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# A Note on the Kierkegaardian Either/Or

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See table of contents

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# A Note on the Kierkegaardian Either/Or

There is perhaps nothing in the writings of Kierkegaard which recurs with such telling frequency as the little phrase " either/or." In a very real way it is a dominant note of his thought and when we understand its significance we gain insight into his anti-intellectualism, his judgment on aesthetics, and his weird and wonderful method of indirect communication. But, although it is a vein that can be mined with great profit, it will be meaningless to consider the either/or without some notion of what Kierkegaard's writings are about.

The surest way to discover the central concern of the Kierkegaardian literature is to ascertain what he meant by " existence." Once we see that it indicates a pre-eminently ethical orientation of thought, we will avoid heavy critiques of a metaphysics which was neither formulated nor dreamt of : the real distinction of essence and existence has relevance for later existentialism but it is somewhat peripheral to Kierkegaard. For him, " existence " has the most everyday meaning possible, it is the life one lives. Existential thought accordingly is that which has relation to action ; the problem then is one of practical philosophy and more specifically of ethics. Everything Kierkegaard had to say relates to the human act. Indeed he tried to devise a way of speaking of action that would issue in a movement of the will on the part of his readers.

Kierkegaardian existentialism is concerned with being, to be sure, but with moral being, being as one ought to be. When Kierkegaard says that existence is a striving, [1] something to be acquired, it is obvious that he is concerned with a modality, a " how ", [2] and not with being simply. So too he says that God does not exist, but is, [3] making use of the *negatio negationis* to indicate that God does not acquire the goodness which He is. Existence, in the sense of being as one ought to be, is distinguished from existence loosely so called ; the existing individual is a driver manning the twin steeds of time and eternity, but " he also drives and is a driver." [4] We do not find here the ambiguity of later existentialists who speak of existence preceding essence ; rather we are faced with but another expression for the fact that a man first is and then must become what he should be.

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1. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (trans. DAVID F. SWENSON and WALTER LOWRIE, Princeton, 1944), p.84.
2. *Ibid.*, p.181.
3. *Ibid.*, p.296.
4. *Ibid.*, p.276.

Before Socrates comes into existence, he quite simply is not. Once he is, the being opposed to his prior non-being is absolute being, being *simpliciter* ; because of this opposition of potency and act, being is first said of that which is distinguished from potency. [1] This absolute being is the substantial being of Socrates and everything that follows from it with necessity, such as having reason and will ; everything superadded to it will be being in a certain respect, accidental. Socrates becomes obese, tanned, bald, and although he truly is these things they are only accidental being for they presuppose being *simpliciter*. The good, on the other hand, connotes the perfected which is desirable. It is only when Socrates has acquired his ultimate perfection as a man that we will call him good simply, although there is a type of goodness which follows on the fact that he is, for existence is a perfection. Thus there is a converse relation between being and goodness *simpliciter* and being and goodness *secundum quid*. [2] That whereby Socrates is absolutely makes him good only relatively, that whereby he is absolutely good is only accidental being.

When Kierkegaard speaks about existence, we should understand what he says in the light of that being *secundum quid* which makes a person good simply. Corroboration for this stand will be had throughout what follows.

Living at a time when Hegelianism was exerting a major influence in Denmark, Kierkegaard was apalled at the fervour with which men bent themselves to the contemplation of reality. At an early age he noted in his Journal [3] that he would seek the archimedean point around which he could array the whole of reality : he found that point in action as opposed to thought. " What I really lack is to be clear in my mind *what I am to do*, not what I am to know, except in so far as a certain understanding must precede every action. The thing is to understand myself . . . to find a truth which is true *for me*, to find the *idea for which I can live and die*." [4] This early distrust of speculative truth, when it is presented as sufficient to convert a man to what he should be, contained the seeds of his revolt against Hegel, for what constituted Kierkegaard's great interest was the knowledge which is ordered to action ; he sought a truth that would be practical and not just speculative. Existential truth is practical truth and it is always passionate because it is dependent upon appetite. Hence, when he had pored over Hegel for years, translating him

1. *Ia*, q.5, a.1, ad 1. See also *Q. D. de Veritate*, q.25, a.5.

