately to make the church-goers understand that they are not practicing properly and are turned in the wrong direction. They are singing that they have "Jesus in their soul," (40) but Daniels knows they are wrong and that the way they practice their religion is a diversion *away* from life and away from the eternal; it will never lead to the "infinite inward passion" necessary for what they seek. The people in the church, however, are unwilling or unable to listen; they prefer to continue singing, turning their noses up at his filth not letting him speak. But neither does Wright ever articulate what it is Daniels is going to say. He merely has Daniels think: "he'll know what to say when he gets there" (92). When the people refuse to let him speak, he tries to communicate with the police only to find he *cannot* speak coherently; he does not know what it is he needs to say, or rather, finds he cannot say it. He does not remember his name, gets his story confused, and tells it incoherently and randomly; the police think he's crazy, and indeed, he most likely is at this point. He then becomes convinced that if he could bring them to the cave, they would see and experience what he did and come to the same realization of Christian-existential guilt. In one sense, he's mistaken to think this because living in the cave was merely the path *he* took to arrive at this understanding of faith. However, he is right that he cannot directly communicate what he has learned and that the most he can do is bring others to a place conducive to existential awakening. At this point in the story, however, Daniels is not coherent enough to realize the communicative dilemma he faces, let alone devise a scheme for its indirect communication. But there is really no need for him to communicate his new found truth either. This indicates that he has lost

so much of himself in the process of his awakening that he is too incoherent to even live in the light of this truth. In achieving authentic faith, Daniels should get the world back. He doesn't. Thus Wright seems to be leveling a political attack against a Kierkegaardian religious attitude which, he suggests, must require not only a one-to-one relation with God, but also a social environment in which one can safely live. Wright's journey was impossible from the start; it was set in motion by social conditions that would deny any possibility of his achieving freedom; he, unlike, as we are about to see, Roquentin, does not misunderstand freedom; he is actually denied it by his social circumstances.

Nevertheless, Wright's story illuminates the transition from despair over to despair of while also providing a political critique of an abstract existential despair of existence. Despite this critique, it does make a case, similar to Kierkegaard's, against the complacent Christian but argues further that more than a one-to-one relationship to God is necessary; the right social factors must also be in place. Although this question of racial oppression is not something Kierkegaard could have specifically dealt with in his time, he does show at least some sensitivity to the inhibiting role played by social conditions. Indeed, his attacks of traditional Christianity and the excessive reflection inherent in Speculative thought are intended to guide the reader around the specific social obstacles to authentic faith. Wright's story, however, suggests that there may be some social obstacles to authentic faith which are insurmountable. Unfortunately, this interesting question is tangential to the aim of this essay, and I will not elaborate on it further.

In the next section I will analyze Sartre's *Nausea* in order to address the

advance of consciousness from a simple despair of to the even more intense demonic defiant despair. Implicit in this novel is also a critique of the Kierkegaardian stages, especially his emphasis on the necessity of God. However, I will give a purely Kierkegaardian reading of Sartre's protagonist Roquentin, examining why he fails not only at a Kierkegaardian authentic subjectivity, but also at the alternative freedom he thinks he has discovered.

B. Demonic Defiant Despair in Sartre's Nausea

We saw with Daniels the transition from despair over the earthly to a despair of the eternal – the despair of having a self. Despair of having a self may lead one not to faith, but instead to defiant despair – an explicit rejection of God and faith. Kierkegaard argues that it might be possible to have perfect clarity about being in despair while *still* being in despair by refusing faith. But if one is in perfect clarity about this, he ought to have achieved authentic subjectivity, and if one is in authentic subjectivity, then he should have arrived there through faith. Kierkegaard leaves open this question: does this clarity of self-knowledge necessarily wrench a person out of his despair? It can be "a subtle question whether it is possible for one to be in despair and be fully aware of one's despair" (47, 61n). This question is crucial to understanding defiant despair, for defiance is characterized most decisively by a rejection of God. The demon becomes fully aware of his despair, but nevertheless, refuses the resolution of faith, of a Kierkegaardian authenticity. Instead, he develops a counter-authenticity that not only doesn't need God, but which makes religious

authenticity inauthentic, an example of "bad faith." An analysis of Sartre's novel *Nausea* will make this clear.

For Kierkegaard, the self is freedom. The self is a finite-infinite synthesis. The self as a "synthesis is a relation, and a relation that, even though it is derived, relates itself to itself, which is freedom" (SUD 27). In other words, freedom is not the freedom to create ourselves, only to choose ourselves by first relating to who we are already. The demon, however, misunderstands freedom. His despair – like Daniels' despair – is also a despair of the eternal, but is a "despairing misuse of the eternal within the self to will in despair to be oneself" (SUD 67) – a self one is, in fact, not, namely, a self-sufficient individual. Rather, for Kierkegaard, freedom lies in the "positive third's" relation to the actual self which means that freedom is characterized as much by necessity as possibility. Kierkegaard writes,

actuality is the unity of possibility and necessity. When a self becomes lost in possibility. . . what is missing is essentially the power to obey, to submit to the necessity in one's life, to what may be called one's limitations. Therefore, the tragedy is not that such a self did not amount to something in the world; no, the tragedy is that he did not become aware of himself, aware that the self he is is a very definite something and thus the necessary. Instead, he lost himself, because this self fantastically reflected itself in possibility. (SUD 36)

This describes the person in defiant despair who thinks freedom is the ability to entirely create oneself, to be entirely responsible for oneself. This person wants to be the master of himself by freely creating the concrete self he wants to be. He wants "to begin. . . not at and with the beginning, but 'in the beginning'; he does not want to put on his own self, does not want to see his given self as his task – he himself wants to compose his self by means of being the infinite form" (SUD 68). In other words, this

individual rejects God, that which created him and which has "established the entire relation" (SUD 14).

When one is in a low level despair, despairing only over particular problems, there is a failure to achieve the "consciousness of the self that is won by infinite abstraction from every externality, [and] this naked abstract self, which compared with immediacy's fully dressed self, is the first form of the infinite self and the advancing impetus in the whole process by which a self infinitely becomes responsible for its *actual* self with all its difficulties and advantages" (55). However, the person in defiant despair does not want to become responsible for his *actual* self, but, instead, wants to be only his infinite self. Thus, as defiant despair develops, the more it begins to create a

peculiar world of its own in inclosing reserve, the more inconsequential are the externalities under which the despair conceals itself. But the more spiritual despair becomes, the more attention it pays with demonic cleverness to deepening despair closed up in inclosing reserve, and the more attention it pays to neutralizing the externalities, making them as insignificant and inconsequential as possible. (73)

This enclosed reserve serves a purpose similar to Daniels' isolation. Cultivating the self in this way, the demonic poet attempts to forge a strong individual sense of self but does so only by ignoring existence. I will argue, through a Kierkegaardian analysis, why this results in his failure to secure freedom.

Nausea is a novel in journal form. The main character, Roquentin, wants to keep a journal in order to see clearly, but he is not merely relating to himself with the aid of his journal. In the process, he will become aware of that of which he despairs but without allowing faith to wrench him out of it. In rejecting God, the person in

defiant despair understands our human nature but does not become woozy with deference or respect for it by accepting the freedom of choosing oneself. Instead, he becomes arrogant and self-righteous, thinking he deserves even more: absolute self-creation. Examining Roquentin's attempt to affirm and justify himself will make clear the psychology of defiant despair in its highest form – demonic defiant despair.

The novel begins at the onset of Roquentin's nausea. On the second page he recounts an event he will later grant as the beginning point of his nausea:

Saturday the children were playing ducks and drakes and, like them, I wanted to throw a stone into the sea. Just at that moment I stopped, dropped the stone and left. Probably I looked somewhat foolish or absent-minded, because children laughed behind my back.

He says, additionally, that he has previously had a few similar experiences that he will not put on paper; the point is that there has been a significant change in himself, and he wants to understand what has happened. That he chooses this occurrence to commit to paper is not accidental: here, he wants to be like the innocent children. Instead, he has found himself changed by an *increased* self-awareness that has led also, as Kierkegaard would suspect, to a concomitant increase in awareness of the world and the objects within the world. For example,

There is something new about my hands, a certain way of picking up my pipe or fork. Or else, it's the fork which now has a certain way of *having itself picked up*, I don't know. A little while ago, just as I was coming into my room, I stopped short because I felt in my hand a cold object which held my attention through *a sort of personality*. I opened my hand, looked: I was simply holding the door-knob. This morning in the library, when the Self-Taught man came to say good morning to me, it took me ten seconds to recognize him. (4)

Notice how the objects are becoming active. This leads Roquentin to ask if it is the things in the world that have changed, or if the change is within him. He doesn't seek to find out; instead, he says he must choose. He decides that is he who has changed. This "decision," however, belies an inner incapacity to be decisive; he does not perceive himself as an active agent directing his life but rather as someone "subject to these sudden transformations" (5) he cannot control. This awareness of his lack of self-determination is the source of his "nausea" (or despair) and is what he seeks to overcome. Because he perceives his lack of autonomy to be the result of the fact that other things in existence have power over him, he is certainly not going to accept the resolution of faith, which would require submission to something not only outside of himself, but higher than himself. Thus, he responds to his awareness of his despair by attempting to establish an autonomous authenticity through which he can achieve full self-control.

This is how he describes the awakening that will eventually lead to a full awareness of his despair:

I got a waft of perfume at each movement of his head. And then, suddenly, I woke from a six-year slumber. The statue seemed to me unpleasant and stupid and I felt terribly, deeply bored. I couldn't understand why I was in Indo-China. What was I doing there? Why was I talking to these people? Why was I dressed so oddly? My passion was dead. For years it had rolled over and submerged me; now I felt empty. But that wasn't the worst: before me, posed with a sort of indolence, was a voluminous, insipid idea. I couldn't look at it. All that was confused with the perfume of Mercier's beard. (5)

This awakening frightens him, for what if this were to happen again?

If I am not mistaken, if all the signs which have been amassed are precursors of a new overthrow in my life, well then I am terrified. It isn't that my life is rich, or weighty or precious. But I'm afraid of what will be born and take possession of me – and drag me-- there? Shall I have to go off again, leaving my research, my book and everything else unfinished? Shall I awake in a few months, in a few years, broken, deceived, in the midst of new ruins? I would like to see the truth clearly before it is too late.

He is writing in his journal to see clearly, to relate to the relation he is. But we can see that he also seeks greater control over his life and fears waking up again in the midst of some new unconscious life. He begins journaling to force himself to become more consciously aware of his own self which he feels he is in danger of losing; he is striving for the "I." In this way, Roquentin realizes that he is not entirely responsible for who he is or the way he has come to see the world. He recognizes right from the beginning the importance – seen as a limitation – of the fact that the self is not autonomous or self-contained; it only exists by virtue of otherness. He says things like "I think I'm ugly because I've been told so" (6). He "marvels" at others who tell each other clear, plausible stories, remarking "when you live alone you no longer know what it is to tell something" (7). He muses on the impossibility of understanding our own faces, "people who live in society have learned how to see themselves in mirrors as they appear to their friends. I have no friends. Is that why my flesh is so naked?" (18)

Roquentin takes offense at this idea; he does not want to be externally defined. He has come to an awareness of his infinite self, and wants to be that self, infinitely, and not be defined by others, or by the world. He does not want to be at the whims of the world, meaning he is really looking for an internal consistency for which he is entirely responsible. His realization that he is not the sort of being he wishes to be

brings on nausea. This compels him to write; this writing alternates between confrontation of and escape from the cause of his nausea, much like one in therapy who alternates between courageous, illuminating insight and distancing false explanations. At heart, his project is a desire for control, for full possession of his existence.

He pursues this goal by trying to get back to some beginning point, back to the primacy of existence. He does this by trying to get to the objects of the world "themselves," which is primarily an attempt to get beyond common language and conceptualization. He begins practicing this possibility with things like beer bottles and cardboard boxes, trying to remove the boundaries which allow them to make sense. He thinks he will be able to find true freedom by getting to the objects beneath our concepts, saying that language gets in the way of our experience of objects and events by replacing the real experience with mere words. He distrusts his memories which are caught in language he can recall but not re-enter (32). But as he attempts to dissolve the conceptual, and "truly" reach the world, he finds that the objects begin to touch him back, as if alive, which he says they should not do. This too makes him reel, bringing on nausea, once again making him aware of his "unfreedom". If he grants this power back to the world and allows himself to be dragged back down to that level, immersed in "nature" or in the immediacy of the objects "themselves," then he will *still* not be able to create himself, and will be subjected to the arbitrariness of a pure physical existence. He realizes that not only can freedom not be found in this return to primacy, but worse, that such a return limits freedom *even more* than the social world. Thus, he says,

I am afraid of cities. But you mustn't leave them. If you go too far you come up against the vegetation belt. Vegetation has crawled for miles towards the cities. It is waiting. Once the city is dead, the vegetation will cover it, will climb over the stones, grip them, search them, make them burst with its long black pincers; it will blind the holes and let its green paws hang over everything. You must stay in the cities as long as they are alive, you must never penetrate alone this great mass of hair waiting at the gates. (156)

In the very first line of the next journal entry he writes that he no longer wishes to go on. He says that he's young and still has strength, but "do I have to?"

