

FEAR AND TREMBLING

TRANSLATED AND INTRODUCED BY

BRUCE H. KIRRMSE



A NEW TRANSLATION

SØREN KIERKEGAARD

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Liveright Publishing Corporation

A DIVISION OF W. W. NORTON & COMPANY

INDEPENDENT PUBLISHERS SINCE 1923

For my family, on both sides of the Atlantic.

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Fear and Trembling, A GUIDE TO AN UNKNOWN COUNTRY

AT THE OUTSET of *Fear and Trembling*, Johannes de silentio, the putative author, cites a passage from the eighteenth-century German philosopher Johann Georg Hamann, which recounts the story of a cryptic, nonverbal message that the early Roman king Tarquin the Proud instructed a messenger to communicate to his son, Sextus Tarquinius. The son understood the message, though the messenger did not, and it is clear, both from this epigraph and from the name de silentio, that Søren Kierkegaard, the actual author, intended the entire book to be a message of the same sort.

Let us therefore tease forth the meanings in the book. First, we must investigate and acknowledge the well-known autobiographical thread that runs through the work, and following that, we will survey the substantive argument that is also present in *Fear and Trembling*.

In September 1849, a bit less than six years after the publication, in October 1843, of the “dialectical lyric” *Fear and Trembling*, which he attributed to one “Johannes de silentio,” Kierkegaard wrote this entry in his journal:

Ah, some day after I am dead, *Fear and Trembling* alone will be enough to immortalize my name as an author. Then it will be read and translated into foreign languages. People will practically shudder at the frightful emotion in the book. But at the time it was written, when the person who was believed to be its author went about in the incognito of a flaneur, looking like the very soul of roguishness, wit, and frivolity, no one could really grasp the seriousness. Ah, you fools, the book was never as serious as it was then. That itself is the true expression of the horror. Had the author appeared to be serious, the horror would have been less. The reduplication is what is monstrous in the horror.

But when I am dead, people will form an imagined figure of me, a dark figure—and the book will be terrifying.

But the book itself has already said something true by pointing out the difference between the poet and the hero. There is a predominantly poetic element within me, but *Fear and Trembling* contains a deliberate mystification, namely that it actually reproduced my own life. The book was already hinted at in this fashion in the intimation of it that can be found in the oldest journal, the one in octavo, that is, the oldest journal from my time as an author.ⁱ

Kierkegaard seems to boast of having obscured the autobiographical element in the work. But in fact, *Fear and Trembling* is, if anything, altogether too obvious about its secrets. Anyone with just a bit of knowledge of Kierkegaard's life and his fateful and painful break with his fiancée, Regine Olsen, can easily find hints that allow, or even encourage, the reader to view the book in the same way that many have read "The Diary of the Seducer" in Kierkegaard's earlier blockbuster, *Either/Or* (published in February 1843)—namely, as a roman à clef, starring Kierkegaard as the (apparent) villain and his fiancée as the (equally apparent) victim. The supposed "incognito" of Kierkegaard's fictive author, Johannes de silentio, is almost embarrassingly transparent, and yet Kierkegaard boasts about his "deliberate mystification." Kierkegaard was certainly right about the brilliance and importance of the book, but he was very much mistaken if he believed that the book had successfully concealed the fact that "it actually reproduced my own life," because the autobiographical vein mentioned above has been mined extensively by many subsequent investigators.

In the passage cited above, from his 1849 journal, Kierkegaard refers to an entry in “the oldest journal from my time as an author,” a journal he designated “JJ.” The entry in question, JJ:87, is from April 1843, about six months prior to the publication of *Fear and Trembling*. The bulk of this entry consists of a version of what came to be the first of the four brief variations on the Abraham/Isaac story that Kierkegaard was to include in the preliminary section of *Fear and Trembling*. Following the portion of the entry that could be mistaken for a draft of a page from that section, Kierkegaard permitted himself this aside:

But where, after all, is the contemporary poet who has a sense for such collisions? And yet Abraham’s conduct was truly poetic, magnanimous, more magnanimous than everything I have read of in tragedies. — When the child is to be weaned, the mother blackens her breast, but her eye looks upon the child just as lovingly. The child believes that it is the breast that has changed, but the mother is unchanged. And this is why she blackens the breast, because she says that it would be a shame for it to look so inviting when the child must not have it. — This collision is easily resolved, because the breast is only a part of the mother herself. Fortunate the person who did not experience more terrible collisions; who did not need to blacken *himself*; who did not need to travel to hell in order to learn what the Devil looks like—so that he could depict himself like that and thus, if possible, save another human being, at least in his or her relation to God. This would be Abraham’s collision. — The person who explains this mystery has explained my life. But who among my contemporaries has understood this?ⁱⁱ

Here again, it certainly does not take much of a sleuth to detect portions of a self-portrait in Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*. In Golden Age Copenhagen, pseudonyms (such as “Johannes de silentio”) were both commonly used and usually transparent. Kierkegaard’s contemporary readers were familiar both with his scandalous conduct toward his fiancée and with his perhaps less than 100 percent successful attempt to repel her by appearing to be a rogue and a dandy. Moreover, Kierkegaard was certain that his voluminous journals and notebooks would be published after his

death, and he took care to preserve them for the future, deleting only those limited portions that he wished to keep *truly* private. Thus 1869, a mere fourteen years after Kierkegaard's death, saw the publication of the first volume of what have become several increasingly inclusive editions of his "private" journals and notebooks. If, in the 1840s, there were some readers who did not recognize autobiographical elements—including, especially, the parallel between Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac and Kierkegaard's "sacrificing" his engagement to Regine Olsen—from the 1860s onward, almost no careful and informed reader of Kierkegaard could fail to recognize them. Therefore, in the present translation of *Fear and Trembling* the reader will not fail to recognize them, either.

Nonetheless, having seen through Kierkegaard's rather unambitious effort to protect his supposed "incognito," his autobiographical presence, in *Fear and Trembling*, we must also appreciate that the book is very much more than a philosophical roman à clef. Therefore, after acknowledging and bearing in mind the autobiographical elements in the book, the most important thing is to address the much more important "unknown" that dominates the book, an unknown that is of far greater significance than mere authorial/autobiographical hide-and-seek.

Fear and Trembling is a difficult and disturbing book. It is *difficult* owing to the complexity of the concepts it develops. This difficulty, however, can be managed by careful reading and consideration of the argument developed by the book's supposed author, Johannes de silentio, one of the many pseudonyms in Kierkegaard's menagerie of personae (literally, the masks through which one speaks—"per sonare").

On the other hand, the *disturbing* quality of the book cannot be dispelled by studiously examining the argument it contains, because *Fear and Trembling* is designed to provoke the reader into considering what is actually meant by the word "faith," and whether those who proclaim themselves "believers" are in reality anything more than good citizens of the state, nice people with whom one feels comfortable. These nice believers pride themselves on also

being up-to-date, on their supposed lack of complacency, and thus on their willingness to “doubt everything.” In de silentio’s view, these moderns believe themselves to be followers of Descartes, whose statement about doubting everything they have seriously misconstrued, yet nonetheless as shareholders in “Christendom,” they also claim to venerate Abraham. The question is: What, if anything, do these nice, modern people, who doubt everything, have in common with Abraham, who “had faith and did not doubt”?ⁱⁱⁱ Thus, in addition to everything else, *Fear and Trembling* is a *polemical* book, directed against what Kierkegaard viewed as the self-satisfaction of his times and the complacency of Christendom.

In the course of *Fear and Trembling*, the narrator explains that the story of Abraham and Isaac has an aspect that presents a difficulty that is not only equal to, but greater than God’s command that Abraham sacrifice his son, namely—as Johannes de silentio puts it, addressing Abraham directly—that after the ordeal is over, and Isaac has been spared at the last moment: “[Y]ou sat happily at table with him in your tent, as you do in the hereafter for all eternity.”^{iv} Johannes de silentio finds it even more miraculous and inexplicable (“absurd”) that after Abraham resigned himself, in faith, to the loss of Isaac, he was capable of receiving him again (equally “absurdly”) and living joyfully the rest of his days. Thus, for de silentio, “faith” is not only the inexplicable paradox of *surrendering* everything, it is also the perhaps even more inexplicable paradox of *receiving* everything once again and living what is indistinguishable from a happy, “normal” life—indistinguishable, because it *is* a happy, normal life, which is not to be confused with the superficially happy, normal lives by which de silentio was surrounded. *Fear and Trembling*, then, constitutes an argument for the reality of “faith”—the faith neither to “go further” nor to “stand still” where one is, but to live continually in faith.

But, once again, what is “faith”? Johannes de silentio thinks that he can help us infer what faith is by seeing what it is *not*. Thus, in the section titled “Tuning Up,” we are introduced to four ways the Abraham/Isaac event did *not* go: (I) Abraham did *not* lose his faith in

God and pretend to be a bloodthirsty idolater in order that Isaac not lose *his* faith; (II) Abraham did *not* lose his faith in God's promise and regain it only after he saw the ram God had provided; (III) Abraham did *not* lose his faith through regret over having been willing to sacrifice Isaac; (IV) Abraham did *not* lose faith and then, by having lost it, cause Isaac to lose his as well.

All this, of course, helps us to understand only what faith is not, and *de silentio* explains that something else is needed in order to grasp the outlines of what faith *is*:

[I]t was in order to collide with this matter that I embarked upon the whole of the preceding investigation, not in order that by so doing Abraham would become more understandable, but in order that the incomprehensibility would be more jarring, for, as I have said, I cannot understand Abraham, I can only admire him. It has also been pointed out that none of the stages described contained an analogy to Abraham; they were developed only in order that, when they were explored within their own spheres, they could, in the instances where the compass exhibited deviation, hint, as it were, at the boundaries of the unknown country.^v

A "new category" is required, namely faith, and *de silentio* does not possess it, which is why he cannot understand Abraham. He can lead us to the boundary of the paradox, the "unknown country" of faith, but he cannot himself enter it. He argues that the "what" or the substance of faith is a paradox, a black hole that defies understanding. To the extent that he is willing and able to explain himself, *de silentio* provides the following explanation of why he wrote his book:

Here it becomes apparent that a new category is needed in order to understand Abraham. Paganism has no notion of such a relation to the deity. The tragic hero does not enter into any private relation to the deity—rather, the ethical is the divine, and thus the paradox contained in it can be mediated in the universal.

Abraham cannot be mediated; this can also be expressed thus: He cannot speak. As soon as I speak, I express the universal, and if I do not do this, no one can understand me. Thus, the moment Abraham wants to express himself in the universal, he must say that his situation is one of spiritual trial, for he has no higher expression of the universal that is superior to the universal he is transgressing.^{vi}

So the question is, What is “this matter” with which *de silentio* wants the reader to “collide”? What is it about Abraham that remains an “unknown country”? Here it is best that we take a step back and consider the meaning of the terms “immediate” and “mediate” and take a look at the shape of Kierkegaard’s conceptual landscape. In Kierkegaard’s view, human beings live with three dimensions or directions: (1) the “aesthetic,” that is, all that relates to a person’s feelings, of pain, pleasure, sorrow, joy; the aesthetic is *immediate*, i.e., it is not mediated through a shared language or medium; the aesthetic is always directed toward the self; (2) the “ethical,” that is, morality, which consists of universal, mutual obligations and constitutes the solidarity of the universal human community; the ethical is *mediated* through the shared medium of language and is always directed both toward the self and toward the other; and (3) the “religious or the demonic,” which indicates a relation of the individual (whom Kierkegaard calls “the single individual,” as opposed to a community or congregation composed of individual human beings who have banded together for one or another shared purpose), directed either toward the divine or toward utter self-enclosure; this third dimension is expressed either as faith or as despair, both of which, like the aesthetic, are *immediate* and cannot be communicated through the medium of language or rational argument; this is thus the locus of the *paradox*. This territory of paradox is thus the unknown country that cannot be described as such, but the boundaries of which can be determined. And it will turn out that although a man of faith, a religious hero such as Abraham, is difficult to fathom, as we will see, we may be able to understand something of the boundaries of the territory of the paradox by

studying a man of despair, a demonic figure such as Gloucester (subsequently Richard III).

Thus, everyone, Kierkegaard grants, is familiar with the aesthetic, with feelings of pain and pleasure. Similarly, everyone is familiar with the ethical, with the moral requirements of the community, even if they fail to live up to them. So, if there is to be a third dimension that includes the religious, it would have to include or account for God's command that Abraham sacrifice his son. And God's command cannot be "accounted for"—it just *is*. And if it is not accepted as it *is*, then there is no such dimension as the religious, and all the veneration that has been directed toward the patriarch Abraham is simply nonsense, sentimentality, dishonesty. This latter point—that Christendom's widespread veneration of Abraham and, by extension, of Christianity generally, is sentimental humbug—is the polemical driving force behind *Fear and Trembling*, and it explains why de silentio constructs his argument for the existence of faith by turning to this particular story from the Old Testament, namely God's command that his favored patriarch Abraham sacrifice Isaac, the long-awaited son of Abraham's old age:

Thus, then, my intention in telling the story of Abraham is to extract from it, in the form of problems, the dialectical element it contains, so that we might see what an enormous paradox faith is, a paradox that is capable of turning a murder into a holy act that is well-pleasing to God, a paradox that restores Isaac to Abraham, which no thinking can master, because faith begins precisely at the point where thinking leaves off.^{vii}

By examining numerous examples, Kierkegaard's narrator shows the reader that, in his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac to God, Abraham confronts us with this "paradox," the paradox of "faith." In order to distinguish the heroism of faith from other forms of heroism, de silentio then presents us with a number of cases other than that of Abraham and Isaac—several famous instances in which a father sacrifices a child for the sake of "the greater good," i.e., the welfare of the state, of the community as a whole. For example, at the outset

of the Trojan War, the Greek king Agamemnon must sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia in order for the gods to provide the favorable winds needed if his fleet is to sail against Troy. Similarly, Jephthah, a ruler of the Israelites, is obligated to sacrifice his daughter because of a vow he had made to God: that in return for God's granting him a military victory for his people, he would sacrifice the first person he encountered upon arriving home. As a third example, de silentio cites Lucius Junius Brutus, first consul of Rome, who ordered the execution of his own sons because they had participated in a conspiracy to restore the monarchy. These heroic sacrifices cited by the narrator are examples of giving the communal good, or "the ethical," priority over one's personal feelings, or "the aesthetic," and the hero who is able to perform such a sacrifice is a "tragic hero" who has sacrificed his *personal* affections and obligations to the higher good of *social* obligation, of duty to "the universal." A tragic hero is a "knight of infinite resignation" who has renounced his or her claim to personal satisfaction in order to serve the universal. Of course, actions such as those mentioned above are very painful for the parent because the ethical requirement of the universal ranks higher than the aesthetic satisfaction of the individual.

Thus, in all of the cases de silentio cites, the heroes resign themselves infinitely. Moreover, he states that while he admires them and could even imitate them, he could not replicate Abraham's faith, "for my enormous resignation was a surrogate for faith."^{viii} Thus resignation is an inadequate substitute for faith. Infinite resignation, by which one gives up everything worldly, is the mark of the tragic hero, the knight of infinite resignation. Infinite resignation is also the "first movement" of the "knight of faith," but in order to be a knight of faith one must also make the "next movement, the movement of faith by virtue of the absurd,"^{ix} and believe that everything will be restored.

Who can help de silentio grasp Abraham's situation? It is clear that Hegel, the leading philosopher of Kierkegaard's "Christendom," cannot be of any help here. For Hegel, the highest level of human development is that the individual becomes a part of "the ethical life,"

which embodies the “social morality” (German, *Sittlichkeit*; Danish, *Sædelighed*) that attains its highest development in “the state.” The state thus supersedes previous levels of development (i.e., the family and civil society) and represents the absolute substance of “the ethical life.”^x Thus, for Hegel, *family* is eclipsed by the needs of the *community*, i.e., the state, and figures such as Agamemnon, Jephthah, and Lucius Junius Brutus are heroes, while Abraham is a murderer. Johannes de silentio develops the radical tension between this Hegelian position, which he identifies with optimistic, progress-oriented, nineteenth-century Danish Christendom, and Luke 14:26: “Whoever comes to me and does not hate his own father, and his mother, and his wife, and his children, and his brothers, and his sisters, yes, even his own soul, cannot be my disciple.”^{xi} Once again, we see that *Fear and Trembling* is a polemical work that exists within the tension between “social morality” and “faith by virtue of the absurd.”

The question that arises in the case of Abraham and Isaac is whether there is a higher instance, a higher good, that outranks the ethical, and if there is, what would such a good—which is not a *human* good—look like? The problem, of course, is that it does not “look” like anything, because it is invisible—it is what de silentio calls a “paradox.” In the preliminary section of *Fear and Trembling*, which he titles “Getting Something Off My Chest,” Kierkegaard’s narrator bluntly challenges the reader: “So, either let us write off Abraham or let us learn to be appalled at this enormous paradox that is his life’s significance, so that we might understand that our age, like every age, can rejoice if it has faith.”^{xii} To repeat the narrator’s point, if we wish to discuss Abraham, we must accept that what he represents—faith in God—is an appalling paradox, a paradox “which no thinking can master, because faith begins precisely at the point where thinking leaves off.”^{xiii}

Faith, then, is a paradox: it cannot be thought, and as we have seen, it is a paradox that is confronted only by a “knight of faith” who is “referred solely to himself.” Furthermore, not only is this knight of faith “unable to make himself understood by others, but he feels no

vain desire to guide others.”^{xiv} Who, then, will guide us? How are we to form any impression of this *terra incognita*, the territory of the paradox that is faith? How can de silentio tell us *anything* about this “unknown country” that causes the compass needle to “deviate”? His solution is to resort to employing a discipline that might be called “negative cartography”: as we have seen, he defines the paradoxical country of faith by showing—seemingly rather fancifully, by way of widely scattered examples from classical Greece and Rome and from the Bible—what faith is *not*. Faith is exemplified neither by Agamemnon, nor by Jephthah, nor by Lucius Junius Brutus.

Having come this far, de silentio has to do something to enable us to examine the “absurd” position of Abraham, who, unlike the knights of infinite resignation, lives happily ever after, for he inhabits the paradoxical “unknown country” of faith and thus is able to continue living in the cheerful, matter-of-fact manner that preceded his ordeal with Isaac on Mount Moriah. In order to take us further, de silentio must abandon the apparently straightforward but misleading analogies to Abraham provided by the classical and biblical figures he has cited thus far, and he turns, first, to the strange, dark story of Sarah, in the Book of Tobit, which provides de silentio with a way past the infinite resignation that characterized those tragic heroes.

Sarah is the noble and dutiful daughter of pious parents. In accordance with the customs of the times, the wishes of her parents, and her own desperate hope, Sarah’s highest duty and joy consist of marriage to an excellent and suitable man, namely Tobias. Alas, despite all these wishes and hopes, when we first meet Sarah, she is on the verge of utter despair because every one of her seven previous betrothals to young men has ended in crushing disaster, for an evil demon has killed each of them on his wedding night. Tobias is indeed brave enough to be willing to be number eight, and even though most people would therefore view the gallant Tobias as the hero of the story, de silentio insists that it is Sarah, not Tobias, who is the true hero, and that in his willingness to confront the demon that had murdered the seven young men, Tobias is simply yet another tragic hero. Sarah is different. She lives at rock bottom with “the

unfathomable sorrow that no amount of time can dispel, no time can heal: to know that it would be of no help, even if life were to do everything!”^{xv} The narrator then points out why Sarah is different—she has confronted despair, and she exhibits something beyond the heroic infinite resignation that characterizes Tobias and the previously mentioned tragic heroes: “[I]t would of course be mockery of Sarah if ethics were to say to her, ‘Why don’t you express yourself in the universal and get married?’ Fundamentally, such natures are in the paradox, and they are in no way any more imperfect than other people except that they are either lost in the demonic paradox or saved in the divine paradox.”^{xvi} Thus Sarah does not fall into the category of the tragic hero as a knight of infinite resignation who has renounced all hope, for even though she lacks Abraham’s heroic confidence, she nonetheless maintains an absurd *hope*, and her situation thus borders on the unknown country of the paradox.

After Sarah, de silentio descends deeper and investigates the figure of the Merman, providing us with various versions of the Merman known from the Danish folk tale “Agnete and the Merman.”¹ (Interestingly, the preferred Merman here is not the one in the traditional folk tale, but the Merman whom de silentio develops in a footnote: Kierkegaard is a brilliant deceiver and is capable of hiding his main point in a footnote!) Like Sarah, the Merman is a transitional figure, because unlike such tragic heroes as Agamemnon, Jephthah, and Brutus, the Merman has “a human preexistence in the consequences of which his life was ensnared.”^{xvii} In other words, unlike all the ideal (and unreal), sinless tragic heroes or “knights of infinite resignation” whom de silentio has developed up to this point, the Merman is like *us*: he has a *past* in which he is enmeshed, he must bear the weight of his *sin*. The “marble statue”^{xviii} figures of classical tragedy are merely mannequins with whom no actual people ought to compare themselves, but the Merman is a *real* person, like the reader, and is confronted by the *real* possibilities of the “paradox,” i.e., the possibilities of “the demonic” and of “faith.” This is true of all authentically *human* figures, and the narrator thus

reserves his highest praise for Shakespeare, who had the insight and the courage to create a demonic figure such as Richard III.

The Merman, as de silentio presents him, turns out to be a case study in “the demonic,” a despair that is beyond all healing, a self-enclosure that is beyond recall. (Interestingly, this view of the demonic is in some ways an anticipation of a category that will recur later, in Kierkegaard’s *The Sickness unto Death*.) After examining the received version of “Agnete and the Merman,” the narrator tells us that “[t]he legend could also be treated in another way,”^{xix} and he then produces a variant of the tale in which the Merman comes to represent demonic self-enclosure, a radical refusal to be healed, an eternal and self-imposed imprisonment in his own suffering. In his radical refusal to speak, the Merman’s embrace of despair recalls the mindless, unfathomable evil of Iago in Shakespeare’s *Othello*, an infinite darkness, a hatred for no reason, which refuses to explain itself or to say anything at all. But although he was familiar with *Othello*, de silentio prefers another Shakespearian villain, whom he regarded as the par excellence expression of the demonic, Richard III:

In this respect, Shakespeare is and forever remains a hero. That dreadful demon, the most demonic figure Shakespeare has depicted, but has also depicted peerlessly—Gloucester (subsequently Richard III): what made him a demon? Obviously, the fact that he could not bear the pity to which he had been hostage since childhood. His monologue in the first act of *Richard III* is worth more than all moral systems, which have no inkling of the terrors of existence or of how to explain them.

I, that am rudely stamp'd and want love's majesty
To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time
Into this breathing world scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them.

One cannot save natures such as Gloucester's by mediating them into an idea of society. Ethics really only makes fools of them.^{xx}

Thus Richard III—who, if he could not “prove a lover” was “determined to prove a villain”—represents the demonic paradox that remains inaccessible to investigation, inexplicable evil, while Abraham, equally inaccessible, represents the divine paradox, incommunicable good. Both Richard III and Abraham are equally removed from the ethical world—the human community, the “universal” of rational discourse—but in opposite directions. The paradox, whether demonic or divine, cannot be directly communicated, it can only be adumbrated—that is, to the extent that it can be known at all, it can be known only by the shadow it casts; it is a country known only by the way it forces the compass needle to deviate.

These three figures—Sarah, the Merman, and Gloucester, who are depicted in their ascending order of urgency and relevance for charting the outline of the paradox—are utterly unlike the classic tragic heroes of sunny antiquity. They are shrouded in mystery, in an unknowability that becomes progressively darker until we encounter the boundary of that unknown country of faith and of despair.

Putting it mildly, *de silentio* is dismayed that the nineteenth century, his own enlightened age, a society that proudly—and smugly—bore the title “Christendom,” is able to take the biblical story of Abraham's ordeal for granted, without so much as a gasp, a cry of protest, much less a defiant show of unbelief. In its refusal to be shocked by God's order that Abraham sacrifice Isaac, Christendom has made what it understands by “faith” into something merely “normal,” something long since settled. Indeed, so much has the matter of Christianity and religion in general been settled, so long has Kierkegaard's enlightened age been satisfied with being at this now-familiar level, that in the view of Denmark's leading cultural figures and tastemakers, it is high time that people stopped “standing still” at faith, but instead “go further.” In his optimistic nineteenth-century Denmark, Kierkegaard believed that the source of this continual

demand to “go further” was the philosophy of Hegel, particularly as popularized by Danish intellectuals such as the playwright and cultural critic Johan Ludvig Heiberg and the theologian Hans Lassen Martensen. (Indeed, it is no surprise that at various points in his notebooks and journals, Kierkegaard makes it clear that he has far more respect for the outright atheists and skeptics of his day, such as Ludwig Feuerbach and D. F. Strauss, than he does for the cultural icons of domesticated Christianity.) Thus, through the arguments advanced by his pseudonym Johannes de silentio, Kierkegaard investigates—and castigates—what he views as the shallow self-certainty of his age, arguing that remaining in faith is anything but “standing still.” In *Fear and Trembling* Kierkegaard expresses his disgust with the self-satisfaction of his supposedly religious contemporaries, foreshadowing T. S. Eliot’s revulsion, in his *Preludes*, at the empty smugness of a civilization “assured of certain certainties”—a civilization about to annihilate itself in two world wars.

ⁱ Entry NB12:147 in *Kierkegaard’s Journals and Notebooks* [hereafter *KJN*, followed by volume and page number], ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn et al., 11 vols. (in 12 tomes) (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007–2020), vol. 6 (2012), p. 237.

ⁱⁱ Entry JJ:87 in *KJN* 2:155–56.

ⁱⁱⁱ See p. 24.

^{iv} See p. 27.

^v See p. 135.

^{vi} See pp. 72–73.

^{vii} See p. 64.

^{viii} See p. 42.

^{ix} See pp. 143–44.

^x See pp. 66 and 71.

^{xi} See p. 87.

^{xii} See p. 63.

^{xiii} See p. 64.

^{xiv} See p. 97.

- xv See p. 124.
- xvi See p. 128.
- xvii See p. 114.
- xviii See p. 102.
- xix See p. 115.
- xx See p. 127.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

WHEN I FIRST studied Kierkegaard in Denmark in the early 1970s, I met a well-read Dane who confided in me that he, and not a few other Danes, found Kierkegaard's Danish so tortuously difficult that they preferred to read him in English translation. Kierkegaard presents serious challenges to his readers (and his translators), owing not only to his use of language—both his enormous vocabulary and his syntax, which can seem contorted—but also to his *ideas*, which are designed to push the reader to the limit and often succeed in doing so. Wherever possible, I have tried to preserve the feeling of Kierkegaard's syntactical eccentricities, including run-on sentences, asides and asides within asides, and long parenthetical remarks. As is well-known, Kierkegaard wrote in many voices, each of which was in its way his own. In the present translation I also have tried to capture the *tone* of Kierkegaard's voice, that is, the tone he chose for his putative author, "Johannes de silentio" (who is anything but silent—except with respect to the *content* of the paradox): a distinctive combination of encyclopedically educated courtliness, acerbity, polemical urgency, eccentricity, chaste discretion, and occasional lyricism. Equally, if not more important, I have also tried to preserve the *sound* of the spoken language, the aural quality of Kierkegaard's writing. In his journals and notebooks Kierkegaard states repeatedly that he composed his texts aloud and that they are meant to be understood by someone who reads them aloud. Three years after the publication of *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard explained how his works are to be read and

requested that “the reader will read aloud, if possible,”ⁱ explaining that “I have said everything aloud to myself many times before I write it.”ⁱⁱ A year later, he further clarified his request: “I am particularly preoccupied with the architectonic-dialectical aspect, which simultaneously is clear to the eye in the proportions of the sentences, and—when one reads them aloud—to the voice, as rhythm, and *I always have in mind a reader who reads aloud*. . . . Most of all I must repeat that I have in mind readers who read aloud and are thus practiced in following every little cadence of a thought and are then able to reproduce this with the voice.”ⁱⁱⁱ And near the end of his life, Kierkegaard reminisced about his practice as a writer: “Sometimes I have sat for hours in this fashion, in love with the sound of language when it echoes with the fecundity of thought; thus I have sat for hours at a time, like a flautist who entertains himself with his flute. Most of what I have written has been spoken aloud many, many times, perhaps scores of times; it has been heard before being written down.”^{iv}

There are several Danish words in Kierkegaard’s text that deserve specific mention here: forms of the verb *prøve* have generally been translated as forms of “test,” though occasionally as forms of “try,” while the related noun, *Prøvelse*, has been translated as “trial,” though occasionally as “test”; forms of the verb *forsøge* have been translated as forms of “try”; and forms of the verb *friste* have been translated as forms of “tempt,” while the related noun, *Fristelse*, has been translated as “temptation.” Kierkegaard’s uses of *friste* and *Fristelse* are noteworthy because forms of these words usually appear in his citations or paraphrases of what was then the authorized Danish translation of Genesis 22:1: “*Gud fristede Abraham*,” which translates as “God tempted Abraham.” (In English translations of the Bible, the Authorized or “King James” Version has “God did tempt Abraham,” while the New Revised Standard Version has “God tested Abraham.”) Another term Kierkegaard uses quite frequently in *Fear and Trembling* is the noun *Anfægtelse*, which in the present translation has consistently been translated as “spiritual trial”; it connotes a profound inner struggle involving doubt,

temptation, and perhaps a sense of enticement. Kierkegaard was aware of the difficulties of this term, and he discusses it in the present volume when speaking of the “paradox”:

It is certainly true that, for the singular individual, this paradox can easily be mistaken for a spiritual trial, but one ought not for that reason conceal it. It is certainly true that the entire constitution of many people may be such that this repels them, but one ought not for that reason make faith into something different in order that they, too, might have it; rather, one should confess that one does not have it, while those who have faith ought to consider formulating some criteria by which people could distinguish the paradox from a spiritual trial.^{v1}

The present translation is based on the new standard Danish critical edition of Kierkegaard’s works, *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* (SKS, followed by volume and page number), ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn et al., 55 vols. (28 text volumes accompanied by 27 volumes of commentary) (Copenhagen: Gad, 1997–2012), volume 4, pp. 97–210. Page numbers enclosed in hash marks and brackets—e.g., #[100]#—indicate the start of the relevant page in SKS. The editors of the SKS edition chose the first printing of the first Danish edition of *Frygt og Bæven* as the principal text, collating several selected copies in order to control for typographical errors. Then, in determining variants, the editors of SKS compared Kierkegaard’s surviving fair copy as submitted to the printer (and, where available, his extant drafts) with the above-mentioned copies of the first printed edition. Because the editors of SKS know that Kierkegaard read through the printer’s proofs of the first edition and made corrections on the proofs—not only correcting typographical and other errors by the printer, but also making occasional changes to the version he had submitted as the fair copy—they accept the first printed edition as the principal text and note variants between it and Kierkegaard’s fair copy (and, on occasion, earlier drafts). In the present translation, the more important of those variants are noted in footnotes on the pages on which they appear.

Kierkegaard also involved himself in the design of his books, including *Fear and Trembling*. He was familiar with the elements of book and page design and was quite definite in his choice of typefaces and fonts, e.g., in the case of the putative author of *Fear and Trembling*, “Johannes de silentio,” which is a hybrid of serif and sans serif. As most educated northern Europeans of his day, Kierkegaard wrote in two hands, a “gothic” hand for most purposes, especially when writing in Danish and German, and a “latin” hand when writing in Latin, French, Italian, English (this latter, very rarely), but also decoratively (as in headings and titles) and for emphasis, even when writing in Danish. Kierkegaard had equally definite views concerning layout, point size, italics, boldface, etc., and he often intervened actively with his printer, examining and marking up printer’s proofs with comments to the typesetter, and making changes. The editors of *SKS* have preserved as many of Kierkegaard’s typographical choices as they can. In my translation, I have done my best to preserve the typographical conventions used in the *SKS* edition.

Translations of foreign-language words and short phrases are provided in square brackets immediately following each occurrence. Translation of longer foreign-language passages are provided in footnotes. Citations from or allusions to biblical passages are identified in footnotes, while other explanations of matters in the text appear as endnotes, some of which have been adapted, often in abbreviated form, from the notes in the commentary volume (vol. K4) of *SKS*.

I am happy to acknowledge my indebtedness to previous translations of Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*: Walter Lowrie (1941), whose translation I read as a university student and later; Howard and Edna Hong (1983), whose translation I taught in American college classrooms; and Alastair Hannay (1985) and Sylvia Walsh (2006), whose translations I have also read carefully and learned from. I hope, of course, that my translation is an improvement on the high standard set by those who have gone before, just as I assume that a future translator will be able to

improve on the present one. As Robert Frost has noted, everyone works together, “whether they work together or apart.”

I am also happy to express my thanks for the support and assistance I have received in connection with my work. The Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre at the Theology Faculty of the University of Copenhagen, its director, Joakim Garff, and my other colleagues at the university have been supportive in many ways and have provided an ideal work environment. My longtime friend and colleague, emeritus professor Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, provided valuable counsel and much needed assistance in solving a number of textual “puzzles.” My friend Jamie Lorentzen gave the entire text a careful and perceptive reading, catching more than a few gaffes. My wife, Margaret Ryan Hellman, went through the manuscript with great patience and care, and I am very thankful for that and for much more.

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- i Entry NB:6 (1846), *KJN* 4:11.
 - ii Entry NB:14 (1846), *KJN* 4:23.
 - iii Entry NB:146 (1847), *KJN* 4:99 (emphasis added).
 - iv Entry NB30:41 (1854), *KJN* 9:419.
 - v See p. 68.

#[99]#

Fear and Tremblingⁱ

DIALECTICAL LYRIC

BY

JOHANNES DE SILENTIOⁱⁱ

ⁱ See Philippians 2:12.

ⁱⁱ Danish and Latin, “John of Silence.” (If the name is rendered in Danish, it becomes “Hans Tausen,” which is the name of the principal figure of the Danish Reformation, a follower of Luther.)

#[100]#

*Was Tarquinius Superbus in seinem Garten mit den
Mohnköpfen sprach, verstand der Sohn, aber nicht der Bote.*ⁱ

HAMANN¹

ⁱ “What Tarquin the Proud said in his garden by means of the poppies was understood by the son, but not by the messenger.”