2. " Sic ergo secundum primum esse, quod est substantiale, dicitur aliquid ens simpliciter et bonum secundum quid, idest inquantum est ens ; secundum vero ultimum actum, dicitur aliquid ens secundum quid, et bonum simpliciter " (*Ia*, q.5, a.1, ad 1).

3. *The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard* (trans. and ed. ALEXANDER DRU, Oxford, 1951), n.4.

4. *Ibid.*, n.22.

into Danish the better to understand him, and gradually came to realize that Hegelianism purported to be the System and yet contained no ethics, Kierkegaard turned from speculation and spent the rest of his life in an attempt to become another Socrates who would show men what they did not know. His method was negative, satirical, immensely enjoyable in the reading : he intended, he said, to indicate what it meant to be a man as opposed to being a mere speculative philosopher.

This dissatisfaction with Hegel was certainly justifiable. In its attempt to see in the confusion of the logical universal the actuality and knowability of the universal *in causando*, Hegelianism claimed to have brought the perfection of God's knowledge within reach of man. Applied to history, this became the search for the necessity behind the apparent contingency. Revelation urges us to know God as well as love Him, and Hegel interpreted this as a mandate to search out the ways of providence in history. [1] To find infallible providence is to find necessity, Hegel thought, and he claimed that we would understand history as God does and see the reason for good and evil. What this meant for human action is all too clear in the following statement : " What irks and infuriates us is not what is, but the fact that it is not as it should be ; once we know that it is as it must be — that is to say, not arbitrary or contingent —, we also recognize that it should be as it is." [2]

It was the good sense of Kierkegaard to recognize that, whether offered as an apple or a system, such knowledge could not be had ; this pseudo-wisdom falls before the Wisdom which assures us that *incertae sunt providentiae nostrae* (IX, 14). Hegelianism might roam the heady heights of universal history and view benignly the course of the world, but it could not make it easy for the individual to act. There is no necessity governing the prudential decision which must be made with fear and trembling. Thus it was that Kierkegaard set himself the task of making things difficult. Others could attempt to make things easy in virtue of speculation ; our melancholy Dane lit another cigar and decided to point out that all this speculation had not alleviated the difficulty of action. [3]

Kierkegaard elaborated an " existential dialectic " describing the movement away from categories which impeded action and towards ethics and Christianity. The movement is from the non-existential to the existential. The tool with which he worked was the disjunction

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1. G. W. F. HEGEL, *Leçons sur la Philosophie de l'Histoire* (trad. J. GIBELIN, Paris, Vrin, 1937), Vol.I, p.23.

2. *Écrits concernant la politique et la philosophie du droit*, édit. LASSON, p.5. English translation given in " The Nature of Man and His Historical Being," by CHARLES DE KONINCK, *Laval théologique et philosophique*, Vol.V, n.2, pp.274-5.

3. So KIERKEGAARD describes the beginning of his authorship : *Journals*, n.536 ; *Postscript*, pp.165-167.

" either/or. " In ethical activity alternatives are presented between which one must choose in a passionate and therefore existential way, a way which involves the whole man. It was because speculation and poetry do not recognize such alternatives and consequently lack existential pathos that Kierkegaard rejected them as not properly human activities.

In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* which is the closest thing to a philosophical work he ever wrote, Kierkegaard addresses himself to the Hegelian pure thought and to the tenet that thought and being are one. He denies this principle on the ground that existence cannot be thought, and in understanding this we must keep in mind our foregoing precisions on the meaning of being for Kierkegaard. It is synonymous with being *secundum quid,* being as one ought to be ; Kierkegaard is saying that one does not become good by thinking. " How is it with the supposed identity of thought and being in connection with the kind of existence that belongs to particular human beings ? Am I the good because I think the good ? " " If the content of thought were reality, the most perfect possible anticipation of an action in thought before I had yet acted, would be the action. In that manner no action would ever take place and the intellectual would swallow the ethical." " When I think of something good that I intend to do, is this identical with having done it ? By no means." [1] But because it is on the plane of human action that Kierkegaard takes exception to Hegel, he is led to concede many things in the realm of the speculative as long as they are not applied to existence. Thus he is willing to grant the Hegelian denial of the opposition of contradiction.