His predicament is this: He's in despair of existence itself. He sees that which he is in actuality. He's searching for authenticity; he is searching for freedom which will grant him his own self, entirely within his control. He cannot be one of the crowd and achieve this, but he soon realizes that he also cannot achieve this if he lets himself be drawn back into the primal world of nature. Everywhere he is faced with his unfreedom. The novel is one hundred and seventy eight pages of this existential torment. Moreover, it is intentionally so, representing Kierkegaard's explanation of defiance as a life "offended at all existence" where one, out of spite and in defiance of all existence, wills "to be himself with it, takes it along, almost flouting his agony," and "rather than seek help, he prefers, if necessary, to be himself with all the agonies of hell" (SUD 71). When this occurs, despair becomes demonic, the rarest and highest form of despair, where one wills to be himself, not out of an extreme self love or self-apotheosis, but purely out of spite, out of a hatred for all existence. Kierkegaard writes,

Not even in defiance does it want to tear itself loose from the power that established it, but for spite wants to force itself upon it, to obtrude defiantly upon it, wants to adhere to it out of malice – and of course, a spiteful denunciation must above all take care to adhere to what it denounces. Rebelling against all existence, it feels that it has obtained evidence against it,

against its goodness.

Roquentin is offended at existence, tormented by his awareness of a freedom that is stopped short of expression at every turn; he is aware of being something that is apparently impossible to actualize. Kierkegaard gets out of this by redefining freedom as a synthesis between necessity and possibility, saying it is the need for God that is humanity's perfection. This is precisely what Roquentin rejects saying that freedom is that which is contingent:

The essential thing is contingency. I mean that one cannot define existence as necessity. To exist is simply *to be there*; those who exist let themselves be encountered but you can never deduce anything from them. I believe there are people who have understood this. Only they tried to overcome this contingency by inventing a necessary, causal being. But no necessary being can explain existence: contingency is not a delusion, a probability that can be dissipated; it is the absolute, consequently, the perfect free gift. All is free, this park, this city, myself. When you realize that, it turns your heart upside down and everything begins to float... here is Nausea. (131)

In demonic cleverness, Roquentin makes Kierkegaard's faith and subjectivity inauthentic, not a move within freedom but an escape from freedom. He says there is nothing necessary about us or any of the things in existence; all is superfluous; all has occurred by mere chance.

This leads him to a dismissal of the importance of particulars. For example, he considers what would happen if the world began to fall apart and crumble, if there was some kind of huge disaster. He says,

Then I'll burst out laughing even though my body may be covered with filthy, infected scabs which blossom into flowers of flesh, violets, buttercups. I'll lean against a wall and when they go by I'll shout: "what's the matter with your science? What have you done with your humanism? Where is your dignity? I will not be afraid – or at least no more than now. Will it not still be existence, variation of existence? All these eyes which will slowly devour a face –

they will undoubtedly be too much, but no more so than the first two,
existence is what I am afraid of. (160 italics mine)

But in rejecting God and dismissing particulars, Roquentin is stuck in an existential oubliette, and he is fully aware of this and that there is no way out. He concludes that existence is free, and that this makes him unfree, or rather, he might as well not be free, if all of existence is free, because this denies him the capacity to create himself, which a free being ought to be able to do. At this point, Roquentin gives up on his project of freedom, reaching one form of Kierkegaard's "resignation".

And I, too, wanted to *be*. That is all I wanted; this is the last word. At the bottom of all these attempts which seemed without bonds, I find the same desire again: to drive existence out of me, to rid the passing moments of their fat, to twist them, dry them, purify myself, harden myself, to give back at last the sharp, precise sound of a saxophone note. That could even make an apologue: there was a poor man who got in the wrong world. He existed, like other people, in a world of public parks, bistros, commercial cities and he wanted to persuade himself that he was living somewhere else, behind the canvas of paintings, with the doges of Tintoretto, with Gozzoli's Florentines, behind the pages of books with Fabrizio del Dongo and Julien Sorel, behind the phonograph records, with the long dry laments of jazz. And then after making a complete fool of himself, he understood, he opened his eyes, he saw that it was a misdeal: he was in a bistro, just in front of a glass of warm beer. He stayed overwhelmed on the bench; he thought: I am a fool. (175)

If he were to stay at this point in resignation, refusing the leap of faith, he would merely be in defiant despair, despairing of his existence which will neither allow him the freedom to create himself nor allow him to "just be," like nature's other creatures. But he doesn't stop here. He finds his way to that "voluminous, insipid idea" he refers to in the beginning of the novel, which, at the time, he could not understand.

He is listening to music when he comes to the point of resignation. But then, he begins to see through the music to the person who created it, and is moved for the

first time in years (177). A woman begins singing and he thinks, "so two of them are saved: the Jew and the Negress. Saved. Maybe they thought they were lost irrevocably, drowned in existence. . . They have washed themselves of the sin of existing." He goes on to say that "this idea suddenly knocks me over, because I was not even hoping for that anymore" (177). We thus see how complete his resignation was. But now we see a new idea emerging, a way of justifying his existence by finding a place in which to be free. He was not such a fool after all. For the first time, he discovers joy.

This leads Roquentin to the decision to write a book. He decides to do this at the end of the novel, but we can presume, what we have just read is his novel, a book where

you would have to guess, behind the printed words, behind the pages, at something which would not exist, which would be above existence. A story, for example, something that could never happen, an adventure. It would have to be beautiful and hard as steel and make people ashamed of their existence. (178)

Roquentin begins his journal with his nausea, but throughout the journal-novel says that beginnings can only be determined after some end is reached. He must have reached the end – an understanding of his nausea – before he could locate that as the beginning, suggesting that the journal is not a journal but a work of creative fiction by the character. However, there is also reason to believe that the character has become a journal keeper, and that this too is his "art," that which will provide the place in which he remains behind actuality/necessity and is free to create himself. This is indicated by the inclusion of two more journal paragraphs after the one quoted above, the last of which, in its pure description, is especially revealing; it suggests that Roquentin will go

on as before:

Night falls. On the second floor of the Hotel Printnaia two windows have just lighted up. The building yard of the New station smells strongly of damp wood: tomorrow it will rain in Bouville. (195)

He "defiantly" puts together a coherent existence that does not *really* exist, except in his imagination. He thus thinks he has succeeded at bringing about his own authentic freedom, through a piece of art that somehow brings his self-creation outside of actuality. To back this up I must make clear what Roquentin means when he refers to his book as an "adventure."

In a conversation with the Self-Taught man, who has this secret desire to have an adventure, Roquentin realizes that he has never had one either. He tells a story about being attacked, which would seem to count, but in telling it, he realizes "it was an event that happened to me. . . I have never had any adventures. Things have happened to me" (52). This makes him realize that a true adventure must be something active from within, but he still cannot come up with any examples. Later on, as he is writing description in an attempt to get beyond the *word* "Sunday" to the *experience* Sunday, he finds that he has created a place where he can distance himself from actuality, from those of the others – another metaphorical "cave," like the one Daniels created for himself. The section ends with Roquentin saying, "Then I felt my heart swelling with a great feeling of adventure" (54). He goes on to more concretely define adventure not as an event, but as "the way in which the moments are linked together" (56). He gives an example, "you see a woman, you think that one day she'll be old, only you don't see her grow old. But there are moments when you think you

see her grow old and feel yourself growing old with her: this is the feeling of adventure" (57).

Adventure is not something in actual existence but is more of a temporal category, an understanding of "the irreversibility of time" (57). Roquentin says that "all that is present does not exist." Taken along with the understanding of the irreversibility of time, this means the following: every present moment, event, action, etc. will inevitably fade into the past. But what lies in the past is always understood from the present, which is where freedom lies. As such, the past is never any more complete or necessary than the future; it too is a possibility to be created, and does not ever exhaust itself. In other words, there is no present moment in itself, meaning the past is not necessary but still holds possibility within it, still can be brought forth in a new present moment which can always understand it in a new way. "The present does not exist" means the present moment is not a thing or event but is, rather, possibility. It is freedom; more precisely, it is *our* freedom. Adventure seizes this freedom in time; it is an imaginary move beyond the necessity of actuality, making the past contingent rather than necessary, meaning what has already occurred is not over and done with but still lies within the realm of possibility, of freedom.

For Kierkegaard, this makes demonic despair furthest from salvation because one who has achieved this state mistakenly believes he has indeed saved himself. According to Kierkegaard, Roquentin is *still* deceived because actuality is a synthesis, meaning Roquentin's "freedom" is imaginary and not actual. However, this is precisely why Roquentin thinks he has solved the problem of achieving freedom. By concluding that the present simply cannot really "exist" he provides for himself a free creative

space. But for Kierkegaard, freedom cannot result from rewriting the past, which would merely reflect a change at the level of ideas, or through the imagination; rather, for him, freedom must relate to one's concrete existence; it results from bringing one's own concrete past, through possibility, into an actual "future". In short, freedom, for Kierkegaard must relate to an actual becoming, not in the realm of imagination, but in concrete existence. Roquentin, however, insists he has achieved his conception of freedom, believing he has transcended the need for God, by transcending necessity, and has effectively transcended existence itself.

For Kierkegaard, Roquentin's position is flawed because while he wants to be more of a self by increasing his freedom, he actually becomes less of a self by diminishing his freedom. Kierkegaard writes:

In the whole dialectic within which it acts there is nothing steadfast; at no moment is the self steadfast [...] at any time it can quite arbitrarily start all over again, and no matter how long one idea is pursued, the entire action is within a hypothesis. The self is so far from successfully becoming more and more itself that the fact merely becomes increasingly obvious that it is a hypothetical self. The self is its own master, absolutely its own master, so called; and preachily this is the despair, but also what it rears as its pleasure and delight. On closer examination, however, it is easy to see that this absolute ruler is a king without a country, actually ruling over nothing [...] in the very moment when it seems that the self is closest to having the building completed, it can arbitrarily dissolve the whole thing into nothing. (SUD 69)

For Kierkegaard, then, Roquentin's freedom is an illusion. Moreover, in cutting himself off from necessity, the demon can only become more of the self he already is, and does not, as he thinks, transcend that existing self. There is a risk involved when one truly embraces the state of becoming, which is a state of change. In willing to be himself, the demon will not risk that change and thereby holds more firmly onto the self which he complains he did not create. In other words, the power of the self, the

power of becoming, is handed over to the crowd, to existence after all. About such a character, Kierkegaard writes:

What is missing is essentially the power to obey, to submit to the necessity of one's life, to what may be called one's limitations. Therefore, the tragedy is not that such a self did not amount to something in the world; no, the tragedy is that he did not become aware of himself, aware that the self he is is a very definite something and thus the necessary. Instead, he lost himself, because this self fantastically reflected itself in possibility. (SUD 36)

C. *Melancholy in The Immoralist*

There is yet a another stage of despair only briefly mentioned in *The Sickness Unto Death*; it is melancholy. This stage is, in one sense, beyond demonic despair and yet, at the same time, it is closer to the cure to be found in authentic faith. Indeed, in Part Two I will argue that this melancholic stage is necessary for Kierkegaard's cure of despair by showing how *Sickness* – through indirect communication aimed at the speculative thinker – attempts to bring the reader into this position precisely *in order* to cure him. In preparation for that argument I must first make clear this stage of despair; to do so I will examine Andre Gide's *The Immoralist*.

Like the protagonists discussed above, a desire for freedom is Michel's primary motivation, and like the others he also fails, but, again, in a way that illuminates key points of Kierkegaard's existential psychology. I argued above that Daniels suffering led him to question his prior perfunctory faith; similarly, Michel – a man of the mind, an historian – begins to see the inadequacy of the intellectual approach to existence,

especially his own existence. This leads him to refocus his attention on his own self, but because he is still operating with a speculative gaze, he mistakenly turns the self into an object. This is the cause of his eventual downfall and loss of the self he strives to become.