#[101]#

PREFACE

Not only in the world of business, but also in that of ideas, our times are holding ein wirklicher Ausverkauf [a real clearance sale]. Everything can be had for such absurdly low prices that in the end it becomes a question as to whether anyone will want to make a bid. Every speculative scorekeeper who conscientiously calculates the momentous progress of modern philosophy, every lecturer, teaching assistant, university student, every one of philosophy's outliers and insiders does not remain standing at the point of doubting everything,¹ but goes further.² Perhaps it would be ill timed and untimely to ask them where they really are going, but it is surely polite and modest to take it for granted that they have doubted everything, for otherwise it would indeed be odd to say that they have gone further. They have all taken this preliminary step, then, and presumably so easily that they do not find it necessary to say a word about how they did it; for not even someone who, in anxiety and concern, sought a bit of enlightenment, found anything of that sort:ⁱ a hint of guidance, a little dietary prescription about how one comports oneself in undertaking this enormous task. "But of course, Descartes has done it, hasn't he?" Descartes, an honorable, humble, honest thinker, whose writings no one can read without the most profound emotion: he did what he said, and said what he did. Alas!

Alas! Alas! this is a great rarity in our times! As Descartes himself so frequently repeats, he did not doubt with respect to faith. (“Memores tamen, ut jam dictum est, huic lumini naturali tamdiu tantum esse credendum, quamdiu nihil contrariam **#[102]#** a Deo ipso revelatur. ... Præter cætera autem, memoriæ nostræ pro summa regula est infigendum, ea quæ nobis a Deo revelato sunt, ut omnium certissima esse credenda; et quamvis forte lumen rationis, quam maxime clarum et evidens, aliud quid nobis suggerere videretur, soli tamen auctoritati divinæ potius quam proprio nostro iudicio fidem esse adhibendam.”ⁱⁱ See *Principia philosophiæ*, pars prima [*Principles of Philosophy*, part 1] §28 and §76). He did not shout “Fire!” and make it everyone’s obligation to doubt, for Descartes was a quiet, solitary thinker, not a bellowing night watchman; he modestly confessed that his method had significance only for himself and was based in part on his earlier, bungled knowledge. (Ne quis igitur putet, me hic traditurum aliquam methodum, quam unusquisque sequi debeat ad recte regendam rationem; illam enim tantum, quam ipsemet secutus sum, exponere decrevi. ... Sed simul ac illud studiorum curriculum absolvi [sc. juventutis], quo decurso mos est in eruditorum numerum cooptari, plane aliud coepi cogitare. Tot enim me dubiis totque erroribus implicatum esse animadverti, ut omnes discendi conatus nihil aliud mihi profuisse iudicarem, quam quod ignorantium meam magis magisque dexteissem.ⁱⁱⁱ Cfr. *Dissertatio de methodo* [See *Discourse on Method*], pp. 2 and 3).³ — What those ancient Greeks (who, after all, did have a bit of understanding of philosophy) assumed to be the task for an entire lifetime because expertise in doubting is not acquired in days or weeks; what was attained by the old, veteran combatant⁴ (who had preserved the equilibrium of doubt through every seductive snare, fearlessly denying the certainty of the senses and of thought, uncompromisingly defying the anxiety of self-love and the flattering advances of sympathy)—in our times, this is where everyone begins.

In our times, no one remains standing at faith, but goes further. It would perhaps be foolhardy to pose the question of where they are going; on the other hand, it is a sign of courtesy and cultivation for me to assume that everyone has faith, for otherwise “going further” would be a peculiar way of speaking. In those old days it was different: then, faith was a task for one’s entire life because people

assumed that the capacity to have faith **#[103]#** was not acquired either in days or weeks. When the old man, tried and tested, approached his end, had fought the good fight^{iv} and kept the faith, then his heart was youthful enough not to have forgotten that anxiety and trembling which had disciplined the youth, which the man certainly mastered, but which no person ever entirely outgrows—unless, that is, one were to succeed, the sooner the better, in going further. So, the point at which those venerable figures arrived—*that* is where everyone in our times begins, in order to go further.

The present author is by no means a philosopher, he has not understood the System⁵—whether it exists, whether it is completed—this itself is already enough for his weak head: the thought of what an enormous head everyone in our times must have because everyone has such an enormous thought. Even if one were able to restate the entire content of faith in conceptual form, it does not follow that one has grasped faith, grasped how one entered into it or how it entered into oneself. The present writer is by no means a philosopher, he is, poetice et eleganter [to express it poetically and in elegant fashion], a supplementary clerk who neither writes the System nor makes any *promises* concerning the System,⁶ who neither obligates himself to write about the System nor obligates himself *to* the System. He writes because for him it is a luxury that is all the more pleasant and palpable, the fewer there are who purchase and read what he writes. He easily foresees his fate in an age when people have written off passion in order to serve scientific scholarship, a time when an author who wants to have readers must take care to write in such a way that people can leaf through the pages during an afternoon nap, and he must take care to conduct himself in the manner of that polite gardener's apprentice in *Adresseavisen*,⁷ who, hat in hand and with references from his most recent place of employment, recommends himself to a highly respected public. He foresees his fate: to be utterly ignored; he has intimations of something frightful: the numerous floggings to which he will be subjected by zealous critics; he trembles at what is even more frightful: that one or another busy scholarly bureaucrat, who

gorges on paragraphs (who, in order to rescue scientific scholarship is always willing to do to someone else's writings what Trop magnanimously did with **#[104]#** *The Destruction of the Human Race*,⁸ in order "to preserve good taste"), who will cut him up into paragraphs, and who thus, with the same inflexibility as the man who, in service to the science of punctuation, divided up his speech in accordance with the word-count, so that there were fifty words before a period and thirty-five before a semicolon. — I prostrate myself in the most profound subservience before every systematic customs inspector: "This is the not the System, it has not the least thing to do with the System. I invoke all blessings upon the System and upon Danes who hold shares in that omnibus⁹ (for it will scarcely become a tower).^v I wish all of them, collectively and individually, good fortune and blessings."

Most respectfully,
Johannes de silentio.

ⁱ Variant: instead of "found anything of that sort," which appears in the first printing of the first edition, the fair copy as submitted to the printer has "found anything of that sort, not even in Hegel's writings."

ⁱⁱ "At the same time we should remember, as noted earlier, that the natural light is to be trusted only to the extent that it is compatible with divine revelation. ... But above all else we must impress upon our memory the overriding rule that whatever God has revealed to us must be accepted as more certain than anything else. And although the light of reason may, with the utmost clarity and evidence, appear to suggest something different, we must still put our entire faith in divine authority rather than in our own judgement," from René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 202–3, 210.

ⁱⁱⁱ "My present aim, then, is not to teach the method which everyone must follow in order to direct his reason correctly, but only to reveal how I have tried to direct my own. ... But as soon as I had completed the course of study at the end of which one is normally admitted to the ranks of the learned, I completely changed my opinion. For I found myself beset by so many doubts and errors that I came to think I had gained nothing from my attempts to become educated but increasing recognition of my ignorance."

- iv See 2 Tim. 4:7.
- v See Luke 14:28–30.

#[105]#

TUNING UP

Once upon a time there was a man who as a child had heard the beautiful storyⁱ of how God tempted Abraham and how he withstood the temptation, kept the faith, and contrary to expectation, received a son a second time. When he grew older, he read the same story with even greater admiration, for life had separated what had been united in the pious simplicity of the child. The older he became, the more often his thoughts turned to that story; his enthusiasm for it became greater and greater, and yet he was less and less able to understand the story. Finally, the story caused him to forget everything else; his soul had only one wish: to see Abraham; one longing: to have been witness to that event. He desired not to see the beautiful regions of the East, nor the earthly splendor of the Promised Land,ⁱⁱ nor that God-fearing couple whose old age God had blessed,ⁱⁱⁱ nor the venerable form of the aged patriarch, nor the vigorous youth God had granted Isaac—he would not have objected if it had taken place on the barren heath. His desire was to follow along on that three-day journey, when Abraham rode with sorrow ahead of him and Isaac beside him. His wish was to be present at the moment when Abraham lifted his eyes and beheld Mount Moriah in the distance, the moment when he left the donkeys behind and went up the

mountain alone with Isaac; for what concerned him was not the artistic tapestry of the imagination, but the shudder of thought.

That man was not a thinker, he felt no need to go beyond faith; it seemed to him that the most splendid thing was to be remembered as its father, an enviable destiny to possess, even if no one knew of it. **#[106]#**

That man was not a learned exegete, he knew no Hebrew; had he known Hebrew he might perhaps have easily understood the story and Abraham.

#[107]#

I

And God tempted Abraham and said to him, take Isaac, your only son, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain that I will show you.^{iv}

IT WAS EARLY MORNING, Abraham arose early, and he had the donkeys saddled, left his tent, and took Isaac with him,^v but Sarah watched them through the window as they went down through the valley, until she saw them no more.^{vi1} They rode in silence for three days. On the morning of the fourth day Abraham said not a word, but lifted up his eyes and saw Mount Moriah in the distance. He left the servant boys behind and went up the mountain only with Isaac, taking him by the hand. But Abraham said to himself: "I will indeed not conceal from Isaac where this path is leading him." He stood still, he placed his hand upon Isaac's head in blessing, and Isaac bowed down in order to receive it. And Abraham's countenance was fatherly, his look was gentle, his voice admonitory. But Isaac could not understand him, his soul could not be lifted up; he clasped Abraham's knees,² he pleaded at his feet, he begged for his young life, for his sanguine hopes; he called to mind the joy in Abraham's house, he called to mind the sorrow and the loneliness. Then Abraham raised the boy up and walked with him, taking his hand, and his words were full of consolation and exhortation. But Isaac could not understand him. He

climbed Mount Moriah, but Isaac did not understand him. Then he turned away from him for a moment, but when Isaac looked upon Abraham's countenance for the second time, it was transformed: the look in his eyes was wild, his form one of terror. He seized Isaac by the breast, threw him to the ground, and said: "Foolish boy, do you think I am your father? I am an idolater. Do you think this is God's command? No, it is my desire." Then Isaac trembled, and in his anguish he cried out: "God in heaven, have mercy on me, God of Abraham, have mercy on me—if I have no father on earth, **#[108]#** then you be my father!" But Abraham said softly to himself: "Lord in heaven, I thank you; it is after all better that he believe me to be a monster than that he should lose faith in you."

*
* *

When the child is to be weaned, the mother blackens her breast. It would of course be a shame for the breast to look so inviting when the child must not have it. So the child believes that the breast has changed, but the mother is the same, the look in her eyes is as loving and tender as ever. Fortunate the person who has not had need of more frightful means to wean the child!

#[109]#

II

IT WAS EARLY IN the morning, Abraham arose early, he embraced Sarah, the bride of his old age, and Sarah kissed Isaac, who had taken away her disgrace,³ who was her pride, her hope for all generations.^{vii} Then they rode along the way, unspeaking, and Abraham's gaze was fixed upon the ground until, on the fourth day, he lifted up his eyes and saw Mount Moriah in the distance, but his gaze turned back again to the ground. Unspeaking, he arranged the wood for the fire, bound Isaac; unspeaking, he drew the knife; then he saw the ram that God had chosen. He sacrificed it and returned home. — — — From that day forth, Abraham was old, he could not forget that God had required this of him. Isaac throve as he had before; but Abraham's eye was darkened, he saw joy no more.

*
* * *

When the child has grown and is to be weaned, the mother virginally conceals her bosom, so the child no longer has a mother. Fortunate the child who did not lose its mother in another fashion!

#[110]#

III

IT WAS EARLY IN the morning, Abraham arose early; he kissed Sarah, the new mother, and Sarah kissed Isaac, her delight, her joy forever. And Abraham rode down the path, full of thoughts; he thought of Hagar and her son, whom he had driven out into the desert.^{viii} He climbed Mount Moriah, he drew the knife.

It was a quiet evening when Abraham rode out alone, and he rode to Mount Moriah. He cast himself down upon his face, he begged God to forgive him his sin, that he had been willing to sacrifice Isaac, that the father had forgotten his duty toward his son. He often rode his lonely way, but he had^{ix} no peace. He could not comprehend that it was a sin to have been willing to sacrifice to God the best he possessed, that for which he would gladly have laid down his life many times; and if it was a sin, if he hadn't loved Isaac like this, then he could not understand that it could be forgiven: for what sin could be more frightful than this?

*
* * *

When the child is to be weaned, then the mother, too, is not without sorrow that she and the child are to be separated more and more; that the child, which first lay under her heart, and later rested upon

her breast, will no longer be so close. So they sorrow the brief sorrow together. Fortunate the one who kept the child so close and had no need of further sorrow!

#[111]#

IV

IT WAS EARLY IN the morning. In Abraham's house everything had been made ready for the journey. He took leave of Sarah, and Eliezer,⁴ the faithful servant, accompanied him along the way until he turned back again. They rode together as one, Abraham and Isaac, until they came to Mount Moriah. But Abraham prepared everything for the sacrifice, calmly and gently, but when he turned aside and drew the knife, Isaac then saw that Abraham's left hand was clenched in despair, that a shudder went through his body—but Abraham drew the knife.

Then they returned home, and Sarah hastened to meet them, but Isaac had lost the faith. Never in the world was there said a word about it, and Isaac never spoke to anyone about what he had seen, and Abraham did not suspect that anyone had seen it.

*
* * *

When the child is to be weaned, the mother has stronger food ready so that the child will not perish. Fortunate the person who has stronger food at hand!

In these and in many similar ways, did the man of whom we speak think about this event. Every time, after having gone to Mount Moriah and returned home, he collapsed with weariness, folded his hands, and said: “Indeed, no one was as great as Abraham—who is capable of understanding him?”

i See Gen. 22:1–19.

ii Presumably a reference to Gen. 12:1–2 and 17:8.

iii See Gen. 18:17–18.

iv See Gen. 22:1–2. Here and elsewhere, Kierkegaard gives a close paraphrase of the 1740 Danish translation of the Old Testament, which was the authorized version in his time.

v See Gen. 22:1–2.

vi See Judith 10:10.

vii See Gen. 12:1–3, 17:2–21.

viii See Gen. 16 and 21:9–21.

ix Variant: instead of “he had” (Danish, *han havde*), which appears in the first printing of the first edition, both the fair copy as submitted to the printer and Kierkegaard’s draft have “he found” (Danish, *han fandt*).

#[112]#

IN PRAISE OF ABRAHAM

If there were no eternal consciousness in a person; if the foundation of everything were only a wild, fermenting power which, writhing in dark passions, brought forth all that is great and all that is insignificant; if, concealed beneath everything, there were an unfathomable and insatiable emptiness—what then would life be but despair? If this were the way things are, if there were no sacred ties that bound humanity together; if the one generation succeeded the other like leaves in the forest;¹ if a generation passed through the world as a ship passes through the sea, as wind through the desert, an unthinking, fruitless activity; if an eternal oblivion, incessantly hungry, lay in wait for its prey, and there were no power strong enough to wrest it away—how empty and devoid of consolation would life be! But for that very reason, it is not so, and, as God created man and woman, so did he form the hero and the poet or orator. The latter can do nothing of what the former does—he can only admire, love, and delight in the hero. Yet he, too, is happy, no less than the hero, for the hero is, as it were, the better part of his being, with which he is in love, though happy that it is not himself, happy that his love can be admiration. He is the genius of recollection, he can do nothing but draw attention to what has been done, do nothing but admire what has been done; he takes nothing

of his own, but watches carefully over what has been entrusted to him. He obeys his heart's choice, but when he finds what he has sought, he walks about, stopping at every man's door with his song and his story, so that all might admire the hero as he does, be proud of the hero as he is. This is his achievement, his humble task; this is his **#[113]#** faithful service in the house of the hero. Thus does he remain faithful to his love; night and day he contends with the treachery of oblivion that wants to steal the hero from him; when he has fulfilled his task, he is gathered up with his hero, who has loved him equally faithfully, for the poet is, as it were, the better part of the hero's being—to be sure, powerless, as memory is, but also transfigured, as memory is. Therefore, no one who was great shall be forgotten, and even if it takes a long time and the hero is taken away by a cloud of misunderstanding,² nonetheless his lover comes, and the more time that passes, the more faithfully he adheres to him.

No! No one who was great in the world shall be forgotten, but everyone was great in his own way, and everyone in proportion to the greatness of what *he loved*. For the person who loved himself became great by himself, and the person who loved others became great by his devotion, but the person who loved God became greater than all. Everyone shall be remembered, but each became great in proportion to his *expectation*. One became great by expecting the possible; another by expecting the eternal; but the one who expected the impossible became greater than all. Everyone shall be remembered, but each was great in proportion to the greatness of that with which he *struggled*. For the one who struggled with the world became great by conquering the world, and the one who struggled with himself became great by conquering himself,ⁱ but the one who struggled with God was greater than all.ⁱⁱ Thus there was strife in the world, man against man, one against thousands, but he who strove with God was greater than all. Thus there was strife on earth: there was one who conquered everything through his power; and there was one who conquered God with his weakness. There was one who depended upon himself and won everything; and there was one who, secure in his own strength, sacrificed everything; but

the one who believed God was greater than all. There was one who was great through his power; and there was one who was great through his wisdom, and one who was great through his hope, and one who was great through his love, but Abraham was greater than all, great through the power whose strength is weakness,ⁱⁱⁱ great through the wisdom whose secret is foolishness,^{iv} whose form is madness, great through the love that is hatred of oneself.^v

By faith, Abraham left the land of his fathers and became a stranger in the Promised Land.^{vi} He left one thing behind and took one thing with him: he left his worldly understanding behind, and he took faith with him—otherwise he would certainly not have gone forth, but would have thought that it was indeed unreasonable. By faith, he was a **#[114]#** stranger in the Promised Land, and there was nothing that reminded him of what was dear to him, but with its novelty everything tempted his soul to indulge in wistful nostalgia. And yet he was God's chosen one,^{vii} in whom the Lord was pleased!^{viii} Indeed, if he had been disinherited, cast away from God's grace, he would have been better able to understand it—now it was as if it were a mockery of him and of his faith. There was also in the world one who lived in exile from the land of his fathers that he loved.³ He has not been forgotten, nor has his lament when, in sorrow, he sought and found what had been lost. There is no lament by Abraham. It is human to lament, human to weep with the one who weeps,^{ix} but it is greater to have faith, more blessed to behold the person of faith.

By faith, Abraham received the promise that all the nations of the earth would be blessed in his seed.^x Time passed, the possibility was there, Abraham had faith; time passed, it became unreasonable, Abraham had faith. There was a person in the world who also had an expectation.⁴ Time passed, evening approached, he was not so wretched as to have forgotten his expectation; therefore neither will he be forgotten. Then he sorrowed, and the sorrow did not deceive him as life had; it did for him everything it could: he possessed his disappointed expectation in the sweetness of sorrow. It is human to

sorrow, it is human to sorrow with the sorrowful, but it is greater to have faith, it is more blessed to behold the faithful one. We have no song of sorrow from Abraham. He did not sorrowfully count the days as time passed; he did not cast suspicious looks upon Sarah, concerning whether she had not grown old; he did not stop the sun in its course^{xi} so that Sarah would not grow old and, with her, his expectation; he did not soothe Sarah, singing her his melancholy refrain. Abraham grew old, Sarah became the laughingstock of the land, and yet he was God's chosen one and the heir of the promise that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. So, would it have been better if he had not been God's chosen one? What is it to be God's chosen one? Is it to be denied, in one's youth, the desire of youth, in order to have it fulfilled, with great difficulty, in one's old age? But Abraham had faith and held fast to the promise. If Abraham had wavered, he would have abandoned it. He would have said to God: "Then perhaps it is not your will that it shall happen,^{xii} so I will abandon the wish; it was my sole wish, it was my blessedness. My soul is upright, I am not concealing any covert rancor because you denied it." He would not have been forgotten, he would have # [115]# saved many by his example, but he would not have become the father of faith; for it is great to abandon one's wish, but it is greater to hold fast to it after having abandoned it. It is great to grasp the eternal, but it is greater to hold fast to the temporal after having given it up. — Then came the fullness of time.^{xiii} If Abraham had not had faith, then Sarah would probably have died of sorrow, and Abraham, deadened with grief, would have failed to understand the fulfillment, but would have smiled at it as a youthful fantasy. But Abraham had faith; therefore he was young, for the person who always hopes for the best, he grows old, deceived by life, and the person who is always prepared for the worst: he becomes old before his time—but the person who has faith: he preserves his eternal youth. Therefore, let this story be praised! For Sarah, despite her advanced age, was young enough to desire the joys of motherhood, and Abraham, despite his gray locks, was young enough to wish to be a father. In the superficial sense, what was miraculous lay in the

circumstance that it took place in accordance with their expectation; in the deeper sense, the marvel of faith consists in the fact that Abraham and Sarah were young enough to wish and that faith had preserved their wish and, along with it, their youth. He accepted the fulfillment of the promise; he accepted it in faith; and this took place in accordance with the promise and in accordance with faith—for Moses struck the rock with his staff, but he did not have faith.^{xiv}

There was joy in Abraham's house, when Sarah stood as a bride on their golden wedding anniversary.

But that was not how it was to remain: Abraham was to be tried yet again. He had fought against that cunning power which contrives everything, against that vigilant foe that never slumbers, against that old man who survives everything—he had fought against time⁵ and had kept the faith. Now all the terror of the struggle was concentrated in a single moment. "And God tempted Abraham and said to him, take Isaac, your only son, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain that I will show you."^{xv}

So then all was lost, more frightfully than if it had never happened! So the Lord had only been mocking Abraham! Miraculously, he had made actual that which was against reason: now he would see it obliterated again. It was of course madness, but Abraham did not laugh as Sarah had when the promise had been proclaimed.^{xvi} All was lost! seventy years of faithful expectation, the brief joy at faith's fulfillment. Who is **#[116]#** it, then, who seizes the staff from the old man, who is it who requires that he himself must break it! Who is it who deprives a person's gray locks of consolation, who is it who requires that he himself must do it! Is there no compassion for the venerable old man, none for the innocent child! And yet Abraham was God's chosen one, and it was the Lord who subjected him to the trial. Now all was to be lost! The glorious remembrance of posterity, the promise in Abraham's seed, it was only a whim, a fleeting thought the Lord had had, which Abraham was now to obliterate. That splendid treasure^{xvii} that was as old as the faith in Abraham's heart, many, many years older than Isaac, the

fruit of Abraham's life, sanctified with prayer, matured in struggle—the blessing on Abraham's lips: this fruit was now to be ripped away, untimely, and become meaningless, for what meaning would it have if Isaac was to be sacrificed! That sorrowful but nonetheless blessed hour when Abraham would take leave of all he held dear, when he would lift up his venerable head one more time, when his countenance would shine like the Lord's,^{xviii} when he was to summon together the whole of his soul for a blessing mighty enough to make Isaac blessed all his days—that hour would not come! For Abraham would certainly take leave of Isaac, but in such a way that he himself would remain behind; death would separate them, but in such a way that Isaac would be its quarry. The old man would not, happy in death, lay his hand upon Isaac in blessing, but, weary of life, lay violent hands upon Isaac. And it was God who tested him. Indeed, woe! Woe to the messenger who came to Abraham with such news! Who would have dared be the emissary of this sorrow? But it was God who tested Abraham.

Yet Abraham had faith, and had faith for this life. Indeed, had his faith been only for a life to come, he would of course more easily have cast everything away in order to be hastily quit of the world to which he did not belong. But Abraham's faith was not of this sort, if there is a faith of this sort—for that is not really faith, but the most distant possibility of faith, which at the farthest margin of its field of vision suspects the presence of its object but is separated from it by a yawning gulf^{xix} within which despair plays its tricks. But Abraham had faith precisely for this life, that he would grow old in the land, honored by the people, blessed by his generation, remembered forever through Isaac, the dearest he had in life, whom he embraced with a love—a love that it would simply be inadequate to describe as a father's duty to love his son, as indeed is echoed in **#[117]#** the command: The son whom you love.^{xx} Jacob had twelve sons, and one whom he loved;^{xxi} Abraham had only one, whom he loved.

But Abraham had faith and did not doubt; he had faith in that which was contrary to reason. If Abraham had doubted—then he would have done something else, something great and glorious, for

how could Abraham do anything other than what is great and glorious! He would have journeyed out to Mount Moriah, he would have split the firewood, lit the fire, drawn the knife—he would have cried out to God: “Do not disdain this sacrifice; it is not the best I own—that I know well, for what is an old man compared to a child of promise—but it is the best I can give you. Let Isaac never come to know of this, so that he might console himself with his youth.” He would have plunged the knife into his own breast. He would have been admired in the world and his name would not be forgotten, but it is one thing to be admired, something else to be a guiding star^{xxii} who saves those who are in distress.

But Abraham had faith. He did not pray for himself, that he might move the Lord; it was only when the deserved punishment was meted out to Sodom and Gomorrah^{xxiii} that Abraham interceded with his prayers.

We read in those Holy Scriptures: “And God tempted Abraham and said: ‘Abraham, Abraham, where are you?’ but Abraham answered: ‘Here am I.’”^{xxiv} You, to whom my discourse is addressed, was this how it was with you? When you saw dire events approaching from far off, did you not say to the mountains, “Conceal me”? did you not say to the heights, “Fall upon me”?^{xxv} Or, if you were stronger, did not your foot move slowly along the path, did not you long to be back on the old track, as it were? When you were called, did you answer, or did you not answer, perhaps softly and in a whisper? Not so with Abraham: he answered joyfully, undaunted, confidently, volubly: Here am I. We read further: “and Abraham arose early in the morning.”^{xxvi} He hurried along, as if to a celebration, and early in the morning he was at the appointed place, on Mount Moriah. He said nothing to Sarah, nothing to Eliezer: who could have understood him? Indeed, had not the temptation itself required of him a vow of silence? “He split the firewood,^{xxvii} he bound Isaac,^{xxviii} he lit the fire, he drew the knife.”^{xxix} My listener! There was many a father who believed that with his son he lost what was dearest to him in the world, that he was bereft of every hope for the future, but of course there was no one who was the child of promise in the sense

that Isaac was for Abraham. There was many a father who lost his child, but of course that was **#[118]#** the unchanging and unfathomable will of God, the Almighty, his hand, that took it. Not so with Abraham. A more arduous test was reserved for him, and Isaac's fate, along with the knife, was placed in Abraham's hand. And he stood there, the old man, with his only hope! But he did not doubt, he did not look anxiously to the right or to the left, he did not beseech heaven with his pleas. He knew that it was God the Almighty who was testing him; he knew that it was the most severe sacrifice that could be required of him, but he also knew that if God required it, no sacrifice was too burdensome—and he drew the knife.

Who strengthened Abraham's arm, who held his right arm lifted so that it did not sink down in impotence!^{xxx} Whoever looks upon this is paralyzed. Who strengthened Abraham's soul,^{xxxi} so that everything did not go black before his eyes, leaving him unable to see either Isaac or the ram! Whoever looks upon this goes blind. — And yet it is perhaps quite rarely that a person is paralyzed or goes blind, and even more rarely is there anyone who worthily relates what happened. We all know it—it was only a test.

If, when he stood there on Mount Moriah, Abraham had doubted, if he had looked about in confusion, if, before he drew the knife, he had by chance discovered the ram, if God had permitted him to sacrifice it instead of Isaac—then he would have gone home, everything would have been the same: he would have had Sarah, he would have kept Isaac—and yet how changed! For his return would have been a flight, his deliverance an accident, his reward shame, his future perhaps perdition. Then he would have borne witness neither to his faith nor to God's grace, but to how frightful it is to ascend Mount Moriah. Then Abraham would not have been forgotten—nor would Mount Moriah: it would not be spoken of like Ararat, where the ark landed,^{xxxii} but as something frightful, for it was here that Abraham doubted.

Venerable Father Abraham! When you returned home from Mount Moriah, you had no need of any words of praise to console you for what was lost, for of course you gained everything and kept Isaac—was it not so? The Lord did not take him from you again, but you sat happily at table with him in your tent, as you do in the hereafter for all eternity.^{xxxiii} Venerable Father Abraham! Millennia **#[119]#** have passed since those days, but you have no need of any latter-day lover to wrest your memory from the grasp of oblivion, for every language calls you to mind—and yet you reward your lover more splendidly than anyone: in the hereafter, you make him blessed in your bosom;^{xxxiv} here, you captivate his eye and his heart with the marvel of your deed. Venerable Father Abraham! Second father of the human race! You, who were the first to sense and to testify to that enormous passion which disdains the frightful battle against the raging elements and the powers of the created world in order to strive with God; you, who were the first to know that highest passion, the holy, pure, humble expression of the divine madness that was revered by the pagans⁶—forgive someone who would speak in praise of you if he has not done so properly. He spoke humbly, as was his heart’s desire; he spoke briefly, as is seemly; but he shall never forget that you needed 100 years^{xxxv} to get, against expectation, a son of your old age, that you had to draw the knife before you kept Isaac; he shall never forget that in 130 years you got no further than faith.

ⁱ See Prov. 16:32.

ⁱⁱ See Gen. 32:25–30; see esp. v. 28, where, after wrestling with the angel, Jacob is given a new name: “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed”; see also Hosea 12:3–4.

ⁱⁱⁱ See 2 Cor. 12:1–10, esp. vv. 9–10.

^{iv} See 1 Cor. 3:18–19.

^v A possible allusion to John 12:25.

^{vi} An allusion to Heb. 11:8–20, esp. vv. 8–9; see also Gen. 17:8, 35:27.

- vii See Luke 23:35.
- viii See Matt. 12:18, 17:1–5; Isa. 42:1.
- ix An allusion to Rom. 12:15.
- x See Gen. 22:18; see also Gen. 12:1–3, 17:2–21; Gal. 3:8.
- xi See Josh. 10:12–13.
- xii See Matt. 26:38–39.
- xiii See Gal. 4:4–5; Eph. 1:8–10.
- xiv See Exod. 17:6; Num. 20:1–12.
- xv See Gen. 22:1–2.
- xvi See Gen. 18:12, but see also Gen. 17:17.
- xvii Perhaps a reference to Gen. 12:2.
- xviii Perhaps a reference to Matt. 17:2.
- xix Perhaps an allusion to Luke 16:26.
- xx See Gen. 22:2.
- xxi See Gen. 35:23–26, 37:3.
- xxii Presumably an allusion to Matt. 2:9.
- xxiii See Gen. 18:23–33.
- xxiv See Gen. 22:1–3. Here, and in the rest of the paragraph, Kierkegaard alters the account in Gen. 22. Thus, in including “where are you?” Kierkegaard inserts a line from Gen. 3:9, where God calls Adam, who has hidden himself in his nakedness.
- xxv See Hosea 10:8 and Luke 23:28–30.
- xxvi See Gen. 22:1–3.
- xxvii See Gen. 22:3.
- xxviii See Gen. 22:9.
- xxix See Gen. 22:10.
- xxx See Exod. 17:8–13.
- xxxi Presumably an allusion to Luke 22:43.
- xxxii See Gen. 8:4.
- xxxiii An allusion to Jesus’s words in Matt. 8:11.
- xxxiv See Luke 16:19–31.
- xxxv See Gen. 21:5.

#[120]#

#[121]#

Problemataⁱ

ⁱ Greek, “problems.” It appears here in Kierkegaard’s transliteration; in the following sections, Kierkegaard uses the singular form, “problema.”

#[122]#

#[123]#

PRELIMINARY: GETTING SOMETHING OFF MY CHEST¹

An old proverb, taken from our external and visible world, says: “Only the one who works gets the bread.”ⁱ Curiously enough, the proverb does not fit into the world to which it most belongs, for the external world is subject to the law of imperfection, and here it happens again and again that also the one who does not work gets the bread and that the one who sleeps receives it more plentifully than the one who works. In the external world, everything belongs to the person who has it; it toils under the law of indifference, and the spirit of the ring obeys the one who has the ring, whether he is a Nouredin or an Aladdin,² and whoever has the treasures of this world has them, regardless of how he got them. In the world of the spirit, things are different. Here there reigns an eternal divine order; here it does not rain upon both the just and the unjust;ⁱⁱ here the sun does not shine upon both the good and the wicked; here it is the case that only the one who works gets the bread, only the one who was in anxiety finds rest, only the one who descends to the underworld rescues the beloved,³ only the one who draws the knife receives Isaac. The one who does not work does not get the bread, but is deceived as the gods deceived Orpheus with an airy vision

instead of the beloved, deceived him because he was fainthearted, not courageous, deceived him because he was a lyre player, not a man.⁴ Here it does not help to have Abraham as one's fatherⁱⁱⁱ or to have seventeen ancestors—what is written about the virgins of Israel holds for the person who will not work: He gives birth to wind.^{iv} But the person who will work gives birth to his own father.

There is a sort of knowledge that presumptuously wants to introduce into the world of spirit the same law of indifference under which the external world suffers.^v It thinks that it is sufficient to know what is great; no other work **#[124]#** is necessary. But for this reason it does not get bread, it dies of hunger while everything transforms itself into gold.⁵ And what does it know, in fact? There were many thousands in the Greece of his times, and innumerable more in later generations, who knew about all the triumphs of Miltiades, but there was only one who became sleepless because of them.⁶ There were countless generations who knew the story of Abraham by heart, word for word—how many did it make sleepless?