It may not be true that something can be true in philosophy and false in theology, but Kierkegaard suggests that something can be true for thought which is not so for the existing individual. [2] He notes that there has been a bit of controversy concerning the denial of contradiction and offers the following solution :

> Hegel is utterly and absolutely right in asserting that viewed eternally, *sub specie aeterni,* in the language of abstraction, in pure thought and pure being, there is no either/or. How in the world could there be when abstract thought has taken away the contradiction, so that Hegel and the Hegelians ought rather to be asked to explain what they mean by the hocus-pocus of introducing contradiction, movement, transition, and so forth into the domain of logic. If the champions of an either/or invade the sphere of pure thought and there seek to defend their cause, they are quite without justification. [3]

By the same token, Hegel is wrong when he would forget the abstraction of his thought and plunge into existence there to deny

1. *Postscript,* pp.294, 302, 303
2. *Ibid.,* p.271.
3. *Ibid.,* p.270.

the *aut/aut.* [1] The philosopher may think in a realm where there are no contradictions, but as an existing individual he must admit that he is faced constantly with either/or's which cannot be mediated. One does not live *sub specie aeterni.* The ethical lays hold of a man and demands that he refrain from contemplation, especially of universal history. [2] History can only judge the external, that which has quantitative importance ; ethics, on the other hand, is the inward and seeks a qualitative difference. This distinction of the internal and external recurs again in Kierkegaard's discussion of aesthetics. For Hegel the outer is the inner and the inner the outer, as indeed it must be for the historian and the poet ; if we cannot infer from the effects of actions to their cause we can make no historical generalizations, view no drama with comprehension. This assumes great importance when Kierkegaard opposes art and ethics and insists that the two have nothing in common. Kierkegaard's case against aesthetics and speculation is that we tend to substitute them for ethics. He castigates a " poetic existence " and the confusion of the historical with the ethical judgment. [3]

By thought we lift ourselves above the conflict of existence, abstract from the contrariety implied in the either/or ; however, one cannot exist in this speculative stratosphere, so it must be regarded as a temptation. The disinterested contemplation of universal history, granting for the moment its possibility, does not diminish the difficulty of my particular actions which are not mere functions of speculative comprehension. This is Kierkegaard's charge against speculation ; it is the same one he makes in the case of aesthetics.

It will be well first to note an ambiguity which exists in the Kierkegaardian writings with regard to aesthetics. Most of Kierkegaard's books were attributed to a bevy of pseudonymous authors for reasons which we will touch on later. He refers to these works as the aesthetic production although they discuss ethics and religion as well as the so called aesthetic sphere of existence. The term, aesthetic, as applied to all the pseudonymous works, refers to the mode of communication and not to the content. At present we are not concerned with Kierkegaard's method of communication, but with his critique of the aesthetic " sphere."

Kierkegaard presents this sphere in the first volume of *Either/Or* and in the banquet scene (*In vino veritas*) of *Stages on Life's Way,* but it is not feasible to trace the argument which is stated so indirectly in those pages. There we are faced with representatives of the aesthetic sphere and their views and observations are meant to convey to us their *Weltanschauung.* It is much more economical

1. *Ibid.*, p.271.
2. *Ibid.*, p.284.
3. *Ibid.*, p.309.

of space and time to seek the general characteristics of this sphere in other works, although we miss thereby some very enjoyable reading.

The etymology of the word " aesthetic " is not unimportant for the comprehension of what Kierkegaard is trying to say, for sensuality is based on touch and the aesthetic sphere is the sensual life, the world of Don Giovanni, the seducer. However, Kierkegaard does not intend to restrict this sphere to the grosser manifestations of sensuality ; he is in fact more interested in the sophisticated aesthete who would make the categories of poetry those of real life. Thus a certain confusion is engendered, for remarks about poetry are also a criticism of the " poetic life." It is due to the fact that artistic categories are not existential that aesthetics is likened to speculation, for " the aesthetic and intellectual principle is that no reality is thought or understood until its *esse* has been resolved into its *posse*." [1] Life has meaning for the aesthete only in so far as it provides him with the material for artistic experience and he is not rich enough or poor enough to distinguish poetry from reality. [2]

> What does being a poet mean? It means having one's own personal life, one's reality in quite different categories from those of one's own poetic work, it means being related to the ideal in imagination only, so that one's own personal life is more or less a satire on poetry and on oneself. [3]