At the age of twenty-four Michel contracts tuberculosis, and thus his journey through despair begins in mere suffering or "despair over" his situation. He rises to the challenge presented by his illness with a fierce determination to overcome it. He says while sick: "a numerous active enemy was living within me. I listened for him, spied on him, felt him. Nor would I defeat him without a struggle [...] and I added half-aloud, as though to convince myself more completely: it's a matter of will. I prepared for war" (26). His attitude at the beginning reveals that he fully expects to return to the self he was before his illness, which would exhibit the following Kierkegaardian caricature:

His relation to the self is like the relation a person may have to his place of residence, which becomes an abomination because of smoke fumes or something else, whatever it might be. So he leaves it, but he does not move away, he does not set up a new residence; he continues to regard the old one as his address, he assumes that the problem will disappear. So also with the person in despair. As long as the difficulty lasts, he does not dare, 'to come to himself'. Presumably this will pass, perhaps a change will take place, this gloomy possibility will probably be forgotten. So as long as it lasts, he visits himself, so to speak, only occasionally, to see whether the change has commenced. As soon as it commences, he moves home again, "is himself" once again [...] but this simply means that he begins where he left off – he was a self up to a point and he went no further than that. (SUD 55)

This is what Michel expects and apparently desires, not having realized that his life has lacked anything up until this point. But his suffering has pushed him beyond his

former self, and he has moved into a higher stage of despair. He realizes, through his illness, that he had "never put his health to the test and that this has both weakened and protected him at the same time" (20). When he is beginning to feel better he says,

less absorbed by suffering now, my life once again became consistent and conscious. After this long agony, I had supposed I would be reborn the same man, and soon connect my present to the past; in the novelty of an unfamiliar country I might thus delude myself; here, no longer. Everything was to teach me what still astonished me: *I had changed*. (49 italics mine)

Before his illness Michel was a man of the mind. Engaging his body as he strove for health – for freedom from his illness – he begins to question the importance of and satisfaction gained from a life of thought. He says,

I came to despise in myself that knowledge that had once been my pride; such studies, formerly my whole life, no longer seemed to have more than a merely accidental and conventional relation to me. I was finding myself a different person and was happy to exist apart from them. As a specialist, I found myself stupid – as a man did I know myself? (51)

This mirrors Kierkegaard's critique of the Hegelian speculative thinker to be discussed in greater detail in Part Two of this essay. In short, the speculative thinker's existence is no more than "thought existence"; the thinking "I" of the Cartesian *cogito*, for example, is not a concrete existing "I" but an abstract Pure "I" of mankind, and not of the individual. With his will awakened through his response to his illness, Michel's individual "I" is strengthened; he has changed in so far as he has increased his awareness that he himself is an existing individual human being. For Kierkegaard, this is a significant increase in consciousness but also an intensification of despair.

In realizing he has not come to know himself despite being a man of thought, Michel begins to pursue this unknown self: "As a man did I know myself? I was scarcely born, how could I know already what I was born *as*? That would have to be

learned" (51). On the one hand, this suggests a Kierkegaardian understanding of the self as in a state of constant becoming; Michel is aware that he has not only changed but that a new self has been *born* in the process. He even compares himself to Lazarus, claiming to be "like a man raised from the dead" (92). He, like both Daniels and Roquetin, experiences his awakening as a process of individuation from the others around him. Michel, like the other two protagonists, becomes very critical of those around him, claiming "in talking to one I feel like I am talking to several" (91). He stands in stark contrast to Roquentin, however, in that he will attempt to nourish this newly emerging self not by retreating from existence but by more rigorously *engaging* in it, claiming he will now "make the thrilling discovery of life" (21). In Tunis, for example, he marvels at how contact with new sensations awakens dormant faculties "which, not having functioned yet, retained all their mysterious youth" (47). He is, then, willing to abandon himself to becoming, willing to lose himself and become something else through his existence in the world; he is trying to make an actual change in his self and not merely trying to live behind existence in fiction, on paper, in the imagination. Michel wants to be real, wants to manifest his freedom in existence but not through defiance of existence. Nevertheless, his approach to becoming a new self reveals that he is still very much a man of speculation, still very much the man he was.

Despite his active engagement in the world, Michel still considers knowing the self to be a search for the "authentic being hidden" (51) underneath the layers of accumulated knowledge, or "the old Adam" (51) as he calls it. He comes to "scorn" the "secondary, learned being whom education had pasted over" (51) this authentic

self, which he then sets out to find. He likens himself to a palimpsest and compares his task of freedom and authenticity to that of "the scholar who beneath more recent script discovers, on the same paper, an infinitely precious ancient text" (51).

In *Sickness*, Kierkegaard briefly mentions melancholy, contrasting its relationship to necessity and possibility with that of the demon:

Instead of taking the possibility back into necessity, [the demon] chases after possibility – and at last cannot find his way back to himself – In melancholy the opposite takes place in much the same way. Melancholically enamored, the individual pursues one of anxiety's possibilities, which finally leads him away from himself so that he is a victim of anxiety or a victim of that about which he was anxious lest he be overcome. (37)

This is precisely what characterizes Michel's despair; driven by a fundamental anxiety of death, he fixates on finding this "inner" authentic self. Moreover, looking back on the time when he was still fighting his physical illness, he notes that "some general nervous disorder complicated the disease; I cannot otherwise explain a series of phenomena irreducible, it seems to me, to a simple tubercular condition" (30). He refers to this condition several more times, and it seems reasonable to "diagnose" this "nervous debility" (49, 55) as a conscious confrontation with despair.

Nevertheless, he ultimately flounders; he cannot find this "old Adam" despite all his adventures and travels and scrutiny of the self. Again and again, during his search for his authentic self, he expresses a philosophical position similar to Kierkegaard's on the incongruity between speculative thought and existence. Yet, he is still trying to know that self. He looks to the novelists and poets in an attempt to locate this knowledge or understanding of the self, but claims, "if they possessed such a thing, they certainly kept it hidden; most of them, it seemed to me, did not live at all,

were content with the appearance of life, and to them life itself seemed no more than a tiresome hindrance to writing" (90). This is interesting in that it is an attack that could easily be leveled against Roquentin, further highlighting the difference between the attitude each takes towards existence. The philosophers cannot help Michel either; he likens them to mathematicians, claiming "they kept as far as possible from troublesome reality, and were no more concerned with life than the algebrist with the existence of the quantities he is measuring" (90). He then takes to the night, to the woods, and to poaching, engaging in life, in new activities, but still with the scholar's inquisitiveness that frustrates him again and again, leaving him without an *answer* to his question concerning the self. He wants to know,

what more can man *do*, what else can man *be*? That was what I had to *know*. Was what man had said up till then all he could say? Wasn't there something he didn't *know* about himself? Could he merely repeat himself? ... And day by day there grew within me the confused sense of untapped wealth lying hidden, smothered by culture, propriety, rules. (146 italics mine)

Yet, in continuing to reach for this authenticity or sincerity, he is finally forced to ask, "[t]hen what was it I called sincerity?" (157) Finally exasperated, he says he "no longer know[s] where to look" (169), adding that "this useless freedom tortures me" (169). His failure and broken will indicate he does not quite "understand" his own philosophical position on the relationship between thought and existence; he is *still* a man of thought. He has changed, but has not come far enough. The ending, however, is not hopeless. Michel is lost, but reaching out; as he begins to tell this story to his friends he says: "I am at a moment in my life past which I can no longer see my way. Yet this is not exhaustion. The point is, I no longer *understand*" (7 italics mine). Perhaps at this point he is about to finally make room for another kind of

"understanding" alongside his speculative thought. Throughout the novel, he has been moving toward an admission of ignorance with regard to his question of the self, becoming more confused, frustrated and even critical of the question itself. In saying that "the capacity to get free is nothing, the capacity to be free is the task" (7), he makes an important distinction between getting free *from* this or that situation and living free in general. As a scientist in search of himself, he is looking to understand the self, which, through objectifying the self, is one way of breaking free from it; the problem is, however, that once one has broken free from it, how can one *be* that self?

Furthermore, Michel's acts of getting free *from* are rooted in an oppositional stance he takes toward each situation he hopes to conquer. Examples of this oppositional stance abound. With the onset of his illness he makes a complete shift from being a man of thought to becoming a man of the body. While sick, he needs to be surrounded by the vitality of youth, but as soon as he is feeling better he becomes bored with the children. After he shaves his beard he decides he must grow his hair. He looks for the secret of life in death (145). He tries to completely suppress his prior social and educational "indoctrination". Even in a conversation with Menalque he says something he does not mean just to be oppositional (105).

While this helps him get over his illness, it is not so productive or effective in other circumstances. Most importantly, this attitude, when applied to his key question regarding the self, is precisely what undermines him; in taking an oppositional stance against the self, he treats it as something to be conquered, as something other, as an object, and this makes it impossible to *be* that self.

If he could recognize this, he would be a truly Kierkegaardian hero, and,

indeed, one could not illustrate him beyond the point where he faces his own ignorance. However, as I will show in Part Two, Kierkegaard does not intend to rely on setting an example to motivate his readers toward the authentic subjectivity which preserves the gulf between the "I" and God. Nevertheless, understanding Michel's mistake and the way in which melancholy might lead an individual to accept a certain kind of self-ignorance will be important in Part Two where I analyze *Sickness* within the context of Kierkegaard's avowed indirect communication and his insistence that his work be not merely philosophical, but Christian – i.e. Edifying. The literary exegesis of Part One was intended to make clear Kierkegaard's objective description of the psychological stages of despair that might result in authentic subjectivity. The aim of Part Two is to show *how* the presentation of *Sickness* might effectively engender authentic subjectivity in the reader, in particular the Hegelian speculative thinker.

Part Two

Introduction

As discussed in Part I, Kierkegaard's *The Sickness Unto Death* is presented to the reader as a series of stages in the psychological development toward the authentic subjectivity achieved through genuine faith. In order to evaluate Kierkegaard's attempt to offer authenticity as an antidote to both Hegelian speculation and the enervated faith of Christianity, it is necessary to account for this seemingly objective and developmental presentation. To do this, I will analyze the objective content of *Sickness* by carefully considering Kierkegaard's authorial intent, especially his avowed indirect communication.

There is a long-standing debate over whether Kierkegaard's indirect communication is due primarily to the semantic difficulties of articulating the meaning of authentic faith or whether it is merely a technique to seduce the reader into the faith relationship. Jacob Gollomb argues that this is a false dichotomy:

without this pragmatic aim in view, Kierkegaard would not have grappled with the semantic problem at all, remaining silent or making due with the solitary monologues of his diaries. For Kierkegaard, the 'what' (semantics) and the 'what for' (pragmatics) are dialectically related, eliminating such dichotomy [...] [Kierkegaard's technique] is *both* a solution to the problems inherent in writing about authentic faith and a means of enticing the reader. (65)

Both constituents of Kierkegaard's communicative dilemma must be kept in mind when evaluating the objective content and structure of *Sickness*. If Kierkegaard's work is to be a response to both Hegel and traditional Christianity, and if the

subjective thinker is to exist alongside speculative thought, then Kierkegaard cannot make his arguments entirely through the logical language of rational argument without undermining that argument. Moreover, it is crucial to remember that Kierkegaard is not merely responding to a philosophical problem, but to an existential one. This means that what is "argued" cannot simply be argued through alternative means; it must increase the reader's self-awareness; more specifically, it must move him closer to the authentic subjectivity of the faith relation.

The primary aim of Part Two is to make a case for how Kierkegaard's *Sickness Unto Death* attempts to satisfy this difficult dual requirement.

In the first section I will discuss Kierkegaard's attack against speculation in terms of his concept of despair as put forth in *The Sickness Unto Death*. I will do this by explicating Kierkegaard's distinction between subjective and objective thinking as well as his interpretation of the historical origins of speculative thought. In the second section I will make clear the communicative dilemma Kierkegaard faces in addressing the problem he locates in speculation. In the third section I further examine Kierkegaard's communicative dilemma by discussing how the religious communication in *Repetition* points to the need for tailoring one's communicative technique to the intended audience, which, as I will argue, in the case of *The Sickness Unto Death*, is the Hegelian speculative thinker. These three sections are in preparation for the fourth section where I will show how *Sickness* is an attempt to put Kierkegaard's theory of indirect communication into religious practice; it is Kierkegaard's attempt to not merely *talk about* redeeming people but to actually redeem them, which he claims was Jesus' defining characteristic. This fourth section,

then, is primarily a technical analysis of how *Sickness* might work on the appropriate reader.

I. Speculation as Despair

Recall in *Sickness* that Kierkegaard claims that at the heart of despair is the desire to be rid of oneself as an existing individual. His primary problem with speculation, as with Christianity, is that it eliminates the individual by "universal[izing] individual human beings fantastically into the race" (SUD 83). While *Sickness* does not explicitly discuss speculation in terms of despair, it is in fact, for Kierkegaard, one of two key ways in which despair manifests itself.¹ In order to discuss how *Sickness* can successfully attack Hegelian speculation (i.e. indirectly and in a way that is edifying), I must first make clear how speculation "solves" "the problem" of the existing, individual "I," or, more specifically what makes speculation despair.