The story of Abraham has the remarkable property that it always remains splendid, however poorly one understands it, though here again what counts is whether one is willing to labor and be heavy laden.^{vi} But people do not want to labor and nonetheless want to understand the story. People honor Abraham with their words, but how? People express the whole affair quite generally: "What was great was that he loved God in such a way that he was willing to sacrifice to him the best he had."^{vii} This is very true, but the "best" is a vague expression. In the course of their thinking and talking, people quite confidently identify Isaac with the best, and the meditator can surely smoke his pipe while meditating, and the listener can very well stretch out his legs in comfort. If that rich young man whom Christ met along the way^{viii} had sold all his possessions and given the money to the poor, we would praise him, as with everything that is great, although we would not understand him without working. But nevertheless, even if he had sacrificed what was his best, he would not have become an Abraham. What people omit from Abraham's story is the anxiety, for I have no ethical

obligation to money, but a father has the highest and holiest obligation to a son. Anxiety, however, is a perilous matter for the faint of heart, so people put it out of mind, yet they nevertheless want to talk about Abraham. Someone speaks of it, then, and in the course of time uses the terms "Isaac" and "the best" interchangeably—everything goes splendidly. If, however, it happened that among the listeners there was a man who suffered from insomnia, then the most frightful, the most profound, tragic, and comic misunderstanding would lay very close at hand. He went home. He wanted to do precisely as Abraham had done, for, after all, his son was the best. If that speaker learned of it, he would perhaps go to the man, he would summon up all his clerical dignity and shout: "Loathsome man, scum of society, what devil has possessed you thus, that you want to murder your son." And the priest, who had not noticed any trace of warmth or perspiration while preaching on Abraham, was surprised at himself over the earnest wrath with which he thundered against that poor man; he was pleased with himself, for he had never spoken with such **#[125]#** forceful zeal. He said to himself and his wife: "I am an orator. What I have lacked was the occasion—when I spoke about Abraham last Sunday, I did not feel the least bit carried away." If that same speaker had possessed an extra bit of rationality to spare, I think he would have lost it if the sinner had replied, in calm and dignified fashion: "It was of course what you yourself preached about last Sunday." How could the priest get something of this sort into his head? And yet it was of course true, and the error lay simply in the fact that he had not known what he was saying. Alas, that there is no poet who could choose to prefer situations such as this to the stuff and nonsense that fill up comedies and novels! Here, the comic and the tragic touch upon each other in absolute infinity. In itself, the priest's discourse was perhaps ridiculous enough, but in its effect it became infinitely ridiculous, yet this was entirely natural. Or suppose the sinner, without actually making any objection, had been converted by the severity of the priest's lecture—suppose that zealous cleric had gone home happy, happy in the consciousness that not only had he been effective from the pulpit, but, above all, as a spiritual counselor with irresistible

powers: for on Sunday, he inspired the congregation, while on Monday, like a cherub with a flaming sword,^{ix} he confronted the person who would put to shame the old adage that in the world things do not happen in the way the priest preaches.*

If, on the other hand, the sinner was not convinced, then his situation is truly tragic. Then he will presumably be executed or sent to the madhouse—in short he would have become unhappy in relation to so-called actuality; in another sense, I indeed think that Abraham made him happy, for the person who works does not perish.

How can one explain a contradiction such as that speaker's? Is it because Abraham has acquired a prescriptive right to be considered a great man, so that whatever he does is great, and if someone else does the same thing, it is sin, sin that cries out to heaven? In that case, I have no desire to participate in such **#[126]#** mindless praise. If faith cannot transform willingness to murder one's son into a holy act, then let the same judgment fall upon Abraham as upon all others. If, perhaps, one lacks the courage to think one's thought through, to say that Abraham was a murderer, then it is surely better to acquire that courage than to waste time on undeserved words of praise. The ethical expression for what Abraham did is that he was willing to murder Isaac. The religious expression is that he was willing to sacrifice Isaac. But it is precisely in this contradiction that the anxiety is situated, the anxiety that indeed can make a person sleepless, and yet, without this anxiety, Abraham is not who he is. Or perhaps Abraham simply did not do what is related about him. Perhaps, because of the way things were in those days, he did something entirely different. Then let us forget him, for what's the use of taking the trouble to remember *that* past that cannot become a present? Or had that speaker perhaps forgotten something—something equivalent to an ethical forgetfulness of the fact that Isaac was the son? If, indeed, by becoming null and void, faith is taken away, then the only thing remaining is the naked fact that Abraham was willing to murder Isaac, which is easy enough to imitate for

anyone who does not have faith, that is, the faith that makes it difficult for him.

For my part, I do not lack the courage to think a thought whole. I have not yet feared any; should I come upon such a thought, then I hope I would at least have the honesty to say: "I am afraid of this thought, it stirs up something strange within me, and therefore I will not think it." If in doing this, I do wrong, I surely will not escape punishment. If I had conceded as true the judgment that Abraham was a murderer, I don't know whether I could have silenced my veneration of him. But if I had thought that, I probably would have kept quiet about it, for one ought not initiate others into such thoughts. But Abraham is no fantasy, he did not sleep his way to renown, he does not owe his fame to a quirk of fate.

Is it possible, then, to speak unreservedly of Abraham without risking that a confused individual goes and does likewise? If I did not dare do so, I would say nothing whatever about Abraham, and, above all, I would not reduce his proportions so that, precisely by my speaking of him, he becomes a snare for the weak. For indeed, if one makes faith everything—that is, makes it what it in fact is—then, in my view, one may surely dare speak of it in our times, which can scarcely be said to abound in faith, and it is only by faith, not by murder, that one achieves likeness with Abraham. If one makes # [127]# love into a fleeting mood, a sensual emotion in a person, then, in wanting to speak of the achievements of love, one merely sets snares for the weak. Everyone, of course, has passing emotions, but if, on that basis, everyone therefore wanted do the frightful thing that love has sanctified as an immortal achievement, then all would be lost, both the achievement and the individual who had gone astray.

So it is certainly permissible to speak of Abraham, for what is great can never cause harm when it is understood in its greatness: it is like a two-edged sword^x that both kills and saves. If it were my lot to speak of it, I would begin by pointing out what a devout and God-fearing man Abraham was, worthy of being called God's chosen one. Only such a person is subjected to a test such as this, but who is

such a person? Next, I would depict how Abraham loved Isaac. In this connection, I would ask for the assistance of all people of good will, so that my discourse might possess the fervency of a father's love. Then I hope to be able to depict it in such a way that not many a father in the realms and lands of the king would dare assert that he loved like this. But if he did not love as Abraham did, then indeed every thought of sacrificing Isaac would be a spiritual trial. This is something one could speak about for more than a few Sundays—indeed, there is no need to rush. If this were spoken of properly, the result would be that a number of fathers would not insist on hearing any more, but for the time being would be happy if they were actually able to succeed in loving as Abraham loved. If, then, there was one person who, having heard about the greatness but also about the frightfulness of Abraham's deed, dared go down that road, I would saddle my horse and ride with him. Until we reached Mount Moriah, at every stopping point along the way I would explain to him that he could still turn back, that he could repent of his misunderstanding about having been called to be tried in such a struggle, that he could confess that he was lacking in courage, so that if God wanted Isaac, he would have to take him himself. I am convinced that such a person is not repudiated, that he can be saved with all the others, but not in the temporal world. Even in the most devout ages, would not a person of this sort be judged in this fashion? I have known someone who at one point could have saved my life if he had been magnanimous. He straightforwardly said: "I certainly see what I could do, but I dare not. I am afraid that afterward I shall lack strength, that I shall regret **[128]** it." He was not magnanimous, but who would cease loving him for that reason?

Then, when I had spoken these words, when I had moved my audience so that they had at least sensed faith's dialectical struggle and its immense passion, then I did not want my listeners to fall into the error of thinking "Well, his faith is so great that it will be sufficient for us to hold on to his coattails."^{xi} Thus I would add: "By no means do I have faith. I am by nature a shrewd fellow, and every such person always has great difficulty in making the movement of faith—

albeit without attributing *any value to this difficulty, which, when a shrewd fellow overcomes it, does not bring him any further than to the point at which the most plain and simple person arrives more easily.*"

Love, after all, has poets for its priests, and sometimes one hears a voice that knows how to honor it. But not a word is heard about faith: who speaks in honor of this passion? Philosophy goes further. Theology sits in the window, all tartered up, courting favor, offering to sell philosophy its delights. Supposedly, it is difficult to understand Hegel, but understanding Abraham is a bagatelle. To go beyond Hegel is a miracle,⁷ but going beyond Abraham is the simplest of all things. For my part, I have expended no small amount of time on understanding the Hegelian philosophy, and I also believe that I have more or less understood it: I am foolhardy enough to believe that if, despite my having taken the trouble, there are various points at which I do not understand him, then he himself has surely not been entirely clear. All this is something I do easily, naturally—my head does not suffer from doing so. When, on the other hand, I must consider Abraham, I am as if annihilated. At every moment I see that enormous paradox that constitutes the content of Abraham's life; at every moment I am repelled, and despite all its passion, my thought cannot penetrate it, cannot get a hairsbreadth further. I strain every muscle to catch sight of it, and at that same instant I am paralyzed.

I am not unacquainted with what the world has admired as great and magnanimous. My soul feels kinship with it and in all humility is satisfied that it was for my cause as well that the hero fought—when I contemplate it, I cry out to myself: *jam tua res agitur* [now this also involves you].⁸ I *think* myself *into* the hero; I cannot think myself into Abraham. When I reach that height, I fall down, for what is offered me is a paradox. Nevertheless, **#[129]#** by no means do I think that faith is something lesser, but on the contrary, that it is what is highest, and also that it is dishonest of philosophy to give something else in its place and to look down upon faith. Philosophy cannot and must not give faith, but must understand itself, know what it has to offer, take nothing away, and least of all deceive people out of

something as though it were nothing. I am not unacquainted with life's troubles and perils; I do not fear them, and I confront them undaunted. I am no stranger to what is frightful: my memory is a faithful spouse, and my imagination, unlike myself, is a diligent little maid who sits quietly at her work all day and in the evening knows how to talk to me so sweetly that I must take a look at it, even if what she paints are not always landscapes or flowers or idyllic pastoral scenes. I have looked what is frightful in the eye, and I don't flee from it in terror, but I know very well that although I confront it courageously, my courage is not, after all, the courage of faith and is nothing in comparison to it. I cannot make the movement of faith, I cannot shut my eyes and hurl myself confidently into the absurd; that is an impossibility for me, but I do not congratulate myself on that account. I am convinced that God is love.^{xii} This thought has a primal, lyrical validity for me. When it is present to me, I am unspeakably blessed; when it is absent, I yearn for it more earnestly than the lover yearns for the object of his love. But I do not have faith—this courage I lack. For me, God's love is incommensurable, both directly and inversely, with the whole of actuality. I am not so fainthearted as to whine and complain because of this, but neither am I so duplicitous as to deny that faith is something much higher. I am quite able to endure living as I do; I am happy and content, but my joy is not that of faith, and in comparison with that is in fact unhappy. I do not burden God with my petty troubles, individual matters do not concern me. I simply gaze fixedly at my love and keep its virginal flame pure and clear. Faith is convinced that God concerns himself with the least things. In this life, I am satisfied to be married to the left hand; faith is humble enough to demand the right hand, for I do not deny and shall never deny that this is humility.

I wonder whether, in my times, anyone is actually capable of making the movement of faith? Unless I am very much mistaken about my times, they are far more likely to be proud of doing what they surely do not even think I am capable of doing: the imperfect movement. My soul is opposed to doing what is **#[130]#** so often done: speaking in inhuman fashion about what is great, as if several

millennia constituted an enormous distance; I prefer to speak of it in human fashion, as if it happened yesterday, and let the distance—which either elevates or passes judgment—be constituted only by the greatness itself. If, therefore (*in the capacity of tragic hero*, for I cannot get any higher than that) I had been commanded to undertake such an extraordinary royal progress as the one to Mount Moriah, I know well what I would have done. I would not have been so cowardly as to stay home, nor would I have dawdled about on the road, nor forgotten the knife in order to delay things a bit. I am quite certain that I would have been right on time, that I would have had everything ready—perhaps I would even have arrived too early, so that it would be quickly over and done with. But I also know what else I would have done. At the moment I mounted the horse, I would have said to myself, “Now all is lost. God requires Isaac. I am sacrificing him and, with him, all my joy—yet God is love and for me continues to be so, for in the temporal realm God and I cannot speak with one another, we do not share a common language.” Perhaps someone or other in our day would be foolish enough, envious enough of the great, to want to get himself or me to believe that if I had actually done that, I would have done something even greater than what Abraham did, for my enormous resignation would have been far more ideal and poetic than Abraham’s narrow-mindedness. And yet this is the greatest of untruths, for my enormous resignation was a surrogate for faith. Nor, indeed, could I have done more than make the infinite movement in order to find myself and regain my equilibrium. Nor would I have loved Isaac as Abraham loved. Humanly speaking, that I was resolute in making the movement could serve as proof of my courage; that I loved him with all my soul is the presupposition without which the whole affair becomes something reprehensible. But I would not, however, have loved as Abraham had, for in that case I would have held back at the very last minute, without on that account having arrived late at Mount Moriah. Furthermore, my conduct would have ruined the entire story, for had I received Isaac again, I would have been in an awkward position. What had been easiest for Abraham would have been difficult for me: to be once again joyful with Isaac! Because the person who,

with the infinity of his entire soul, *proprio motu et propriis auspiciis* [by one's own impulse and on one's own behalf], has made the infinite movement and cannot do more: it is only in the pain that he retains Isaac.

But what did Abraham do? He arrived neither too *early* nor too **# [131]#** late. He mounted the donkey, he rode slowly along the way. During all that time, he had faith: he had faith that God would not require Isaac of him, while he was nonetheless willing to sacrifice him if it was required. He had faith by virtue of the absurd, for there certainly could not be any talk of human calculation, and it was of course absurd that God, who required this of him, should revoke the requirement the next instant. He ascended the mountain; even at the instant the knife glittered, he had faith—that God would not require Isaac. Then he was surely surprised at the outcome, but through a double movement he had come back to his prior state, and therefore he received Isaac even more joyfully than the first time. Let us go further. We let Isaac actually be sacrificed. Abraham had faith. He did not have faith that one day he would be blessed in the hereafter, but that he would be happy here in the world. God could give him a new Isaac, call back to life the one sacrificed. He had faith by virtue of the absurd, for indeed all human calculation had long since ceased. Sorrow can put a person out of his senses: this is something one sees, and it is quite sad. That there is a strength of will that beats so far up into the wind that it rescues the understanding, even if a person does become a bit strange: this is also something one sees, and I have no intention of disparaging it. But to lose one's reason and, with it, the whole of finitude for which it is the broker—and then, by virtue of the absurd, to gain that same finitude: this terrifies my soul, but I do not on that account say that it is something paltry, for, on the contrary, it is the only marvel. People generally hold the view that what faith produces is not a work of art, that it is coarse and ill mannered, something solely for the coarser sort of people, yet it is something very different. The dialectic of faith is the finest and most extraordinary of all. It has a loftiness of which I can form a notion, but nothing more than that. I can make a tremendous jump on a trampoline that hurls me into infinity; my spine is like that of a

tightrope walker, contorted since my youth, and thus it is easy for me: I can walk through existence on my head, one-two-three! But I cannot do what comes next. For I cannot perform the marvel, but only be astounded by it. Indeed, if, the moment he swung his leg over the donkey's back, Abraham had said to himself: "Now Isaac is lost. I might just as well sacrifice him here as travel the long road to Moriah"—then I would have no need of Abraham, whereas now I bow seven times before his name and seventy times^{xiii} before his deed. This, indeed, **#[132]#** he did not do, which I can prove from the fact that he received Isaac with joy—truly heartfelt joy—that he needed no preparation, no time, in order to embrace finitude and its joys. If this was not how it was with Abraham, then he would perhaps have loved God, but would not have had faith, for the person who loves God without faith reflects upon himself—the person who loves God in faith reflects upon God.

It is upon this pinnacle that Abraham stands. The last stage that he left behind, out of sight, is infinite resignation. He actually goes further and comes to faith. For all these caricatures of faith—the pitiable, lukewarm indolence that thinks: "There is of course no emergency, it's not worth worrying about before it happens;" the wretched hope that says: "One cannot know what will happen; after all, it could be possible ...": these travesties have their place in life's squalor, and they have already been infinitely despised by infinite resignation.

Abraham I cannot understand; in a certain sense, I cannot learn anything from him other than to be astonished. If people imagine that by considering the outcome of this story they can let themselves be moved into having faith, they deceive themselves and want to cheat God out of the first movement of faith; they want to suck sage counsel about life out of the paradox. Perhaps someone or other will succeed in this, for our times do not remain standing at faith, with its miracle of turning water into wine:^{xiv} they go further, they turn wine into water.

Would it not in fact be best to remain standing at faith, and is it not shameful that everyone wants to go further? When, in our times

—and this is of course proclaimed in a variety of ways—people do not want to remain standing at love, where are they going, then? To worldly shrewdness, narrow-minded calculation, to wretchedness and misery, to everything that can cast doubt upon humanity's divine origin.^{xv} Would it not be best that a person remained standing at faith, and that the person who is standing took care not to fall,^{xvi} for the movement of faith must always be made by virtue of the absurd, though, note well, in such a way that a person does not lose finitude, but gains it wholly and completely. For my part, I can certainly describe the movements of faith, but I cannot make them. If a person wants to learn the movements of swimming, he can put on a harness and suspend himself from the ceiling: he will certainly describe the movements, but he is not swimming. In the same way, I can describe the movements of faith, but when I am thrown into the water, I certainly do swim (for I am not one of those who wade), but I make other **#[133]#** movements, I make the movements of infinity, whereas faith does the opposite: after having made the movements of infinity, it makes those of finitude. Fortunate, then, the person who can make those movements: he performs a marvel, and I shall never tire of admiring him; whether it be Abraham or a servant in Abraham's house, whether it be a professor of philosophy or a poor serving-maid is a matter of complete indifference to me—I look only at the movements. But those I do indeed look at, and I do not let myself be fooled, either by myself or by anyone else. It is easy to recognize the knights of infinite resignation: their step is light, intrepid. On the other hand, those who bear the treasure of faith⁹ easily deceive, because their external appearance bears a striking similarity to what both infinite resignation and faith profoundly despise: bourgeois philistinism.

I honestly confess that I have not found any reliable example of this in the course of my work, though I do not for that reason deny that perhaps every second person is such an example. Nonetheless, for many years I have indeed searched for one in vain. People commonly travel all over the world to see rivers and mountains, new stars, brightly colored birds, monstrous fishes, ridiculous races of

human beings; people abandon themselves to a bestial stupor that gawks at existence—and think they have seen something. That sort of thing does not engage my interest. On the other hand, if I knew where a knight of faith lived, I would walk there on foot, for that marvel engages me absolutely. I would not let go of him for an instant; at every moment I would observe how he made the movements; I would view myself as provided for in life and would divide my time between observing him and practicing the exercises myself, and in this way devote all my time to venerating him. As I have noted, I have not found any such person, but I can nonetheless imagine him. Here he is. I make his acquaintance, I am introduced to him. From the very moment I lay eyes on him, I immediately thrust him away, and I myself jump back, clap my hands together, and say, half aloud: “Good Lord! Is this the person? Is he really him? For he looks just like a tax collector.” But it really is him. I draw a bit closer to him, watching for the slightest movement, to see if there might not be a little, heterogeneous bit of a telegraphic message from infinity, a glimpse, a mien, a gesture, a sorrow, a smile that betrayed the infinite in its heterogeneity with the finite. No! I examine his figure from head to toe, to see whether there might not **#[134]#** be a crevice through which the infinite peeped out. No! He is solid through and through. His footing? It’s sturdy, belonging entirely to finitude. No elegantly dressed bourgeois who goes out for a Sunday afternoon walk in Frederiksberg¹⁰ treads the earth more solidly. He belongs entirely to the world—no bourgeois philistine could belong to it more than he. There is none of that distant and distinguished air by which one recognizes the knight of the infinite. He takes delight in everything, takes part in everything, and every time one sees him participate in something, he does it with a diligence typical of the worldly person whose soul is engrossed with such things. He attends to his work. When one looks at him, one would think he was a scrivener who had given his soul to double-entry bookkeeping, so meticulous is he. He takes time off on Sundays. He goes to church. He discloses no heavenly gaze, nor does he betray any sign of the incommensurable; if one did not know him, it would be impossible to

distinguish him from the rest of the crowd, for his powerful hymn-singing attests, at most, to his healthy lungs. In the afternoon, he goes for a walk in the forest. He takes delight in everything he sees, in the crowds of people, the new omnibuses,¹¹ the Sound.¹² When you encounter him on the Strand Road,¹³ you would think he was a mercantile fellow who was feeling his oats: this is precisely how he enjoys himself, for he is not a poet, and I have sought in vain to lure forth from him any poetic incommensurability. Toward evening, he walks home, his gait as untiring as that of a postman. On his way, he reflects that his wife probably has a special little warm dish ready for him when he comes home, for example, a roast head of lamb with vegetables. If he met someone like-minded, he could continue to talk about this dish with a passion befitting a restaurateur, right up to Østerport.¹⁴ As it happens, he doesn't have four shillings¹⁵ to his name, and yet he fully and firmly believes that his wife has that delicious dish waiting for him. If she has it, to see him eat it would be a sight for fine folk to envy, and for common folk, something inspiring, for his appetite is greater than Esau's.^{xvii} His wife does not have it: curiously enough, he is entirely the same. Along the way he passes a building site and encounters another man. They talk for a moment: the man is erecting a building in no time at all, he has at his disposal everything necessary. The stranger leaves him, thinking: "That was surely a capitalist," while my admired knight thinks: "Well, if it were necessary, I could surely get it." He **#[135]#** lounges at an open window and looks out upon the square where he lives: everything that is going on—a rat slipping under a gutter plank, children playing—engages him utterly peacefully with existence, as though he were a girl of sixteen. And yet he is no genius, for I have sought in vain to detect in him the incommensurability of genius. He smokes his pipe in the evening; when you look at him, you could swear he was the pork butcher across the way, vegetating in the dusk. He is easygoing and is as carefree as if he were a frivolous do-nothing, and yet every moment of his life he purchases the opportune moment^{xviii} at the highest price, for he does not do the least thing except by virtue of the absurd. And yet, yet—indeed, I

could get furious about it, if for no other reason, then out of envy—yet this person has made, and at every instant is making, the movement of infinity. In infinite resignation, he drains the profound sadness of existence. He knows the blessedness of infinity. He has felt the pain of forsaking everything, those things in the world a person holds most dear, and yet finitude tastes fully as good to him as to someone who has never known anything higher, for his remaining in finitude had no trace of dispirited, anxiety-ridden tutelage—and yet he possesses this self-assurance to delight in it, as though it were the most certain thing of all. And yet, yet the entirety of this earthly figure he presents is a new creation^{xix} by virtue of the absurd. He infinitely resigned everything, and then he grasped it again by virtue of the absurd. He continually makes the movement of infinity, but he does so with such precision and certainty that he continuously gets finitude out of it, and not for an instant does one suspect anything else. It is said that the most difficult task for a dancer is to leap into a specific position in such a way that at no instant is he reaching for the position, but is in that position in the leap itself. Perhaps no dancer is capable of doing this—this is what that knight does. The great mass of people live lost in worldly worries and joys: these are the ones who sit along the wall, they do not join the dance. The knights of the infinite are dancers and possess elevation. They make the upward movement and fall down again, and this is not a bad pastime, nor is it unpleasant to look upon. But every time they fall down, they are unable immediately to assume the position, they waver for an instant, and this wavering shows that they are indeed foreigners in the world. This can be more or less obvious, depending on the talent they possess, but nonetheless even the most talented **#[136]#** of these knights cannot conceal this wavering. One does not need to see them in the air, one need see them only at the instant they touch the earth and have touched it—and one recognizes them. But to be able to fall in such a way that at that same second it looks as though one were standing and walking, to transmute the leap in life into walking,¹⁶ to express absolutely the

sublime in the pedestrian—that is something only that knight can do—and that is the only marvel.

But this marvel can easily deceive. Therefore, I will describe the movements in a specific case that can illuminate their relation to actuality, for that is the crux of the matter. A young lad falls in love with a princess. The entire content of his life is contained in this love, and yet the situation is such that it would be impossible for this to become a reality, impossible for it to be translated from ideality to reality.[†] Naturally, the slaves of wretchedness, the frogs in the swamp of life, screech: “A love of this sort is foolishness, and the brewer’s rich widow is just as good and reliable a match.” Let them go on croaking in the swamp, undisturbed. The knight of infinite resignation does not act thus—he does not forsake love, not for all glories of the world. He is no fool. First, he makes certain that this really is the content of his life, and his soul is too healthy and dignified to squander the least bit on intoxication. He is no coward; he is not afraid to let it steal into his most secret, most secluded thoughts, to let it entwine itself in innumerable twists and turns around every ligament of his consciousness—if his love becomes unhappy, he will never be able to wrest himself free of it. He senses a blissful delight in letting this love surge through his every nerve, and yet his soul is as solemn as that of someone who has drained the cup of poison¹⁷ and feels how the liquid penetrates every drop of his blood—for this moment is life and death. When he has thus imbibed the entirety of love and has immersed **#[137]#** himself in it, he does not lack the courage to attempt and to venture everything. He surveys his situation in life; he summons fleet-winged thoughts that follow his every command like trained doves; he waves his wand over them, and they rush off in every direction. But then, when they all return, every one of them a messenger of sorrow, explaining to him that it is an impossibility—then he becomes silent, he dismisses them, he remains alone, and then he makes the movement. If what I am saying here is to have any meaning, what matters is that the movement take place properly.[‡] First, the knight will have the strength to concentrate the entire content of life and the whole

significance of actuality in one single wish. If a person lacks this concentration, this resolve, if, right from the start, his soul is to be dispersed into the multifarious, he never comes to make the movement. In his life he will behave shrewdly, like the financiers who invest their money in all the various stocks and bonds, in order to make a profit on the one when they suffer a loss on the other—in short, he is no knight. Next, the knight will have the strength to concentrate the entire result of his thought in one act of consciousness. If he lacks this resolve, if his soul, right from the start, is dispersed into the multifarious, then he will never have time to make the movement; in life, he will continually run errands and he will never enter into eternity, for at the very moment he is closest to it, he will suddenly discover that he has forgotten something, so that he must go back. **#[138]#** At the next instant he will think, “Is it possible?”—and indeed it is, but by making observations of this sort, one never comes to make the movement, but with their help one sinks deeper and deeper into the mire.

So the knight makes the movement, but which movement? Will he forget the entire matter, for indeed, in that, too, there is a sort of concentration? No! for the knight does not contradict himself, and it is a contradiction to forget the entire content of one’s life and yet remain the same. He feels no inclination to become someone else, and he does not in any way regard that as great. Only inferior natures forget themselves and become something new. Thus the butterfly has utterly forgotten that it was a cabbage worm; perhaps it can, in turn, so completely forget that it was a butterfly that it can become a fish.²¹ The more profound natures never forget themselves and never become other than what they were. The knight, then, will recollect everything, but precisely this recollection is the pain, and yet in this infinite resignation he is reconciled with existence. The love for that princess became for him the expression of an eternal love; it took on a religious character, transfigured into a love for the eternal Being that, indeed, denied him fulfillment, yet reconciled him once again in the eternal consciousness of its validity in an eternal form that no actuality can take from him. Fools and

young people chatter about everything being possible for a person. This, however, is a great error. Spiritually speaking, everything is possible, but in the world of finitude there is much that is not possible. The knight, however, makes this impossible possible by expressing it spiritually, but he expresses it spiritually by renouncing it. The wish that would lead him forth into actuality but was shipwrecked upon the impossibility is now turned inward, but it is not therefore lost, nor is it forgotten. At times, the obscure movements of the wish within him awaken the recollection; at other times, he himself awakens it—for he is too proud to be willing to let what was the entire content of his life be a matter of a fleeting moment. He keeps this love young, and as the years pass, it grows, as he does, in years and in beauty. On the other hand, he has no need of any finite occasion for its growth. From the moment he made the movement, the princess is lost. He has no need of those erotic titillations, by seeing the beloved etc., nor, in the finite sense, has he any need to be constantly bidding her farewell, because he recollects her in the eternal sense, and he knows very well that the lovers who are so keen on bidding one another farewell for the last time, yet again, are right to be so keen on it, and right to think it is the last time, for they forget one another soonest of all. He has grasped the profound secret that even in loving another person one ought to be sufficient unto oneself. He pays no attention, in the finite sense, to what the princess does, and this itself proves that he has made the movement infinitely. Here one has the opportunity to see whether the individual's movement is genuine or feigned. There was a person who also believed that he had made the movement—but look, time passed, the princess did something else, she married a prince, for example, and then his soul lost the elasticity of resignation. From this, he showed that he had not made the movement properly, for the person who has resigned infinitely is sufficient unto himself. The knight does not annul his resignation, he preserves his love as youthful as it was at the first moment; he never relinquishes it, precisely because he has made the movement infinitely. He cannot be disturbed by what the princess does—it is only the lower natures, whose actions are governed by premises

external to themselves, who find in someone else the law for their actions. If, on the other hand, the princess is like-minded, something beautiful will emerge. Then she will present herself to the knightly order of which one becomes a member not by ballot, but of which everyone who possesses the courage to join becomes a member—the knightly order that proves its immortality from the fact that it makes no distinction between man and woman. She, too, will preserve her love young and vibrant; she, too, will have overcome her agony, even if she does not, as it says in the ballad, “Lie every night beside her lord.”²² These two, then, will for all eternity be suited for one another with such a firm and regular *harmonia præstabilita* [preestablished harmony]²³ that if there ever came a moment—a moment that does not concern them in a finite sense, for if it did, they would grow old—if ever a moment came at which they would be permitted to express their love in the temporal world, they would then be capable of beginning at the precise point at which they would have begun if they had been united originally. The person who understands this, be it man or woman, can never be deceived, for it is only the lower natures who imagine they are deceived. No girl lacking this pride truly understands how to love, but if she has this pride, then all the cunning and shrewdness in the world cannot deceive her. **#[140]#**

In infinite resignation there is peace and repose; every person who wants it, who has not degraded himself by self-contempt (which is even more frightful than being overly proud), can discipline himself into making this movement, which in its pain reconciles a person with existence. Infinite resignation is that shirt told of in the old legend:²⁴ the thread is spun under tears, bleached with tears, the shirt is sewn in tears—but then it indeed provides better protection than iron and steel. The flaw in the legend is that the linen can be prepared by a third party. The secret in life is that everyone must sew it for himself, and the remarkable feature is that a man can sew it fully as well as a woman. In infinite resignation there is peace and repose and consolation in the pain—that is, when the movement is made in normal fashion. It would not, however, be difficult for me to write an

entire book if I wanted to enumerate the various misunderstandings, the awkward positions, the slipshod movements I have encountered in my scant practice. People believe very little in spirit, and yet spirit is precisely what matters in making this movement: it is important that it not be the one-sided result of a *dira necessitas* [dire necessity],²⁵ and always, the more this is present, the more doubtful it is that the movement is normal. Thus, if one prefers to think that cold, barren necessity must be present, one is thereby saying that no one can experience death before he actually dies, which seems to me crass materialism. But in our times people are less concerned about making pure movements. If someone who wanted to learn how to dance were to say “Now, for centuries, one generation after another has learned positions—it’s high time that I profit from this and, without further ado, start right off with the French dances,” people would surely laugh a little at him. But in the world of spirit, people find this extremely plausible. What, then, is education? I should have thought it was the course through which the individual runs in order to catch up with himself; and the person who does not want to run through that course is helped very little, even if he is born in the most enlightened age.

Infinite resignation is the final stage prior to faith, so that everyone who has not made that movement does not have faith. For only in infinite resignation do I become transparent to myself in my eternal validity, and only then can there be talk of grasping existence by virtue of faith. **#[141]#**

We will now let the knight of faith present himself in the case under discussion. He does exactly the same as the other knight: he infinitely renounces the love that constitutes the content of his life, he is reconciled in pain. But then the marvel takes place: he makes still another movement, more wondrous than all, for he says: “And yet I have faith that I will get her—namely, by virtue of the absurd, by virtue of the fact that for God, all things are possible.”^{xx} The absurd is not among the distinctions that lie within the proper limits of the understanding. It is not identical with the improbable, the unforeseen, the unanticipated. At the instant he resigned, the knight was

convinced of the impossibility, humanly speaking; this was the conclusion reached by the understanding, and he possessed sufficient energy to think it. In the infinite sense, on the other hand, it was possible—that is, by relinquishing it; but this possessing is of course also a giving up. Yet to the understanding, this possessing is no absurdity, for the understanding continued to maintain, correctly, that in this world of wretchedness^{xxi} where the understanding reigns, it was and remains an impossibility. The knight of faith is conscious of this with equal clarity. Thus, the only thing that can save him is the absurd, and this he grasps by faith. Accordingly, he acknowledges the impossibility, and at that same instant he has faith in the absurd. For if he were to imagine that he has faith without wholeheartedly acknowledging the impossibility with the full passion of his soul, he would be deceiving himself, and his testimony has no validity anywhere, for he has not even come to infinite resignation.

Faith, therefore, is no aesthetic emotion, but something much higher, precisely because it has resignation as its presupposition. It is not the immediate inclination of the heart, but is the paradox of existence. Thus, if, despite all difficulties, a young girl retains the conviction that her wish will surely be fulfilled, this certitude is not at all that of faith, and this is true even though she was brought up by Christian parents and had perhaps spent an entire year attending confirmation lessons given by her priest. In all her childlike naiveté and innocence, she is certain, and indeed this certitude ennobles her being and gives her a supernatural dimension, so that, wizardlike, she is able to conjure forth the finite powers of existence and make the very stones weep,²⁶ while on the other hand, in her befuddlement, she can just as easily run from pillar to post and move the entire world with her pleas. Her certitude is very lovable, and one can learn a great deal from her, but there is one thing a person cannot learn from her: one cannot learn to make **#[142]#** movements, for in the pain of resignation, her certitude does not dare look the impossibility in the eye.

I am indeed capable of comprehending that it takes strength and energy and freedom of spirit to make the movement of infinite

resignation. I am also able to comprehend that it can be done. What comes next astonishes me; my head spins, for after having made the movement of resignation, then, by virtue of the absurd, to receive everything, to receive what one has wished for, to receive it entire, unabbreviated: this is beyond human powers, this is a marvel. But this much I can comprehend, that the young girl's certitude is mere folly in comparison with faith's unyieldingness despite its having comprehended the impossibility. Every time I want to make that movement, everything goes black: at that same instant I admire it absolutely, and at that same instant my soul is seized by an enormous anxiety, for what is it, then, this tempting God? And yet this is the movement of faith, and that is what it remains, even if philosophy, in order to confuse the concepts, wants to make us believe that it has faith, even if theology wants to sell it off at a bargain price.