Such a life, Kierkegaard contends, must end inevitably in despair, for reality is not poetic and the demands which existence makes on the individual are not aesthetic ones. Aesthetics abstracts from existence and thus it too escapes the either/or, for it is not concerned with whether what it is treating is real or not as long as it is possible. [4] Too, the criteria of poetry are those of speculative history : the quantitative predominates, the outward and the visible. [5]

Kierkegaard read and loved the Greeks, and it was quite natural for him to compare his thought with theirs. He takes explicit issue with Aristotle with regard to the effect of poetry. Kierkegaard claims that poetry does not reconcile one with but rather arouses one against existence, " for poetry is unjust to men by reason of its quantitative estimate, it has use only for the elect, but this is a poor sort of reconciliation." [6] He complains that the fear and pity aroused by tragedy draw the spectator out of himself in such a way that he identifies himself with the hero, whereas religion would counsel

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1. *Ibid.*, p.288.

2. *Either/Or*, Vol.I (trans. DAVID F. and LILIAN M. SWENSON), p.253.

3. *Journals*, n.861. On this point, W. B. YEAT'S poem, " The Choice " is of interest. Cf. *Collected Poems* (MacMillan, New York, 1951), p.242.

4. *Postscript*, p.286.

5. *Ibid.*, p.348.

6. *Stages on Life's Way* (trans. WALTER LOWRIE, Princeton, 1945), p.414.

a fear that has reference to oneself. [1] And yet : " It is not wrong of the spectator to want to lose himself in poetry, this is a joy which has its reward, but the spectator must not mistake the theater for reality, nor himself for a spectator who is nothing else but a spectator at a comedy." [2] Poetry can make the good triumph emphatically in five acts, but in real life results are never so perceptible and satisfying. In poetry we see things not as they are but as they ought to be, in this Kierkegaard is in agreement with Aristotle ; but imagining them as they ought to be and making them as they ought to be are two different things.

The accusation against speculation and poetry is the same : they both abstract from the difficulty of existence in such a way that either/or no longer causes the anguish it does for the individual who would posit an action. And since becoming good entails choice between opposing things, the individual would do well to eschew philosophy and poetry so as not to be tempted away from the task which is his. Just as universal history is a theater where God is essentially the only spectator, [3] so the little theater of poetry is not to be confused with the satisfaction of the ethical requirement. To surmount the difficulties of life by abstracting oneself out of them is a fantastic solution ; the true answer lies in the direction of passionate and dedicated existence.

Kierkegaard's concessions to Hegelian speculation surprise one much more than his charges against it, and his dissatisfaction with poetry seems to be somewhat of a mock problem. Nevertheless there is a certain truth in what he says and, *divo Thoma adjuvante*, we can give a more succinct and intelligible expression of that truth.

Due to the fact that the intellect draws things to itself and receives them according to its own mode, things which in themselves are related as contraries are not contrary in the mind.

> There can be no contrariety in the intellective soul, for it receives according to the mode of its existence ; indeed those things which are received by it are without contrariety, because the notions of contraries are not contrary in the intellect, but the science of contraries is one. [4]

The science of medicine considers both health and sickness although these cannot coexist in the same man, for

> the being of one contrary is excluded by the other, but the knowledge of one is not removed by knowledge of the other, but rather aided. So it

1. *Ibid.*, p.417.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Postscript*, p.141.

4. " In anima autem intellectiva non potest esse aliqua contrarietas. Recipit enim secundum modum sui esse ; ea vero quae in ipsa recipiuntur, sunt absque contrarietate, quia etiam rationes contrariorum in intellectu non sunt contrariae, sed est una scientia contrariorum " (*Ia*, q.75, a.6).

is that the forms of opposites are not opposed in the mind. Indeed the substance or essence of privation is the same as that of its opposite, just as in the mind the notion of health and sickness are the same, for it is by the absence of health that sickness is known. [1]

The intellect can know nothing which will cause it displeasure, nothing is contrary to its contemplative enjoyment of the intelligible species it abstracts from things. Even error is incapable of causing distress to the mind for either it is thought to be true and the mind delights in it as in the truth, or it is known to be error, and this is but another instance of knowing the truth. [2] In a very real way we get above the contrariety found in things when we know their natures ; indeed the knowledge of one contrary is the means of knowing the other and the two achieve a certain unity for the mind. Sickness is the negation of health, evil the negation of good : even non-being gains existence in the mind insofar as it is opposed to being. This by no means destroys the opposition of contradiction, however, for we can never understand a thing as simultaneously and in the same respect both of two opposites. [3]

In the case of the will this situation is reversed, for the will's movement is towards things as they are in themselves. There may be no contrariety in the understanding of contraries, but as they exist they are opposed and this contrariety will be reflected in the will as it relates itself to things. It is a good for the intellect to know goodness, a good to know evil, [4] but this happy neutralism disappears when it becomes a question of choosing the one or the other. Then it is that the full impact of their contrariety strikes us.