In *The Postscript*, Kierkegaard distinguishes subjective thinking from objective thinking, stating that "[w]henas objective thinking is indifferent to the thinking subject and his existence, the subjective thinker as existing is essentially interested in his own thinking, is existing in it" (73). Subjective thinking is marked by "inwardness [and] possession, whereby it belongs to the subject and to no one else" (73). It, unlike objective thinking, is concerned not with the result but with the process of becoming, a process which is available to anyone "who has not permitted himself to be tricked into becoming objective, into inhumanly becoming speculative thought" (73).

¹ The other, of course, is traditional Christianity

Kierkegaard claims further that "the subjective thinker is not a scientist-scholar; he is an artist. To exist is an art" (351).

The decisive factor between subjective and objective thinking is the relationship between thinking and existence. In *The Postscript*, Kierkegaard traces the historical development of how this relationship is constructed by contrasting an existential Socrates with the "speculative" Plato, Descartes and Hegel, placing considerable emphasis on the culpability of Descartes' *cogito*. It is through Descartes' proof that speculation gains great momentum, but only by obfuscating and evading the question of being by inadequately "proving" the unproblematic certainty of the knowing subject and then focusing its gaze objectively outward; in other words it simply ignores the question while "boast[ing] of having explained everything (CUP 302). For Kierkegaard, this failure of Hegelian speculation to adequately deal with existence is problematic for, at least, two reasons. First, because it rests on a Cartesian foundation, it unproblematically assumes as given a knowing subject as the bedrock for its subsequent skeptical philosophy. Contrary to this apodictic self, Kierkegaard's self is precisely that which is always precariously *uncertain*, and, thus, must be both more rigorously interrogated philosophically and more radically engaged existentially. Speculation, however, dodges this dual task through a conflation of thought and being. This creates an objective "subject" who is primarily a thinker; being, then, for speculation "does not mean the thinking person is, but basically only that he is a thinker" (CUP 124). This allows him to hide in a "mystical suspension [...]" whereby the decisive explanation regarding the *real question* becomes impossible" (CUP 313 italics mine).

Secondly, it transforms the individual "I" into the *sub specie aeterni* or abstract humankind. Kierkegaard argues that the Cartesian "I," which provides the philosophical foundation for Hegelian speculation, is not a concrete, individual, *existing* "I", but a "pure I". In *The Postscript* he writes:

If the *I* in *cogito* is understood to be an individual human being, then the statement demonstrates nothing: I *am* thinking ergo I am, but if I *am* thinking, no wonder, then, that I am; after all, it has already been said, and the first consequently says even more than the last. If, then, by the *I* in *cogito*, one understands a single individual existing human being, philosophy shouts: Foolishness, foolishness, here it is not a matter of my *I* or your *I* but of the pure *I*. But surely this pure *I* can have no other existence than thought-existence. What, then, is the concluding formula supposed to mean; indeed, there is no conclusion, for then the statement is a tautology. (CUP 317)

In this way, speculation only *appears* to mediate reason with existence. Descartes' proof – his archimedean point – rests deceptively in existence because it is grounded not in the single "I" but in the Pure "I" of "thought-existence", of reason. Thus, Kierkegaard argues that there is a false mediation which takes place not between reason and Christianity, (or between reason and existence), but between reason and *reason's understanding* of existence and Christianity; in other words, it takes place entirely within reason itself. The problem is not merely that speculation does not ever come to a genuine understanding of existence (i.e. of the concrete, single "I") prior to its act of mediation; even more, mediation *itself* belongs to speculative thought, and to understand the individual existence that is the key element of Christianity is to realize that the single individual *cannot* be mediated. Kierkegaard writes:

Is not *mediation* speculative thought's idea? Consequently, when the opposites are *mediated*, the opposites (speculative thought – Christianity) are not equal before the arbiter, but Christianity is an element within speculation, and speculation acquires dominance [...] When two opposites are mediated and

these are mediated in a higher unity, the opposites can perhaps be of equal standing because neither of them is the opposite of speculation. But when the one opposite is speculation itself, and mediation occurs, and mediation is speculation's idea, then it is an illusory gesture to speak of an opposite of speculation, since the reconciling power is itself speculation. (CUP 376)

In tracing Hegelian speculation back to the Cartesian contradiction, Kierkegaard is attempting to show how even though existence is the one certainty from which speculation can proceed, it is precisely existence (or the subjective) that must be *overcome* in order to secure that certainty. In other words, this false mediation purports to ground an absolute knowledge by forcing an *objective* stability on an essentially unstable *subject*. Hence, the way in which speculation pretends to move toward a solution to the problem of knowledge hides the fact that it is primarily responding to the unstable, subjective, individual – the problem of existence. It achieves this by universalizing the individual into the race whereby the "I" is transformed into the "we", the individual into the community. Speculation, therefore, is despair: the desire and attempt to be rid of oneself, an individual human being. When the despairing Christian bands with the others in an attempt to escape God's wrathful judgment, he is looking for safety. Speculation is also trying to hide in a crowd, but not as much for safety as for the comfort that comes from certainty. Kierkegaard writes: "the objective way is of the opinion that it has a security that the subjective way does not have [and it thinks] it avoids a danger that lies in wait for the subjective way and at its maximum this danger is madness" (194). While Kierkegaard also considers the isolated individual to be mad, it will be through God – not reason – that the essentially internally unstable subject is stabilized by its true opposite – God

or the Absolute. To solve the problem as reason does, however, through a mediation which eliminates this absolute, does not solve the madness of the isolated "I," for it creates a "pure I" that is not only more like a "we" but which will also "correspond only to itself" in reason (CUP 192). Kierkegaard argues further that this can also amount to lunacy for the concrete speculative individual himself: "the objective truth as such does not at all decide that the one stating it is sensible; on the contrary, it can even betray that the man is lunatic, although what he says is entirely true and especially objectively true" (194). Think, for example, of Beckett's Watt or the logical language games of Shakespeare's clowns.

For such an existing, individual, speculative thinker, existence becomes "rather like a satire on him":

With regard to his own actuality, it would depend upon whether his thinking could be completely successful in abstracting from actuality. That is indeed what the abstract thinker wants, *but it is of no use; he still continues to exist* and this continuance of his existence, "this sometimes sad professorial figure," is an epigram on the abstract thinker, not to mention the allegation of ethics against him. (318 italics mine)

Put more simply, in trying to make the subject of "infinitely great importance" (i.e. God-like in its knowing capacity), speculation loses the *individual* subject, thereby making it of "infinitely little importance" (CUP 124). Kierkegaard insists, however, both as Climacus and Anti-Climacus, that this cannot be done; the "I" can never really be eliminated. In *Sickness*, for example, he writes "despair continually converts itself into a living [...] What it wants to do is consume itself, something it cannot do [...] he cannot consume himself, cannot get rid of himself, cannot reduce himself to nothing" (18-19).

But it must be kept in mind that Kierkegaard's authentic subjectivity, specifically as he attempts to communicate it in *The Sickness Unto Death*, is an *antidote* to this despair of Hegelian speculation. If this work is to succeed, and cure this despair, it must make a case for the existing individual, for Kierkegaard's Christianity. This cannot be done through speculative thought itself because, recall, Christianity is its opposite and must remain so. Moreover, *each* speculative thinker must come to realize the subjective truth for himself, otherwise the communication will be rendered nugatory. This constitutes Kierkegaard's communicative dilemma which I will now discuss in greater detail.

II. Kierkegaard's Communicative Dilemma

The distinction of subjective thinking refers to the elusive concept of authenticity (or faith) discussed in part one of this essay. To induce this is the primary purpose of Kierkegaard's work. This aim, however, is bedeviled by the subjective, and therefore private, nature of the goal, thus creating, first and foremost, a communicative puzzle. In both *Philosophical Fragments* and *The Postscript*, Kierkegaard attempts to make clear the communicative dilemma of a writer who aspires not to communicate "authenticity" as an objective concept but to incite the reader into such a position (a position which, recall, can only be achieved through the individual's own one-to-one relation to God). Thus, Kierkegaard's terms for authenticity: "subjective thinking," the "appropriation itself," "inwardness," etc. are always, at best, a mere penumbral illumination of the concept itself. Consider this passage, for example:

the essential content is essentially a secret, because it cannot be communicated directly. This is the significance of the secrecy. [...] the essential in this knowledge is the appropriation itself [and] means that it remains a secret for everyone who is not through himself doubly reflected in the same way, but that this is the essential form of the truth means that it cannot be stated in any other way. (CUP 79)

Authenticity, for Kierkegaard, does not exist as an object, therefore I will not presume to reduce it to such. Because "authenticity" is "stated" only by an existing individual to, for, and from himself, the appropriate object of my inquiry ought *not* to be authenticity *itself* but the communication that purports to produce it. This shift in focus will achieve a more comprehensive analysis of this key Kierkegaardian concept. Moreover, this approach will allow me to consider Kierkegaard's philosophy within the peculiar context he is forced to create for himself given his attempt to thwart the discourse of both speculation and conventional Christianity. This evaluation will require a close analysis of Kierkegaard's work in both theory and practice; in other words, I will analyze, first, how he invites himself to be read and, second, the specific ways his work can potentially be received by one who takes him up on this invitation. The question I put to Kierkegaard's texts is a technical one: what specific techniques does Kierkegaard use to effectuate his indirect communication?

Because Kierkegaard was inspired by Socrates in both aim and method, it is necessary to examine this relationship carefully. Mary Jane Rubenstein argues that Socrates "haunts [...] the entirety of Kierkegaard's authorship" (42). She begins her argument by distinguishing between the Socrates as depicted in *The Concept of Irony* and Kierkegaard's later version in *The Postscript*, but goes on to argue that this difference was not a mere change of mind but, instead, a communicative trick with

two main goals: first, it is a strategic attack against Hegel, and second, it is an attempt to steal Socrates out of this speculative tradition, resurrecting him instead as an existential thinker. I will summarize Rubenstein's account of how Kierkegaard achieves this maneuver in order to explicate how the Kierkegaard-Socrates relationship is important to Kierkegaard's indirect communication in *Sickness*.

A. Kierkegaard's Socrates

Rubenstein argues that Kierkegaard, in *The Concept of Irony*, attributes to Socrates an historical role in the emergence of the Hegelian Idea, thereby placing Socrates as an early progenitor of this tradition. Kierkegaard, however, does not, she claims, "in [anticipation] of his later, indirect authorship [...] resolve his dissertation neatly." Instead, he ends by claiming that Socrates' "irony [...] is the moment that *either* enables *or* disables the system" (446). However, it is not until *Philosophical Fragments* that he begins to capitalize on this path he has set, this time to attack Hegelianism more specifically. Rubenstein argues that this is accomplished in two ways:

First, Socrates becomes the much-sought Origin: Climacus suggests that Socrates' resolution of the paradox set Western history on a course that denied Absolute Difference so thoroughly that it found its culmination in the numbing and static identity of the System. Secondly (perhaps politically, but more likely out of respect for his own notion of indirect communication), Climacus diverts his readers' attention, outwardly criticizing Socrates, but focusing solely on those elements of Socrates' thought that are most proto-Hegelian. This way, he can criticize Hegel without *opposing* Hegel; Climacus is too smart for that. (448)

This is a strategic move; the hope is that Hegelians will be caught off guard rather than thrown into an immediately confrontational stance where they would be well armed against Kierkegaard's attack. In a parallel move in *Fragments* Kierkegaard does not refer to the alternative he presents as "Christian." Rubenstein claims "this is because, as Climacus laments, 'the whole terminology has been confiscated by speculative thought'" (449).

Most significantly, this indirect way of attacking Hegel – through Socrates – has the additional effect of excising the "Socrates" that speculation "inherited"; it is then followed by an attempt to reclaim a slightly different "Socrates" – namely, the one presented in the *Postscript* as an existential or subjective thinker. Rubenstein claims that Socrates represents the subject who refuses objectivity, thus satisfying for Kierkegaard a need to both "locate irreducible subjectivity" and "communicate it" (451). But this, too, must not be directly communicated, and hence Kierkegaard presents us with contradictory versions of Socrates in *Irony*, *Fragments* and the *Postscript*. These different presentations, however, all aim at a single two-fold communication. First, it is an attempt to resurrect a Socratic ignorance, which the totalizing Hegelian system lacks. Second, Socrates represents the possibility that there is a way not only to retain but also to *communicate* this Socratic ignorance. In *Fragments*, Kierkegaard claims that "between one human being and another the Socratic relationship is indeed the highest, the truest". In his journals he writes that Jesus "established no teaching but was active. He didn't *teach* that there was redemption for man, he *redeemed* them" (14). If Socrates' teaching can come close to this, then there is hope, too, for Kierkegaard's desire to be similarly endowed. Both

figures certainly provided guidance for Kierkegaard who insists that he cannot remain quiet; a religious person must say something. He writes in *Sickness*:

If everyone, each one individually, observed silence because no one wanted to venture to be that traitorous, that rash, or that shameless, then this universal silence would in fact be another kind of insolence, a fraud, a cunning insurrection against God, who by no means wants ideality's demands to be suppressed. (160)

Thus the question becomes: what and how *does* one, such as Kierkegaard, write?