Resignation does not require faith, for what I gain in resignation is my eternal consciousness, and this is a purely philosophical movement which I am confident I can make when it is required and which I can discipline myself to make, for every time some finite matter wants to overwhelm me, I starve myself out until I make the movement, because my eternal consciousness is my love of God, and for me that is higher than everything. Resignation does not require faith, but to gain the least bit more than my eternal consciousness does require faith, for that is the paradox. People often confuse the movements. People say that one needs to have faith in order to renounce everything—indeed, one hears what is even stranger, that someone laments having lost his faith, and when one looks at the scale to see where he is, one sees, curiously enough, that he has only come to the point at which he should make the movement of infinite resignation. Through resignation, I renounce everything, I make this movement by myself, and if I do not make it, it is because I am cowardly and soft and without enthusiasm and do not sense the importance of the great dignity assigned to every human being: to be one's own censor, which is far loftier than to be Censor General of the entire Roman Republic.²⁷ I make this

movement on my own, and in doing so what I acquire is myself in my eternal consciousness, in blessed harmony **#[143]#** with my love for the eternal Being. Through faith I do not renounce anything. On the contrary, through faith I indeed receive everything, precisely in the sense in which it is said that the person who has faith like a mustard seed can move mountains.^{xxii} A solely human courage is required to renounce the whole of temporality in order to gain the eternal, but this I do gain, and I cannot in all eternity renounce it—that would be a self-contradiction. But a paradoxical and humble courage is required in order then to grasp the whole of temporality by virtue of the absurd, and this is the courage of faith. It was not through faith that Abraham renounced Isaac, but it was through faith that Abraham received Isaac. That rich young man^{xxiii} should have given away everything by virtue of resignation; then the knight of faith should have said to him: “By virtue of the absurd, you will regain every penny, you can believe that!” And these words would not have been without significance to the formerly rich young man, for had he given away all his possessions because he was tired of them, then his resignation was rather paltry.

Temporality, finitude is what it all depends on. By my own strength I can renounce everything and then find peace and repose in the pain; I can put up with everything—even if that frightful demon, more frightful than the skeleton which terrifies people, even if madness held the fool’s motley before my eyes and I understood from its look that it was I who should wear it—as long as what is more important to me than my earthly happiness is that my love of God be victorious within me, I can still save my soul. Even at this last moment, a person can still gather his entire soul in one single glance toward heaven, from whence comes every good gift,^{xxiv} and this glance will be understood by himself and by the one whom it seeks as signifying that he nonetheless remained true to his love. Then he shall calmly don the fool’s motley. The person whose soul does not possess this romanticism has sold his soul, whether he got a kingdom for it, or some wretched silver coins.^{xxv} But by my own strength I cannot get the least bit of what belongs to finitude, for I am

continually using all of my strength to resign everything. By my own strength I can give up the princess, and I will not sulk but will find joy and peace and repose in my pain, but by my own strength I cannot get her back again, for I use precisely all of my strength to resign. But by faith, as that marvelous knight says, by faith you shall get her by virtue of the absurd.

Look, this movement I cannot make. As soon as I want to begin # [144]# on it, everything reverses itself and I flee back into the pain of resignation. I can swim in life, but I am too heavy for this mystical hovering. To exist in such a way that, at every instant, my opposition to existence expresses itself as the most beautiful and confident harmony with it: that I cannot do. And yet it must be splendid to get the princess: this I say at every instant, and the knight of resignation who does not say it: he is a deceiver, he has not had one solitary wish, and he has not kept the wish young in his pain. Perhaps there was someone who found it quite convenient that the wish was no longer alive, that the barb of pain was blunted, but someone like that is no knight. A freeborn soul who caught himself doing this would despise himself and start over again and above all not permit his soul to deceive itself. And yet it must be splendid to get the princess—and yet the knight of faith is the only happy one, the heir apparent of finitude, while the knight of resignation is a stranger and a foreigner.^{xxvi} To get the princess in this way, to live with her cheerfully and happily, day in and day out (for this, too, could of course be imagined: that the knight of resignation could get the princess, but that his soul had perceived the impossibility of their future happiness), to live like this, cheerfully and happily at every instant by virtue of the absurd, at every instant to see the sword suspended over the beloved's head,²⁸ and yet not to find repose in the pain of resignation, but joy by virtue of the absurd—this is marvelous. The person who does it is great, the only great one—the thought of it stirs my soul, which has never hesitated to admire what is great.

If indeed every person in my times who is unwilling to remain standing at faith were a man who has grasped life's terror and has understood what Daub means when he says that a soldier who

stands alone, with a loaded musket, at his post beside a powder magazine on a stormy night gets queer thoughts;²⁹ if every person who is unwilling to remain standing at faith were a man who had the strength of soul to grasp the thought that the wish was for something impossible, and then gave himself the time to be alone with that thought; if every person who is unwilling to remain standing at faith were a man who was reconciled in pain and reconciled through pain; if every person who is unwilling to remain standing at faith were a man who thereafter (and if he has not done all that precedes this, he should not inconvenience himself when there is talk of faith) performed the marvel, grasped the whole **#[145]#** of existence by virtue of the absurd—then what I am writing is the loftiest praise of the times by the lowliest person in these times, who is capable only of making the movement of resignation. But why, then, are people not willing to remain standing at faith, why do we sometimes hear that people are ashamed to admit that they have faith? This is something I cannot comprehend. If ever I am able to come to the point of being able to make that movement, I will in the future ride in a coach and four.³⁰

Is it really so? Is all the bourgeois philistinism I see in life—which I do not permit myself to judge by my words, but by my deeds—is it not actually what it seems to be, is it the marvel? This is indeed thinkable, for that hero of faith indeed bore a striking likeness to it; for that hero of faith was not even an ironist or a humorist, but something still loftier. In our times there is much talk of irony and humor, especially by people who have never managed to practice them, but who nonetheless know how to explain everything. I am not entirely unacquainted with these two passions;³¹ I know a bit more about them than what is found in German and German-Danish compendiums. Therefore I know that these two passions are essentially different from the passion of faith. Irony and humor also reflect upon themselves and therefore belong to the sphere of infinite resignation; they have their elasticity in the fact that the individual is incommensurable with actuality.

The final movement, the paradoxical movement of faith, whether it be a duty or anything else, I cannot make, despite the fact that I would more than gladly do it. Whether someone has the right to say this must be left to that person to decide; whether he can come to an amicable agreement concerning this remains a matter between him and the eternal Being who is the object of faith. What every person can do is that he can make the movement of infinite resignation, and for my part I would not hesitate to label cowardly any person who wants to imagine that he is incapable of doing it. With faith, it is another matter. But what no one is permitted to do is to lead others to believe that faith is something inferior or that it is something easy, whereas it is the greatest and most difficult of things.

People understand the story of Abraham in another way. They laud God's grace for having restored Isaac to him—the whole affair was only a trial. A trial: this word can say a lot and a little, and yet the whole affair is over as soon as it is said. We mount a **#[146]#** winged horse and at that very instant we are atop Mount Moriah. At that very instant we see the ram. We forget that Abraham only rode upon a donkey, that it went on its way slowly, that he had a three-day journey, that he needed time to split the firewood, to bind Isaac, and to sharpen the knife.

And yet people praise Abraham. The orator might just as well sleep until fifteen minutes before he is to speak; the listener might just as well sleep during the talk, for everything goes along smoothly enough, without any difficulties from any of the parties. If there were someone present who suffered from insomnia, perhaps he went home, sat in a corner, and thought: "The whole thing is a minute's business—you just wait a minute, then you see the ram, and the trial is over." If the orator were to meet him when he was in this state, I think he would confront him with his full dignity and say: "Wretch, to let your soul sink into such foolishness. No miracle takes place, and all of life is a trial." And as the orator continued with his outburst, he would become increasingly effusive, more and more pleased with himself, and although he had not noticed his face flushing when he had spoken of Abraham, he now felt how the vein in his forehead bulged. Perhaps he would have been dumbstruck had the sinner

replied, in calm and dignified fashion: “But it was what you yourself preached about last Sunday.”

So, either let us write off Abraham or let us learn to be appalled at this enormous paradox that is his life’s significance, so that we might understand that our age, like every age, can rejoice if it has faith. If Abraham is not a nullity, a phantom, some bit of frippery we use to pass the time, then the error can never be that the sinner wanted to do likewise; rather, what is important is to see the greatness of Abraham’s deed, so that the man can judge for himself whether he has the vocation and the courage to be tried by something of this sort. The comical contradiction in the orator’s conduct was that he made Abraham into someone insignificant and yet wanted to prevent the other person from behaving in like manner.

Should we, then, not dare speak of Abraham? Yet I believe we should. Were I to speak of him, I would first depict the pain of the trial. To that end, leechlike, I would suck all the anxiety and distress and agony out of a father’s suffering so that I might describe what Abraham suffered, while during all this, he nonetheless had faith. I would point out that the journey lasted three days and a good part of the fourth—indeed, those three and a half days **#[147]#** should become infinitely longer than the couple of thousand years that separate me from Abraham. Then I would remind them—of what is in fact my own view—that nonetheless every person may dare turn back before embarking on this sort of thing and that at every moment he can repent of it and turn back. If this is done, then I fear no danger, nor do I fear awakening in people a desire to be tried as Abraham was. But if someone wants to market a bargain-price edition of Abraham and nonetheless prohibit everyone from doing as he did, that is ridiculous.

Thus, then, my intention in telling the story of Abraham is to extract from it, in the form of problems, the dialectical element it contains, so that we might see what an enormous paradox faith is, a paradox that is capable of turning a murder into a holy act that is well-pleasing to God, a paradox that restores Isaac to Abraham, which no thinking can master, because faith begins precisely at the point where thinking leaves off.

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- i See 2 Thess. 3:10–12.
- ii See Matt. 5:45.
- iii See Matt. 3:8–9.
- iv See Isa. 26:18.
- v See Rom. 8:20–22.
- vi See Matt. 11:28–30.
- vii Presumably an allusion to John 3:16.
- viii See Matt. 19:16–22.
- ix See Gen. 3:24.
- x Perhaps a reference to Heb. 4:12.
- xi See Matt. 9:20–22.
- xii See 1 John 4:8.
- xiii Matt. 18:21–22.
- xiv See John 2:1–10.
- xv See Gen. 1:27.
- xvi See 1 Cor. 10:12.
- xvii See Gen. 25:29–34.
- xviii See Eph. 5:15–16; see also Col. 4:5.
- xix See 2 Cor. 5:17.
- xx See Matt. 19:26; Mark 10:27, 14:36; Luke 18:27; see also Gen. 18:14.
- xxi Variant: instead of “of wretchedness,” which appears in the first printing of the first edition, both the fair copy as submitted to the printer and Kierkegaard’s draft have “of finitude.”
- xxii See Matt. 17:20.
- xxiii See Matt. 19:16–22 and Mark 10:17–22.
- xxiv See James 1:17.
- xxv An allusion to Matt. 26:15.
- xxvi An allusion to Heb. 11:8–20, esp. vv. 8–9; see also Gen. 17:8, 35:27.

* In the old days they said: It is a shame that in the world things do not happen in the way the priest preaches. Perhaps there will come a time, especially with the help of philosophy, when they can say: Fortunately things do not happen in the way the priest preaches for, after all, there is a bit of meaning in life—in his preaching there is none at all.

† It is self-evident that, if it shows itself incapable of being realized, any interest whatever in which an individual has concentrated the entire reality of actuality can give rise to the movement of resignation. I have, however, chosen falling in love in order to illustrate the movements, because this interest is certainly more easily understood and thus frees me from all preliminary considerations which in the deeper sense could only be of interest to specific individuals.

‡ *This requires passion. Every movement of infinity takes place by means of passion, and no movement can be brought about through reflection. This is the continual leap in existence that explains the movement, whereas mediation¹⁸ is a chimera, which in Hegel is supposed to explain everything, and which, furthermore, is the only thing he never tried to explain.* Even to make the famous Socratic distinction between what one understands and what one does not understand requires passion, and naturally, to make the genuinely Socratic movement, that of ignorance,¹⁹ requires even more passion. But what the times lack is not reflection, but passion. Therefore, the times are really, in a sense, too tenacious of life to be capable of dying, for dying is one of the strangest leaps, and I have always been fond of a little verse by a poet, because after having, in the preceding five or six verses, beautifully and simply expressed his wish for the good things of life, he ends as follows:

ein seliger Sprung in die Ewigkeit [a blessed leap into eternity].²⁰

#[148]#

PROBLEMA I

IS THERE A TELEOLOGICAL SUSPENSION OF THE ETHICAL?

The ethical, as such, is the universal, and as the universal it applies to everyone, which from another point of view can be expressed as meaning that it applies at every moment. It reposes immanently in itself, has nothing outside itself that is its $\tau\epsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ [goal; end; or purpose], but is itself the $\tau\epsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ for everything it has outside itself, and when the ethical has incorporated this in itself, it goes no further. Defined immediately as sensuous and psychical, the single individual is the particular who has his $\tau\epsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ in the universal, and his ethical task consists of always expressing himself in this, of annulling³² his individuality in order to become the universal. Whenever the individual wants to assert himself in his particularity vis-à-vis the universal, he sins, and only by acknowledging this can he once again reconcile himself with the universal. Whenever the individual, having entered into the universal, feels an impulse to assert himself in his particularity, he is in a state of spiritual trial, and he can work his way out of it only by penitently surrendering himself,

as an individual, to the universal. If this is the highest that can be said about a human being and about his existence, then the ethical has the same character as a human being's eternal salvation, which for all eternity and at every moment is his τέλος, since it would be a contradiction for it to be possible to surrender it (i.e., suspend it teleologically), for as soon as it is suspended it is forfeited, whereas what is suspended is not forfeited, but is indeed preserved in the higher, which is its τέλος.

If this is the way things are, then Hegel is right when, in "The Good and Conscience," he lets the human being be defined solely as the particular; **#[149]#** he is right to view this definition of the human being as a "moral form of evil" (see especially *The Philosophy of Right*),³³ which is to be annulled in the teleology of the ethical life, so that the individual who remains at that stage either sins or is undergoing a spiritual trial. On the other hand, where Hegel is wrong is in speaking of faith, wrong because he does not volubly and clearly protest against Abraham being honored and lauded as the father of faith, whereas Abraham ought to be sent back to a lower court and exposed as a murderer.

Faith, indeed, is this paradox: that the single individual is higher than the universal, though, note well, in such a way that the movement repeats itself, so that therefore, after having been in the universal, then, as the single individual, he isolates himself as higher than the universal. If this is not faith, then Abraham is lost, then faith has never existed in the world simply because it has always existed. For if the ethical—i.e., social morality—is what is highest, and nothing incommensurable remains in a person in any other way than this incommensurability being what is evil (i.e., the singularity of the individual who must be expressed in the universal), then we need no categories other than what Greek philosophy had or what can be logically derived from those categories. Hegel ought not have concealed this fact, for, after all, he did study Greek thought.

Not infrequently one hears of men who (for lack of losing themselves in study, immerse themselves in phrases) say that there is a light that illuminates the Christian world whereas a darkness

broods over the pagan world. This sort of talk has always struck me as odd, because every more careful thinker, every more serious artist, rejuvenates himself with the eternal youth of the Greek people. Remarks of this sort can be explained by the circumstance that people don't know what to say, only that they must say something. It is appropriate to say that paganism did not possess faith, but if, in saying this, one has supposedly said something, one must be a bit clearer about what one understands by faith, for otherwise one sinks back into the same sort of clichés. It is easy to explain the whole of existence, faith included, without having a notion of what faith is, and in this life, if one has an explanation of this sort, one could make a worse bet than to count on being admired for, as Boileau³⁴ says: *un sot trouve toujours un plus sot, qui l'admire* [a fool always finds a greater fool to admire him].³⁵

Faith is precisely this paradox: that the single individual, as the single individual, is higher than the universal, is justified over against the universal, not subordinate, but superior, though, note well, such that it is the single individual **#[150]#** who having, as the single individual, been subordinate to the universal, now, through the universal, becomes the single individual and, as the single individual, is superior to it; that the single individual, as the single individual, stands in an absolute relation to the absolute. This position cannot be mediated, for all mediation takes place precisely by virtue of the universal.³⁶ It is and remains for all eternity a paradox, inaccessible to thought. And yet faith is this paradox, or else (I ask the reader to keep these consequences in mente [in mind] at every point, though it would be too prolix for me to write them out every time)—or else faith has never existed precisely because it has always existed, or else Abraham is lost.

It is certainly true that, for the singular individual, this paradox can easily be mistaken for a spiritual trial, but one ought not for that reason conceal it. It is certainly true that the entire constitution of many people may be such that this repels them, but one ought not for that reason make faith into something different in order that they, too, might have it; rather, one should confess that one does not have

it, while those who have faith ought to consider formulating some criteria by which people could distinguish the paradox from a spiritual trial.

The story of Abraham contains just such a teleological suspension of the ethical. There has been no lack of clever heads and meticulous scholars who have found analogies to it. Their wisdom amounts to the pretty proposition that at root everything is the same. If the matter is examined a bit more carefully, I very much doubt that anyone will find a single analogy in all the world (apart from a later example,³⁷ which proves nothing at all) if one insists that Abraham represents faith and that faith is properly represented in him whose life is not merely the most paradoxical that can be thought, but is so paradoxical that it cannot be thought at all. He acts by virtue of the absurd, for it is indeed the absurd that he, as the single individual, is higher than the universal. This paradox cannot be mediated, for as soon as he [i.e., Abraham] starts to do that, he must confess that he was undergoing a spiritual trial, and in that case he will never come to sacrifice Isaac, or if he has sacrificed Isaac, he must return to the universal in repentance. By virtue of the absurd, he gets Isaac back again. Therefore, Abraham is not at any moment a tragic hero, but is something entirely different, either a murderer or a person of faith. Abraham does not have the middle term that rescues the tragic hero. This is why **#[151]#** I can understand a tragic hero but cannot understand Abraham, even though, in a certain mad sense, I admire him more than all others.

Expressed ethically, Abraham's relation to Isaac is quite simply this: that a father shall love his son more than himself. Nonetheless, the ethical has various gradations within its own domain; we will see whether this story contains any such higher expression of the ethical that can explain his conduct ethically, that can ethically justify him in suspending the ethical obligation toward the son without thereby moving beyond the teleology of the ethical.

When an undertaking that is the concern of an entire people is thwarted, when an endeavor of this sort is impeded by the disfavor of heaven, when the angry god sends a dead calm sea that mocks all

efforts, when the diviner does his sorrowful duty and proclaims that the god requires a young girl as a sacrificial offering³⁸—then the father must display heroic courage and make the sacrifice. He must magnanimously conceal his pain even though he could wish that he were “a lowly man, who dared weep,”³⁹ and not the king, who must act as a king. And even though, in private, the pain penetrates his breast, even though there are only three among the people who share his secret,⁴⁰ soon the entire people will share knowledge of his pain, but will also share knowledge of his heroic deed: that he was willing to sacrifice her, his daughter, the lovely young girl, for the good of the whole community. O, bosom! O, fair cheeks, golden hair (v. 687).⁴¹ And the daughter will touch him with her tears, and the father will avert his face, but the hero shall raise the knife. —Then, when news of this reaches the ancestral home, the beautiful young women of Greece will blush with enthusiasm, and if the daughter was engaged to be married, her fiancé will not be angry, but will be proud to share in the father’s heroic deed, because the girl belonged to him even more tenderly than she belonged to her father.

When, with his heroic courage, the brave judge,ⁱ who saved Israel in its hour of need by binding both God and himself with the same vow in a single breath, was obligated heroically to transform the young girl’s rejoicing, the beloved daughter’s joy, into sorrow, and all Israel must grieve with her over her virginal youth—but every freeborn man must understand, every courageous woman must admire Jephthah, and every virgin in Israel must wish that she would act as did his daughter. For what would it have helped if Jephthah had been victorious by means of his vow if he did not keep it? Would not the victory have been taken away again from the people?

When a son neglects his duty, when the state entrusts the father with the sword of judgment, when the laws require that the punishment come from the father’s hand, then **#[152]#** the father must heroically forget that the guilty person is his son, he must magnanimously conceal his pain, but there shall not be a single person among the people, not even the son, who does not admire the father, and this will be remembered every time the laws of Rome

are interpreted: that many people interpreted them in more erudite fashion, but none did so more gloriously than Brutus.⁴²

If, on the other hand, while a favorable wind was propelling the fleet toward its goal under full sail, Agamemnon had sent that messenger to fetch Iphigenia so that she might be sacrificed; if Jephthah, without having been bound by any vow that decided the people's fate, had said to his daughter, "Grieve, now, over your brief youth for two months—then I will sacrifice you"; if Brutus had had an upright and honorable son, and nonetheless had called upon the lictors⁴³ to execute him—who, indeed, would have understood them? If, when asked why they did this, these three men had replied, "It was a trial in which we were tested," would people have understood them any better?

When, at the decisive moment, Agamemnon, Jephthah, and Brutus vanquish the pain with heroic courage, when they have heroically given up the beloved and must simply fulfill their outward task, there will never be a noble soul in the world who does not shed tears of sympathy for their pain, of veneration for their deed. If, on the other hand, these three men were, at the decisive moment, to add these few words to the heroic courage with which they bore the pain: "But nonetheless it will not happen"—who would then understand them? If, in explanation, they added, "We believe this by virtue of the absurd," who then would understand them any better? For who would not readily understand that it was absurd—but who would understand that someone could then believe it?

The difference between the tragic hero and Abraham is obvious. The tragic hero still remains within the ethical. He lets an expression of the ethical have its *τελος* in a higher expression of the ethical; he reduces the ethical relation between father and son or daughter and father to the status of a sentiment that has its dialectic in its relation to the idea of the ethical life. Here there can be no question of the teleological suspension of the ethical itself.

With Abraham, things are different. By his act he transgressed the boundary of the entire realm of the ethical; he had a higher *τελος* outside the ethical, in relation to which he suspended it. For I would

certainly like to know how anyone can place Abraham's deed in relation to the universal, whether **#[153]#** anyone can find any connection whatever between what Abraham did and the universal, other than the fact that Abraham transgressed it. Abraham did not do it to save a nation, nor to vindicate the idea of the state, nor to appease angry gods. If there could have been talk of an angry deity, it would of course have been angry with Abraham only, and Abraham's entire deed stands in no relation to the universal—it is a purely private undertaking. Therefore, while a tragic hero is great because of his ethical virtue,⁴⁴ Abraham is great because of a purely personal virtue. There is no higher expression of the ethical in Abraham's life than this: that a father is to love his son. This does not in any way involve the ethical in the sense of social morality.⁴⁵ To the extent that it was present, the universal was of course concealed in Isaac, hidden, as it were, in Isaac's loins, and would then have had to cry out from Isaac's mouth: "Don't do it, you are destroying everything."

So why does Abraham do it? For God's sake and—what is absolutely identical with that—for his own sake. He does it for God's sake because God requires this proof of his faith; he does it for his own sake so that he can provide the proof. The identity of these two is perfectly expressed in the word that has always been used to describe it: it was a trial, a temptation. A temptation—but what does that mean? In other circumstances, what tempts a person is of course that which would restrain him from doing his duty, but here the temptation is the ethical itself, which would restrain him from doing God's will. But what, then, is duty? Duty is of course precisely the expression for God's will.

Here it becomes apparent that a new category is needed in order to understand Abraham. Paganism has no notion of such a relation to the deity. The tragic hero does not enter into any private relation to the deity—rather, the ethical is the divine, and thus the paradox contained in it can be mediated in the universal.

Abraham cannot be mediated; this can also be expressed thus: He cannot speak. As soon as I speak, I express the universal, and if

I do not do this, no one can understand me. Thus, the moment Abraham wants to express himself in the universal, he must say that his situation is one of spiritual trial, for he has no higher expression of the universal that is superior to the universal he is transgressing.

Therefore, while Abraham awakens my admiration, he also appalls me. The person who denies himself and sacrifices himself for duty gives up **#[154]#** the finite in order to grasp the infinite—he is secure enough. The tragic hero gives up what is certain for what is even more certain, and the eye of the observer rests confidently upon him. But the person who gives up the universal in order to grasp something still higher that is not the universal: What does he do? Is it possible that this can be anything other than a spiritual trial? And if it is possible, but the single individual was mistaken, what salvation is there for him? He suffers all the pain of the tragic hero, he annihilates his happiness in the world, he renounces everything, and perhaps at the same instant cuts himself off from the lofty happiness that was so precious to him that he would purchase it at any price. An observer simply cannot understand him, nor can he let his eye rest confidently upon him. Perhaps what the believer intends simply cannot be done because it is of course unthinkable. Or, if it could be done, if the individual had misunderstood the deity, what salvation would there be for him, then? The tragic hero needs tears and he requires tears, and where is the envious eye that is so barren that it could not weep with Agamemnon? But where is the person whose soul is so lost that he was so presumptuous as to weep over Abraham? The tragic hero carries out his exploit at a specific moment in time, but in the course of time he does something no less important: he visits the person whose soul is enveloped in sorrow, whose breast is unable to breathe because of stifled sighs, whose thoughts weigh heavily upon him, laden with tears; he appears before him; he dispels the sorcery of sorrow; he unfastens the corset; he draws forth tears so that in *his* suffering the sufferer forgets his own. One cannot weep over Abraham. One approaches him with a *horror religiosus* [reverent awe], as Israel approached Mount Sinai.ⁱⁱ — If, then, the solitary man who ascends Mount Moriah,

which with its peak towers heaven-high over the plains of Aulis,⁴⁶ if he is not a sleepwalker who walks confidently over the abyss while the person who stands at the foot of the mountain, looking on, shivering with anxiety, and out of veneration and horror does not even dare call out to him: what if that solitary man becomes inwardly confused, what if he had erred! — Thanks! and again thanks, be to the man who extends expression, the fig leaf of the word,ⁱⁱⁱ to the person who has been assaulted and left naked by life's sorrows, so that he can conceal his wretchedness. Thanks be to you, great Shakespeare, you are capable of saying everything, everything, everything precisely as it is—and yet why did you never speak of this agony? Did you perhaps reserve it for yourself, like the beloved whose name one cannot even bear that the world mention? **#[155]#** For with a little secret of which he cannot speak, the poet purchases this power of the word that can speak of the burdensome secrets of everyone else—and a poet is not an apostle: it is only by the power of the devil that he casts out devils.^{iv}

But if the ethical is teleologically suspended like this, how then does the single individual in whom it is suspended exist? He exists as the single individual in opposition to the universal. Does he sin, then?—for, viewed ideally, this is the form of sin: that even though the child does not indeed sin because it is not aware of its existence as such, nonetheless, viewed ideally, its existence is sin, and the ethical makes its demands of it at every instant. Were one to deny that this form can be repeated in such a manner that it is not sin, then judgment is passed upon Abraham. What, then, was the manner of Abraham's existence? He had faith. This is the paradox by which he remains on the peak and which he cannot explain to anyone else, for the paradox is that he, as the single individual, places himself in an absolute relation to the absolute. Is he justified in doing so? His justification is once again the paradox, for if he is justified, then he is justified not by virtue of being anything universal, but by virtue of being the single individual.

How, then, does the single individual assure himself that he is justified? It is simple enough to level the whole of existence into the

idea of the state or the idea of society. If one does that, one can also mediate easily enough, for then one simply does not arrive at the paradox that the single individual, as the single individual, is higher than the universal, which I can also express appropriately with a proposition of Pythagoras, that odd numbers are more perfect than even numbers.⁴⁷ In our times, to the extent that one occasionally hears a response concerning the paradox, it is generally something like this: "It is something people judge according to the outcome." A hero who has become the σκανδαλον [scandal; offense]⁴⁸ of his times, aware of the fact that he is a paradox who cannot make himself understood, calls out bravely to his times: "The outcome will surely prove that I was justified." In our times we hear this cry less frequently, for as the fault of our age is that it does not produce heroes, so is its virtue that it also produces few caricatures. So in our times, when we hear the words "It is something that is to be judged according to the outcome," we immediately know with whom we have the honor of speaking. Those who speak thus are a prolific race to whom I will assign the common name: the assistant professors. They live in their thoughts, secure in existence; they have a *permanent* position and *secure* prospects in a well-organized state; they have centuries, or indeed, even millennia **#[156]#** between themselves and the agitations of existence, and they have no fear that this sort of thing can recur: What would the police, the newspapers, say? Their task in life is to judge the great men, to judge them according to the outcome. Behaving like this with respect to the great reveals a curious mixture of arrogance and wretchedness: arrogance, because a person believes himself called to pass judgment; wretchedness, because a person feels that his life does not have the faintest kinship with the lives of the great. Everyone who is even the least bit *erectoris ingenii* [of a higher way of thinking] has not, after all, become an utterly cold and clammy mollusk, and when he approaches someone great, he cannot entirely ignore the fact that ever since the creation of the world, it has been customary for the outcome to come last, and that if someone truly wants to learn something from the great, it is precisely the

beginning to which one must pay attention. If someone who is to act were to judge himself according to the outcome, he would never come to begin. Then, even if the result might give joy to the entire world, it cannot help the hero, for he only came to know the outcome when the whole thing was finished, and that is not what made him a hero: he became a hero by having begun.

Furthermore, in its dialectic, the outcome (insofar as it is finitude's answer to the infinite question) is absolutely heterogeneous with the hero's existence. Or is the circumstance that he got Isaac by a *marvel* supposed to prove that Abraham was justified in relating to the universal as the single individual? If Abraham had actually sacrificed Isaac, would he therefore have been less justified?

But people are curious about the outcome, as with the outcome of a book; no one wants to know anything of the anxiety, the agony, the paradox. People flirt aesthetically with the outcome; it comes as unexpectedly as a prize in the lottery, but also just as easily—and when they have heard the outcome, they are edified. And indeed, no despoiler of temples who labors in irons is as base a criminal as someone who plunders the sacred in this manner—nor indeed was Judas, who sold his Lord for thirty shekels,^v more contemptible than the person who sells greatness in this way.

I am profoundly opposed to speaking inhumanly about what is great, letting it emerge darkly at an enormous remove and in indistinct form, letting it be great without permitting what is human in it to appear—whereby it ceases to be great. For what makes me great is not what happens to me, but what I do, and surely no one thinks that a man became great because he won the grand prize in the lottery. Even if someone were born in humble **#[157]#** circumstances, I nonetheless require of him that he not be so inhuman toward himself as to be incapable of imagining the king's castle other than at a distance, dreaming vaguely of its greatness, desiring at the same time both to elevate it and to abolish it by having elevated it in mean-spirited fashion. I require of him that he be enough of a human being to step forth with confidence and dignity even in that place. He must not be so inhuman as to want

shamelessly to violate everything, to storm into the king's chambers directly from the street—by doing so he loses more than the king does. On the contrary, he should find joy in observing every rule of decorum with happy and confident enthusiasm, which is precisely what will make him openhearted and cheerful. This is only a metaphor, for that difference is but a very imperfect expression of the spiritual distance. I require of every human being that he not think of himself in such inhuman fashion that he does not dare set foot in those palaces which are inhabited not only by the memories of the elect, but also by the elect themselves. He must not force his way forward shamelessly, claiming kinship with them. He must feel blessed every time he defers to them, but he must be frankly cheerful, confident, and always something more than a charwoman, for if he does not want to be more than that, he will never gain entry. And what will assist him is precisely the anxiety and distress by which the great are tried, for otherwise, if he has a bit of backbone, the great would merely arouse his righteous envy. And things that are only capable of appearing great at a distance, things a person wants to make into something great with the assistance of empty and hollow phrases—those things a person annihilates by himself.

Who in the world was as great as that favored woman, the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary? And yet, how do we speak of her? That she was favored among women^{vi} does not make her great, and if it were not for the odd circumstance that those who listen are able to think as inhumanly as those who speak, then every young girl might very well ask, “Why wasn't I, too, the favored one?”—and if I had nothing other than this to say, I would not at all brush the question aside as stupid, for, abstractly considered, every human being is equally situated with respect to being shown favor. People omit the distress, the anxiety, the paradox. My thoughts are as pure as anyone's, and surely the thinking of someone who can think like this will become pure, and if this is not the case, he indeed has something frightful in store, for once a person has brought these images to mind, he cannot get rid of them again, and if he sins against them, then, in their **#[158]#** quiet wrath they avenge

themselves terribly, more terribly than the stridency of ten bloodthirsty literary critics. It is certainly true that Mary gave birth to the child in miraculous fashion, but nonetheless it took place after the manner of women,⁴⁹ and a time such as this is one of anxiety, distress, and paradox. It is true that the angel was a ministering spirit, but he was not an obliging spirit who went to the other young girls in Israel, saying: "Do not despise Mary, something extraordinary is happening with her." Rather, the angel came only to Mary,^{vii} and no one could understand her. Indeed, what woman was abused as Mary was, and yet is it not true here, too, that whom God blesses he curses in the same breath?^{viii} This is the spirit's understanding of Mary, and in no way is she (this is something it infuriates me to say and, even more, infuriates me when people have thoughtlessly and ingratiatingly viewed her in this way) a lady who sits in splendor, playing with the child of God. Nonetheless, when she said: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord,"^{ix} then she is great, and I think that it must not be difficult to explain why she became the Mother of God. She has no need of any worldly admiration any more than Abraham has need of tears, for she was not a heroine, and he was not a hero, but in no way whatever did they become greater than that by having been spared the distress and the agony and the paradox—rather, it was through these that they became greater.

It is great that the poet, in exhibiting the tragic hero for the admiration of the public, dares say: "Weep for him, for he deserves it," for it is great to deserve the tears of those who deserve to shed them. It is great that the poet dares hold the mass of people in check, dares discipline the crowd, so that each person examines himself to see if he is worthy to weep over the hero, for the waste water of snivelers degrades what is holy. — But what is greater than all this is what the knight of faith dares say, even to the noble person who would weep over him: Weep not for me, but weep for yourself.^x

One is moved; one longs to go back to those beautiful days; sweet, sentimental longings lead one to the desired goal: to see Christ walk about in the Promised Land. One forgets the anxiety, the agony, the paradox. Was it so easy not to be mistaken? Was it not

frightful that this person, who went about among the others, that he was God? Was it not frightful to sit at table with him? Was it so easy a matter to become an apostle? But the outcome, the eighteen centuries, that helps, it helps enable this shabby deception with which one deceives oneself and others. I do not feel that I have the courage to wish myself contemporary with such events, **#[159]#** but I therefore do not pass harsh judgment upon those who erred, nor do I think ill of those who saw rightly.

But I return to Abraham. In the period prior to the outcome, either Abraham was at every instant a murderer, or we are confronted with a paradox that is higher than all mediation.