. . . There is nothing in the same genus which is contrary to the delight we take in consideration, so that there would be some other consideration contrary to the first. The reason for this is that the species of contraries are not contraries in the intellect ; thus the delight had in considering white is not contrary to that had in considering black. But because the

1. " Esse autem unius contrarii tollitur per esse alterius ; sed cognitio unius oppositi non tollitur per cognitionem alterius, sed magis iuvatur. Unde formae oppositorum in anima non sunt oppositae. Quinimmo ' substantia ', idest quod quid erat esse privationis est eadem cum substantia oppositi, sicut eadem est ratio in anima sanitatis et infirmitatis. Per absentiam enim sanitatis cognoscitur infirmitas " (*In VII Metaph.*, lect.6, n.1405).

2. *Q. D. de Veritate*, q.26, a.3, ad 8.

3. " Dicendum quod ipsae res contrariae non habent contrarietatem in anima, quia unum est ratio cognoscendi alterum ; et tamen in intellectu est contrarietas affirmationis et negationis, quae sunt contrariae, ut dicitur in fine *Perih.* Quamvis enim esse et non esse non sint contraria, sed contradictorie opposita, si considerentur ipsa significata prout sunt in rebus, quia alterum est ens, et alterum est pure non ens ; tamen si referantur ad actum animae, utrumque ponit aliquid esse. Unde esse et non esse sunt contradictoria ; sed opinio qua opinamur quod bonum est bonum, est contraria opinioni qua opinamur quod bonum non est bonum " (*Ia IIae*, q.64, a.3, ad 3). See ARISTOTLE, *On Interpretation*, chap.14.

4. *Q. D. de Veritate*, q.26, a.3, ad 6.

act of the will consists in a movement of the soul toward the thing and things in themselves are contraries, movements of the will toward contraries are themselves contrary, e.g. the desire of sweet is contrary to desire of the bitter. [1]

It is a perfection to know those things which it would be an imperfection to desire ; the will does not abstract from things as does the intellect and those things chosen are conjoined to the soul and if they are imperfect they leave their mark on it. [2] Intellectually it is a delight to know evil both with regard to the subject and the object, for as known the object is attained in its intelligibility. But insofar as this object is opposed to the will, there is a certain distress following on the comprehension : it is to be remembered that the intellect is but a part of the subject. [3] The act of intellection, seen only as that which is proper to a given potency, does not admit of contrariety in the same genus ; but with regard to operation, when it is a question of union with the thing, contrariety asserts itself. [4] Appetite comes to play a role in the way that a man looks on the proper object of his intellect ; so much so that one can be said to hate the truth. This can only be said with respect to some particular truth, however, insofar as it conflicts with an object of desire. For example, one may wish to be free of the truth of Faith so that he might freely sin. [5] The contrariety involved is, again, not in the intellect but in the whole man.

All of this is repeated when we turn to art ; the contrariety of things is surmounted in such a way that chance and contingency are *quodammodo* comprehended. The poet can represent for us that which in the harsh reality of our personal lives would cause pain and anguish and we experience great pleasure in the imitation.

And it is also natural for all to delight in works of imitation. The truth of this second point is shown by experience : though the objects themselves be painful to see, we delight to view the most realistic representations of them in art, the forms for example of the lowest animals and of dead bodies. [6]

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1. " . . . Delectatio quae est in considerando non habet contrarium in eodem genere, ut scilicet aliqua alia consideratio sit ei contraria ; et hoc ideo quia species contrariorum in intellectu non sunt contrariae ; unde delectationi quae est in considerando album non contrariatur delectatio quae est in considerando nigrum. Sed quia actus voluntatis consistit in motu animae ad rem, sicut res in seipsis sunt contrariae, ita motus voluntatis in contraria sunt contrarii : desiderium enim dulcis contrariatur desiderio amari . . . " (*Q. D. de Caritate*, q.6, ad 8).