B. Socratic Method in The Postscript

In *The Postscript* we get an example of what Kierkegaard's indirect communication might look like in practice. Recall the communicative dilemma introduced above with regard to subjective knowledge; in the *Postscript*, however, Kierkegaard does not utilize indirect communication specifically for the edifying task of bringing a reader to his own subjective truth; rather, in this text, Kierkegaard uses indirect communication to serve a more traditionally philosophical end, abstractly arguing for a subjective truth in contrast to the objective truth of speculation; it does not, however, strategically attempt to bring the reader into his *own* subjective truth.

In contrast, *Sickness* attempts to further utilize this Socratic relationship for the religious aim of delivering the reader into authentic subjectivity. Yet, Kierkegaard makes clear he is not arguing for a return to the *pagan* Socrates; rather, he stresses in *The Postscript* the need to *really* progress beyond the Socratic. Speculation claims to do this but fails because it does so only through its false mediation discussed above. Hence, for Kierkegaard, the move beyond the Socratic requires the retrieval of

Socrates by truly understanding him, i.e. existentially. Note, this is very close to Kierkegaard's criticism that speculation falsely thinks it has outgrown Christianity and may perhaps be another trick on Kierkegaard's part, namely, to reclaim "Christianity" through recourse to the more philosophically admired Socrates.

Rubenstein interprets Kierkegaard's trick like this:

If Climacus had begun by pitting Christianity, or any of its recognizable tenets, against Hegelianism, the dutiful speculator would rush to his own defense, thinking, "Christianity. I know what that means," and taking immediate refuge in his mediated, conceptual comprehension of Christianity. Believing that he already understood the matter at hand, the Hegelian would fail to realize that he himself had become Untruth – that he was no closer to the truth than the drudge down the street who had never even *heard* of Hegel. It was only by first razing his reader's understanding – by ignoring Christianity as we know it and reconstructing the paradoxically religious against paganism – that Climacus could hope to bring his readers to understand what Socrates knew all along [...] but confronted as we ultimately are with the absolute paradox, none of us knows anything (457.)

In any case, Kierkegaard's desired result is the same: revealing speculation's mediation to be false, and revealing the inadequacy of a totalizing Hegelian system that leaves no room for the Absolute; through reason, it claims to be able to explain even God.

Socratic ignorance, on the other hand, retains the absolute (albeit a pagan version), while Socratic maieutics appeals to the existing individual, a prerequisite state for Kierkegaardian Christianity.

This indirect approach is important for another reason. By presenting his argument through contradictory interpretations of Socrates, Kierkegaard attempts to thwart any simple followers who would just tag along. Although such reasoning will not bring one to subjective truth, it does engage the individual at a deeper level than mere direct communication and hence, may provide some preliminary practice in the

attainment of one's own subjective truth, which does, after all, hinge on decisiveness and agency. Additionally, because blind assent of the student is a major obstacle for the teacher of subjective truth, the Socratic teacher must also retain a certain degree of distance. Rubenstein argues that this

authorial self erasure (un)manifests itself as both a narrative withholding and an autobiographical withholding. By refusing to speak directly and by claiming personal ignorance of the matter at hand, the communicator, whether he be Socrates, Climacus, or Kierkegaard, keeps himself out of the truth to which he circuitously points. He thus preserves the radical subjectivity of truth *and* the integrity of the interiority [...] The teacher as vanishing tradition prevents his students from entering into a direct relationship with him; insuring that they do not commit his words to memory and nod in vigorous assent simply because he is the master. (458)

She claims further that Socrates' "refusal of Alciabiades in the *Symposium* is an example of this Socratic distancing. Here, I part with Rubenstein's romantic and idealized view of Kierkegaard to make one further, crucial point about his communication. Although a Socratic/Kierkegaardian teacher does not want servile students, to think that this will not happen and that it can be avoided in any genuine teaching relationship is naïve. Rather, the authentic teacher will utilize this inevitable tendency in student desire – in Kierkegaard's case he will find a way to use this to turn the devout Hegelian against himself. This point is crucial to my later technical analysis of *Sickness*, and I elaborate on it here through a Kierkegaardian analysis of Socrates' relationship with Alciabiades in *The Symposium*.

C. Alciabiades' Existential Lesson

In the *Symposium*, Alciabiades does not enter the dialogue until near the end. He enters rambunctiously drunk and is adorned with Dionysian ivy and violets. Upon seeing Socrates, he exclaims, "you're lying here in ambush for me again aren't you?" Despite his contentious mood, the group greets him amicably, and they ask him to join their discussion in praise of love. Alciabiades cantankerously claims that he cannot praise love in the presence of Socrates, saying, "Don't you deny it! I can't praise anyone else when you're around." At this point, it is unclear if this is because Socrates won't let him or because Alciabiades is blinded by infatuation for his teacher; the rest of the text suggests the latter. Erixymachus coaxes him further by assuring him that he can, for his turn, praise Socrates, and Alciabiades readily accepts.

He begins by praising the beautifully seductive nature of Socrates' arguments. It is not, however, the mere beautiful *expression* of these arguments, for he says further, "whenever we hear anyone else talking, even a very good orator, no one takes any interest, but when someone hears you (or someone else repeating your arguments, even if he is quite a poor speaker) [...] we are astounded and possessed" (52). Yet, Alciabiades is clearly frustrated by Socrates, particularly his avowal to be "ignorant about everything and know nothing" (53). Alciabiades claims that this is mere appearance and that he will, for his turn in the discussion, make clear who Socrates really is. He says:

You can see that Socrates is lovingly fixated on beautiful young men, is always around them – in a daze, and furthermore that he is ignorant about everything

and knows nothing [...] He's put on this external appearance just like the statue of Silenus, but when his interior is opened up, he is more filled than you would think [...] and his entire life is occupied with being ironic and playing games with people. I don't know whether any of you have seen the glorious figures inside him when he is serious and opens up. I did see them once, and they seemed to me to be so divine, golden, splendid and amazing, that, to put it briefly, whatever Socrates commands must be done. (53)

He continues to praise Socrates' arguments, stating that even though they often appear, at first, to be ridiculous, "filled with donkeys and packasses [...] blacksmiths, cobblers and tanners," they are still the "only arguments that make sense [...] and when they are fully expanded they deal with everything that a person who wants to be good and beautiful needs to consider" (57). Thus, Alciabiades reveals the intensity of his infatuation with Socrates – which is precisely what should be avoided according to both Socrates and Kierkegaard. However, based on what Alciabiades says next, I will argue that he has gone a step beyond (rather than in retreat from) his infatuation for his teacher, and that this is the move that marks him as a superior student. This achievement indicates not only that which should occur in the student, but also shows why it is essential that this be induced only indirectly; it must come entirely from within.

Alciabiades has been ill-tempered since entering, and, although he begins with great praise for Socrates, his foul mood soon returns as he begins to make his case clear: he is outraged over this infatuation because he realizes the "servile state" this puts him in. He says:

I believe that Pericles and other good orators I have heard spoke well, but I was not affected like this. My soul didn't clamor or get angry about my *servile state*. However, I have been put in that position many times by this Marsyas here, with the effect that it seemed to me that I ought not to live the way I

have [...] and even now, I know in my heart that if I would open my ears, I wouldn't be able to resist, but would be affected the same way [...] I know in my heart that I cannot refute him and so I ought to do what this man commands, but then I go away, a slave to the honor given by the asses. So I desert him and escape, and whenever I see him, I am ashamed of what we had agreed on. (58)

What does Alciabiades find so maddening? Granted, Socrates, in general, is an exasperating person who accosts people in the market place, asking questions whose persistent simplicity – like the questions of a child – is precisely their almost obscene obscurity. But this is not what is aggravating Alciabiades, who, as can be discerned even from the above quotes, has followed Socrates quite far in the adventure of reason. Rather, from a Kierkegaardian perspective, Alciabiades's frustration comes from the resulting dissatisfaction of having seen "the inside" of reason, which suddenly leads him to a dead-end of his free will, which is necessarily the denial of his "subjective truth." Nonetheless, Alciabiades's recognition of his servile state and his awareness of his lack of his own subjective truth (within Socrates' objective reason) is simultaneously its creation; at that moment, subjectivity's truth is becoming actual for Alciabiades. Moreover, this occurs only as a result of Alciabiades's rebellion against his teacher, a necessary step to sever the inevitable teacher-student bond. It will become clear later, through the re-analysis of *Sickness*, that this rebellion is the only way for the student to achieve what has been promised by a teacher such as Socrates, or a writer like Kierkegaard.

This sort of rejection or rebellion is not significant in the reader's resolution of the contradictions between *Irony*, *Fragments* and *The Postscript*. It is, however, crucial to understanding *Sickness*, which operates on a similar trickery as the books

mentioned above, but with the added element of rebellion, it achieves the even more psychological and edifying end appropriate to Kierkegaard's concept of subjective truth. To put it another way, the *Postscript* utilizes indirect communication to achieve a philosophical victory; *Sickness* attempts to go a step further by attempting to eventuate the truth of subjectivity, which is the mark of authenticity.

D. Kierkegaard's Socratically Artful Communication

To achieve this religious end Kierkegaard argues that more than Socratic self control and distance is necessary; indirect communication also requires art. Although the meaning of "art" for Kierkegaard is not immediately clear, he does leave us some clues. In *Repetition*, for example, the narrator suggests what he does *not* mean by art:

If I were to elaborate on the young man's moods as I learned to know them, to say nothing of anecdotally including a host of irrelevant things – living rooms and wearing apparel, lovely localities, relatives and friends – this narrative could become an interminable story. That, however, I do not want. I like to eat lettuce, but I always eat only the heart; in my opinion the leaves are for the pigs... I prefer the delights of conception to the discomforts of childbirth. (141)

Key here is "irrelevant"; such artistic details will not help Kierkegaard accomplish his religious, communicative goal. From a Kierkegaardian perspective, art, such as literature, can bury the reader in details of a fictive world, and thereby provide escape from oneself, which, recall, is the desire at the heart of despair: to be rid of oneself. This creates a quandary for any would-be religious poet for whom "the pathos is not a matter of singing praises and celebrating and composing song books, but of existing

oneself" (CUP 388). The difference is that for the aesthetic poet the production of the work of art is what is important; for the religious poet, his work should show that he exists religiously. And to create a work which will inspire *others* to become religious (the task of *Sickness*) is an even greater difficulty. For an analysis of *Sickness*, Kierkegaard's claim that religious communication requires art must be understood within the context of this last point. Hence, by "art" he must mean something closer to "artful," which implies cunning and deceit.

In his journals, Kierkegaard states that "religious things have to do with a softly murmured soliloquy with oneself. Alas, things are so topsy turvy that, instead of having to do with each individual going alone into his secret closet to commune quietly with himself, people believe that religion is a matter for very loud talk" (101). Religious communication, then, instead of providing morals through tales of exemplary others, must attempt to bring the reader to exist as an individual. Kierkegaard purports to do this to the Hegelian thinker by getting him to "turn the observer's gaze onto himself" (CUP 331). Detailing one's own inner sufferings cannot be of religious help for another, especially the Hegelian thinker who is his primary target; he writes, "it is terrible to think for just one instant about this life I have led in the most hidden recesses of my soul, of course, never having breathed a word of it to a single person, not even daring to set down the least bit of it" (CUP 342). Again, such aesthetic details would not promote Kierkegaard's religious end. Nevertheless, as we saw above, he still feels compelled to do something, to write something, to attempt to bring readers, first, to an existence as a single individual, and second, into a one-to-one relationship with God; this two-fold task is the unifying aim

of his work.

A different approach, then, is necessary for a truly religious communication which aims to give the reader back to himself. For Kierkegaard, "[t]o celebrate a hero of faith is just as fully an esthetic task as to celebrate a war hero" (CUP 388). Hence, the religious writer's goal cannot be achieved by providing the reader with an example to be followed. This is not only because the very idea of following in another's footsteps already implicitly undermines the personal and subjective nature of the goal – as with Alciabiades – but also because providing such a grand example may undermine the *motivation* of the reader. Kierkegaard argues that to provide an *actual* example of someone who accomplishes the task at hand (religious or otherwise) may not be of help because this does not necessarily suggest that the task is a *possibility* for the reader *himself*. Kierkegaard writes:

the fact that this person and that person actually have done this and that can just as well have a delaying as a motivating effect. The reader merely transforms the person who is being discussed (aided by his being an actual person) into the rare exception [...] That one person knows twenty-four languages and a second can swim the channel and a third person walks on his hands etc. -- one can admire that [...] But if the person presented is supposed to be great with regard to the universal because of his virtue, his faith, his nobility, his faithfulness, his perseverance, etc., then admiration is a deceptive relation. (CUP 358)

In other words, Kierkegaard is claiming that while there are certainly many stories that can appropriately invoke admiration, this attitude is inappropriate and inadequate when it comes to inspiring one into authentic subjectivity or faith. Kierkegaard clearly illustrates this point in *Repetition*, and, although this book deals with the problem of the individual who thinks he is already a Christian more than it does with

the problem of the speculative thinker, analysis of this work will nevertheless aid in uncovering the communicative deceit of *The Sickness Unto Death*.