Abraham's story thus contains a teleological suspension of the ethical. He, as the single individual, has become higher than the universal. This is the paradox that does not admit of mediation. How he came into it is just as inexplicable as how he remains in it. If this is not how things are with Abraham, then he is not even a tragic hero, but a murderer. To want to continue calling him the father of faith, to speak of this to people who are not concerned with anything other than words, is thoughtless. By one's own strength, one can become a tragic hero, but not a knight of faith. When a person enters upon the path of the tragic hero, a path that in a certain sense is burdensome, there will be many who could give him counsel; no one can counsel, no one can understand, the person who walks the narrow way of faith. Faith is a marvel, and yet no human being is excluded from it, for all human life is united in passion,^{*} and faith is a passion.

i i.e., Jephthah; see Judg. 11:30–40.

ii See Exod. 19:12.

iii See Gen. 3:7.

iv See Mark 3:14–23.

v See Matt. 26:15.

vi See Luke 1:28.

vii See Luke 1:28–38.

viii See Gen. 32:25–31.

ix See Luke 1:38.

x See Luke 23:28.

xi “This, too, was wit, and indeed a peasant woman’s wit, but the circumstances made it inevitable. And consequently, one must not seek the explanation for the witty expressions concerning pain and grief in the circumstance that the person uttering them is a refined, well-brought up, reasonable, and also witty person; *for the passions make everyone equal once again*—but in the fact that under the same circumstances, every person would in all likelihood unvaryingly say the same thing. A queen could have had, and must have had, the same thought the peasant woman had, just as what the king says in that situation could have been and indubitably would have been said by a peasant. See *Collected Works*, vol. 30, p. 223.” Kierkegaard’s reference is slightly garbled; the actual locus is *Gotthold Ephraim Lessings sämtliche Schriften* [Complete Writings of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing], 32 vols. (Berlin, 1825–1828), vol. 30 (1828), pp. 223–24. Lessing (1729–1781) was an Enlightenment era philosopher, writer, and dramatist.

* Lessing somewhere has said something similar from a purely aesthetic standpoint. What he really wants to point out in the passage is that sorrow, too, can express itself wittily. To this end, he cites a rejoinder from the unfortunate English king, Edward II. As a contrast to this, he cites Diderot, who recounts a story about a peasant woman, and her retort. He then continues: Auch das war Witz, und noch dazu Witz einer Bäuerin; aber die Umstände machten ihn unvermeidlich. Und folglich auch muß man die Entschuldigung der witzigen Ausdrücke des Schmerzes und der Betrübniß nicht darin suchen, daß die Person, welche sie sagt, eine vornehme, wohlerzogene, verständige, und auch sonst witzige Person sey; *denn die Leidenschaften machen alle Menschen wieder gleich*: sondern darin, daß wahrscheinlicher Weise ein jeder Mensch ohne Unterschied in den nämlichen Umständen das nämliche sagen würde. Den Gedanken der Bäuerin hätte eine Königin haben können und haben müssen: so wie das, was dort der König sagt, auch ein Bauer hätte sagen können und ohne Zweifel würde gesagt haben. See *Sämtlich. W. 30, B. p. 223*.^{xi}

#[160]#

PROBLEMA II

IS THERE AN ABSOLUTE DUTY TOWARD GOD?

The ethical is the universal, and as such is in turn the divine. It is thus correct for a person to say that fundamentally every duty is a duty toward God, but if one cannot say more than this, then one is also saying "I do not really have any duty toward God." Duty becomes duty by being referred to God, but in duty itself I do not enter into any relation to God. Thus, it is a duty to love one's neighbor. It is a duty by its being referred to God, but in the duty itself I do not enter into relation to God, but to the neighbor whom I love. So if, in this connection, I say that it is my duty to love God, I am really uttering a tautology, inasmuch as "God" is here taken in a totally abstract sense as the divine, i.e., the universal, i.e., duty. Then the entire existence of the human race rounds itself off within itself, like a sphere, and the ethical is at once both the limit and the fulfillment. God becomes an invisible, vanishing point, an impotent thought; his power is confined solely to the ethical that fills existence. So, insofar as an individual might come up with the idea of wanting

to love God in any sense other than the one specified here, he is overwrought, he loves a phantom that, if it had sufficient strength to be capable of speaking, would say to him: "I do not require your love, stay where you belong." Insofar as it might occur to an individual to love God in a manner different from this, this love becomes suspect, like the love spoken of by Rousseau in which a person loves the Tartars instead of his neighbor.⁵⁰

If what has been set forth here is correct, if there is nothing # [161]# incommensurable inherent in a human life, but whatever incommensurability is present is there only accidentally, from which nothing follows when existence is viewed in accordance with the idea—then Hegel is right. But Hegel is not right in speaking of faith or in allowing Abraham to be regarded as its father, for in this latter assertion Hegel has passed judgment both upon Abraham and upon faith. In Hegelian philosophy, das Äußere [the outer] (die Entäußerung) [the externalization] is higher than das Innere [the inner]. This is most often illustrated by an example. The child is das Innere, the man is das Äußere; from this it can be seen that the child is in fact determined by the outer, and conversely, the man, as das Äußere, is in fact determined by das Innere. Faith, on the contrary, is this paradox: that inwardness is higher than outwardness, or to recall an expression mentioned previously, that the odd number is higher than the even number.⁵¹

For the ethical view of life, the task for the single individual is thus to divest himself of the determinant of inwardness and express it in what is outward. Every time the single individual shrinks from doing this, every time he wants to hold back or disappear once again into the determinant of inwardness, into feeling, mood, etc., he is sinning—he is immersed in spiritual trial. The paradox of faith is this: that there is an inwardness that is incommensurable with the outer, an inwardness which, note well, is not identical with that first inwardness, but is a new inwardness. This must not be overlooked. Modern philosophy has permitted itself simply to put the immediate in place of "faith."⁵² When this is done, it becomes ridiculous to deny that faith has existed in every age. In this way, faith is now grouped

in the rather commonplace company of feeling, mood, idiosyncrasy, vapeurs [the vapors],⁵³ etc. To this extent, philosophy may be right in maintaining that one ought not remain standing there. But there is nothing that justifies philosophy in speaking like this. Faith is preceded by a movement of infinity: only then, *nec opinata* [unexpectedly], does faith come, by virtue of the absurd. This is something I can certainly understand without on that account asserting that I have faith. If faith is nothing but what philosophy says it is, then Socrates has already gone beyond it, far beyond it, instead of the converse: that he has not come to it. In the intellectual sense, he has made the movement of infinity. His ignorance⁵⁴ is infinite resignation. This task is indeed one appropriate for human powers, even though people in our times belittle it; but only when **#[162]#** that has been done, only when the single individual has exhausted himself in the infinite, only then is the point reached at which faith can break forth.

The paradox of faith, then, is this: that the single individual is higher than the universal, that the single individual (to recall a dogmatic distinction that has become uncommon in our times) determines his relation to the universal by his relation to the absolute, not his relation to the absolute by his relation to the universal. The paradox can also be expressed by saying that there is an absolute duty to God, for in this relation of duty, the single individual relates as the single individual absolutely to the absolute. In this connection, when it is said that there is a duty to love God, something different is being said than was said in the preceding, for if this duty is absolute, then the ethical has been reduced to the relative. It does not, however, follow from this that this ethical is to be annihilated, but it takes on an entirely different expression, the paradoxical expression, so that, e.g., love of God can bring the knight of faith to express his love of his neighbor in a fashion that is the opposite of what, ethically speaking, is his duty.

If this is not how things are, then faith has no place in existence, then faith is a spiritual trial, and Abraham is lost because he gave in to it.

This paradox does not admit of mediation, for it depends precisely on the fact that the single individual is only the single individual. As soon as this single individual wants to express his absolute duty in the universal, as soon as he becomes conscious of it in the universal, he knows himself to be undergoing a spiritual trial, and then, if he in fact puts up resistance, he fails to fulfill the so-called absolute duty—and if he fails to resist, then he sins, even if realiter [in reality; objectively] his deed turns out to be what was his absolute duty. What, then, should Abraham have done? Were he to say to another person: “I love Isaac more than everything in the world, and that is why it is so hard for me to sacrifice him,” the other person would surely have shaken his head and said: “Why, then, will you sacrifice him?” Or, if the other person had been clever, he would surely have seen that Abraham was displaying feelings that were in flagrant contradiction to his deed.

In the story of Abraham we find a paradox of this sort. Expressed ethically, his relation to Isaac is this: that the father is to love the son. The ethical relation is reduced to the relative in contrast to the absolute relation to God. Abraham has no answer to the question of “Why?” other than that it is a trial, a temptation, which as noted above, **#[163]#** constitutes the unity of its being both for God’s sake and for his own sake. These two categories also correspond to one another in everyday speech. Thus, when we see a person do something that does not comport with the universal, we say, “He’s scarcely doing that for God’s sake,” meaning by this that he did it for his own sake. The paradox of faith has lost the middle term, i.e., the universal. On the one hand, it contains the expression for the most extreme egotism (to do the frightful deed, doing it for one’s own sake); on the other hand, the expression of the most absolute devotion, to do it for God’s sake. Faith itself cannot be mediated into the universal, for then it is annulled. Faith is this paradox, and the single individual is absolutely unable to make himself understood by anyone. One may of course imagine that the single individual can make himself understood by another individual who is in the same situation. Such a notion would be unthinkable if people in our times were not seeking to sneak into greatness in so many insidious ways.

The one knight of faith is absolutely unable to help the other. Either the single individual himself becomes a knight of faith by taking the paradox upon himself, or he never becomes one. Companionship is utterly unthinkable in these matters. Any detailed explanation of how Isaac is to be understood is always something the single individual can provide only for himself. And even if one could set forth, in ordinary terms, a detailed explanation of what is to be understood by Isaac (which, furthermore, would be the most ridiculous self-contradiction: to bring the single individual—who is precisely someone who stands outside the universal—under universal categories, for he must act precisely as the single individual who is outside the universal), no one other than the single individual himself as the single individual would ever be able to satisfy himself concerning this. Therefore, even if someone were cowardly and wretched enough to want to be a knight of faith on someone else's responsibility, he would not become one anyway, for only the single individual, as the single individual, becomes one, and this is what is great, which I surely can understand without becoming one myself, for I am lacking in courage—but this is also what is frightful, which I can grasp even better.

As is well-known, in Luke 14:26 there is a remarkable teaching concerning the absolute duty to God: “Whoever comes to me and does not hate his own father, and his mother, and his wife, and his children, and his brothers, and his sisters, yes, even his own soul, cannot be my disciple.”⁵⁵ These are hard words—who can stand to listen to them?ⁱ **#[164]#** For that reason they are in fact heard very seldom. But this silence is only an evasion that helps nothing. Nevertheless, the theology student learns that these words appear in the New Testament, and in one or another exegetical resource⁵⁶ he finds enlightenment to the effect that per μείωσις [in a weaker sense], here and in a couple of other places, μισεῖν [to hate] means minus diligo, posthabeo, non colo, nihili facio [loves less, sets aside, does not honor, reckons as nothing]. The context in which these words appear does not, however, appear to support this tasteful explanation. Specifically, in the next verseⁱⁱ there is a story about

how a person who wants to erect a tower first makes an estimate to see whether he is capable of completing it, lest people laugh at him afterward. The close connection between this story and the verse just cited seems indeed to indicate that the words are to be taken as frightfully as possible, in order that each person might examine himself concerning whether he can erect the building.

If that pious and sentimental exegete thinks that he can smuggle Christianity into the world by haggling like this, and that by employing grammatical and linguistic means and by arguing κατ' αναλογίαν [by analogy] he can succeed in convincing a person that this was the meaning of that passage, then it is to be hoped that at that same moment he will also succeed in convincing that person that Christianity is one of the most pitiable things in the world. For that teaching, which in one of its most lyrical effusions, where the consciousness of its eternal validity asserts itself most forcefully, is nothing other than a noisy slogan signifying nothing but merely indicates that a person should be less benevolent, less attentive, more indifferent; the teaching which, at the moment it makes as if to say something frightful, ends by driveling instead of terrifying—that teaching is certainly not worth the trouble of standing up for.

The words are terrifying, yet I certainly believe that one can understand them without it necessarily following from this that the person who has understood them therefore has the courage to act accordingly. Still, a person must be honest enough to acknowledge what is written, to admit that it is something great, even though he does not himself have the courage to do it. The person who acts in this fashion will not exclude himself from participation in that beautiful story, for it in fact includes a sort of consolation for the person who lacks the courage to begin building the tower. But he must be honest and not explain this lack of courage as humility, when on the contrary it is pride—whereas the courage of faith is the only humble courage. **#[165]#**

Now, it can readily be seen that if the passage is to mean anything, it must be understood literally. God is the one who demands absolute love. If, in demanding someone's love, a person thinks that this must also be demonstrated by that person becoming

indifferent to everything else that had been dear to him—then he is not only an egotist, but also stupid, and to the extent he staked his life on this love from the desired person, the one who demands this sort of love is simultaneously signing his own death warrant. Thus, a husband requires that his wife leave father and mother,ⁱⁱⁱ but if he were to regard as proof of her extraordinary love for him that she became, for his sake, a lukewarm, apathetic, etc. daughter, then he is more stupid than the stupidest of people. If he had any notion of what love is, he would wish to discover that her love as a sister and a daughter was perfect and complete, and in this he would see the certainty that his wife would love him as did no other in the kingdom. Thus, with the help of an exegete, we are supposed to see as a worthy notion of the deity what one would regard as a sign of egotism and stupidity in a human being.

But in what manner are they to be hated? Here I will not point out the human distinction between loving and hating, not because I have so much against it, for it does, after all, involve passion, but because it is egoistic and is not fitting here. If, on the other hand, I regard the task as a paradox, then I understand it, i.e., I understand it in the way in which one understands a paradox. The absolute duty can thus bring a person to do what ethics would forbid, but in no way can it bring the knight of faith to cease loving. Abraham demonstrates this. Thus, at the moment he is willing to sacrifice Isaac, the ethical expression for what he is doing is this: He hates Isaac. But if he actually hates Isaac, then he can rest assured that God does not require this of him, for Cain^{iv} and Abraham are not identical. He must love Isaac with all his soul. Inasmuch as God requires Isaac, he must, if possible, love him even more, and only then can he *sacrifice* him, for in its paradoxical opposition to his love of God, this love of Isaac is of course what makes his deed a sacrifice. But this is the distress and the anxiety in the paradox: that he is absolutely unable to make himself understood in human terms. Only at the instant when his deed is in absolute contradiction to his feelings—only then does he sacrifice Isaac, but the reality of his deed **#[166]#** is that by

which he belongs to the universal, and there he is and remains a murderer.

Furthermore, the passage in Luke must be understood in such a way that one appreciates that the knight of faith does not have any higher expression whatsoever of the universal (as the ethical) in which he can save himself. Thus, if we let the Church require this sacrifice of one of its members, we have only a tragic hero. The idea of the Church is in fact not qualitatively different from that of the State, insofar as the single individual can come into it by means of simple mediation, and insofar as the single individual has come into the paradox, he does not come to the idea of the Church—he does not get out of the paradox, but must find either his salvation or his perdition within it. With his deed, such a hero of the Church expresses the universal, and there is no one in the Church, not even his father and mother, etc., who fails to understand him. On the other hand, he is not a knight of faith, and he indeed has a response that is different from Abraham's: he does not say that it is a trial or that it is a temptation by which he is being tried.

People usually refrain from citing passages such as this one from Luke. They are afraid of letting people loose; they fear that as soon as it pleases the single individual to behave as the single individual, the worst will happen. Furthermore, people think that existing as the single individual is the easiest thing of all, and that therefore people must be compelled to become the universal. I am unable to share either this fear or this opinion, and for the same reason. Whoever has learned that to exist as the single individual is the most frightful thing of all must not be afraid to say that it is the greatest thing of all, but he must also say it in such a way that his words scarcely become a snare for someone who is confused, but rather help him enter into the universal, though his words do open up a bit of space for what is great. Whoever does not dare mention passages such as this does not dare mention Abraham either, and the belief that it is quite easy to exist as the single individual contains a highly disturbing indirect admission concerning oneself—for the person who really has self-respect and concern for his soul is certain that a person who lives under his own surveillance, alone in the entire world, lives more

stringently and more secluded than a young woman in her virgin's bower. Of course, it is certainly true that there can be people who need to be subjected to compulsion, people who, if they were unrestrained, would run riot in selfish pleasures like wild beasts. But a person must demonstrate that he is not among them precisely by knowing how to speak with anxiety and with trembling. And, out of # [167]# veneration for the great, he must speak, lest it be forgotten for fear of harm—harm that surely will not occur if he speaks in such a manner that people know that this is what is great, know its terrors, and in the absence of this knowledge, neither do people know its greatness.

Let us, then, consider a bit more closely the distress and the anxiety in the paradox of faith. The tragic hero renounces himself in order to express the universal; the knight of faith renounces the universal in order to become the single individual. As noted, everything depends upon how one is situated. Someone who believes that it is quite easy to be the single individual can always be certain that he is not a knight of faith, for happy-go-lucky types and vagabond geniuses are not men of faith. By contrast, the knight of faith knows that it is glorious to belong to the universal. He knows that it is beautiful and pleasant to be the single individual who translates himself into the universal, who, so to speak, himself edits a clean and elegant and—so far as possible—error-free edition of himself that can be read by everyone. He knows that it is refreshing for a person to be understandable to himself in the universal in such a way that he understands it and, in turn, every individual who understands him understands the universal in him, and both find joy in the security of the universal. He knows that it is beautiful to be born as the single individual who has his home, his welcoming place of rest, in the universal, which if he wishes to remain there, immediately receives him with open arms. But he also knows that, higher than this, a narrow, steep path wends its lonely way; he knows that it is frightful to be born alone, outside the universal, to wander without encountering one single wanderer. He knows very well where he is and how he is situated in relation to people. Humanly speaking, he is mad and cannot make himself understood

by anyone. And yet, madness is the mildest expression for it. If he is not viewed in this way, he is a hypocrite, and the further up the path he ascends, the more abominable a hypocrite he becomes.

The knight of faith knows that it is inspiring to surrender oneself to the universal, that it requires courage to do so, but also that there is peace of mind in doing so, precisely because it is for the sake of the universal. He knows that it is glorious to be understood by every noble soul so that the observer himself is ennobled by doing so. This he knows, and he feels himself to be bound, as it were. He could wish that this was the task that had been set for him. Thus, from time to time, Abraham could surely have wished that the task were to love Isaac as was fitting and proper for a father and in a manner that could be understood by everyone, unforgettable throughout the ages. He could wish that the task were to sacrifice Isaac for the universal, so that he could **#[168]#** inspire fathers to carry out glorious deeds—and he was almost terrified at the thought that for him such wishes are merely spiritual trials and must be dealt with as such, for he knows that he is walking a lonely path and that he accomplishes nothing for the universal, but is himself only being tried and tested. Or what did Abraham accomplish for the universal? Let me speak humanly, in purely human terms! He spent seventy years getting a son in his old age. He took seventy years to acquire that which other people acquire very quickly and which provides them with enduring happiness. And why? Because he is being tried and tempted. Is this not madness! But Abraham had faith, and Sarah alone wavered and caused him to take Hagar as a concubine^v—but for that very reason he also had to drive the woman away. He gets Isaac—then he is to be tested once again. He knew that it is glorious to express the universal, glorious to live with Isaac. But that is not the task. He knew that it is royal to sacrifice such a son for the universal; he himself would have found repose in doing so, and, as the vowel reposes in its consonant,⁵⁷ everyone would have found repose in lauding his deed. But that is not the task—he is being tested. That Roman general, who is famous under his appellation “Cunctator,”⁵⁸ stopped the foe by his delaying—but in comparison to

him, was not Abraham indeed a delayer!—though he does not save the state. This is the content of the 130 years.^{vi} Who could endure it—would not his contemporaries, if there could be talk of such, say: “With Abraham it is an eternal delay. Finally he gets a son—that took long enough—and then he wants to sacrifice him. Is he not mad? And if only he could explain why he wants to do it—but it’s always a trial.” Nor could Abraham have provided any further explanation, for his life is like a book that has been impounded by the divine and does not become *publici juris* [a public matter].

This is what is frightful. A person who does not see this can always be certain that he is not a knight of faith, but whoever does see it will not deny that even the most tried tragic hero trips along as though he were dancing in comparison to the knight of faith, who is only able to move forward slowly, creeping. And once he has realized this and ascertained that he does not have the courage to understand it, he will surely have some sense of the marvelous glory which that knight attains: that he becomes God’s confidant, the Lord’s friend,^{vii} and (to express it in purely human fashion) that he addresses God in heaven in familiar terms as “You,” while even the tragic hero only addresses him in the third person. **#[169]#**

The tragic hero is soon finished and has soon gone to his rest; he makes the infinite movement and is then secure within the universal. The knight of faith, on the other hand, is kept sleepless, for he is continually tested, and at every moment there is the possibility of turning back to the universal in repentance; and this possibility can just as well be a spiritual trial as the truth. He cannot gain any enlightenment about this from any human being, for then he would be outside the paradox.

First and foremost, then, the knight of faith has the passion to concentrate in one single moment the entirety of the ethical that he is violating, so that he can give himself the assurance that he really loves Isaac with all his soul.* If he cannot do that, he is undergoing a spiritual trial. Next, he has the passion immediately to summon up the whole of this conviction, and to do so in such a way that it is as fully valid as it was at the first instant. If he cannot do that, he never

starts, for he must continually begin all over again. The tragic hero, too, concentrates in one single moment the ethical that he transgressed teleologically, but in doing so he has a place of refuge in the universal. The knight of faith has only and solely himself, and therein lies what is frightful. Most people live with the sort of ethical obligation that allows each day to have its own troubles,^{viii} but then they never attain **#[170]#** this passionate concentration, this energetic consciousness. In a certain sense, the universal can help the tragic hero attain this consciousness, but the knight of faith is alone in everything. The tragic hero does this and finds repose in the universal; the knight of faith is constantly kept in tension. Agamemnon gives up Iphigenia, has thereby found repose in the universal, and then proceeds to sacrifice her. If Agamemnon had not made the movement, if at the decisive moment, instead of that passionate concentration, his soul had been lost in some commonplace babble about how he had other daughters, and that vielleicht das Außerordenliche [perhaps the extraordinary] might yet happen—then of course he is no hero, but an inmate from a mental institution. Abraham also has the concentration of a hero, although it is much more difficult for him because he has no support whatsoever in the universal—but he makes one additional movement, by which he concentrates his soul back upon the marvel. If Abraham has not done that, then he is only an Agamemnon, if indeed there is any way to explain how being willing to sacrifice Isaac is defensible if it does not benefit the universal.

Now, whether the single individual is actually undergoing a spiritual trial or is a knight of faith is something that can be decided only by the single individual himself. Nonetheless, on the basis of the paradox it is possible to construe several distinguishing characteristics that can also be understood by someone who is not within the paradox. The true knight of faith is always someone absolutely isolated; the false knight is a member of a sect, which is an attempt to escape the narrow path of the paradox and become a tragic hero at a bargain price. The tragic hero expresses the universal and sacrifices himself for it. Instead of that, the sectarian

Mester Jakel⁵⁹ has a private theater consisting of some good friends and comrades who represent the universal about as well as the untrustworthy witnesses in *Gulddaasen*⁶⁰ represent justice. The knight of faith, by contrast, is the paradox; he is the single individual, absolutely and solely the single individual, devoid of all connections and complications. This is the terrifying situation that the sectarian weakling cannot endure. Thus, instead of learning from this that he is incapable of doing what is great and then straightforwardly admitting it (something of which I of course cannot but approve, for that is what I myself do), the poor devil thinks that by uniting with some other poor devils he will be able to do it. But this is simply out of the question: cheating is not tolerated in the world of spirit. A dozen sectarians link arms, they know nothing whatever of the lonely spiritual trials that await the knight of faith, from which that knight dares not **#[171]#** flee, precisely because it would be even more frightful if he were to force his way forward presumptuously. The sectarians drown one another out with noise and clamor, holding anxiety at bay with their shouting, and a whooping carnival crowd of this sort thinks it can storm heaven and that it is treading the same path as the knight of faith who, in the loneliness of the universe, never hears any human voice, but walks alone with his fearsome responsibility.

The knight of faith is referred solely to himself, he feels the pain of being unable to make himself understood by others, but he feels no vain desire to guide others. The pain is his assurance; he is unacquainted with that vain desire, his soul is too earnest for that. The false knight easily betrays his true identity by this mastery, which he has acquired in an instant. He has no grasp at all of the matter at issue: that insofar as another individual is to walk the same path, he must become the single individual in entirely the same manner and has no need of any guidance, least of all from someone who wants to force himself upon him. Here, again, a person flees, he cannot endure the martyrdom of not being understood, and then, conveniently enough, he chooses instead the world's admiration of his mastery. The true knight of faith is a witness, never a teacher,

and therein lies the profound humanity that is rather more valuable than that foolish compassion for the well-being of others that is honored under the name sympathy, while it is in fact nothing other than vanity. The person who wants only to be a witness thereby professes that no person, not even the humblest, has need of another person's sympathy or should be degraded by that sympathy in order that the other person might be raised up. But just as he did not acquire what he acquired at a bargain price, neither does he sell it at a bargain price: he is not so contemptible as to accept the admiration of people and repay them with his silent contempt—he knows that whatever is truly great is equally accessible to all.

So either there is an absolute duty toward God, and if there is, it is the paradox that has been described: that the single individual as the single individual is higher than the universal and as the single individual stands in an absolute relation to the absolute—or else faith has never existed because it has always existed, or else Abraham is lost, or else one must explain the passage in Luke 14^{ix} as did that tasteful exegete, and in the same way explain the similar passages^x and those like it.^{xi}

ⁱ See John 6:60.

ⁱⁱ Actually, two verses later, Luke 14:28.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Matt. 19:4–6.

^{iv} See Gen. 4:2–16.

^v See Gen. 21:1–21.

^{vi} See Gen. 21:5.

^{vii} See Isa. 41:8 and James 2:23.

^{viii} See Matt. 6:34.

^{ix} See Luke 14:26.

^x See Deut. 13:6–10, 33:9; Matt. 10:37, 19:29.

^{xi} Variant: in the fair copy as submitted to the printer, Kierkegaard had first written, “the similar ones (e.g., 1 Cor 7:11).”

* Now I will illuminate once more the difference between the collision that confronts the tragic hero and the collision that confronts the knight of faith. The tragic hero makes sure that the ethical obligation is totally present in him by transforming it into a wish. Thus Agamemnon can say, "This is my proof that I do not violate my duty as a father: that my duty is my sole wish." Thus, here we have wish and duty confronting one another. In life it is good fortune when they coincide—when my wish is my duty and conversely—and the task in life for most people is precisely to adhere to their duty and, through their enthusiasm, to transform it into their wish. The tragic hero renounces his wish in order to fulfill his duty. Wish and duty are also identical for the knight of faith, but he is required to renounce both of them. So if he wants to resign by giving up his wish, he finds no rest, for that is of course his duty. If he wants to adhere to his duty and to his wish, he does not become a knight of faith, for the requirement of absolute duty was precisely that he give it up. The tragic hero acquired a higher expression of duty, but not an absolute duty.

#[172]#

PROBLEMA III

WAS IT ETHICALLY DEFENSIBLE OF ABRAHAM NOT TO HAVE TOLD SARAH, ELIEZER, ISAAC ABOUT HIS UNDERTAKING?

The ethical, as such, is the universal; as the universal it is in turn the disclosed. The single individual, defined immediately as a sensate and psychical being, is the concealed. Thus, his ethical task is to extricate himself from his concealment and become disclosed in the universal. So whenever he wants to remain in concealment, he is sinning and is immersed in spiritual trial from which he can emerge only by becoming disclosed.

Here we are once again at the same point. If there is no concealment that has its basis in the single individual being higher than the universal, then Abraham's actions cannot be defended, for he disregarded the intermediate authorities⁶¹ of the ethical. If, on the other hand, there is a concealment of this sort, then we are confronted with the paradox, which does not admit of mediation, as it is based on the single individual as the single individual being higher than the universal, while the universal is precisely mediation.

Hegelian philosophy assumes no justified concealment, no justified incommensurability.⁶² Thus it is consistent with itself in requiring disclosure, but it is inconsistent in wanting to regard Abraham as the father of faith and in wanting to speak of faith. Faith, then, is not the first immediacy but a subsequent immediacy. The first immediacy is the aesthetic, and on this point Hegelian philosophy may well be correct. But faith is not the aesthetic, or else faith has never existed because it has always existed.

Here, it is best to look at the entire matter from a purely aesthetic point of view, and to **#[173]#** that end embark upon an aesthetic deliberation to which I ask the reader to devote himself entirely for a moment, while I, for my part, will modify my presentation in accordance with the subject matter. The category that I will investigate in a bit more detail is that of the *interesting*,⁶³ a category which, especially in our times—precisely because the age lives in *discrimine rerum* [at a decisive point; undergoing great changes]—has taken on great significance, for it is really the category of the turning point. Therefore, one should not, as sometimes happens after one has oneself been enamored of it [the category of the turning point] *pro virili* [with all one's strength], disdain it because it is something one has outgrown, but neither should one be altogether too eager in its pursuit, for it is certain that to become interesting, or that one's life be interesting, is not a task for artistic finesse but is a fateful privilege that, like every privilege in the world of the spirit, can be purchased only in profound pain. Thus, Socrates was the most interesting person who ever lived; his life is the most interesting that has been led, but this existence was assigned to him by the god, and insofar as he himself had to acquire it, he was indeed not unacquainted with trouble and pain. Taking such a life in vain is unseemly for anyone who thinks seriously about life, and yet in our times it is not unusual to see examples of such efforts. Moreover, the interesting is a border category, a boundary area between aesthetics and ethics. For this reason, this deliberation must continually trespass upon the territory of ethics, while in order to acquire significance it must grasp hold of the matter with aesthetic intensity and concupiscence. In our times,

ethics rarely concerns itself with matters of this sort. Supposedly, the reason is that there is no room for it in the System.⁶⁴ Then one could of course do it with monographs, and furthermore, if one wants to keep it from being too wordy, one could do it briefly and still achieve the same thing—if, that is, one has the predicate in one's power, for a person can reveal an entire world with one or two predicates. Shouldn't there be room in the System for such little words?

In his immortal *Poetics*, Aristotle says: *δυσὸς μὲν οὖν τοῦ μύθου μέρη, περὶ ταῦτ' ἐστὶ, περιπέτεια καὶ ἀναγνώρισις* [two parts of the myth, namely, reversal and recognition, are decisive for these events]⁶⁵ (see chap. 11). Of course, it is only the second element that interests me here: *ἀναγνώρισις*, recognition. Everywhere, whenever there is talk of a recognition, there is *eo ipso* [by that very fact] talk of a prior concealment.⁶⁶ Thus, as the recognition is the resolving, the slackening element in the dramatic life, so is the concealment the tensioning element. I cannot here go into what Aristotle develops in the earlier portion of **#[174]#** the same chapter concerning the various merits of tragedy, all in proportion to the degree to which *περιπέτεια* [reversal] and *ἀναγνώρισις* [recognition] coincide, or concerning single and double recognition,⁶⁷ even though, owing to that chapter's inwardness and its quiet absorption in the subject, it would be tempting to do so, especially for someone who has long wearied of the superficial omniscience of those who write surveys. A more general comment may be in place here. In Greek tragedy, concealment (and its consequence, recognition) is a remnant of the epic and has its basis in a fate in which the dramatic action disappears and from which it has its obscure, enigmatic origin. This is why the effect produced by a Greek tragedy is similar to the impression made by a marble statue, which lacks the power of the eye. Greek tragedy is blind. Therefore, a certain abstraction is required if one is properly to permit oneself to be affected by it. A son⁶⁸ murders his father, but it is only afterward that he learns that it is his father. A sister⁶⁹ is about to sacrifice her brother, but at the decisive moment she discovers that it is her brother. Tragedy of this sort is less capable of engaging our *reflective* age. Modern drama

has given up fate, it has emancipated itself with respect to drama, it is able to see, it looks within itself, it incorporates fate in its dramatic consciousness. Concealment and disclosure are then the free activity of the hero, for which he is responsible.

Recognition and concealment are also an essential element in modern drama. It would be too long-winded to cite examples of this. I am sufficiently respectful to assume that in our times—which in matters of aesthetics are so voluptuous, so vigorous and ardent, that they can conceive as easily as does the female partridge, which, according to Aristotle, is able to do so merely by hearing the call of a male partridge or the sound of its wings overhead⁷⁰—anyone, if he merely hears the word “concealment,” could easily shake half a score of novels and comedies from up his sleeve. For this reason I can be brief and thus quickly provide just a sketch of a more general sort. If the person who conceals himself (and thus adds some dramatic ferment to the piece) is concealing some *nonsense*, we have a comedy. If, on the other hand, he is related to the idea, he may approach becoming a tragic hero. Here, just an example of what is comical. A man puts on rouge and wears a wig. This same man wants to be successful with the fair sex, he is quite sure of victory with the help of the rouge and the wig, which make him absolutely irresistible. He catches a girl and is at the **#[175]#** pinnacle of happiness. Now comes the point of the story: If he can confess to what he has done, does he not lose the whole of his power to enchant? If he reveals himself as merely—yes, as a bald man—does he not in turn thereby lose the beloved? The concealment is his freely chosen act, for which aesthetics indeed holds him responsible. This science is no friend of bald-headed hypocrites, it abandons him to ridicule. This must be sufficient merely to hint at what I mean; comedy cannot be the subject of interest for the present investigation.

The path I must take is to carry out concealment dialectically through aesthetics and ethics, for what is important is that aesthetic concealment and the paradox disclose themselves in their absolute dissimilarity.