2. *Ia IIae*, q.86, a.1, ad 2.

3. *III Sent.*, d.15, q.2, a.3, sol.3, ad 3.

4. *Ibid.*, d.26, q.1, a.5, ad 5.

5. *Ia IIae*, q.29, a.5.

6. *Poetics*, 1448 b 9 ; cf. *Ia IIae*, q.32, a.8.

The workings of chance in the compass of a play are a delight to see because we can understand their meaning ; the good artist can make the most improbable encounter seem inevitable and his plot imposes rationality on the irrational. One leaves the theater reconciled with life, content that there is a meaning in the unpredictable quirks of daily existence. A well-worked tragedy evokes the emotions of fear and pity in the spectators, arouses an inner tumult which is only resolved at the end of the piece ; the playwright is master of the little world where evil is punished and the good quite palpably rewarded.

Kierkegaard's statements on all this strike one as a laboring of the obvious : poetry is not life, life is not poetic. The imitation of human actions takes what Kierkegaard calls somewhere a foreshortened perspective thanks to which there is a beginning, middle and end. Problems raised find their solution and there is a stabilization of the emotions aroused by the conflict. In life it is otherwise : as existing individuals we are *in via* and the drama of our lives goes on after the theatrical curtain is rung down. The part we play is known fully only to God. Art bestows a certain finality on events and surmounts the banality and uncompleteness of existence. More, it portrays the inner conflict of the individual in an outward perceivable way ; it arouses a given emotion by finding what Eliot calls an " objective correlative " which assimilates the subjective. Now this is precisely Kierkegaard's complaint. Not only does art present the choice between an either/or as inevitable but it would have us believe that external manifestations are an infallible index to what is contained within.

Kierkegaard wants to oppose art and morality, aesthetics and the ethical demands which are made on the existing individual. This issues in a rather strange stand on the relationship of art and morals. In an entry in the *Journals*, [1] he says that it is nonsense to demand that the poet unfold a moral view of life in his works ; this is but the desire of mediocrity that all attempts at greatness be brought low so that one who is mediocre can feel justified in never having dared anything out of the ordinary.

> Those who really have a moral attitude are perfectly able to endure that appearance in reality, and do not quarrel with the poet for depicting the enormous success of immorality, how it achieves greatness and power —he sees through all that and sees immorality and that is enough for him.

This opinion will seem the more surprising in a moment when we consider Kierkegaard's theory of indirect communication, but it cannot be dismissed as an isolated remark. In the *Stages* he refers to Hamlet's doubts as " unpoetic scruples."

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1. N.857.

If Hamlet is kept in purely aesthetic categories, one must see to it that he has demoniac strength to carry out such a resolution. His scruples are in this case of no interest at all ; his procrastination and delay . . . merely abase him so that he does not become an aesthetic hero, and so becomes nothing at all. [1]

Kierkegaard persists in seeing poetry and the aesthetic sphere of existence as amoral ; in imitating human actions poetry is bound by no restriction whatsoever. That it might at least be as restricted as the men it imitates never seemed to occur to him, but surely if the artist ignores the principles of synderesis and the generalities of moral science his imitation will be vitiated at its root and turn into a distortion.

Be this as it may, we can agree with the general argument under discussion. Art and science surmount the contrariety with which action is everywhere faced ; they move in a realm in which contrariety does not present the difficulty it does on the existential or prudential level. So much is true, but Kierkegaard seems to have been overwhelmed by certain pretentious philosophers and artists when he calls these two essential temptations. The philosopher who thinks that his ability to define virtue makes him virtuous had best remember that he can also define vice. Hegel subsumed the ethical task into speculation, just as some artists, noting that in their art they got above the harsh opposition of good and evil, sought salvation in this aesthetic abstraction. [2] Could they not depict men of high virtue as well as draw villains of the meanest stripe? Let the *vulgus* be concerned with the banal contrariety of things, on Olympus good and evil sip from the same cup. These aberrations should be seen for what they are, and not as the final word on speculation and art. Kierkegaard is right in maintaining that it is in the existential order that either/or has its real meaning, for action implies will and the will moves toward things as they are in themselves. The will does not act as a part of man, but he is identified with its acts : *Facti sunt abominabiles, sicut ea quae dilexerunt* (OSEE, IX, 10).