III. Religious Communication in Repetition

For Kierkegaard, traditional religious communication through story is inadequate because it typically reduces those stories to a moral or rule to be followed, and as such remains in the ethical, never achieving the authentically religious. This loses what is essential in the religious, which must relate to the individual, not to the (inauthentic) universal social "self".

For example, *The Book of Job* – a prominent feature of Kierkegaard's *Repetition* – is typically reduced to a moral about what God chooses to give and take away. This presents an obstacle to the reader who will have to make an extra effort to read the *story* and not the watered down moral. The *Book of Job* is an important example because the aim of the religious author is to bring the reader into a position parallel to – but not identical with – that of Job. To achieve this end, the religious author must keep in mind that only the religious experience – and not the circumstances which produce it -- is necessary; in other words, it can be achieved in various ways for different people. Moreover, it cannot be communicated directly, which makes tricky the choice of what to commit to paper. Recall Wright's protagonist Fred Daniels. At the end of the story he thinks he can surmount the communicative dilemma by bringing others to the site of his religious awakening. But this place and his experiences were merely what worked *for him*. In relation to the

story of Job, the religious task is to subjectively experience what Job has experienced and not merely to objectively understand what he has experienced. But to achieve this, one must be careful not to make the same mistake as Daniels does when he leads the policeman back to the sewer. Analysis of the role of Job in *Repetition* will make clear this further nuance of Kierkegaard's communicative dilemma.

Repetition makes clear what it means to relate to a story as possibility. In contrast to the traditional philosophical discourse of *The Postscript*, *Repetition* makes this point concretely through a narrative about a young man in love. Incapable of pursuing the relationship, he turns to the story of Job in order to deal with his anguish. There is, of course, a lot more going on in this book, but it is primarily the way in which the young man relates to Job that is relevant to the aim of this essay.

The young man's struggle to understand Job distinguishes a genuine existential Christianity from the rule-based Christianity most people follow. *Fear and Trembling*, published in the same volume, criticizes this more directly by clearly placing the religious above the ethical. This is not just to claim, as the title suggests, that the religious is not something that can be easily attained, by, say, going to church. It goes further, claiming that the ethical relates (merely) to the universal while the religious relates to the individual. Hence, when the religious is involved, there can be a justified suspension of the ethical, as in the case of Abraham's intended sacrifice of his son. These two books, then, work together to illuminate the primary tension between the Old and New Testaments – a shift in emphasis from the law to faith. From a Kierkegaardian perspective, the way faith comes to be preached and practiced, especially through the story of Job, reveals that faith has become very much like

another rule to be followed. This critically eliminates the innovative introduction of Jesus Christ, and thereby undermines Christianity itself. Kierkegaard's *Repetition* attempts to reclaim Job for a more authentic religious end; his story of the young man's reading of Job illustrates a Christianity which does not merely console, but which presents a demand on the individual.

The young man repeatedly returns to the text to read it in such a way that "each word remains new" to him. He reads it not as "one reads another book, with the eyes, but," he says, "I lay the book, as it were, on my heart" (204), and in this way he claims to "make [Job's] words my own and take upon myself the responsibility" (205). This makes each encounter with the text a personal experience of the man's own and not a mere voyeuristic appropriation of the events or facts in the story. He is not, then, simply engaging in the observation and admiration of another whom he takes to be exceptionally great, but is instead trying to relate to and engage in this greatness himself. In other words, he understands that Job's greatness is a possibility for himself.

Through the young man, Kierkegaard provides us with an example of the way in which one might relate himself in a genuinely religious way to the knowledge of Christianity. But the first step is not simply to take Job's greatness on as his own, as a possibility for himself. Rather, he must first understand what it is that *really* makes Job great. Popular interpretation of the religious authority establishes Job's greatness as his persistent faith and, especially, his eventual reward. In questioning this, the young man attempts to avoid the temptation to reduce the religious to mere knowledge of a simple moral. He begins this interrogation by asking the following:

Is that really all you said, those beautiful words: The lord gave and the Lord

took away; blessed be the name of the Lord? Did you say no more? . . . Do you know nothing more to say than that? Do you dare to say no more than what professional comforters scantily measure out to the individual, what professional comforters, like formal masters of ceremonies, lay down for the individual, that in the hour of need it is appropriate to say: The Lord gave, and the Lord took away ... just as they say "God bless you" when one sneezes!" (216)

This approach to the story further indicates that the young man has come to realize that he does not *already* know what the story means. In this way, Kierkegaard contrasts the young man with the typical Christian who understands the religious through easily digested moral fables and easy to follow rites and rules, and who, as a result, mistakenly thinks he not only understands Christianity but is in fact an individual Christian. Nevertheless, the example of the young man also suggests that there is a way to approach the "knowledge" of Christianity that will invigorate the self and teach one, not so much about the character(s) of a story, but more so, about one's own self. This, of course, is what distinguishes ethical and religious communication (both of which relate to the individual himself) from aesthetic communication (which orients the individual away from himself). Thus, the way in which the young man relates to the story of Job corresponds not only to Kierkegaard's concept of what it means to *exist* religiously but also underscores the key difficulty Kierkegaard emphasizes again and again from myriad points of view, namely, that of *communicating* the religious. Kierkegaard writes that religious communication cannot

on any account be done didactically, because then the misunderstanding would in a new misunderstanding instantly make capital of the explanatory attempt, as if existing consisted in coming to know something about a particular point. If this is communicated as knowledge, the recipient is mistakenly induced to understand that he is gaining something to know, and then we are back in knowledge again. (CUP 249)

Throwing his previous understanding into question allows the young man, first, to construct a different – albeit objective – interpretation of the text and second, to begin to relate to *that* Job as a possibility for himself. This is crucial for Kierkegaard's peculiar religious definition and aim because the typical Christian interpretation evades the difficult task of becoming an individual Christian.² The mainstream understanding tends to look for comfort and security, and this focus on the end, namely Job's eventual reward, allows the would-be individual Christian to be too easily satisfied. The problem is not so much that he is left with a mere moral (persistent faith and eventual reward) but that this interpretation skips the most difficult part. The would-be Christian allows *Job* to endure the weight of faith for him and then simply steals the result. Never does such an understanding require the individual to go through the anguish, anger and doubt experienced by Job. In contrast, the young man's shift in focus allows for precisely this anguished experience that can qualify as what Kierkegaard labels an "ordeal". A closer look at how this develops for the young man will provide the necessary preparation for the technical analysis of *Sickness*.

A. The Category of the Ordeal

The way in which *Repetition* distinguishes between the ordeal itself (as experienced by the young man himself) and the knowledge *that* something is an ordeal is similar to the discussion of possibility and actuality in *The Postscript*. Kierkegaard writes that the ordeal

2 A redundant phrase from a Kierkegaardian perspective

is not esthetic, ethical or dogmatic – it is altogether transcendent. Only as knowledge about an ordeal, that it is an ordeal, would it be included in a dogmatics. But as soon as the knowledge enters, the resilience of the ordeal is impaired, and the category is actually another category. This category is absolutely transcendent and places a person in a purely personal relationship of opposition to God, in a relationship such that he cannot allow himself to be satisfied with any explanation at second hand. (REP 174)

To *be* an ordeal for an individual is what makes the category transcendent. This category is marked by the difference between making an objective statement, "Job knows that..." and having one's own similar subjective experience. For the young man to reach the category of ordeal, again, the first step is for him to believe there is something present in the story beyond the moralistic interpretation, beyond what he already knows about it. He can then begin to construct an alternative account of the story, which he does when he realizes that

Job's greatness... is not even that he said: the Lord gave and the Lord took away; blessed be the name of the the Lord – something he in fact said at the beginning and did not repeat later. Rather, Job's significance is that the disputes at the boundaries of faith are fought out in him, that the colossal revolt to the wild and aggressive powers of passion is present here. (216)

This is, of course, still knowledge *about* Job, but by giving this alternative reading of the text, the young man at least is beginning to see what really makes Job great: the way in which he relates to God – a way that must be understood as it is and not reduced to moral rules. But for this to become an ordeal for the young man himself, he, too, must take on a similar battle at the boundaries of faith; he must have a similar experience. He comes closest, it seems, in the following passage which sounds much like the distinction of "despair of" put forth in *Sickness* and discussed in Part One above:

I am at the end of my rope. I am nauseated by life; it is insipid – without salt and meaning. If I were hungrier than Pierrot, I would not choose to eat the explanation people offer. One sticks a finger in the ground to smell what country one is in; I stick my finger into the world – it has no smell. Where am I? What does it mean to say: the world? What is the meaning of that word? Who tricked me into this whole thing and leaves me standing here? Who am I? How was I not informed of the rules and regulations but just thrust into the ranks as if I had been bought from a peddling shanghaier of human beings? How did I get involved in this big enterprise called actuality? Why should I be involved? Isn't it a matter of choice? And if I am compelled to be involved, where is the manager? To whom shall I make my complaint? After all, life is a debate – may I ask that my observations be considered? If one has to take life as it is, would it not be best to find out how things go? (221)

This piece would lend itself well to the stage, but it is precisely because it can be read in various tones that interpretation is difficult. It is very much like "despair of," but is it genuinely so? Or is it said and experienced in a disconnected and cynical defiance? Has the young man merely come to *objectively* realize what it is that Job has experienced, or is he really experiencing and feeling this for himself? The problem may be that this experience of existential angst is just another interpretation similar to the moral rejected above.

While trying to religiously relate to Job's experience as a possibility for himself, the young man says, "these I understand; these words I take as my own. At the same time, I sense the contradiction and smile at myself as one smiles at a little child who has donned his father's clothes" (REP 206). This indicates that relating to another even as possibility may be more problematic than Kierkegaard initially thought. Crucial for achieving authentic subjectivity is a moment of rebellion and rejection like the one we saw with Alciabiades above, and which, as will be seen in the next section, is essential for the success of *Sickness*. This is present for Job but lacking for the young

man, who is simply trying to become like Job. Job can bring himself through the experience of "despair of" and then begin to move toward authentic faith/subjectivity because *for him* the retreat of God is revealed through the loss of his earthly possessions. This leads him to realize that he does not and cannot understand God and eventually leads him to reject and rebel against what he comes to see as the injustice of God. For the young man, however, God (or his understanding of God) does not retreat in this way. There is still a question that the young man must face regarding the meaning of faith and God, but it is not the result of losing his deserved rewards; rather, for him, the "disputes at the boundaries of faith" are related to his inability to live life, a result of his melancholy. For Kierkegaard, melancholy is directly related to speculative thought which disengages the individual from existence by undermining his subjective decisiveness – and this is where the young man's battle must be fought. Moreover, Kierkegaard's religious communicative dilemma, though it is about a one-to-one relation to God and therefore seems to ignore social reality, cannot be understood apart from the historical obstacles which inhibit the cultivation of faith. The religious communicator's goal is to figure out a way to turn these social hindrances into an opportunity for the manifestation of faith.

I have been arguing that Kierkegaard's work is intended to be an antidote for both an enervated Christianity and for Hegelian speculation. At this point, two points become more clear. First, Kierkegaard is not merely preaching a genuine Christianity; his attack against traditional Christianity is primarily to distinguish Christianity as practiced in the world from what he considers to be genuine Christianity. Second, the problem of communicating and inciting individuals into a genuine Christianity cannot

be understood as if taking place in a void; *Sickness* is a *response* to speculation, and therefore it must be considered within that cultural context. Kierkegaard's communicative task, then, is to trick the Hegelian reader into restoring the gulf eliminated through the false mediation of the relative and absolute and thereby get him into a position *truly parallel* to that of Job. This will be a position that is appropriate for a *speculative* thinker but which will still have the result of restoring the gulf between God and man. Kierkegaard's philosophical-religious communication can achieve this only by driving the speculative thinker into such a position through the application of that thinker's *own* reasoning.

How to go about this is, of course, the communicative problem Kierkegaard faces. Because the speculative thinker does not *want* to become a subjective thinker, an exemplary other cannot effectively be held out as a possible actuality for him. This means that Kierkegaard will have to be much more cunning and deceitful with his choice of bait. Here, Kierkegaard faces much more than the problem of getting the reader to relate to the text as possibility; he must offer a possibility that the speculative thinker not only wants, but one which will dissolve in his grasp, forcing him to reject what was so earnestly sought as he realizes its impossibility. This, and only this, will maintain the gulf between the absolute and the relative, and only this can preserve Christianity and the single individual. The possibility Kierkegaard invites the speculative reader to chase is self-knowledge, and the book that attempts this deceitful attack is *The Sickness Unto Death*.