A couple of examples. A girl is secretly in love with someone, though they have not definitively declared their love to one another. Her parents force her to marry someone else (she could also be doing so as a dutiful daughter). She obeys her parents. She conceals her love “in order not to make the other person unhappy, and no one will ever come to know what she suffers.” — By uttering a single word, a young fellow can possess the object of his longings and his restless dreams. But this little word would compromise, indeed perhaps (who knows?) destroy an entire family; he magnanimously decides to remain in concealment: “The girl is never to know of it, so that she might perhaps be happy with someone else.” A pity that these two people, each of whom is concealed from his or her respective beloved, are also concealed from one another, for otherwise a remarkable sort of higher unity could have been brought about. — Their concealment is a free act for which they are indeed responsible to aesthetics. Aesthetics, however, is a polite and sentimental science that knows of more loopholes than any pawnbroker. So what does it do? It makes everything possible for the lovers. With the assistance of a chance occurrence, it gives the respective partners of the projected nuptials a hint about the magnanimous decision made by their opposite numbers—the situation is clarified, the lovers find one another and in addition are elevated to the status of genuine heroes. For despite the fact that they did not even have time to sleep on their heroic resolution, aesthetics nonetheless regards them as if they had spent many years courageously pursuing their goal. Aesthetics, indeed, does not pay much attention to time—regardless of whether what is at stake is something in jest or something earnest, time passes equally rapidly for it. **#[176]#**

But ethics knows nothing of this chance occurrence or of this sentimentality, nor does it have such a fleeting concept of time. With this, the matter takes on a different appearance. One does not do well to argue with ethics, for it has pure categories. It makes no appeals to experience, which of all ridiculous things is the most ridiculous, and so far is experience from making a man wise that, if he knows nothing higher, it will more likely make him mad. Ethics

has no chance occurrences, so it arrives at no explanations; it does not trifle with dignities; it places enormous responsibility on the shoulders of a frail hero; it condemns as presumptuous his desire to play Providence through his actions, but it also condemns him for wanting to do so through his suffering. It commands that one believe in actuality and have the courage to do battle against all the adversities of actuality rather than against those bloodless sufferings that a person is responsible for taking upon himself; it warns against believing in the clever calculations of the understanding, which are more perfidious than the oracles of antiquity. It warns against all untimely magnanimity: let actuality take hold—then it is time to demonstrate courage, but then ethics itself will offer all possible assistance. If, however, these two had been moved by anything more profound, if there had been earnestness in recognizing the task, earnestness in setting to work, then something surely would have come of them, but ethics cannot help them—it is affronted, for they are keeping a secret from it, a secret they have assumed on their own responsibility.

Thus, aesthetics required concealment and rewarded it; ethics required disclosure and punished concealment.

At times, however, aesthetics itself requires disclosure. If, ensnared in aesthetic illusion, the hero believes that with his silence he is saving another person, aesthetics requires and rewards silence. If, on the other hand, the hero interferes in another person's life, disturbing it with his action, it requires disclosure. Here I pause at the tragic hero; for a moment I will consider Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*. Agamemnon must sacrifice Iphigenia. Now, aesthetics requires silence of Agamemnon inasmuch as it would be unworthy of the hero to seek consolation from any other person, just as, out of concern for the women, he ought to conceal it from them as long as possible. On the other hand, the hero—precisely in order to be a hero—must also be tried in the frightful **#[177]#** spiritual trial that Clytemnestra's and Iphigenia's tears will cause him to undergo. What does aesthetics do? It has a way out; it has ready at hand an old

servant who discloses everything to Clytemnestra.⁷¹ Now everything is in order.

Ethics, however, has no chance occurrences and no old servant ready at hand. The aesthetic idea contradicts itself as soon as it is to be carried out in actuality. Ethics therefore requires disclosure. The tragic hero demonstrates his ethical courage precisely by the fact that he is not ensnared in any aesthetic illusion and is himself the one who proclaims Iphigenia's fate to her. If he does this, he is ethics' beloved son, in whom it is well pleased.ⁱ If he remains silent, it may be because he thinks that by so doing he makes things easier for others, but it may also be because that by so doing he makes things easier for himself—though he knows he is free of this motive. If he remains silent, he takes a responsibility upon himself as the single individual, inasmuch as he disregards an argument that could come from without. As a tragic hero, this is something he cannot do, for this is precisely why ethics loves him: because he constantly expresses the universal. His heroic deed requires courage, but this courage also includes the requirement that he not evade any argument. Now it is quite certain that tears constitute a frightful *argumentum ad hominem* [an argument directed at the person of one's opponent (rather than at the matter under discussion)], and there could doubtless be a person who was not moved by anything, but was nonetheless moved by tears. In the play, Iphigenia is permitted to weep; in actuality, as with Jephthah's daughter,ⁱⁱ she ought to be granted two months to weep, not in solitude, but at her father's feet, and to use all her arts, "which consist only of tears," and to entwine herself, rather than an olive branch, around his knees (see v. 1224).⁷²

Aesthetics required disclosure, but helped itself with a chance occurrence; ethics required disclosure and found its satisfaction in the tragic hero.

Despite the rigor with which ethics requires disclosure, it nonetheless cannot be denied that, precisely because they are determinants of inwardness, secrecy and silence actually make a person great. When Amor leaves Psyche, he tells her: "You will give

birth to a child who will be divine if you remain silent, but will be human if you betray the secret.”⁷³ The tragic hero, who is the darling of ethics—he is the purely human being; him I can indeed understand, and his every undertaking is indeed in the open. If I go further, I **#[178]#** continually collide with the paradox, the divine and the demonic, for silence is both. Silence is the demon’s snare, and the more silence, the more frightful the demon becomes, but silence is also the deity’s mutual understanding with the single individual.

Before I go over to the story of Abraham, however, I will summon forth a pair of poetic personages. Using the power of dialectics, I will place them under duress, and by swinging the lash of despair over them, I shall surely keep them from standing still, so that in their anxiety they might possibly be able to bring one thing or another to light.*

In his *Politics*,⁷⁶ Aristotle relates an account of a political disturbance in Delphi that originated in an affair concerning a marriage. *The bridegroom, concerning whom the diviners had foreseen a misfortune that would spring from his marriage, suddenly changes his plan at the decisive moment when he comes to fetch the bride*—he will not marry. I need **#[179]#** say no more than this.† In Delphi this event scarcely took place without tears; if a poet were to make use of it, he could certainly count on arousing sympathy. Is it not terrible that love, which in life is often enough a fugitive, is here also deprived of the assistance of heaven? Is not the old saying that marriages are made in heaven here put to shame? Usually, it is all the adversities and difficulties of finitude which, like evil spirits, want to separate the lovers, but love has heaven on its side, and this holy alliance thus conquers all foes. Here it is heaven itself that separates what heaven itself has indeed united.^{iv} Who indeed would have suspected this? least of all the young bride. Only a moment ago she was sitting in her room in all her beauty, and the lovely maidens had conscientiously adorned her, so they could confidently say to the whole world that not only had they been happy to do so, but that they had been envious as well—indeed, they had been happy that it was impossible for them to have been more envious because it was

impossible that she could have been more beautiful. She sat alone in her chamber and was transformed from beauty unto beauty, for everything of which feminine art was capable had been employed to adorn worthily the one who was worthy—yet still there was one thing lacking, something the young maidens had not dreamt of: a veil, finer, lighter, and yet more concealing than the one in which the young maidens had enveloped her: a bridal veil such as no young maiden could imagine or with which she could help her—indeed, even the bride knew not how to help herself. It was an invisible, benign power whose delight it is to adorn a bride, who enveloped her with it without her knowing of it, for she only saw how the bridegroom walked past and went up to the temple. She saw **#[180]#** the door close after him, and she became even more calm and blissful, for she knew that now, more than ever, he belonged to her. The temple door opened, he strode forth, but she virginally averted her glance and therefore she did not see that his countenance was troubled, but he saw that heaven was surely jealous of the bride's loveliness and of his good fortune. The temple door opened and the young maidens saw the bridegroom stride forth, but they did not see that his countenance was troubled, for they were busy fetching the bride. Then she stepped forth in all her maidenly modesty, yet nonetheless as a mistress surrounded by her corps of maidens who curtsied before her as maidens always curtsy before a bride. She stood thus at the head of the lovely troupe and waited—it was only a moment, for the temple was close by—and the bridegroom came—but he walked past her door.

But I break off here; I am no poet and work only by means of dialectics. First, it should be noted that it is at the decisive moment that the hero receives this intelligence, so he is innocent and blameless—he has not frivolously involved himself with the beloved. Next, he is confronted, or rather opposed, by a divine pronouncement; thus, unlike those flimsy lovers, he is not guided by a conceited view of his own shrewdness. Furthermore, it goes without saying that the pronouncement makes him just as unhappy as it does the bride, indeed, a bit more so, inasmuch as he is indeed the occasion of it. Certainly, it is indeed true that the diviners only

prophesied misfortune for *him*, but there is a question as to whether this misfortune will not, in striking him, also strike their marital happiness. What is he to do, then? (1) Is he to remain silent, go through with the wedding, and think, "Perhaps the misfortune will not strike immediately; in any case I have stood firm by my love and have not been afraid to make myself unhappy, but I must remain silent, for otherwise even this short interlude will be forfeited." This seems plausible, but it absolutely is not, for if he did that, he would have offended against the girl. In a way, by his silence he has made the girl guilty, for if she had known this, she would never have given her consent to such a union. Then, in the hour of need, he would have to bear not only the misfortune but also the responsibility for having remained silent and her righteous anger at him for having remained silent. (2) Is he to remain silent and not go through with the wedding? In that case he would have to involve himself in a deception whereby he annihilates himself in his relation to her. Aesthetics might perhaps approve of this. The catastrophe could then be formed to resemble what **#[181]#** actually happened, except that at the last minute an explanation would arrive—albeit after the fact, because from an aesthetic standpoint it is necessary that he die, unless this discipline [of aesthetics] believes itself capable of canceling that calamitous prophecy. Nonetheless, however magnanimous it is, proceeding in this manner is an insult to the girl and to the reality of her love. (3) Is he to speak? We must of course not forget that our hero is a little too poetic to be capable of regarding a renunciation of his love as something of no more significance than a failed business venture. If he speaks, then the entire matter becomes an unhappy love story in the manner of Axel and Valborg.^{‡77} **#[182]#** They become a couple who are separated by heaven itself. Yet in the present case this separation is to be thought of somewhat differently, for it is also the result of the free actions of individuals. What is especially difficult about the dialectic of this affair is that the misfortune is supposed to befall him alone. They get no common expression for their suffering, and thus they differ from Axel and Valborg, who were equally separated by heaven

because they were equally close to one another. If that had been the case here, then it would be possible to imagine a way out. For since, in separating them, heaven does not indeed employ any visible might, but leaves them to their own devices, one could indeed imagine them jointly deciding to defy heaven and all its misfortune.

Ethics, however, will require that he speak.^v So the essential expression of his heroic courage will then be found in his abandonment of aesthetic magnanimity, which in *casu* [in this case], however, cannot indeed be easily thought of as containing any admixture of the vanity that is associated with being concealed, for it must after all be clear to him that he does indeed make the girl unhappy. The reality of this heroic courage, however, is owing to the fact that it has had and has canceled its presupposition, for otherwise we could get heroes aplenty, especially in our times, times that have demonstrated peerless virtuosity in the forgery that accomplishes what is highest by springing over what lies in between.

But what is the purpose of this sketch, then, seeing as I do not, after all, get any further than to the tragic hero? Because it might nonetheless possibly cast some light upon the paradox. Everything, then, depends on how the bridegroom is positioned in relation to the diviners' pronouncement, which in one or another way becomes decisive for his life. Is that pronouncement *publici juris* or is it a *Privatissimum* [a strictly private matter]? The scene is set in Greece; the pronouncement of a diviner is understandable by all; I mean not merely that the single individual can understand its content lexically, but that the single individual can understand that a diviner proclaims the decision of heaven to the single individual. So the pronouncement of the diviner is understandable not merely to the hero, but to everyone, and no private relation to the divine results from it. He can do what he will, whatever is prophesied will happen, and neither by doing nor by refraining from doing anything will he come into any closer relation to the divine or become the object either of its grace or of its wrath. Every individual will understand the outcome just as well as the hero, and there is no secret writing that is decipherable only by the hero. So, if he wants to speak, he can

very well do so, for he can make himself understood; if he wants to remain silent, it is because he wants, by virtue of being the **#[183]#** single individual, to be higher than the universal, he wants to conjure up for himself all sorts of fantastic notions of how she will quickly forget this matter,^{vi} etc. If, on the other hand, the will of heaven had not been proclaimed to him by a diviner, if it had come to him in entirely private fashion, if it had placed itself in an entirely private relation to him, then we are at the paradox—supposing such a thing in fact exists (for here my deliberation takes the form of a dilemma)—then he could not speak, no matter how much he wanted to. Then he was not enjoying himself in the silence, but was suffering pain, though for him this was precisely the assurance that he was justified. His silence, then, did not have its basis in his wanting to place himself, as the single individual, in an absolute relation to the *universal*, but that he, as the single individual, was placed in an absolute relation to the *absolute*. Then, as best as I can imagine, he would indeed be able to find repose in this, whereas his magnanimous silence would be continually disturbed by the requirements of the ethical. Altogether, it would be desirable if aesthetics would for once try to begin where it has for so many years left off: with the illusion of magnanimity. The moment it did so, it would work hand in hand with the religious, for that is the only power that can rescue the aesthetic out of its conflict with the ethical. Queen Elizabeth sacrifices to the state her love for Essex by signing his death warrant.⁷⁸ This was a heroic deed, even if there was a bit of personal resentment involved because he had not sent her the ring. As we know, he did send it, but owing to the vindictiveness of a woman at court, it had been held back. It is said *ni fallor* [if my memory does not fail me] that Elizabeth learned of this and thereafter sat for ten days, with one finger in her mouth, biting it and not speaking a word, whereupon she died. This would be a task for a poet who understood how to wrench open the mouth; otherwise it would at most be something that could be used by a ballet master, with whom poets in our times often enough confuse themselves.

I will now follow this with a sketch along the lines of the demonic. In this connection I will make use of the legend of Agnete and the Merman.⁷⁹ The Merman is a seducer who rises up from the concealment of the deep; wild with desire, he seizes and crushes the innocent flower that stood by the shore in all its loveliness, its head bowed in thought, listening to the whispering of the sea. Until now, this is how poets have imagined it. Let us make a change. The Merman was a seducer. He has called out to Agnete. His smooth and slippery words have lured forth what had been concealed within her. In the Merman she has found what she sought, **#[184]#** what she had been looking for down on the bottom of the sea. Agnete is willing to accompany him. The Merman has taken her in his arms. Agnete twines herself about his neck. Trustingly, and with all her soul, she gives herself to the stronger one. He is already standing at the shore. He bends over the sea, ready to dive down with his prey—then Agnete looks at him yet again, not in fear, not in doubt, not gloating over her good fortune, not intoxicated with desire, but in absolute trust, in absolute humility, like the humble flower she deems herself to be. With this look she entrusts the whole of her fate to him in absolute confidence. — And behold! The sea no longer rages, its wild voice falls silent. The passion of the natural world, which is the Merman's strength, abandons him, the sea becomes calm as glass—and still Agnete continues to look upon him in this manner. Then the Merman collapses, he cannot withstand the power of innocence. His element has failed him, he cannot seduce Agnete. He leads her home again, he explains to her that he had only wanted to show her how beautiful the sea is when it is calm. And Agnete believes him. — Then he turns back alone, and the sea rages, but the despair within the Merman rages even more furiously. He can seduce Agnete, he can seduce a hundred Agnetes, he can charm any girl—but Agnete has won, and the Merman has lost her. Only as prey can she become his; he cannot belong faithfully to any girl, for he is after all only a merman. I have taken the liberty of making a minor alteration[§] to the Merman. **#[185]#** Actually, I have also altered Agnete a bit, for in the legend Agnete is not entirely without guilt, as generally

speaking, it is nonsense and pandering and an insult to womankind to imagine a seduction in which the girl has absolutely no guilt, none whatsoever. In the legend, Agnete is—and here I will modernize my language a bit—a woman who requires the interesting,⁸⁰ and every such woman can always be certain that there is a merman nearby, for mermen discover this sort of thing with half an eye and pursue it like a shark pursues its prey. It is thus very stupid to think (or it is a rumor the Merman has propagated) that so-called cultivation protects a girl against seduction. No: existence is more just and evenhanded—there is only one protection: innocence.

Now we will give the Merman human consciousness and let his being a merman designate a human preexistence in the consequences of which his life was ensnared. There is nothing standing in the way of his becoming a hero, for the step he is now taking is one of reconciliation. He is saved by Agnete; the seducer is crushed, he has submitted to the power of innocence, never again can he seduce. But at that very moment two powers are fighting over him: repentance, and Agnete and repentance. If he is taken by repentance alone, then he is concealed; if he is taken by Agnete and repentance, then he is disclosed.

Now, to the extent that repentance takes hold of the Merman and he remains concealed, he has surely made Agnete unhappy, for Agnete loved him in all her **#[186]#** innocence; she believed that at that moment—when he indeed seemed to her to have changed, however much he concealed it—he truly had merely wanted to show her the beautiful calmness of the sea. However, in his passion the Merman himself becomes even more unhappy, for he loved Agnete with an abundance of passions and furthermore had a new guilt to bear. The demonic element in his repentance will now surely explain to him that this is precisely his punishment, and the more it torments him the better.

If he abandons himself to this demonic element, perhaps he will make yet another attempt to save Agnete, as one can in a certain sense save a person with the help of evil. He knows that Agnete loves him. If he can wrest Agnete free of that love, she will in a way

be saved. But how? The Merman is too sensible to believe that an openhearted confession will arouse her disgust. So perhaps he will attempt to summon up every dark passion within her, ridicule her, mock her, make her love into something ridiculous, and if possible, incite her pride. He will not spare himself any suffering, for this is the profound contradiction in the demonic, and in a certain sense, there is infinitely more good in a demonic person than in trivial people. The more selfish Agnete is, the more easily she will be deceived (for it is only very inexperienced people who think that it is easy to deceive innocence; existence is very profound, and it is easiest for shrewd, clever people to fool those who are shrewd and clever), but the Merman's sufferings will be all the more frightful. The more ingeniously his deception is constructed, the less will Agnete modestly conceal her suffering from him; she will employ every means, and they will not be without effect—that is, not to shake him from his decision, but to torment him.

Thus, with the help of the demonic, the Merman wanted to be the single individual who as the single individual was higher than the universal. The demonic has the same characteristic as the divine, namely that the single individual can enter into an absolute relation to it. This is the analogy, the counterpart to that paradox of which we speak. It therefore bears a certain similarity that can be deceptive. Thus, the Merman would appear to have the proof that his silence is justified because he suffers all his pain in it. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that he is able to speak. If he speaks, then he can become a tragic hero, in my view a very great tragic hero. Perhaps only few will **#[187]#** grasp wherein this greatness consists.[¶] Then he will have the courage to wrest himself free of every self-deception about using his arts to make Agnete happy; he will have the courage, humanly speaking, to crush Agnete. In addition, I will here make just one psychological remark. The more selfishly Agnete has been developed, the more dazzling the self-deception will be; indeed, it is not unthinkable that it could actually happen that by making use of his demonic shrewdness, the Merman could not only—humanly speaking—have saved Agnete, but have elicited from her something

extraordinary, for a demon knows how to torture strengths out of even the weakest person, and in his way he can have very good intentions toward a person.

The Merman stands on a dialectical knife-edge. If, in repentance, he is rescued out of the demonic, there are two possible paths. He can hold back, remain in concealment, but not depend upon his shrewdness. He then does not come as the single individual into an absolute relation to the demonic, but finds repose in the counterparadox that the deity will save Agnete. (This is probably how the Middle Ages would make the movement, for according to its way of thinking, the Merman has obviously reverted to the monastery.) Or he can be saved by Agnete. Now, this must not be understood as meaning that through Agnete's love he is supposedly saved from becoming a seducer in the future (this is an aesthetic attempt at rescue, which always evades **#[188]#** the main question, namely the continuity in the Merman's life), for in this respect he is saved; he is saved insofar as he becomes disclosed. Then he marries Agnete. Nonetheless, he must have recourse to the paradox. For indeed, if through his guilt the single individual has come outside the universal, he can return to it only by virtue of having come, as the single individual, into an absolute relation to the absolute. Now, here I will make an observation by which I say more than was said at any point in the foregoing.[#] Sin is not the first immediacy, sin is a subsequent immediacy. In sin the individual is already higher, in the direction of the demonic paradox, than the universal, because it is a contradiction of the universal to want to require itself of a person who lacks the *conditio sine qua non* [necessary and indispensable condition]. If, among other things, philosophy also considered that it could occur to a human being to act in accordance with its teachings, a peculiar comedy would result from it. An ethics that ignores sin is an utterly futile discipline, but if it takes sin into account, then it has *eo ipso* gone beyond itself. Philosophy teaches that the immediate is to be annulled.⁸¹ This is true enough, but what is not true is that sin is, as a matter of course, something immediate, any more than faith, as a matter of course, is something immediate.

As long as I move within these spheres, everything goes easily, but neither does what is said here explain Abraham, for Abraham did not become the single individual through sin—on the contrary, he was the righteous man who was God's chosen one. The analogy to Abraham will become visible only after the single individual has been bought to the point of being capable of realizing the universal, and then the paradox repeats itself.

Therefore, I can understand the movements of the Merman, whereas I cannot understand Abraham, for it is precisely by means of the paradox that the Merman comes to the point of wanting to realize the universal. If, indeed, he remains concealed and initiates # [189]# himself into all the agonies of repentance, he becomes a demon and as such is annihilated. If he remains concealed, but does not shrewdly think that he can liberate Agnete by being himself tormented in the bondage of repentance, he undoubtedly gains peace, but is lost to this world. If he becomes disclosed, if he permits himself to be saved by Agnete, then he is the greatest human being I can imagine, for it is only aesthetics that frivolously thinks it is praising the power of love by having the lost soul be loved by an innocent girl and thereby be saved; it is only aesthetics that takes an erroneous view of the matter and thinks that the girl, rather than the Merman, is the heroic figure. So the Merman cannot belong to Agnete unless, after having made the movement of infinite repentance, he makes one additional movement, the movement by virtue of the absurd. He can make the movement of repentance by his own strength, but he indeed uses absolutely all of his strength in making it, and thus it is impossible for him, by his own strength, to come back and grasp actuality once again. When a person does not have passion enough to make either the one movement or the other, when one saunters through life in careless and slovenly fashion, repents a little, and thinks that the rest of it will surely take care of itself, then, once and for all, one has renounced living in the idea, then one can very easily achieve—and help others to achieve—what is highest, i.e., to fool oneself and others into imagining that in the world of the spirit things go as they do in a game of cards, where everything takes place by chance. One can then amuse oneself by

considering how odd it is, indeed, that precisely in an age in which everyone can of course achieve the highest, there can be such widespread doubt concerning the immortality of the soul⁸²—for the person who has actually made merely the movement of infinity, he scarcely has any doubts about that. Conclusions reached by passion are the only reliable ones, i.e., the only ones that are convincing. Fortunately, in this case existence is more loving, more faithful than what wise men claim, for it excludes no person, not even the humblest; it deceives no one, for in the world of the spirit the only person who is deceived is the one who deceives himself. It is everyone's view (and to the extent that I allow myself to judge about it, it is also my view) that entering a monastery is not the highest thing, but in no way is it my view that, in our times, when no one enters a monastery, everyone is therefore greater than the profound and earnest souls who found repose in a monastery. How many people in our times have passion enough to consider this and then to judge themselves honestly? Merely the thought of taking time upon one's conscience like this, of giving one's conscience, in its insomniac tirelessness, the time to search through every secret thought, so that **#[190]#** a person—if he does not at every instant make the movement by virtue of what is noblest and holiest in a person—can through dread and anxiety discover^{**} and, if by no other means, then through anxiety, lure forth the dark undercurrent that in fact conceals itself in every human life—whereas when one lives in society with others, one so easily forgets, so easily slips away from this, is supported in so many ways, is granted the opportunity to begin anew: I have thought that merely by itself, this thought, understood with proper respect, could serve to chasten many an individual in our times, times which believe they have already arrived at what is highest. But people concern themselves very little about this in our age, which has arrived at the highest—though in fact no age has been taken over by the comic as has precisely this one. And it is inconceivable that the age itself has not already, by generatio æquivoca [spontaneous generation], given birth to its hero, the demon who will mercilessly perform the frightful drama of bringing the entire

age to laugh and to forget that it is laughing at itself. Or, when a person has already attained what is highest by the age of twenty, what more is existence than something to laugh at? And yet, what higher movement has the age come up with since the time people stopped entering monasteries? What sits at the head of the table other than wretched worldly wisdom, shrewdness, and faintheartedness, which in cowardly fashion induces people to imagine that they have accomplished what is highest and slyly restrains them from even attempting something lesser? The person who has made the movement into the monastery has only one movement left—that is the movement of the absurd. In our times, how many understand what the absurd is? In our times, how many people live in such a way that they have renounced everything or have gained everything? How many are even honest enough to know what they are capable of and what they are not capable of? And isn't it true that insofar as there are such people, they are more likely to be found among the less cultivated and among women? Just as the demonic person always reveals **#[191]#** himself without understanding himself, so, in a sort of clairvoyance, does the age reveal its flaw, for again and again it insists upon comedy. Should this actually be what the age needs, does the theater perhaps have need of a new piece in which someone's dying for love is made ludicrous, or would it not rather be redemptive for the age if *this* happened among us: if the age became witness to an event of this sort, so that for once it could gain the courage to believe in power of the spirit, the courage to refrain from suffocating, in cowardly fashion, the better part of itself, the courage to refrain from enviously suffocating it in others—with laughter. Does the age really have need of a ludicrous Erscheinung [appearance] of a religious enthusiast in order to have something to laugh at, or does it not rather need an enthusiast to remind it of what has been forgotten?

If one wanted a plot in a similar style, but that would be more moving, because the passion of repentance was not set in motion, one could make use of a story from the Book of Tobit. Young Tobias wants to marry Sarah, who is the daughter of Raguel and Edna. This girl is beset by tragedy. She has been given to seven men, all of

whom perished in the bridal chamber. For my plot, this is a bit of a defect in the story, for when one thinks of a girl's seven fruitless attempts to get married—even though she has come very close to doing so, as close as a university student who has failed his examinations seven times—the comic effect is almost unavoidable. In the Book of Tobit the emphasis lies elsewhere, and the high number is therefore an important and even a tragic component, for young Tobias's magnanimity is thus all the greater, both because he is his parents' only son (6:15) and because the deterrent factor is all the more pressing. So this feature must be omitted. Sarah, then, is a girl who has never been in love, who still preserves the bliss of a young girl, her enormous first mortgage on life, who holds her "Vollmachtbrief zum Glücke" [license to be joyous]⁸⁵—to love a man with all her heart. And yet, she is unhappier than anyone, for she knows that the evil demon who loves her will kill the bridegroom on her wedding night. I have read much of sorrow, but I doubt that there is anywhere a sorrow as deep as the one that lies in this girl's life. Yet, when the unhappiness comes from without, there is nonetheless some consolation to be found. If life has not brought a person what could have made him happy, there is still the consolation that he could have been able to receive it. But the unfathomable sorrow that no amount of time can dispel, no time can heal: to know that it would be of no help, **#[192]#** even if life were to do everything! In his simple naiveté, a Greek author conceals so infinitely much when he says: πάντως γὰρ οὐδεις Ἐρωτα ἔφυγεν ἢ φευξεται, μέχρι ἂν κάλλος ᾗ καὶ ὀφθαλμοὶ βλέπωσιν [For absolutely no one has ever escaped Love nor ever shall, as long as beauty exists and eyes can see]⁸⁶ (see Longus's *Pastoralia*). Many a girl became unhappy in love, but still, she *became* so—Sarah *was* so before she became so. It is grievous to be unable to find someone to whom one can give oneself, but it is *inexpressibly* grievous to be unable to give oneself. A young girl gives herself, and then people say, "Now she's no longer free," but Sarah was never free—and yet she had never given herself. It is grievous if a girl gives herself and is defrauded, but Sarah was defrauded before she gave herself. When, finally, Tobias wants to

wed her, what a world of sorrows, then, must not the consequences hold? What wedding ceremonies, what preparations! No girl was ever defrauded as was Sarah, for she was defrauded of the most blissful thing of all, of the absolute wealth that even the poorest girl possesses, defrauded of the secure, unlimited, unbounded, unrestrained rapture of self-abandon—for of course, there first had to be smoke from placing the fish's heart and its liver on the glowing coals.^{vii} And how must a mother bid farewell to her daughter who, like herself, has been defrauded of everything and consequently must defraud her mother of the most beautiful of things. Just read the story. Edna prepared the chamber, and she led Sarah into it, and she wept, and she received her daughter's tears. And she said to her: "Be of good courage, my child! May the Lord of heaven and earth give thee joy for this thy sorrow! Be of good courage, daughter." And now, the moment of the wedding. We read (if we can, despite the tears): "But when they both were shut in the room together, Tobias arose from the bed and said, 'Arise, sister! and we will pray that the Lord might have mercy on us'" (8:4).

If a poet were to read this tale, if he were to make use of it, I wager one hundred to one that he would place all the emphasis on young Tobias. The story reminds us yet again of that heroic courage of being willing to risk one's life in the face of such manifest danger, for the morning following the wedding, Raguel says to Edna: "Send one of the maids there and let her see if he is alive—so that if he is not, I can bury him and no one will know of it" (see 8:13)⁸⁷—this heroic courage would be the theme of the story. I take the liberty of suggesting something different. Tobias acted bravely, courageously, and chivalrously, but any man who does not have the courage to act in that manner is a cowardly sissy who knows neither what love is nor what it is to be a man nor **#[193]#** what is worth living for—he has not even grasped the little mystery that it is better to give than to receive,^{viii} and has not an inkling of the great mystery: that it is far more difficult to receive than to give—that is, if one has had the courage to do without and has not proven a coward in the hour of need. No, Sarah: she is the heroine. She it is whom I want to

approach as I have never approached, or have felt tempted to approach in thought, any girl among those of whom I have read. For how much love of God is not required in order to be willing to permit oneself be healed, when, through no fault of one's own, one has been deformed from the very beginning—from the very beginning, a calamitous specimen of a human being! What ethical maturity to assume the responsibility, to permit the beloved to undertake so perilous a venture! What humility in relation to another person! What faith in God, that she might not, in the next instant, hate the man to whom she owed everything!

Let Sarah be a man, and the demonic is right there, ready at hand. The proud, noble temperament can bear everything, but one thing it cannot bear, it cannot bear pity. Pity contains an insult that can be inflicted upon him only by a higher power, for of himself he can never be an object of it. If he has sinned, he can bear the punishment without despairing—but, without guilt, right from his mother's womb, to have been chosen as the object of pity, that is a sweet stench in his nostrils that he cannot endure. Pity has a peculiar dialectic: at one moment it requires guilt, at the next it will have none of it, and therefore, to be predestined to pity becomes more and more frightful the more the individual's misfortune tends toward the spiritual. But Sarah is without guilt, she has been cast out as prey to every suffering, and in addition to this she is to be tormented by people's pity—for indeed, even I, who in fact admire her more than Tobias loved her, even I cannot mention her name without saying: "the poor girl." Put a man in Sarah's place, let him know that if he were to love a girl, then, on their wedding night, a spirit from hell will come and murder his beloved. Then it would certainly be possible that he would choose the demonic, that he would shut himself up within himself and (in the manner in which demonic natures secretly speak) he would say: "Thanks, I am no friend of ceremonies and verbosity, I do not require the joys of love at all, I can of course become a Bluebeard,⁸⁸ who takes pleasure in seeing girls perish on their wedding night." Generally, one does # [194]# not get to know very much about the demonic,

notwithstanding that, especially in our times, there is a justifiable demand that this territory be explored, and notwithstanding the fact that the observer, if he is the least bit able to establish a little rapport with the demon, can make use of just about any person, at least momentarily. In this respect, Shakespeare is and forever remains a hero. That dreadful demon, the most demonic figure Shakespeare has depicted, but has also depicted peerlessly—Gloucester (subsequently Richard III): what made him a demon? Obviously, the fact that he could not bear the pity to which he had been hostage since childhood. His monologue in the first act of *Richard III* is worth more than all moral systems, which have no inkling of the terrors of existence or of how to explain them.

I, that am rudely stamp'd and want love's majesty
To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time
Into this breathing world scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them.⁸⁹

One cannot save natures such as Gloucester's by mediating them into an idea of society. Ethics really only makes fools of them, just as it would of course be mockery of Sarah if ethics were to say to her, "Why don't you express yourself in the universal and get married?" Fundamentally, such natures are in the paradox, and they are in no way any more imperfect than other people except that they are either lost in the demonic paradox or saved in the divine paradox. From time immemorial, people have been pleased to believe that witches, nixies, trolls, etc. were deformed creatures, and it cannot be denied that when one sees a malformed creature, everyone has an immediate tendency to connect the notion of such beings to moral depravity. What an enormous injustice, since the

relation must rather be the reverse of this: that existence itself has corrupted them, just as when a stepmother causes children to be wicked. Something original in their nature or in their history has placed them outside the universal: this is the beginning of the demonic, in which the individual himself is indeed without guilt. Thus, Cumberland's Jew⁹⁰ is also a demon, even though he does what is good. Thus, too, the demonic can express itself as contempt for people, **#[195]#** a contempt that, note well, does not cause the demonic person himself to behave contemptuously; on the contrary, he has his strength in his knowledge that he is better than all those who judge him. — In connection with all such things, the poets^{ix} ought, if anything, doubtless be the first to sound the alarm. God knows what works the present generation of younger versifiers is reading! Their studies probably consist of learning rhymes by rote. God knows what their significance is in life! Right now, I don't know that what they are doing serves any purpose other than that of providing an edifying proof of the immortality of the soul, inasmuch as in this connection we can cheerfully say to ourselves what Baggesen says of the town poet, Kildevalle:⁹¹ "If he becomes immortal, then so do we all." —What is said here of Sarah—which is intended more or less as a poetic production and thus has an imaginative presupposition—takes on its full significance if one adopts a psychological point of view in immersing oneself in the old saying: *nullum unquam exstitit magnum ingenium sine aliqua dementia* [there is no genius who does not have a certain degree of madness].⁹² For this dementia is the genius's suffering in existence—it is, if I dare put it thus, the expression of divine envy, whereas genius is the expression of divine partiality. Thus, from the beginning, the genius is disoriented in relation to the universal and is brought into relation to the paradox, whether, in despair about his limitation (which in his view transforms his omnipotence to impotence), he seeks demonic reassurance and therefore will not acknowledge, either to God or to mortals, that this is what he seeks—or he reassures himself religiously in love of the deity. Here are to be found tasks for psychology on which, it seems to me, a person could gladly spend

an entire life, and yet we rarely hear a word about them. In what relation does madness stand to genius? Can one construct the one from the other? In what sense and to what degree is the genius ruler of his madness? For otherwise he would of course actually be mad. But in addition to love, observations such as these involve a high degree of cunning, for it is extremely difficult to carry out observations of a superior person. Nonetheless if, paying careful attention to this, one were to read through several of the most brilliant authors, it might be possible—one single, solitary time, albeit with much effort—to discover a little.