These observations also explain the genesis of Kierkegaard's theory of indirect communication as evidenced in the pseudonymous works. His purpose was a polemical one, for he wanted to lead

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1. *Stages*, p.410.

2. " *Ernest.* Must we go, then, to Art for everything? *Gilbert.* For everything. Because Art does not hurt us. The tears that we shed at a play are a type of the exquisite sterile emotions that it is the function of Art to awaken. We weep, but we are not wounded. We grieve, but our grief is not bitter. [. . .] It is through Art, and through Art only, that we can realize our perfection ; through Art, and through Art only, that we can shield ourselves from the sordid perils of actual existence " (OSCAR WILDE, *Intentions*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, pp.167-8). For a dissimilar but relevant treatment of this deification of art, see REID MACCALLUM, *Imitation and Design* (ed. WM. BLISSETT, University of Toronto Press, 1953), pp.46-53. Cf. also SCHOPENHAUER, *The World as Will and Idea*, Vol. II, Bk.3.

men into existential categories. He judged that they already had more than enough to think about : he would *make* them choose. But to communicate an existential message directly would enable men to think about it and the contrariety he wanted to stress, the either/or which became his hallmark, would be deadened by thought which would surmount the disjunction. What was required was a mode of communication which would be indirect and so insinuate his message into the hearts of men that it would appear as a good to be chosen rather than a truth to be known. This artistic method explains the wider conception of aesthetics by which Kierkegaard qualified his pseudonymous writings.

The existential dialectic presented in these works was Kierkegaard's own poetic production, but it was poetic in method only, not in intent. He had no desire to reconcile men with existence : his task was to force them to realize what it means to be a man. He conceived of a truncated poetry which would present men grappling with existential problems, the practical problems of life ; all the alternatives of action would be given and then, stop. No solution was to be found in these " passion narratives " thus leaving the problem grating like an unresolved chord in the soul of the reader ; this lack of a solution, Kierkegaard reasoned, would force him to enter into the problem, not as a disembodied intellect, but as a man whose passional nature had been aroused. Thus his method shared something with poetry : " a passion narrative also stands in relation to a reader just as the aesthetic production does." [1] This method was evident in his first work, *Either/Or*, which pits an aesthete against a representative of the ethical sphere in such a way that neither view is said to win the day. Hence the title. The method varies in the later books, but it always retains its original purpose : to draw the reader into the discussion so that problems raised would not be something to think about, but the clarion call to action.

There is then a fundamental inconsistency in Kierkegaard with regard to art : he rejects it with one hand and takes it back with the other. He denies that art serves a moral purpose and then makes use of art to draw men to Christianity. In the rejection, he says that art is beyond good and evil in every way ; he then turns it to what he conceives is good purpose. We merely touch on this anomaly here as a full treatment would doubtless require an extended exposition of the doctrine on art and morality. We can note that Kierkegaard's inborn extremism led him to predicate absolute freedom from morals of art because he recognized it eluded the existential pathos before contraries, just as the realization that speculation also achieved this led him to concede that the principle of contradiction was thereby abrogated.

1. *Stages*, p.416.

The further question of the efficaciousness of the Kierkegaardian method is a difficult one to answer. The poetic disposes for virtue, but it is a feeble vehicle for doctrine, it is in fact *infima doctrina*. Yet Kierkegaard endeavoured to present the most speculative problems in an artistic manner, even those of faith ; moreover he contended that this was the only method possible. This penchant of his has had its effect on the later schools of Existentialism in that they deny any distinction between art and philosophy, the novel and the treatise. [1] However, one will willingly admit that when it is a question of moving the will of another, art is the most effective tool at our command.

These elementary considerations serve to show the importance of the notion of either/or in the thought of Kierkegaard, and although, due to the brevity of our treatment, we cannot invoke the maxim " tout comprendre est tout pardonner," we can see the great amount of truth which underlies the Kierkegaardian position in this one area. It is unfortunate that his overpowering desire for black/white tends to diminish the effectiveness of his either/or ; however, it will be agreed that this did not stamp out every similarity with orthodoxy.

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1. Something stated quite explicitly by ALBERT CAMUS, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (Paris, Gallimard, 1942), pp.133-138.