IV. Kierkegaard's Indirect attack of Hegelian Speculation in The Sickness Unto

Death

In his journal Kierkegaard writes:

I will call the attention of the crowd to their own ruination. And if they don't want to see it willingly, I shall make them see it by fair means or foul [...] I do not intend to beat them (alas one man cannot beat the crowd); no, I will force them to beat me. Thus I actually compel them [...] It is all a matter of baiting them for decisive action. (105)

I will argue that this is precisely what *Sickness* attempts to do.

The pseudonymous author of *The Sickness Unto Death* is Anti-Climacus, whom Kierkegaard claims in *The Point of View* to be "a higher pseudonymity [...] pointing out a higher ideal". In his journals, Kierkegaard claims that Anti Climacus is "a Christian on an extraordinarily high level" (qtd in Berthold-Bond 4). *Sickness*, then, cannot merely describe the stages toward authentic subjectivity, not if it is to satisfy its author(s); it must also engender a new faith relation, one capable of inaugurating the individual subjective thinker. But despite its overtly Christian aim and focus, I will show how this book must be understood primarily within the context of Hegelian Speculation.

In the Preface of *Sickness* Kierkegaard writes:

Many may find the form of this "exposition" strange; it may seem to them too rigorous to be upbuilding and too upbuilding to be rigorously scholarly. As far as the latter is concerned, I have no opinion. [...] From the Christian point of view, everything, indeed everything, ought to serve for upbuilding [...] Everything essentially Christian must have in its presentation a resemblance to the way a physician speaks at the sickbed; even if only medical experts understand it, it must never be forgotten that the situation is the bedside of a sick person. It is precisely Christianity's relation to life (in contrast to scholarly distance from life [...]) that is upbuilding, and the mode of

presentation , however rigorous it may be otherwise, is completely different, qualitatively different from the kind of scientificity and scholarliness that is "indifferent," whose lofty heroism is so far, Christianly, from being heroism that, Christianly, it is a kind of inhuman curiosity. (5)

Once one has read the rest of Part I of the text, noting its objective presentation, it should be clear, given this preface, that there is more going on here than mere objective description of psychological stages. If Kierkegaard is communicating in this way, why and to what end?

In his discussion of Kierkegaard's *Point of View*, Joakim Garff writes:

During his account of his "existence" in relation to the aesthetic production, Kierkegaard emphasizes that inverse deception has been the tactic determining his maieutic activity: "seldom has any author used so much cunning, intrigue, and ingenuity in order to win honor and respect in the world, to deceive it inversely as I have – to deceive in the sense of truth." For there is, Kierkegaard announces, a difference between deceiving someone *into* the truth, and one should therefore not let oneself "be deceived by the word deception". (116)

This raises the question of how to read the objective content of *Sickness*. Is it *both* objectively true *and* written to induce a rejection of Hegelian speculation and incite one into authentic subjectivity? Possibly. But if Kierkegaard's Christian aim always trumps every other aspect of his communication, then the objective content cannot be trusted; it must be analyzed by always keeping in mind Kierkegaard's primary end: Christian edification. Hence, to properly analyze *Sickness* requires one to keep in mind three points. First, what Kierkegaard holds against traditional Christianity and Hegelian speculation. Second, the communicative dilemma this creates. Third, an understanding that this book is an attempt at a *cure*, and moreover, it is a cure for a "disease" of such a nature that it would be "the worst misfortune never to have had

this sickness" (SUD 26). I will now show what *Sickness* can do to an earnest, devoted, speculative thinker, and thereby reveal Kierkegaard's indirect attack against Hegel.

A. Kierkegaard's Unhappy Consciousness?

In his article "Lunar Musings? An investigation of Hegel's and Kierkegaard's portraits of despair," Hegelian philosopher Daniel Berthold-Bond attempts to show the similarity of Kierkegaard's despair to Hegel's unhappy consciousness. He does this to make sense of his own philosophical perspective as a Hegelian who, as he claims, has been "taken in by Kierkegaard". But to be seduced by Kierkegaard is precisely to *reject* Hegel; and following Hegel leaves no room for Kierkegaard. This, of course, is what Berthold-Bond wants to deny. Unfortunately, his account is flawed on at least two counts. First, he does not adequately consider Kierkegaard's communicative dilemma with regard to communicating the truth of subjectivity, which is crucial to Kierkegaard's discussion of despair, and, second, in order to draw these similarities, Berthold-Bond reveals his inadequate understanding of Kierkegaard's concept of despair. Nevertheless, his comparison will assist me in constructing my own account of *The Sickness Unto Death*, helping me to argue that this book, primarily through an ironic appropriation of Hegelian thought, aims to trick the speculative reader into seeing the absurdity of his own position, thereby causing him to reject it for himself.

Berthold-Bond points out that Kierkegaard began discussing despair as early as *Either/Or's* "The Unhappiest One," which makes direct reference to Hegel's

unhappy consciousness; Kierkegaard does not, however, approach this concept systematically until *Sickness* (3). He argues further that like the progression of stages of despair outlined in *Sickness*, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* "details the journey of self-discovery of consciousness as it moves through the gallery of the shapes of spiritual life, from its most naïve and complacent awareness of itself and its world to the standpoint of genuine self-knowledge" (3) Berthold-Bond does not focus on the structural similarities of Kierkegaard's work to Hegel's dialectical structure, choosing instead to emphasize how "the actual portraits of the forms of despair substantially mirror Hegel's descriptions" (8). He misses the main point of these similarities, however, by not carefully considering Kierkegaard's aim as a religious author. He notes, but then dismisses, Kierkegaard's predilection for ironic appropriation of other thinkers, especially Hegel. This leads him to accept Kierkegaard's truth at its objective face value which allows him to maintain a Hegelian-Kierkegaardian position which brings the two thinkers too close together. The objective content of *Sickness* which Berthold-Bond uses in order to make his case is not the *actual* content of the book; it is only the *technique* Kierkegaard employs to communicate a very different kind of truth.

Berthold-Bond's second mistake is perhaps even more devastating to his attempt to be a Hegelian-Kierkegaardian philosopher: he misunderstands a key component of Kierkegaard's concept of despair, and it is this misunderstanding that allows him to objectively appropriate both thinkers. Berthold-Bond claims that both Hegel and Kierkegaard define despair as "self-division or ontological incompleteness" (5). Bond defines despair as "the inability to reconcile opposites internal to the self" (2).

He claims further that the therapeutic response of each (reason for Hegel and faith for Kierkegaard) is an attempt "to respond to the fundamental desire of all consciousness, *the desire for self unification*." But what Berthold-Bond leaves out, though he does note that "it is just this unrest that is the self," is that in Kierkegaard's parlance *despair's* desire is to be *rid* of oneself, that self that is in unrest. Thus, there may be a desire for self unification, but for Kierkegaard this is in no way the religious *goal* of the individual; even the self that exists before God is *not* a unified self, not in the Hegelian sense at least; rather, it remains in unrest, "stabilized" only in its relation to God or by "relating itself to itself *in the relation that established it*" (SUD). For Hegel, on the other hand, the aim *is* to reconcile this internal unrest, namely through reason, and the system, becoming not a single individual but part of the community of humankind, thereby ridding oneself of the individual self. Therefore, Hegel's "resolution" is, from a Kierkegaardian perspective, *still* despair.

All this, however, remains in the mode of a direct attack against Hegel, and I want to show how *Sickness* potentially provides an indirect attack and is therefore an ingenious example of religious communicative deceit. By using the similarities Berthold-Bond notes (but misunderstands from a Kierkegaardian perspective) I will show how *Sickness* is an ironic appropriation of Hegel's thought aimed at getting the speculative reader to reject his own professed position.

B. Kierkegaard's Prank on Hegel

Kierkegaard recognizes a specific dilemma of the religious author when he asks:

How does it happen that a person's life becomes so spiritless that Christianity seemingly cannot be brought to bear upon it at all, just as when a jack (and Christianity's elevating is a jacking up) cannot be used because there is no firm ground but only marshland and bog? (SUD 101)

Indirect communication is necessary because, in his age, the sense of individuality is so weak that there is no way to Christianly begin by appealing to the individual himself; his individuality is simply not vital enough. But like any effective teaching method, Kierkegaard's approach must begin from where the student already is. If this is deep inside the objective thinking of the Cartesian *cogito*, then this is where the teacher must reach. Hence, the effectiveness of *Sickness* requires only that the reader is already of the speculative point of view. Kierkegaard attempts to use this objective thinking against the Hegelian with the intention of tricking him into a rejection of that speculative thinking, at least in so far as it relates to the existence of the individual "I" which is eliminated through reason's false reconciliation of despair noted above.

While Kierkegaard certainly directly attacks Hegel, his *real* attack is not so obvious. This is necessary because to make an existential argument against speculation one cannot allow the other to speculatively consider the direct argument at hand – the Hegelian is well equipped to defend himself against such an attack by simply taking the existential argument within speculation itself and taking account of it there. What Kierkegaard needs to do instead is to get the speculative thinker to bring his reasoning into existence – and the real attack does not commence until this is done.

Kierkegaard writes in *The Postscript* that when

anyone who with enthusiasm concentrates his soul on willing to allow himself to be guided by a sage of that kind, and uncritically just uses his guidance compliantly by willing to form his existence according to it [then]... he accomplishes the most superb epigram on him, because a speculator of that sort is anything but served by a learner's honest and enthusiastic zeal for expressing and accomplishing, for existentially appropriating his wisdom, since this wisdom is something that the Herr Professor himself has imagined and has written books about but has never attempted himself. [... these writers] write that which, if it is to be read with the aid of action [...] proves to be nonsense [...]. (191)

Kierkegaard, rather than simply arguing against Hegel, is *testing* the validity of Hegel's thought, or, more specifically, trying to drive a speculative reader into existentially testing Hegel's thought. Hence, this tactic is, as Kierkegaard claims, very much a prank. He writes: "would that I could show the Hegelian method looks almost like a prank when it is used on a minor detail – then perhaps I could satisfy some reader" (CUP 151). As a prank it works by leading the reader to apply the reasoning under question in a way that gets him to undermine it himself, *through its very use*.

Kierkegaard writes:

Let a doubting youth, but an existing doubter with youth's lovable, boundless confidence in a hero of scientific scholarship, venture to find in Hegelian positivity the truth, the truth of existence [...] the youth must never think of wanting to attack him; he must rather be willing to submit unconditionally to Hegel with feminine devotedness [...] (310)

Sickness attempts this prank by sending "the youth", with his "feminine devotion" to Hegel, to find the truth of existence, his *own* existence. This is the "minor detail" on which the prank pivots; by inviting the speculative thinker to apply his thinking to his own self, Kierkegaard anticipates that this self will become for that thinker an object.

Recall that this is precisely how Gide's Michel – a man of thought – attacked the problem of his own existence. The success of *Sickness* rests on its ability to hide the attack in the form of a similar invitation: to "*know*" one's own self is the possibility presented.

The Hegelian, of course, already knows what this means. Berthold-Bond, for example, in arguing the similarity of the stages toward "genuine self knowledge" does not pause to analyze how this is understood differently for each of the two thinkers he is comparing. But Kierkegaard, who is relying on the reader's own submission to Hegelian thought, is expecting precisely this response. He has presented the objective content of *Sickness* in a way which can potentially lead the Hegelian reader to conclude, for himself, that the single individual cannot be thought, and yet, here "I" am. The speculative thinker, when faced with this, wants desperately to reconcile it, mediate it, but finds he cannot. This constitutes Kierkegaard's prank and indirect attack, and it is precisely this conclusion which can make Kierkegaard's religious communication a success, if it can actually work on an individual. I will now look more closely at the devices and tricks used in *Sickness* to achieve this end.

C. Speculation as a further intensification of Demonic Defiant Despair

The task of the author of *The Sickness Unto Death* is this:

[...] to separate speculation and the speculative philosopher, and then, just as with enchantment, witchcraft and demon possession, to use a powerful incantation in order to get the bewitched speculative thinker transformed or changed into his actual form, into an individual existing human being. (CUP 187)

For Kierkegaard, the speculative thinker transforms the "I" into the "we." This mirrors the lament in *Sickness* about the wretchedness of people being "lumped together and deceived rather than being split apart so that each may attain the highest" (SUD 26). The next two sections will make a case for how Kierkegaard attempts to individuate the speculative reader.