I will consider yet another case: that an individual wants to save the universal by his concealment and silence. For this I can make use of the legend **#[196]#** of Faust.⁹³ Faust is a doubter,^{††} an apostate of the spirit who goes the way of the flesh. This is the poet's view, and even though it is repeated over and over again that every age has its Faust, nonetheless one poet after another doggedly goes down the same beaten path. Let us make a slight alteration. Faust is the doubter κατ' ἐξοχήν [in the eminent sense; par excellence]; but he has a sympathetic nature. Even in Goethe's version of Faust I feel the absence of a deeper psychological insight into the secret conversations that doubt carries on with itself. In our time, when of course everyone has experienced doubt, no poet has yet taken any steps in this direction. So indeed, I think I would like to offer them royal bonds on which they could write of all the many experiences they have had in that connection—they would scarcely be able to write more than what would fit in the upper margin.

Only when one turns Faust in upon himself like this, only then can the doubt appear in such poetic fashion, only then does he himself really discover all of its sufferings in actuality. Then he knows that it is spirit that sustains existence, but he also knows that the security and happiness in which people live are not grounded in the power of the spirit, but can easily be explained as an unreflective bliss. As a doubter, as *the* doubter, **#[197]#** he is higher than all this, and if anyone wants to deceive him by getting him to imagine that he has gone beyond doubt, he easily sees through it, for the person

who has made a movement in the world of spirit—thus, an infinite movement—can immediately detect in the response whether the one who is speaking is a man who has been sorely tested or is a Münchhausen.⁹⁴ Faust knows that he can accomplish with his doubt what a Tamerlane⁹⁵ accomplished with his Huns: alarm and terrify people, cause existence to buckle under their feet, sow disunity among people, cause the scream of anxiety to resound everywhere. And if he does this, he is nonetheless no Tamerlane—in a certain sense he has the authorization of thought and is authorized to do this. But Faust is a sympathetic temperament, he loves existence, his soul knows no envy, he realizes that he cannot stop the fury that he is certainly capable of awakening, he desires no Herostratic honor⁹⁶—he remains silent; he conceals the doubt more carefully in his soul than the girl who conceals beneath her heart the fruit of a sinful love; he tries as best he can to walk in step with other people, but what takes place within him is something he consumes within himself, and in this way he presents himself to the universal as a sacrifice.

Sometimes, when an eccentric thinker **#[198]#** raises the whirlwind of doubt, one can hear people complain, saying: “Would that he had remained silent.” Faust realizes this idea. Anyone who has an idea of what it means that a person lives by spirit also knows what the hunger of doubt means and that the doubter hungers just as much for the daily bread of life as for nourishment of the spirit. So even though all the pain Faust suffers can constitute a quite good argument that it is not pride that has possessed him, I shall nonetheless make use of a little precautionary measure I can easily contrive, for just as Gregory of Rimini was called *tortor infantium*⁹⁷ because he assumed the damnation of infants, I could be tempted to call myself *tortor heroum* [tormentor of heroes], as I am very inventive when it comes to tormenting heroes. Faust does not see Margaret after he has chosen pleasure, for my Faust does not choose pleasure at all. He does not see Margaret in Mephistopheles’ concave mirror, but in all her lovely innocence, and because his soul has preserved its love of humanity, he is also quite capable of falling

in love with her. But he is a doubter. His doubt has annihilated actuality for him, for so ideal is my Faust that he is not one of these scholarly doubters who doubt for one hour per semester while occupying a professorial chair but otherwise are able to do everything else—as well as this—without the assistance of spirit or by virtue of spirit. He is a doubter, and the doubter is just as hungry for the daily bread of happiness as for spiritual sustenance. Nonetheless, he remains true to his decision and remains silent; he speaks to no one of his doubt, nor to Margaret of his love.

It's obvious that Faust is too ideal a figure to permit himself to be satisfied with the nonsense that if he were to speak, he would bring about a general discussion, or that the whole matter would pass off without consequences, or perhaps, or perhaps. (Here, as every poet can easily see, there is a comic element dormant in the plot: by bringing Faust into an ironic relation to these low-comic fools who in our times go chasing after doubt; who present an external argument, e.g., a doctoral diploma, as proof of their having truly doubted; or they swear that they have doubted everything; or they prove it from the fact that in the course of their travels they met a doubter: these special couriers and sprinters in the world of spirit who in the greatest haste get a bit of news about doubt from one person and about faith from another, and now wirtschaftete [do business] in the best manner, all according to whether the congregation prefers fine sand or coarse sand.⁹⁸) Faust is too ideal a figure to go about in slippers. A person who does not have an infinite passion **#[199]#** is not ideal, and the person who does have an infinite passion has long since saved his soul from such rubbish. He remains silent in order to sacrifice himself—or he speaks, conscious that he will confuse everything.

If he remains silent, then he will be condemned by ethics, for it says: "You must acknowledge the universal, and you acknowledge it precisely by speaking, and you dare not take pity on the universal." One should not forget this observation when one sometimes passes harsh judgment on a doubter because he speaks. I am not inclined to judge such conduct leniently; but here, as everywhere, it is

important that the movements take place in proper, normal fashion. If worse comes to worst, a doubter, even if his words caused the world every possible misfortune, is much to be preferred over these wretched sweet teeth who taste a bit of everything and want to cure doubt without knowing what it is and who therefore are usually the immediate cause when doubt bursts forth in wild and uncontrollable fashion. — If he speaks, then he confuses everything, for even if that does not happen, he only gets to know that afterward, and a person cannot be helped by the outcome, either at the moment at which a person acts or with respect to his responsibility.

If he remains silent on his own responsibility, he may well be acting magnanimously, but to his other pains he will add a little spiritual trial, for the universal constantly torments him, saying: “You should have spoken—how can you be certain that your decision was not in fact the result of covert pride.”

On the other hand, if the doubter is able to become the single individual who as the single individual stands in an absolute relation to the absolute, he can receive authorization for his silence. In that case, he must transform his doubt into guilt. Then he is in the paradox, but then his doubt has been cured, even though he may acquire another doubt.

Even the New Testament would acknowledge a silence of this sort.^x Indeed, there are even places in the New Testament that praise irony, provided it is used to conceal something higher. Nonetheless, this movement is as much a movement of irony as is any other movement that has its basis in subjectivity being higher than actuality. No one in our times wants to hear of this, no one wants to hear anything about irony other than what was said by Hegel,⁹⁹ who, strangely enough, had little understanding of it and bore a grudge against it—something our times have good reason not to abandon, for our times must simply keep up their guard against irony. In the Sermon on the Mount it says: “When you **#[200]#** fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others.”^{xi} This passage testifies straightforwardly that subjectivity is incommensurable with actuality, indeed, that it is

permitted to deceive. If only the people of our day who gad about spouting loose talk about the idea of congregation,¹⁰⁰ would read the New Testament, they might perhaps have other thoughts.

But now to Abraham, how did he act? For I have not forgotten (and now perhaps the reader will be kind enough to remember) that it was in order to collide with this matter that I embarked upon the whole of the preceding investigation, not in order that by so doing Abraham would become more understandable, but in order that the incomprehensibility would be more jarring, for, as I have said, I cannot understand Abraham, I can only admire him. It has also been pointed out that none of the stages described contained an analogy to Abraham; they were developed only in order that, when they were explored within their own spheres, they could, in the instances where the compass exhibited deviation, hint, as it were, at the boundaries of the unknown country. Insofar as there is to be any talk of an analogy, it must be the paradox of sin, but this, in turn, lies in another sphere—it cannot explain Abraham and is itself much more easily explained than is Abraham.

Thus, Abraham did not speak. He spoke neither to Sarah, nor to Eliezer, nor to Isaac. He passed over the three levels of ethical jurisdiction, because for Abraham there was no higher expression of the ethical than family life.

Aesthetics permitted—indeed, required—silence of the single individual if by remaining silent he could save another person. This in itself demonstrates sufficiently that Abraham is not situated within the boundaries of the aesthetic. In no way is he silent in order to save Isaac, as the whole of his task—sacrificing Isaac for his own and for God's sake—is absolutely an offense to the aesthetic, for aesthetics can surely understand that I sacrifice myself, but not that I sacrifice someone else for my own sake. The aesthetic hero was

silent. Nevertheless, ethics judged him for keeping silent by virtue of his accidental particularity. He was silent on the basis of his human prescience. This is something ethics cannot forgive: every human knowledge of this sort is only an illusion. Ethics requires an infinite movement, it requires disclosure. Thus the aesthetic hero can speak, but refuses to do so. #[201]#

The genuine tragic hero sacrifices himself and everything that is his for the universal; his undertaking, everything stirring within him, belongs to the universal. He is disclosed, and in this disclosure, he is ethics' beloved son. This does not describe Abraham; he does nothing for the universal, and he is concealed.

Thus, we now confront the paradox. Either the single individual as the single individual can stand in an absolute relation to the absolute, and then the ethical is not the highest—or Abraham is lost: he is neither a tragic hero nor an aesthetic hero.

Here, once again, it could seem that the paradox is the simplest and easiest thing of all. However, I must repeat that a person who remains convinced of this is not a knight of faith, for distress and anxiety are the only conceivable justification, even if it cannot be conceived in general, for then the paradox is abolished.

Abraham remains silent—but he *cannot* speak: therein lies the distress and the anxiety. Indeed, if in speaking I cannot make myself understood, then I am not speaking, even if I were to speak uninterruptedly night and day. This is the case with Abraham. He can say everything, but one thing he cannot say, and yet if he cannot say it—that is, say it so that someone else can understand it—then he is not speaking. The consolation of speech is that it translates me into the universal. Now, Abraham can say the most beautiful things to be found in any language about how he loves Isaac. But this is not what weighs upon his mind—there is something deeper, that he will sacrifice him because it is a trial. No one can understand this latter thought, and therefore everyone can only misunderstand the former. This distress is something with which the tragic hero is unacquainted. First of all, he has the consolation that every counterargument has been granted its due, that he has been able to

give Clytemnestra, Iphigenia, Achilles,¹⁰¹ the chorus, every living being, every voice from the heart of humanity, every cunning, every distressing, every accusatory, every sympathetic thought the opportunity to stand up in opposition to him. He can be certain that everything that could be said against him has been said, unsparingly, mercilessly—and to strive against the entire world is a consolation, to strive against oneself is frightful. He does not have to fear having overlooked anything, that he might afterward have to cry out, as King Edward IV did at the news of the murder of Clarence: **#[202]#**

Who sued to me for him? Who, in my wrath,
Kneel'd at my feet, and bid me be advis'd?
Who spoke of brotherhood? who spoke of love?¹⁰²

The tragic hero is unacquainted with the frightful responsibility of solitude. In addition, he has the consolation that he can weep and cry out with Clytemnestra and Iphigenia—and tears and cries assuage, but unutterable sighs^{xii} are torture. Agamemnon can quickly pull his soul together in the certainty that he will act, and then he still has time to console and encourage. This Abraham cannot do. When his heart is moved, when his words would contain blessed consolation for the whole world, he dares not console, for would not Sarah, would not Eliezer, would not Isaac say to him: “Why do you want to do it, then? You can of course refrain from doing it.” And if, in his distress, he wanted to give vent to his feelings, wanted to embrace everything dear to him before he took the final step, then he would perhaps have occasioned the frightful consequence that Sarah, that Eliezer, that Isaac would be offended in him and believe him a hypocrite. He cannot speak; he speaks no human language. And even if he understood all the world’s languages, even if his loved ones also understood them, nonetheless he could not speak—he speaks in a divine language, he speaks in tongues.^{xiii}

I can well understand this distress; I can admire Abraham; I am not afraid that someone, having heard this story, could be tempted

recklessly to want to be the single individual, but I also confess that I do not have the courage for it and that I am happy to renounce any prospect of going further, even if it were possible that I would ever—however tardily—get that far. Abraham can break off at any moment, he can repent it all as a temptation: then he can speak, then everyone would be able to understand him—but then he is no longer Abraham.

Abraham *cannot* speak, for that which would explain everything is something he cannot say (i.e., in a manner in which it could be understood): that it is a trial—though mind you, a trial in which the ethical constitutes the temptation. Someone situated like this is an emigrant from the sphere of the universal. But even less can he # [203]# utter what comes next. As has been sufficiently set forth earlier, Abraham in fact makes two movements. He makes the movement of infinite resignation and gives up Isaac. This is something no one can understand, because it is a private undertaking, but following this, at every instant, he makes the movement of faith. This is his consolation, for he says: “Nonetheless, it will not happen, or, if it does happen, the Lord will give me a new Isaac, namely by virtue of the absurd.” With the tragic hero,¹⁰³ there is at least an end to the story. Iphigenia submits to her father’s decision; she herself makes the movement of infinite resignation and they now understand one another. She can understand Agamemnon because his undertaking expresses the universal. On the other hand, were Agamemnon to say to her: “Even though the god requires you as a sacrifice, nonetheless, it might still be possible that the god did not require it—that is, by virtue of the absurd,” at that very instant he would become unintelligible to Iphigenia. If he could say this by virtue of human calculation, then Iphigenia would probably understand him, but then it would follow that Agamemnon had not made the movement of infinite resignation, and then he is no hero, then the diviner’s pronouncement is a sailor’s yarn, and the whole business is a vaudeville.¹⁰⁴

So Abraham did not speak. Only one word from him has been preserved, the only reply to Isaac, which also proves sufficiently that

he had not spoken previously. Isaac asks Abraham where the lamb is for the burnt offering. “And Abraham said: ‘God himself will provide a lamb for the burnt offering, my son!’”^{xiv}

Here I will examine these last words by Abraham a bit more closely. Without these words, the entire event would lack something; if they had been different, then everything would perhaps have dissolved in confusion.

I have often considered to what extent a tragic hero, whether he culminates in suffering or in taking action, ought to have a final remark. In my judgment, this depends on the sphere of life to which he belongs, upon whether his life has intellectual significance, upon whether his suffering or action stands in relation to spirit.

It is obvious that at his moment of culmination, the tragic hero, like any other human being who is not bereft of speech, can speak a few words, perhaps a few appropriate words, but there is the question of how appropriate it is for him to speak them. If the significance of his life is to be found in an **#[204]#** outward action, then he has nothing to say, then everything he says is essentially chitchat, by which he merely weakens the impression he makes, while the formalities of tragedy dictate that he carry out his task in silence, whether it consists in taking action or in suffering. To keep from going too far afield, I will simply take what lies closest at hand. If it had been Agamemnon himself, rather than Calchas,¹⁰⁵ who had drawn the knife over Iphigenia, he would simply have demeaned himself by wanting to say a few words at the last moment, for the significance of his act was of course obvious to all. The rites and procedures pertaining to piety, compassion, feelings, and lamentation had all been performed, and furthermore, his life had no relation to spirit, i.e., he was not a teacher or a witness to the spirit. On the other hand, if the importance of a hero's life is related to spirit, a failure to speak would weaken the impression he makes. What he has to say, then, is not a couple of appropriate words, a little oration, but the meaning of his words is that he consummates himself at the decisive moment. An intellectual tragic hero such as this—he ought to have and he ought to^{xv} retain the last word. We

require of him the same transfigured bearing as is appropriate for every tragic hero, but then we require one word in addition. Insofar, then, as an intellectual tragic hero of this sort culminates in a suffering (in death), with these final words he becomes immortal before he dies, whereas the ordinary tragic hero becomes immortal only after his death.

We can take Socrates as an example. He was an intellectual tragic hero. His death sentence is announced to him. At that instant he dies, for the person who does not understand that it takes the entire strength of the spirit to die and that the hero always dies before he dies—he will not get very far in his observation of life. As a hero, then, what is required of Socrates is that he repose in himself, undisturbed, but as an intellectual tragic hero what is required of him is that, at that final moment, he have sufficient strength of spirit to consummate himself. Thus, unlike the ordinary tragic hero, he cannot concentrate on continuing to confront death, but must make that movement so quickly that at that same instant he is conscious of being beyond that struggle and asserts himself. Thus, if Socrates had remained silent in the crisis of death, he would have diminished the effect of his life and awakened a suspicion that the ironic elasticity within him was not an elemental strength but a game which possessed a flexibility that **#[205]#** had to be employed inversely in order to buoy him in pathos at the decisive moment. **##**

What has here been suggested briefly can indeed not be applied to Abraham if one intends, by analogy, to find some fitting words for Abraham to end with, though probably it could be done if one appreciates the necessity that at the final moment Abraham must consummate himself, that he must not draw the knife in silence but have some words to say, for as the father of faith, he is of absolute significance with respect to spirit. I cannot in advance form any idea of what he is to say; after he has said it, I can indeed understand it, ^{xvi} indeed, in a certain sense I well understand Abraham in what he has said, without, however, thereby having come any closer to him than I have been in the foregoing. If there had been no final remark by Socrates, ¹⁰⁷ I could have imagined myself in his place and

formulated one; had I been unable to formulate one, a poet could have managed it, but no poet gets as far as Abraham.

Before I proceed further in examining Abraham's last words more closely, I must first point out the difficulty of Abraham's being able to say anything at all. As explained above, the distress and anxiety in the paradox lay precisely in the silence: Abraham cannot speak.^{§§} In a way, then, it is a self-contradiction to require that he speak unless one wants to have him out of the paradox again, so that he **#[206]#** suspends it at the decisive moment, whereby he then ceases to be Abraham and negates everything that went before. Thus, if at the decisive moment Abraham were to say to Isaac: "You are the one whom this concerns," this would only be a weakness. For if he could speak at all, he should have spoken long before, and then the weakness would consist in the fact that he had not had the maturity of spirit and the concentration to have thought through all of the pain beforehand, but had pushed some of it away from himself, so that the actual pain was greater than what had been imagined. Furthermore, in speaking like this he would fall out of the paradox, and if he really wanted to speak with Isaac, he would have to transform his situation into a spiritual trial, for otherwise he indeed could not say anything, and if he does that, then he is not even a tragic hero.

A final remark by Abraham has indeed been preserved, however, and insofar as I can understand the paradox, I can also understand Abraham's total presence in this remark. First and foremost, he does not say anything, and it is in this form that he says what he has to say. The response he gives Isaac has the form of irony, for it is always irony when I say something and yet do not say anything. Isaac questions Abraham in the belief that Abraham knows. Now, were Abraham to have replied, "I know nothing," he would have spoken an untruth. He cannot say anything, for what he knows he cannot say. So he replies: "God himself will provide a lamb for the burnt offering, my son!"^{xvii} Here one can see the double movement in Abraham's soul that has been described previously. If Abraham had only resigned himself to the loss of Isaac and done nothing more,

then what he said would have been untrue, for he indeed knows that God requires Isaac as a sacrifice, and he knows that he is ready and willing to sacrifice him at that very moment. Then, having made that movement, at every moment he made the next movement, the movement of faith by virtue of the absurd. To this extent he does not say something untrue, for by virtue of the absurd it was of course possible that God could do something completely different. Thus he does not say something untrue, but neither does he say anything at all, for he speaks in a foreign tongue. This becomes even more evident when we consider that it was Abraham himself who was to sacrifice Isaac. Had the task been different, had the Lord commanded Abraham to bring Isaac out onto Mount Moriah, so that he himself could let his lightning strike Isaac and in that way take him as a sacrifice, then, in a straightforward sense, Abraham would actually have been right in speaking as enigmatically as he did, for in that case he himself could not have known what was to happen. But **#[207]#** given the way the task was assigned to Abraham, he himself must of course act; thus, at the decisive instant he must know what he himself will do, and thus he must know that Isaac is to be sacrificed. If he does not definitely know this, then he has not made the infinite movement of resignation, then his words are indeed not untrue, but he is also very far from being Abraham, he is more insignificant than a tragic hero—indeed, he is an irresolute man who cannot decide on the one thing or the other, and therefore he will always come to speak in riddles. But a waverer such as this is the very parody of a knight of faith.

Here, once again, it is clear that one can in a way understand Abraham, but only in the way in which one understands the paradox. For my part, I can in a way understand Abraham, but I also comprehend that I do not have the courage to speak in that manner any more than I have the courage to act as Abraham did. But I do not for that reason by any means say that it is something insignificant, for on the contrary, it is the only marvel.

And how, then, was the tragic hero judged by his times? That he was great, and they revered him. And that honorable gathering of noble souls, the jury that every generation convenes to judge the

preceding generation? It judged in like manner. But there was no one who could understand Abraham. And yet, what did he achieve? — that he remained true to his love. But the person who loves God has no need of tears, no admiration—in love, he forgets the suffering; indeed, so completely has he forgotten it that afterward there would not be the least hint of pain if God himself did not remember it, for he sees in secret,^{xviii} and knows the distress, and counts the tears, and forgets nothing.

So, either there exists a paradox, that the single individual, as the single individual, stands in an absolute relation to the absolute, or Abraham is lost.

i See Mark 1:11.

ii See Judg. 11:37–40.

iii From the Greek, literally, “to see for oneself.”

iv See Matt. 19:4–6.

v Variant: the first edition, as printed, has “lose” (Danish, *tabe*); the fair copy, as submitted to the printer, has “speak” (Danish, *tale*).

vi Variant: instead of “matter” (Danish, *Sag*), which appears in the first printing of the first edition, both the fair copy as submitted to the printer and Kierkegaard’s draft have “sorrow” (Danish, *Sorg*).

vii See Tobit 6:1–8.

viii Acts 20:35.

ix Variant: instead of “the poets” which appears in the fair copy as submitted to the printer, the first printing of the first edition has “the poet.”

x See Matt. 8:4, 9:30; Mark 1:34, 1:44.

xi See Matt. 6:17–18.

xii See Rom. 8:26.

xiii Possibly an allusion to 1 Cor. 14:2.

xiv See Gen. 22:8.

xv Variant: instead of “ought to have and he ought to,” which appears in the first printing of the first edition, the fair copy as submitted to the printer has “ought to have what otherwise is often enough sought in ludicrous ways, he ought to.”

xvi Variant: instead of “understand it,” which appears in the fair copy as submitted to the printer, the first printing of the first edition has “understand.”

xvii See Gen. 22:8.

xviii See Matt. 6:4, 6:18.

* These movements and positions could very well serve as a subject for aesthetic investigation; on the other hand, the extent to which faith and the entire life of faith could be such a subject is something I will here leave undecided. Still, because I am always pleased to offer my thanks to those to whom I am indebted, I will thank Lessing for the various suggestions concerning a Christian drama that are found in his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*.⁷⁴ He has, however, fastened his attention on the strictly divine aspect of this life (the consummated victory) and therefore has had doubts. Perhaps he would have judged differently if he had paid more attention to the strictly human aspect. (Theologia viatorum [theology of wayfarers (or pilgrims)].)⁷⁵ It cannot be denied that he expresses himself very briefly, and to some extent evasively, but when I have an opportunity to include Lessing, I am always very happy to include him at once. Lessing was not only one of Germany's most encyclopedic minds; not only, owing to his knowledge, did he possess unusual acumen, with the result that one can safely rely on him and his autopsyⁱⁱⁱ without fear of being misled by random, undocumented, and irrelevant quotations, by half-understood phrases taken from unreliable compendiums, or of being disoriented by a moronic trumpeting of new notions that were presented far better by the ancients—but he also possessed an extremely rare gift for explaining what he himself has understood. That was where he remained standing—in our times people go further and explain more than they themselves have understood.

† According to Aristotle, the historical catastrophe was as follows: In order to avenge themselves, the [bride's] family placed a temple vessel among his [the bridegroom's] household goods, and he is condemned as a temple robber. This, however, is a matter of no importance, for the question is not whether the family is clever or stupid in taking revenge—the family acquires ideal significance only insofar as it is drawn into the hero's dialectic. Moreover, it is fateful enough that, in wanting to flee the danger by not marrying, he plunges into it, and in addition that his life comes into contact with the divine in a twofold manner: first, through the prophecy of the diviner, next by being condemned as a temple robber.

‡ Incidentally, from here one could explore dialectical movements of another sort. Heaven prophesies that he will suffer misfortune because of his marriage, so of course he could refrain from going through with the wedding, though not on that account give up the girl, but live with her in a romantic relationship, which would be more than adequate for the lovers. But this involves an affront to the girl, because in his love for her he does not express the universal. However, this would be a task both for a poet and for an ethicist who wants to defend marriage. In general, if poetry paid attention to the religious or to the inwardness of the individual, it would

take on far more meaningful tasks than those with which it occupies itself at present. In poetry one hears this story over and over again: A man is pledged to one girl, whom he once had loved—or perhaps had never truly loved—for now he has seen another girl who is the ideal. A man makes a mistake in life: it was the right street but the wrong house, for the ideal girl lives just across the street, on the second floor—people think this is a subject for poetry. A lover makes a mistake: he saw the beloved by candlelight and thought she had dark hair, but look!—upon closer inspection, she had blonde hair: but her sister is the ideal—people think this is a subject for poetry. In my view, every such man is a scoundrel who can be unbearable enough in real life, but who ought to be immediately hooted off the stage if he wants to put on airs in poetry. A poetic collision is produced only by passion against passion, not by this rummaging about of particular details within the same passion. For example, in the Middle Ages, if a girl, after having fallen in love, comes to the certainty that earthly love is a sin and prefers a heavenly sort, here there is a poetic collision, and the girl is poetic, for her life is in the idea.

§ The legend could also be treated in another way. Even though he has seduced many in the past, the Merman does not want to seduce Agnete. He is no longer a merman, or, if you will, he is a poor unfortunate merman who has long sat in sorrow at the bottom of the sea. Yet he knows, as the legend indeed teaches, that he can be saved by the love of an innocent girl. But he has a bad conscience concerning girls, and he dares not approach them. Then he sees Agnete. Many times before, concealed in the rushes, he has seen her walking along the shore. Her loveliness, her quiet preoccupation with herself, captivates him, but in his soul all is sadness—no frenzied desire stirs within it. And then, when the Merman adds his sigh to the whispering of the rushes, when she listens to it, when she stands quietly and lapses into dreaming, lovelier than any woman and yet as beautiful as an angel of salvation, the Merman is infused with confidence. The Merman takes courage, he approaches Agnete, he wins her love, he hopes for his salvation. But Agnete is no placid girl, she is very taken with the raging sea, and the plaintive whispering of the rushes pleased her only because it then raged even more powerfully within her. She wants to be away, away, storming wildly out into the infinite with the Merman whom she loves—so she incites the Merman. She disdained his humility—now pride awakens. And the sea rages, and the waves boil, and the Merman embraces Agnete and plunges with her down into the abyss. Never had he been so frenzied, never so full of desire, for he had hoped for his salvation through this girl. Soon he grew tired of Agnete, though her body was never found, for she became a mermaid who tempted men with her songs.

¶ Aesthetics occasionally treats something similar in its customary pandering manner. The Merman is saved by Agnete, and it all ends with a happy marriage. A happy marriage! that's easy enough. On the other hand, if ethics were to deliver the wedding discourse, I think things would be different. Aesthetics throws the cloak of love over the Merman—then everything is forgotten. It is so inattentive as

to believe that things are the same with a marriage as they are with an auction where everything is sold “as is” when the hammer falls. It only makes sure that the lovers find each other; the rest is of no concern to it. If only it could see what happens afterward, but it has no time for that—it immediately busies itself with matching up another loving couple. Of all disciplines, aesthetics is the most perfidious. Everyone who has properly loved it becomes in a certain sense unhappy, but the person who has never loved it is and remains a pecus [blockhead; fool].

In the foregoing, I have diligently avoided taking into account anything related to the question of sin and its reality. Everything has been centered on Abraham, and I am still capable of reaching him (that is, insofar as I can understand him) within the categories of immediacy. As soon as sin makes its appearance, ethics runs aground precisely upon repentance, for repentance is the highest expression of the ethical, but precisely as such it is the deepest ethical self-contradiction.

** People do not believe this in our serious times, and yet it is quite remarkable that even in pagan times, which by their nature were more frivolous and less reflective, the two genuine representatives of the Greek view of existence, γνῶθι σαυτον [know thyself!], have each in their way suggested that, by immersing oneself in oneself, one discovers first and foremost a disposition toward evil. I probably do not need to say that I have Pythagoras⁸³ and Socrates⁸⁴ in mind.

†† If one does not want to make use of a doubter, one could choose a similar figure, an ironist, for example, whose keen scrutiny has discovered the ridiculousness of existence, right down to its foundation, who through a secret accord with the forces of life has ascertained what the patient desires. He knows that he possesses the power of laughter; if he is willing make use of it, he is certain of victory—and indeed, what is more, certain of his happiness. He knows that a single voice will be raised in opposition, but he knows that he is stronger. He knows that someone can still cause men to appear serious for a little while, but he also knows that they secretly yearn to join him in laughter. He knows that, for a little while, someone can make a woman shade her eyes with her fan when he speaks, but he knows that behind the fan she is laughing. He knows that the fan is not absolutely opaque. He knows that one can write on it with invisible script. He knows that when a woman bats at him with her fan, it is because she has understood him. He knows the infallible truth about how laughter steals its way into a person and lives concealed within him, and that once it has established its residence there, it lies in concealment, waiting. Let us imagine for ourselves a sort of Aristophanes, a sort of Voltaire, slightly altered, for he is also a sympathetic sort, he loves existence, he loves people, and he knows that even if censure by laughter will perhaps raise up a young generation that is saved, a great many people of the present generation will be lost. So he remains silent, and to the

extent possible, he himself forgets to laugh. But dare he remain silent! Perhaps there are a number of people who simply do not understand the difficulty of which I speak. They probably believe that it is admirably magnanimous to remain silent. That is absolutely not my view, for I believe that every such person, if he has not had the magnanimity to remain silent, commits treason against existence. So I therefore require this magnanimity of him. But if he has it, does he then dare remain silent? Ethics is a dangerous science, and it might well have been the case that Aristophanes, guided solely by ethical considerations, chose to let laughter pass judgment on an age that had gone astray. Aesthetic magnanimity cannot be of help, for a person does not venture such things on account of it. If he is to remain silent, he must enter into the paradox. — I will sketch yet another plot: for example, that a person possesses an explanation of a hero's life that explains it in a quite unfortunate way, and yet an entire age reposes upon this hero in absolute security, without suspecting anything of the sort.

‡‡ Opinions can vary as to which of Socrates' remarks may be regarded as decisive, as Socrates has been poetically volatilized by Plato in so many ways. I propose the following: the death sentence is announced to him; at that very instant he dies; at that very instant he vanquishes death, consummating himself in the famous rejoinder: that he was surprised at having been condemned by a majority of three votes.¹⁰⁶ Not with any bit of idle chatter from the marketplace, nor with any foolish remark by an idiot could he have jested more ironically than with the death sentence that ordered his execution.

§§ Insofar as there can be any talk of an analogy, one can be found in the situation of Pythagoras at his death, for right up to the last moment he carried through the silence he had always maintained, and therefore he *said*: "It is better to be killed than to speak." (See Diogenes, bk. 8, §39.)¹⁰⁸

#[208]#

EPILOGUE

Once, in Holland, when the price of spices went rather low, the merchants had a couple of loads dumped into the sea in order to drive prices up. This was a forgivable and perhaps necessary ploy. Do we need something similar in the world of spirit? Are we so completely certain that we have attained what is highest that—in order at least to have something with which to pass the time—there is nothing left for us to do other than to imagine, piously, that we have not come that far? Is this the sort of self-deception that the present generation needs? Ought it be educated to acquire a virtuosity in this sort of thing, or has it not rather attained sufficient perfection in the art of deceiving itself? Or does it not rather have need of an honest seriousness which, fearless and incorruptible, points out the tasks, an honest seriousness which lovingly preserves the tasks, which does not frighten people so that they want to rush headlong into what is highest, but keeps the tasks young and beautiful and lovely to beholdⁱ and beckoning to all, and yet also challenging and inspiring for noble souls (for the noble nature is inspired only by what is difficult)? Whatever one generation learns from another, no generation learns what is truly human from a previous generation. In this respect every generation begins in primal fashion: it has no task other than that faced by every previous generation; nor (assuming that the previous generation did not

betray its task and deceive itself) does it come any further. What is truly human is passion, in which indeed the one generation perfectly understands the other and understands itself. Thus no generation has learned from another how to love. No generation gets to begin at any other point than the beginning. No subsequent generation has a task that is abbreviated in comparison to the preceding one, and if someone is unwilling to remain standing at love as previous generations did, **#[209]#** but wants to go further, then it is just idle and foolish talk.

But the highest passion in a person is faith, and here no generation begins at any point other than where the preceding generation began; every generation begins at the beginning; the next generation comes no further than the one preceding it, provided that that generation had been faithful to its task and did not abandon it. Of course, the generation may not say that this is wearisome, for this, after all, is the task the generation has, and it has nothing to do with the fact that the preceding generation had the same task—unless the particular generation, or the individuals of that generation, presumptuously wants to occupy the place that rightfully belongs only to the spirit who governs the world and has the patience not to become weary. If the generation starts doing this sort of thing, it is in error, and what wonder, then, that the whole of existence appears to it to be in error—for surely there was no one who found existence to be more erroneous than the tailor in the fairy tale who ascended to heaven while still alive and observed the world from that standpoint.¹ As long as the generation concerns itself solely with its task, which is what is highest, it cannot become weary, for the task is always sufficient for a human lifetime. If, on a day off from school, children have already finished playing all their games before noon and then impatiently say: “Isn’t there anyone who can think up a new game?” does this, then, prove that these children are more highly developed and more advanced than the children of the same or of a previous generation, who were capable of making their familiar games last the whole day? Or does it not rather prove that the former group of

children lack what I would call the lovable earnestness that is a part of play?

Faith is the highest passion in a person. In every generation there are perhaps many who never even come to it, but no one comes further. Whether in our time there are also many people who do not discover it, I will not decide; I dare refer only to myself, someone who does not conceal the fact that he has a long way to go, without therefore wanting to deceive himself or what is great by making it into something insignificant, into a childhood illness from which one could wish to recover as soon as possible. But life also has tasks enough for the person who does not get as far as faith and, if he loves them honestly, his life will not be wasted, even if it never is like the lives of those who perceived and grasped what is highest. But the person who has come to faith—whether he be the remarkably gifted person or **#[210]#** the simple person makes no difference—he does not remain standing at faith. Indeed, he would be indignant if someone said that to him, just as a lover would be offended if someone said that he had remained standing at love, for he would say, “I do not remain standing at all, for I have my life in it.” Yet neither does he come any further, not to anything else, for when he discovers this, then he has another explanation.