At a general level, and to any audience, *Sickness* presents itself to the reader as a challenge. In the first paragraph of the Preface, Kierkegaard writes, "it is, of course, one thing if it cannot be upbuilding for everyone, because not everyone is *qualified* to do its bidding" (5 italics mine). This may incite the reader simply by implying that *he* may not be *capable* of achieving what this book has to offer. Simultaneously, it informs the reader that there is, inside this book, a task to be achieved. The way Kierkegaard discusses the stages of despair is also a part of his "incantation." First, he is relying on what he describes both in his diary and in *Repetition* as "the medical school phenomenon" whereby medical students begin coming down with the symptoms of the diseases they study. Second, the description clearly presents the various states of despair as developmental stages; no one will want to identify with the lower level duds, but will instead insist that he, too, is highly self-aware and conscious in the world. (Recall, despair is a category of consciousness)

Kierkegaard, however, is specifically trying to cure or "convert" the *speculative* thinker, and *Sickness* must be analyzed in terms of how it targets that audience. In this book, as in his other works, Kierkegaard argues that the single individual cannot be thought; it can only be lived, and moreover, this is no easy task.

Thus the overt task Kierkegaard is putting before the reader is to *become* (and not merely to think) that single individual. The Hegelian reader will certainly realize that this is the primary challenge of the book; he will not, however, take up *that* challenge because he will also note the implicit assumption that one must *become* a subjective thinker *because* it is *impossible* to think it. In sensing this attack against speculation, such a reader is already armed and rebellious and will therefore not take up the challenge to *become* a self, but will instead respond to the other, implicit, challenge, one he thinks he has just constructed himself: the task of *knowing* the self. In other words, the speculative thinker might attack *Sickness* with the defensive question, "what do you mean there is something (the) we cannot explain?"

With this move, Kierkegaard drives speculation's gaze onto the self and onto the "I," which he expects will be taken in by an *observer's* gaze. He then further seduces the speculative thinker through an objective description of the psychological stages which appear to be an attempt to understand or explain the self. The objective thinker, of course, will feel right at home in this discourse. And while Kierkegaard strongly emphasizes the edifying requirement of his book, he does not deny or question the work's apparent scholarly presentation and objective content. But the speculative thinker is not on guard against this aspect of Kierkegaard's work, but only against Kierkegaard's claim that one cannot objectively know the self. In this way Kierkegaard begins to corral this thinker deeper inside his own professed position. Moreover, these stages are, as Berthold-Bond suggests, strikingly similar to the stages of Hegel's unhappy consciousness, which mirror each other until the highest stage of demonic despair. At this point, however, they appear to diverge as speculation, in

contrast to Kierkegaard's faith, responds to demonic despair through the transition to *reason* whereby the "I" becomes a "we". Nevertheless, Berthold-Bond asserts this is a similarity, writing:

For Hegel there is a leap as well, since while he is convinced that the 'logic' of despair points beyond itself to a resolution in reason. The failure of the self-enclosed soul of despair logically points to the movement out of self-enclosure to community, from particularity to universality, from feeling to reason. (12)

Here Berthold-Bond is claiming that this is a therapeutic resolution to despair parallel to Kierkegaard's faith. But it is not entirely clear that this is a leap out of or in response to despair; it can just as easily be interpreted as a further intensification of despair. I have already argued that speculation is despair – the attempt to be rid of the self one is. I would now like to make that claim stronger by arguing that speculation is the most intense form of despair, going beyond even the demonic poet.

Recall Kierkegaard's claim that speculation in trying to make itself "infinitely great" makes itself "nothing at all" (CUP 124). This is because with speculation the individual "I" loses itself to become a part of a collective we with the promise of security, certainty and absolute knowledge. This is similar to the demonic poet who tries to achieve this independently by becoming god-like and in absolute control, not through absolute knowledge, but by creating imaginary worlds. Both annihilate the self by creating an illusory realm of "existence" not connected to actual existence and which "exists" only on paper. Recall the demonic poet Roquentin discussed above who "create[s] things that do not exist" by writing fiction; similarly, the Hegelian philosopher eschews existence through the creation of the system which also exists

only on paper.

Kierkegaard, of course, cannot make this direct parallel between speculation and demonic poetry because it would cause the speculative thinker to put up his guard. Speculation thinks it has gone beyond this exercise in illusion and fantasy – it is not satisfied to merely make up stories; it seeks to uncover the Truth. But it approaches its task by avoiding the question of existence and the individual self. Kierkegaard writes, "an existing person has unquestionably found there the secure foothold outside existence where he can mediate – on paper. The Archimedean point has been found, but one does not notice that it has succeeded in moving the whole world" (CUP 419). Like the demonic poet, the speculative thinker moves existence, particularly his own existence, into a fantasy realm, but one that has the even further illusion of Truth. Roquentin, on the other hand, is perfectly clear and sober in his awareness that he is creating worlds that will not exist; this is, of course, what makes him defiant. The speculative thinker, however, is no longer even conscious of his defiance or his demonic "poetry" – he is convinced he is living in and uncovering truth. Speculation, then, has indeed moved beyond demonic despair, but *not* in a way that acts as a *therapeutic* response, as Berthold-Bond claims. Rather, this response leaves speculation even further from truth, from the truth of subjectivity.

In *Sickness* Kierkegaard writes:

Compared with the person who is conscious of his despair the despairing individual who is ignorant of his despair is simply a negativity further away from the truth and deliverance. Despair itself is a negativity; ignorance of it, a new negativity, for the old legend about breaking a certain magic spell is true: the piece has to be played backwards or the spell is not broken. However, it is in only one sense, in a purely dialectic sense, that the individual who is ignorant of his despair is further from the truth and deliverance than one who knows it

and yet remains in despair, for in another sense, an ethical-dialectical sense, the person who is conscious of his despair and remains in it is further from deliverance, because his despair is so intensive. Yet ignorance is so far from breaking the despair or changing despair to nondespair that it can in fact be the most dangerous form of despair. (44)

Speculation's response to despair, then, leaves it furthest from the truth (of subjectivity) despite how far it is advanced in terms of the stages of despair. However, one must not ignore that the lower level of despair is "in another sense even further from breaking out of despair," which suggests that arriving at subjective truth somehow requires the speculative detour. The cure requires the sickness, and recall, Kierkegaard argues that "it is the worst misfortune to never have had this sickness" (SUD 27). But if Kierkegaard's communication is to be effective, it must somehow utilize the way in which the speculative thinker already views the world; there must be a way of using the observer's gaze against himself in a way that will cause him to undermine and see the folly in his very own position and thereby begin to undo the "magic spell" of speculation. In the next section I will show how this challenge to know the self as an observer is the point on which Kierkegaard's indirect attack hinges.

D. The Dialectical Importance of Melancholy

Kierkegaard argues in *The Postscript* that the task of the religious author is to "turn the *observer's gaze inward*" (359 italics mine). The melancholy state is precisely this inward turn of the observer's gaze, and it is Kierkegaard's hope that *The Sickness Unto Death* can succeed at enticing the speculative reader to reverse his course of

deepening despair by focusing his objective observer gaze inward. Recall, for Kierkegaard, that speculation remains an untested hypothesis because it does not take place in existence. In turning the observer's gaze onto itself, Kierkegaard is attempting to give speculation the existential test whereby it will be evaluated by something other than speculation itself. And if Kierkegaard is right, that the single individual cannot be thought, then he may be able to solve his communicative dilemma by getting the Hegelian to undermine himself through an experience similar to that of Gide's Michel.

The most difficult and tenuous part of Kierkegaard's trick will be to bring the objective thinker into the experience of "despair of". Speculation initially results from a flight from this experience, as discussed above in reference to the Cartesian *Cogito* – it flees from subjective torment and isolation by backgrounding the individual "I" and filling the emptiness with objective knowledge, ignoring the question of the self on which its method nevertheless rests. But this describes speculation and not any individual speculative thinker, who, because he has been inaugurated into such a way of thinking by an age and generation dominated by this thought, may not have ever *personally* experienced or resolved this dilemma; in other words, he is a part of this demonic response almost by default. This will provide an advantage to Kierkegaard, because, to the objective thinker, the very idea of "despair of" – a despair without object – will sound ludicrous; already waiting to rebel, he will reject it, most likely by citing the importance of particular despairs and thus accusing Kierkegaard of not knowing what despair and suffering really mean. With this move of apparent attack, Kierkegaard is gaining the upper hand, for with this move, the objective thinker does not go off fantastically into demonic poetry or speculation but into melancholy –

relating to the self *as object*, which is exactly the position Kierkegaard needs him to be in *first* if he is ever going to entice him into rejecting and rebelling against this position through the decisiveness of authentic subjective thinking.

This is not to imply that melancholy is the cure, only that it is yet another stage; but it is one that begins to return the self to itself, to reverse the magic spell. The key difference is that with both demonic despair and speculation, the self is existing in imagination, in pure possibility, and thereby begins to lose actuality (which, recall, for Kierkegaard results from the synthesis of necessity and possibility). In this way the demon and the speculative thinker both lose the actual self, who without a past (necessity) no longer has any *actual* possible future. Melancholy loses itself too but in the opposite direction; "melancholically enamored" such an individual does not chase after endless abstract possibility but instead, fixates on the self, on a search for the self – for example, Michel's search for the "old Adam," for the "authentic being hidden within." For Kierkegaard, however, the self is not such a *thing* to be *found*, and certainly not to be explained, which is what the melancholy is really about: the attempt to explain the self to the self in terms of speculative thought's general approach to knowledge. This attempt at explanation is, of course, the attempt to be rid of the self, of *being* a self, in a word, despair. Unable to find himself or explain himself, the melancholy individual sinks further and further into inaction and indecisiveness.

The hope is that once the speculative thinker is brought to this impasse he might realize that this task cannot be finished, and indeed significant headway cannot even be made – approaching the understanding of the self in this way becomes circular

and contradictory. Rather than gaining in understanding, one begins, instead, to lose the self. This is the danger of the melancholy position. Despite this danger, melancholy invites the possibility of rebellion against this endless, impossible task and is, perhaps, the only way for the necessary, subjective, decisive action to occur. In *The Postscript* Kierkegaard writes:

If the individual does not stop reflection, he will be infinitized in the reflection, that is, no decision is made. By thus going astray in reflection, the individual really becomes objective; more and more he loses the decision of subjectivity and the return into himself. Yet it is assumed that reflection can stop itself objectively, whereas it is just the other way around; reflection cannot be stopped objectively, and when it is stopped subjectively, it does not stop of its own accord, but it is the subject who stops it. (116)

For Kierkegaard, only a *subjective* resolution can put a stop to this endless, inconclusive thinking; in other words, what is necessary is a leap that steps outside of this thinking. One, then, must rebel against and reject this speculative thinking, and Kierkegaard has been trying to bait the reader to do just that. He hopes that inviting the reader to know himself as an object will eventually drive the person so mad that, like both Alciabiades and especially Michel, he has almost no choice but to reject that which he has been given and admit that the single individual cannot be thought, cannot be explained, and yet, here I am. Michel, for example, exasperated and confused by the end of the novel, may have reached this position. It is not entirely clear at the novel's end if he is lost, if he will return to his prior identity, or if he will find his way to the resolution of a Kierkegaardian faith. This is not important; what matters is that he is, at this point, at a moment of choice where he may, through decisive action, rebel against and reject this aspect of speculative thought. If he can or has done this, then he has restored the gulf between the relative and the absolute and has thereby

preserved "Christianity." It is in this moment of near madness, as the speculative thinker rebels against his unsuccessful attempts at explaining himself to himself, that this individual is in a parallel position to Job, experiencing the anguish of his own existence before the absolute. Moreover, he has achieved this in a way appropriate for him, in his own time and his own social conditions.

Conclusion

The primary goal of *The Sickness Unto Death* is to both make clear and engender a genuine Christianity. Part One of this essay discussed this in its more straightforward Christian context, showing how it is a response to what Kierkegaard saw as an enervated Christianity. Part Two showed how the book addresses a different audience – namely, the Hegelian speculative thinker – by deceitfully attempting to convert him through an indirect attack whereby the anticipated counter-attack yields Kierkegaard's desired religious goal. My analysis of *Sickness*, however, has thus far bracketed a crucial question: is God really a necessary component to the antidote to the existential problem Kierkegaard identifies in Hegelian speculation?

Kierkegaard is often credited as being the father of existentialism; in the wake of his religious work, however, comes a strong tradition of *atheist* existentialism, exhibited, for example, in the work of Nietzsche, Sartre and Camus. These thinkers attack Kierkegaard's position on God as being an inauthentic flight from the self, which is precisely what Kierkegaard claims *his* Christianity is *not*. Kierkegaard's discussion of the demonic poet seems to anticipate this atheist response. In discussing the possibility of the demonic response and the limited success it does achieve, Kierkegaard does not argue that faith is the only response to the speculative failure to deal adequately with the existing individual; instead, he argues that faith is the preferable *choice*. Because, for Kierkegaard, the question of God is not a metaphysical one about the *truth* of His existence, the argument must rest on both the

preferability of the religious choice and on a Christian understanding of existential authenticity. And this is precisely where Kierkegaard lets his argument stand.

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