“One must go further, one must go further.” This urge to go further is an old thing in this world. Heraclitus² the obscure, who deposited his thoughts in his writings and his writings in the Temple of Diana (for his thoughts had been his armor in life, and therefore he hung them up in the temple of the goddess)—Heraclitus the obscure said: “One cannot walk through the same river twice.”^{*} Heraclitus the obscure had a disciple who did not remain standing at that point, he went further and added: “One cannot do it even once.”[†] Poor Heraclitus to have such a disciple! With this improvement, Heraclitus’s thesis became an Eleatic⁵ thesis that denies movement, and yet that disciple only wanted to be a disciple of Heraclitus who went further, not back to what Heraclitus had abandoned.

i See Gen. 2:9, 3:6.

* Και ποταμου ροη απεικαζων τα οντα λεγει ως δις ες τον αυτον ποταμον ουκ εμβαιης [he compares them to a stream of a river, and says that you cannot go into the same stream twice]. See Plato, *Cratylus* 402a. Ast, vol. 3, p. 158.³

† See Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 1, p. 220.⁴

NOTES

Translator's Introduction

1. Once again, more than a few investigators have noted that the tale of Agnete and the Mermaid contains significant parallels to the story of Kierkegaard's broken engagement to Regine Olsen, and thus have seen in this tale, and in other episodes included in *Fear and Trembling*, coded—or not very coded—references to the real life of the book's real author. None of this concerns us here.

Translator's Note

1. Concerning the term *Anfægtelse* and its translation, see the discussions in Howard V. and Edna H. Hong's translation, *Fear and Trembling and Repetition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 343–44, where *Anfægtelse* is translated as “spiritual trial,” and Alastair Hannay's translation of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) in which *Anfægtelse* is translated both as “spiritual trial” and as “temptation.”

Epigraph

1. Cited from *Hamann's Schriften* [Hamann's Writings], ed. F. Roth, 8 vols. (Berlin, 1821–1843), vol. 3 (1828), p. 190. Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788) was a German philosopher and author. Tarquin the Proud (Latin, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus), d. 495 BC, last of the kings of Rome (reign 535–510 BC). When Tarquin's son, Sextus Tarquinius, who had arrived in the city of Gabii in order to subdue it for his father, asked his father for orders about how to carry out his mission, the father sent no written reply, but instructed his messenger to accompany Sextus into a garden and then to strike off the heads of the tallest

poppies. The messenger did not understand the message, but Sextus understood that his father had ordered him to kill the city's leading men.

Preface

1. A reference to René Descartes (1596–1650), French philosopher, mathematician, and natural scientist, who asserted that everything ought to be subjected to doubt (Latin, “de omnibus dubitandum est”), with the exception of the fact that the person who is doubting does indeed exist as a thinking being: “I think, therefore I am” (Latin, “cogito ergo sum”).
2. In referring to “going further,” Kierkegaard is making satirical reference to his contemporary Danish Hegelians such as Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791–1860) and Hans Lassen Martensen (1808–1884), who wanted to go further than Hegel himself had gone in his own efforts to go further than *his* philosophical predecessors.
3. René Descartes, “Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One’s Reason and Seeking the Truth in the Sciences,” *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 1:112, 113.
4. Perhaps a reference to Socrates.
5. i.e., Hegelian philosophy.
6. An innuendo directed at the Danish philosopher Rasmus Nielsen (1809–1884), who began as an adherent of Hegel, publishing his work *Den speculative Logik i dens Grundtræk* [Outlines of Speculative Logic], in four booklets (Copenhagen, 1841–1844); however, these four installments were all that ever appeared, with the fourth installment ending in midsentence.
7. *Adresseavisen* is an abbreviated reference to *Kjøbenhavns kongelig alene privilegerede Adressecomptoirs Efterretninger* [Information from Copenhagen’s Only Royally Licensed Advertising Office], but in this case the reference is to an actual advertisement for a gardener’s apprentice that appeared not in *Adresseavisen* but in *Berlingske politiske og Avertissements-Tidende* [Berling’s Political and Advertisement Times], no. 34, February 6, 1843, and no. 39, February 11, 1843, where, under the heading “Positions Available,” a small illustration depicts a man bowing forward with a watering can in his hand, accompanied by this text: “There is a position open beginning May 1st at Hørbygaard in Holbæk for a gardener, preferably unmarried, who is competent in his profession and can also produce proof of sobriety and good conduct.”
8. In scene 7 of Johan Ludvig Heiberg’s vaudeville, *Recensenten og Dyret* [The Reviewer and the Beast] (1826), the perpetual student Trop wants to divide his tragedy *Menneskeslægtens Ødelæggelse* [The Destruction of the Human Race] into two volumes out of respect for prevailing taste. See *J. L. Heibergs*

Skrifter. Skuespil [J. L. Heiberg's Writings: Plays], 7 vols. (Copenhagen 1833–1841), vol. 3 (1834), p. 221.

9. Kierkegaard is making a derogatory reference to Hegel's philosophy as an "omnibus" (for all), alluding to the fact that Hegel's philosophy was now being adapted for every purpose and for every sort of explanation, so it was a universal means to explain just about anything, just as the brand-new means of transportation was also an "omnibus," i.e., that it would transport anyone and everyone. Thus, Kierkegaard's meaning here is that both Hegelian philosophy and these new coaches were public conveyances that are willing to transport everyone and anything.

Tuning Up

1. Kierkegaard also cites this passage in his journals: see entry JJ:1: "1842. May. I find a perfect example of the *Romantic* in the Old Testament, in the book of Judith, chap. 10, v. 11: 'Judith went out, she and her handmaid with her; and the men of the city looked after her, until she was gone down the mountain, until she had passed through the valley, and they could see her no more. And they went straight onward through the valley'" *KJN* 2:135.
2. Kneeling and clasping the knees of one's superior was a sign of humility and respect in the ancient Greek world; see Homer, *Odyssey*, bk. 6, vv. 142–49.
3. i.e., the fact that she had not borne a child.
4. Before Abraham received Isaac, he viewed Eliezer as his heir; see Gen. 15:2.

In Praise of Abraham

1. See Homer, *Iliad*, bk. 6, vv. 146–49.
2. See *ibid.*, bk. 3, vv. 380–81; possibly also an allusion to Acts 1:9.
3. Perhaps an allusion to the prophet Jeremiah; it has also been suggested that the reference is to Ovid, who had been banished to the Black Sea and hoped to be permitted to return to Rome.
4. See n. 3, *supra*.
5. Presumably, this alludes to the tale of Jupiter and Io, of Jupiter's jealous wife, Juno, and of Argus, who was to watch over Io; see Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, bk. 1. Kierkegaard could also be alluding to a retelling by the Danish Golden Age poet Adam Oehlenschläger (1779–1850) of the Old Norse myth that recounted the impossible tasks that Thor attempted during his visit to the giants of Jotunheim; see, e.g., "Thors Reise til Jothunheim" [Thor's Journey to Jotunheim], included in *Nordiske Digte* [Nordic Poems] (Copenhagen, 1807). Thor loses a wrestling match with a wrinkled old woman who turns out to be the personification of time.

6. Presumably an allusion to Plato's *Phaedrus* 244a–45c, 256a–c, and 265b. See Plato, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Including the Letters*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 491–92, 501–2, and 511.

Problemata

1. Kierkegaard's Danish, "Foreløbig Expectoration," translates literally as "Preliminary Expectoration." In Kierkegaard's day, "Expectoration" still retained, at least for the learned, the meaning of unburdening one's soul or of "getting something off (Latin, *ex*) one's chest (Latin, *pectus*)."
2. An allusion to the story of Aladdin's ring from the collection of tales, *One Thousand and One Nights*. The story served as the inspiration for Adam Oehlenschläger's play *Aladdin, eller den forunderlige Lampe* [Aladdin, or the Wonderful Lamp], which was included in his *Poetiske Skrifter* [Poetic Writings], 2 vols. (Copenhagen, 1805), which Kierkegaard owned. Aladdin and Nouraddin are characters in the play and represent, respectively, light and darkness.
3. An allusion to the Greek myth that tells of Orpheus's rescue of Eurydice in the underworld; here, and in what follows, Kierkegaard is referring to the version in Plato, *Symposium*, 179d; see Plato: *The Collected Dialogues, Including the Letters*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 533–34.
4. See Plato's version of the Orpheus myth in his *Symposium*, 179d, where Orpheus is denigrated for having been a mere "minstrel."
5. An allusion to the story of the Greek king Midas, related by Ovid in bk. xi of his *Metamorphoses*; see Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1916), 2:126–31.
6. Miltiades the Younger (died 489 BC) was an Athenian military leader whose triumphs included victory over the Persians at the battle of Marathon (490 BC). In his *Vitae parallelae* [Parallel Lives], the Greek historian Plutarch (c. AD 46–c. 120) relates that in the period following the victory at Marathon, the Greek political and military leader, Themistocles (c. 524–459 BC), was made sleepless when he contemplated Miltiades' feat, and he subsequently played a key role in defeating the second Persian attempt to invade: "For it is said that Themistocles was so transported with the thoughts of glory, and so inflamed with the passion for great actions, that, though he was still young when the battle of Marathon was fought against the Persians, upon the skilful conduct of the general, Miltiades, being everywhere talked about, he was observed to be thoughtful, and reserved, alone by himself; he passed the nights without sleep, and avoided all his usual places of recreation, and to those who wondered at the change, and inquired the reason of it, he gave the answer, that 'the trophy

of Miltiades would not let him sleep.” *Plutarch’s Lives*, trans. John Dryden, 3 vols. (London, 1910), 2:293.

7. See n. 2 to Preface.
8. See Horace, *Epistles*, bk. I, 18:84: “nam tua res agitur, paries cum proximis ardet” (‘Tis your own safety that’s at stake, when your neighbour’s wall is in flames), *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 374–75. Kierkegaard has “jam” for Horace’s “nam.”
9. An allusion to *Troens rare klenodie* [Faith’s Rare Treasure] (1739), a well-known Danish hymnal by the poet and bishop Hans Adolph Brorson (1694–1764).
10. Frederiksberg is immediately adjacent to Copenhagen; its park has long been a favorite destination for walks.
11. Public transit consisting of horse-drawn coaches was introduced in Copenhagen around 1840.
12. The Sound, or Øresund, is the body of water separating Copenhagen and the Danish island of Zealand from Sweden.
13. The Strand Road, or Strandvejen, runs north from Copenhagen, parallel to the shore.
14. In Kierkegaard’s day, Copenhagen was still surrounded by defensive ramparts, and on one’s way back into town on the Strand Road, one would have to pass through Østerport (literally, Eastgate).
15. A very small amount of money, roughly the price of a loaf of rye bread, the staple of the day.
16. See entry FF:193 (from 1838) in *KJN* 2:104: “Just as human walking is a continual falling, all consistency is a continual inconsistency.” See also Paper 283:1 (from 1843) in *KJN* 11, pt. 1, pp. 274–76, esp. 275: “The doctrine of motion. (the transition). (not on the spot and not beyond the spot) Here is the leap—therefore the human gait is a falling”; see the accompanying explanatory note, in which the notion of the human gait as a continual falling is traced to the Danish natural scientist Hans Christian Ørsted, the German philosopher J. G. Herder, and to standard German reference works of Kierkegaard’s time. Kierkegaard makes this same point in *Philosophical Fragments*.
17. An allusion to the death of Socrates, who was ordered to drink a cup of poisonous hemlock; see Plato, *Phaedo*, 117b–c, in Plato, *Collected Dialogues*, p. 97.
18. An allusion to Hegel’s notion of “Vermittlung” [mediation], the suspension of conceptual opposites, which become reconciled in a higher conceptual unity.
19. See *Apology*, 21a–d, in Plato, *Collected Dialogues*, pp. 7–8.
20. The verse has not been identified, but supposedly the final words of the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) were “I am about to take

my last voyage, a great leap in the dark.”

21. A reference to Plato’s *Phaedo* 81c–82a; see Plato, *Collected Dialogues*, pp. 64–65.
22. From a medieval Danish folk song, “Ridder Stig og Findal” [Knight Stig and Findal], no. 5 in the cycle “Runernes Magt” [The Power of Runes], which ends with the verse: “Now Maiden Rigitslille has recovered from her distress, / She sleeps every night beside Knight Stig Hvide”; from *Udvalgte Danske Viser fra Middelalderen; efter A. S. Vedels og P. Syvs trykte Udgaver og efter haandskrevne Samlinger* [Selected Danish Songs from the Middle Ages, from the Printed Editions by A. S. Vedel and P. Syv and from Manuscript Collections], ed. W. Abrahamson, R. Nyerup, and K. L. Rahbek, 5 vols. (Copenhagen, 1812–1814), vol. 1, p. 301.
23. A concept developed by the German philosopher G. W. Leibniz (1646–1716), who argued in his most important work, *Essaie de théodicée* [Essay on Theodicy], published in 1710, that the existence of an infinitely good and powerful God precludes the existence of absolute evil.
24. See “Erzsi die Spinnerin” [Erszi the Spinster], in *Magyarische Sagen, Märchen und Erzählungen* [Magyar Legends, Fairy Tales, and Stories], 2 vols. (Stuttgart and Tübingen, 1837), vol. 2, p. 18. See EE:89 in *KJN* 2:29.
25. Cited from Horace’s *Odes*, bk. 3, no. 24, 6, ultimately referring to the Fates’ merciless (Latin, *dirae*) rulings; see Horace, *Odes and Epodes*, ed. and trans. Niall Rudd, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 196–97, where “dira necessitas” is translated “dreaded Doom.”
26. In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, bk. 11, vv. 44–53, Orpheus’s music could move stones, trees, rivers, and animals, all of which wept at his death; see Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2:122–25.
27. In ancient Rome, two censors were charged with carrying out the census and collecting taxes, as well as overseeing public morality.
28. An allusion to a tale told of Damocles, servant of Dionysius II, tyrant of Syracuse (fourth century BC). When Damocles praised the tyrant’s enviable situation, he was compelled to exchange places and sit upon the throne for one day—with an enormous sword suspended over his head by a single hair from a horse’s tail, so that Damocles could learn of the constant danger associated with being a ruler.
29. The German philosopher Karl Rosenkranz (1805–1879) relates a conversation with the German theologian Karl Daub (1765–1836) in which Daub is said to have made a similar statement; see Rosenkranz, *Erinnerungen om Karl Daub* [Memories of Karl Daub] (Berlin, 1837), pp. 24–25.
30. In Kierkegaard’s day, having one’s carriage drawn by more than one or two horses was reserved for the nobility and people of great means.

31. Probably an allusion to Kierkegaard's magister dissertation, *On the Concept of Irony*, which he had defended in 1841.
32. Kierkegaard uses the verb *ophæve* (the Danish equivalent of Hegel's German term *aufhebe*), literally, to "lift up," and in Hegel's philosophical usage it means to annul something in such a manner that it can also be preserved in a subsequent "higher unity"; it has been translated into English with such terms as "annul," "abrogate," "suspend," "sublate," and "abolish." See also n. 18, *supra*, and n. 33, *infra*.
33. In his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel develops the three spheres of "objective Spirit," after which he divides the work into three parts: "abstract right," "morality," and "the ethical life" (German, *Sittlichkeit*; Danish, *Sædelighed*), i.e., social morality. The second part ("morality," i.e., individual as opposed to social morality) is further divided into three subdivisions, of which the third (§129–41) treats "The Good and Conscience." In §140 Hegel develops the moral forms of evil, beginning with "hypocrisy" and followed by "probabilism," i.e., the standpoint that is satisfied with what is likely because it views certainty as unattainable or impossible; next comes "Jesuitism," understood as the principle that the ends justify the means; thereafter comes "conviction," in which one appeals to individual conscience; lastly comes "irony," as the highest form of subjectivity and of evil. Neither the objective law ("abstract right") nor subjective morality can in itself claim to be actuality, and they therefore must be unified (reconciled) in a higher unity, and this unity is "the ethical life" (also translated as "social morality"). In the ethical life, objective Right has gained actuality and substance, while subjective arbitrariness has been deprived of its latitude. In the third part of the work, Hegel develops the ethical life according to its three levels: the family, civil society, and the state, which is the absolute substance of "the ethical life."
34. Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636–1711), French poet and critic, friend of Racine and Molière.
35. The verse forms the conclusion of the first canto of Boileau's *L'Art Poétique* [The Art of Poetry] (1674).
36. See n. 18, *supra*.
37. Presumably Jesus Christ.
38. A reference to Euripides' tragedy *Iphigenia at Aulis*. The play is set at the outset of the Trojan War, and the Greek fleet is gathered in Aulis, but cannot set sail for Troy because the goddess Artemis is displeased with the Greek leader, King Agamemnon, and has caused the wind to blow in the wrong direction. The diviner Calchas reveals that in order to grant a favorable wind, the goddess requires the sacrifice of Agamemnon's daughter Iphigenia.
39. See *Iphigenia at Aulis* in Euripides, *Bacchae, Iphigenia at Aulis, and Rhesus*, ed. and trans. David Kovacs, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 210–11 (vv. 448–51): "Low birth—what a

good thing that is! Such people may weep without hesitation and say anything they like! But to a man of high birth all is misery. The prestige of our position controls our lives, and we are slaves to the masses. I shrink from weeping, shrink likewise, wretched man that I am, from not weeping since I have come into the worst of disasters.”

40. See *ibid.*: “The only Achaeans who know how these matters stand are Calchas, Odysseus, and Menelaus” (pp. 176–77, vv. 106–7).
41. The verse number indicated is from Kierkegaard’s Danish edition, *Iphigeneia i Aulis* [Iphigenia at Aulis], in *Euripedes*, trans. Chr. Wilster (Copenhagen, 1840); in the Loeb Classical Library translation it reads “O breast and cheeks, O golden hair,” vv. 681–82.
42. As related in Livy’s history of Rome, Lucius Junius Brutus (d. 509 BC), the legendary Roman hero and first consul of Rome, was obligated to execute his own sons, Titus and Tiberius, because they had participated in a conspiracy to restore Rome’s exiled king to the throne. See Livy, *History of Rome*, trans. B. O. Foster, 13 vols., Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1919), vol. 1, pp. 230–35 (bk. 2, 5:8–9).
43. Lictors were officers of justice in ancient Rome, and in formal processions they preceded the higher public officials, bearing the ceremonial fasces (a bundle of rods, bound together, with an axe-head projecting) as a symbol of state authority. Lictors also functioned as executioners.
44. i.e., as an expression of “the ethical life” (Danish, *det Sædelige*); see n. 33, *supra*.
45. The Danish term Kierkegaard uses here is *det Sædelige*, a parallel to Hegel’s German notion of *Sittlichkeit* (Danish, *Sædelighed*); see n. 33, *supra*.
46. The flat landscape surrounding the port of Aulis, in central Greece, where Euripides’ play *Iphigenia at Aulis* is set.
47. Kierkegaard probably has the reference to Pythagoras from the discussion in W. G. Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie* [History of Philosophy], 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1798–1819), vol. 1, pp. 105–10; see esp. p. 106.
48. The term occurs a number of times in the New Testament; see, e.g., 1 Cor. 1:23.
49. That is, in the normal biological manner; see Gen. 18:11 and 31:35.
50. In his work *Émile ou de l’Éducation* [Emile, or On Education], the Swiss-French philosopher and author Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) warns against the cosmopolitan mind-set that seeks to fulfill, at a great remove, those moral obligations that lie close at hand.
51. See n. 47, *supra*.
52. Presumably an allusion to the philosophy of Hegel, where in accordance with Hegel’s speculative and dialectical method, the development of concepts begins in the realm of the immediate and then points out the contradiction to which it is subject. This contradiction must necessarily be overcome, which

takes place when it is brought to consciousness in a higher standpoint, and so on until absolute knowledge has abolished and incorporated within itself every contradiction (see n. 33, *supra*). Thus, the “first immediacy” must be abolished in a higher form of knowledge, but if that knowledge is not to be placed higher than faith, then according to Kierkegaard, faith must constitute a “subsequent immediacy” that lies outside philosophy’s development of concepts.

53. i.e., nausea accompanied by an ill humor; a fashionable illness (especially among women), comparable to hysteria and hypochondria, but also to spleen.
54. On Socratic ignorance, see Plato, *Apology*, 21a–d, in Plato, *Collected Dialogues*, pp. 7–8.
55. This appears to be Kierkegaard’s own translation from the Greek; notably, it differs from the English translation in, e.g., the *NRSV*, which translates the Greek word ψυχήν as “life,” where Kierkegaard translates it as “soul” (Danish, *Sjæl*).
56. Kierkegaard is referring to C. G. Bretschneider, *Lexicon manual graeco-latinum in libros Novi Testamenti* [Greek and Latin Hand Dictionary to the Books of the New Testament], 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1829), vol. 2, p. 87.
57. A reference to ancient Hebrew, which originally consisted exclusively of consonants and had no vowels at all. This led to confusion, and subsequently three vowels were added. Later, in the sixth–ninth centuries AD, an additional series of vowels was added, and the three older vowels became superfluous, but were retained in written Hebrew, where they were said to be “reposing” in an adjacent consonant.
58. Fabius Maximus, a Roman general who defeated Hannibal’s army in southeast Italy in 217 BC by repeatedly using delaying tactics, received the surname *Cunctator* (Latin, “delayer”).
59. A figure similar to the Italian *Pulcinella* or the English *Punch*, representing a peasant or a fool, who was a principal character in the *commedia-dell’arte*-style puppet shows regularly performed in *Dyrehavsbakken*, the amusement park at the Deer Park, an open area immediately north of Copenhagen.
60. A reference to Chr. Olufsen, *Gulddaasen. Et Lystspil i fem Optog* [The Golden Snuffbox: A Comedy in Five Acts] (1793); the play features a court case in which unreliable witnesses prevail against an innocent man.
61. The word Kierkegaard uses here is “*Melleminstantser*,” which designates an intermediate body in an organ of government or an appellate level in a court system.
62. See n. 52, *supra*.
63. The German poet and literary critic Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) developed the notion of “the interesting” in his essay “*Ueber das Studium der griechischen Poesie*” [On the Study of Greek Poetry] (1795–1796), in which he asserted that modern poetry, unlike Greek poetry, “makes no claim of objective universality; ... its ideal and its goal is the interesting, i.e., the subjective

attraction and the poetic effect.” In a review of Adam Oehlenschläger’s play *Dina* in his journal *Intelligensblade* [Intelligencer], nos. 16–17, November 15, 1842, the Danish dramatist, critic, and Hegelian philosopher Johan Ludvig Heiberg had written on the concept of “the interesting,” noting that ancient tragedy, “in a word, had no knowledge of the *interesting*, which is a modern concept for which the ancient languages do not even have a proper term. This circumstance characterizes at once both what is great and colossal about ancient tragedy and its limitations, for the consequence of this is that although that art form requires *depiction* of character, it is fundamentally intolerant of character *development*: indeed, here there is, so to speak, nothing to develop, any more than in a marble statue. From the beginning, everything has been formally determined, indeed predetermined, in every contour.” Later in the review, Heiberg writes: “From what has been stated, it can be seen that the category that is prominently employed in *Dina* is that of *the interesting*, a very popular designation, understood by everyone, even those who have no further understanding of aesthetic concepts. In what I have written above, I have on occasion already noted that the interesting is a category that belongs to the more recent forms of art. ... Many cultivated people ... almost become angry when asked if they have enjoyed one or another remarkable piece in the theater: ‘No, it was a performance which *interested* me to an extraordinary degree.’ They do not understand that what is enjoyable—just as, on the other hand, what is sublime, elevating—refers to an immediate mood and thus much more designates the result of the art form, than does the interesting, in which so much reflection is still present.” Thus, “the interesting” included means that were piquant, titillating, and sometimes sensational, disharmonic, etc.; these pleased the public, but displeased some critics who viewed them as lacking in beauty and thus inadmissible as art. “The interesting” is thus linked both to the artist’s appeal to the public by using increasingly spectacular means and to an element of self-reflection that was regarded as specifically modern.

64. i.e., the system of Hegelian philosophy.
65. From Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1452b:8–9. The most recent Loeb Classical Library edition, *Aristotle: Poetics; Longinus: On the Sublime; Demetrius: On Style* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 66–67, has “These, then, are the two components of the plot—reversal and recognition” (Stephen Halliwell, trans.).
66. See Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1452a:29–1452b:9.
67. See Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1452b:3–7.
68. i.e., Oedipus, in Sophocles’ tragedy *Oedipus Rex*.
69. i.e., Iphigenia, in Euripedes’ tragedy *Iphigenia in Tauris*.
70. See Aristotle, *Historia Animalium*, trans. A. L. Peck, 3 vols., Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1916), vol. 2, pp. 126–31, (bk. 5, 541a:27–31).

71. See Euripides, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, pp. 258–67, vv. 855–99, where rather than Agamemnon, it is an aged servant who on his own initiative tells Iphigenia’s mother, Clytemnestra, what is to happen.
72. See Euripides, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, pp. 296–99 (vv. 1211–40), esp. p. 297, v. 1224: “all the skill I have is in my tears.” An olive branch expressed a plea for mercy.
73. See Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, trans. W. Adlington, rev. S. Gaselee, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1915), bk. 5:11, pp. 216–17.
74. See *Gotthold Ephraim Lessings sämtliche Schriften*, 30:223ff. For an English translation, see G. E. Lessing, *The Hamburg Dramaturgy*, trans. Wendy Arons and Sara Figal, ed. Natalya Baldyga (New York: Routledge, 2019), essays 1–2; available online.
75. i.e., the theology of those who are still on their way, as opposed to “theologia beatorum,” the theology of the blessed.
76. Aristotle, *Politics*, 5, 4, 1303b 37–1304a 4; see Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1932), pp. 390–91.
77. A reference to the play *Axel og Valborg* (Axel and Valborg), published in 1810 by the Danish Romantic poet Adam Oehlenschläger. This tragic drama, set in Norway, involves the love of Axel and Valborg, who have been forbidden to marry because they are close relatives. They succeed, however, in gaining a papal dispensation to do so, but this is blocked by a monk who is an advisor to the king and an expert in canon law.
78. In essays 22 and 23 included in his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (in *Gotthold Ephraim Lessings sämtliche Schriften*), G. E. Lessing writes on the relation between fact and fiction in historical drama, citing the tragedy *The Count of Essex* (French, *Le Comte d’Essex*), 1678, by French dramatist Thomas Corneille (1625–1709), a younger brother of Pierre Corneille. For political reasons, Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603) had the Earl of Essex executed in 1601. Subsequently, she learned that a ring, which she had given Essex with instructions that he send it to her in the event he needed a pardon, had actually been sent, but that owing to court intrigue, it had never reached her.
79. The story, “Agnete og Havmanden” [Agnete and the Merman], appears in *Udvalgte Danske Viser fra Middelalderen; efter A. S. Vedels og P. Syvs trykte Udgaver og efter haandskrevne Samlinger* [Selected Danish Songs from the Middle Ages, from the Printed Editions by A. S. Vedel and P. Syv and from Manuscript Collections], ed. W. Abrahamson, R. Nyerup, and K. L. Rahbek, 5 vols. (Copenhagen, 1812–1814), vol. 1, p. 313, and had also been treated by the Danish writers Jens Baggesen (1764–1826) and Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875).
80. See n. 63, *supra*.
81. See n. 32 and n. 52, *supra*.

82. An allusion to the debate that had begun in Germany with the publication in 1830 of *Gedanken über Tod und Unsterblichkeit* [Thoughts on Death and Immortality] by the Left Hegelian Ludwig Feuerbach, who denied individual immortality. Kierkegaard's teacher and friend Poul Martin Møller joined the debate, publishing the essay "Tanker over Mueligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed, med Hensyn til den nyeste derhen hørende Literatur" [Thoughts Concerning the Possibility of Proofs of Human Immortality, with Reference to the Most Recent Literature on the Topic] in *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur* [Literary Monthly] (Copenhagen, 1837), vol. 17, pp. 1–72, 422–53. On p. 6 of the above-mentioned piece, Møller writes: "Here, namely, we presuppose as a definite fact that nowadays express denial of immortality is more widespread than at any previous time during the centuries of Christianity."
83. Kierkegaard probably has the reference to Pythagoras from Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie*, 1:94, where there is a description of how Pythagoras trained his students in self-concentration.
84. See Plato, *Phaedrus* 229c–230a, in Plato, *Collected Dialogues*, p. 478.
85. The expression appears in a line from the poem "Resignation" by the German poet Friedrich Schiller: "Da steh' ich schon auf deiner finstern Brücke, / Furchtbare Ewigkeit! / Empfange meinen Vollmachtbrief zum Glücke! / ... / Ich weiß nichts von Glückseligkeit" ("Then I indeed stood on your dark bridge, / Frightful Eternity! / Receive, then, my license to be joyous! / ... / I know nothing of happiness").
86. *Daphnis and Chloe*, prologue, §4 in *Pastoralia* by the second-century AD Greek writer Longus. Translation from Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe*, ed. and trans. Jeffrey Henderson, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 14–15.
87. The Bible Kierkegaard used had slightly different verse divisions. In the *NRSV*, see Tobit 8:12.
88. The legend of Bluebeard, a man who murdered his brides on their wedding night, is best known from the version told by the French author and folklorist Charles Perrault (1628–1703) in his *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* [Stories and Tales of Times Past]. The tale had been adapted as a play by the German author Ludwig Tieck (1773–1853), and had recently appeared in translation in *Digtninger af Ludwig Tieck* [Poems by Ludwig Tieck], trans. Adam Oehlenschläger, 2 vols. (Copenhagen, 1839), in vol. 2, pp. 1–64, as "Ridder Blaaskiæg. Et Eventyr" [Knight Bluebeard, a Fairy Tale].
89. William Shakespeare, *King Richard III*, act 1, sc. 1. Kierkegaard cites the passage from the German translation by A. W. von Schlegel and Ludwig Tieck, *Shakspeare's dramatische Werke*, 12 vols. (Berlin, 1839–1841), vol. 3 (1840), pp. 235–36: "Ich, roh geprägt, und aller Reize baar, / Vor leicht sich dreh'nden Nymphen mich zu brüsten; / Ich, so verkürzt um schönes

Ebenmaß, / Geschändet von der tückischen Natur, / Entstellt, verwahrlost, vor
der Zeit gesandt / In diese Welt des Athmens, halb kaum fertig / Gemacht, und
zwar so lahm und ungeziemend / Daß Hunde bellen, hink' ich wo vorbei.”

90. Richard Cumberland (1732–1811), an English dramatist, wrote the comedy *The Jew*, which premiered in 1794 and featured a Jewish moneylender, Sheva, who is reviled for being miserly when in truth he is really very charitable. The play was performed at the Royal Theater in Copenhagen in period 1795–1835.
91. Kildevalle is Kierkegaard's error for “Killevalle,” a character in a satirical poem by the Danish poet Jens Baggesen.
92. The saying is a paraphrase of a work by the Roman philosopher and writer Seneca (c. 4 BC–AD 65), *De tranquillitate animi* [On Tranquility of Soul]. A standard English translation, in Seneca, *Moral Essays*, trans. John W. Basore, 3 vols., Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1932), vol. 2, pp. 284–85, has “[N]o great genius has ever existed without some touch of madness” (xvii, 10). Seneca claims to be quoting Aristotle; see Aristotle, *Problemata*, 30.1.
93. Refers to Johann Faust, also known as Dr. Faustus (c. 1466–c. 1541), who, according to legend, entered into a pact with the Devil, Mephistopheles, in order to attain knowledge. Kierkegaard knew the Faust figure from folk tales and especially from J. W. Goethe's *Faust* (part 1 [1808] and part 2 [1831]).
94. i.e., a liar, a fantast. A reference to Baron Karl Friedrich Hieronymus von Münchhausen (1720–1797), a German fabulist whose famously exaggerated and entertaining stories of himself and his exploits were collected and published at the end of his life.
95. Tamerlane was a fourteenth-century warlord from Mongolia who conquered an enormous expanse stretching from the Great Wall of China to the Volga River and down into the Indian subcontinent. Kierkegaard erroneously associates him with the Huns, a central Asian people who threatened eastern Europe in the fourth and fifth centuries AD.
96. i.e., infamy. Herostratus (fourth century BC) sought fame by burning down the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus.
97. Gregory of Rimini (c. 1300–1358), an Augustinian monk who taught in Paris, maintained that unbaptized children went to hell and was thus known as “tortor infantium” (“tormentor of infants”).
98. An allusion to the comedy *Erasmus Montanus eller Rasmus Berg* [Erasmus Montanus, or Rasmus Berg] (1731), act 1, sc. 3, by the Danish-Norwegian writer Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754), in which Peer Degn, the parish clerk, explains that in connection with a burial he must ask people whether they would like to have “fine sand” (which costs more) or “just plain dirt” to cast upon the grave.

99. Hegel treats Romantic irony critically in a number of his works. In *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, §140, he writes of Romantic irony as the epitome of evil. The introduction to Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* includes a critical description of Romantic irony, and later in the same work, Hegel examines the principle of that irony. In vol. 2 of *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel presents Socrates' irony and contrasts it with modern irony. Hegel also makes brief mention of irony in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline*, and his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.
100. An apparent reference to the ecclesiastical views espoused by the Danish theologian N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872) and his followers.
101. In Euripides' tragedy *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Iphigenia comes to Aulis in the belief that she is to wed Achilles.
102. William Shakespeare, *King Richard III*, act 2, sc. 1. Kierkegaard cites the passage, with minor deviations, from the German translation by Schlegel and Tieck, *Shakspeare's dramatische Werke*, 3:278: "Wer bat für ihn? Wer kniet' in meinem Grimm / Zu Füßen mir und bat mich überlegen? / Wer sprach von Bruderpflicht? Wer sprach von Liebe."
103. i.e., Agamemnon, in Euripedes' tragedy *Iphigenia in Tauris*.
104. i.e., a light comedy of the sort adapted from Parisian theater pieces and popularized in Copenhagen in the 1820s by the playwright, critic, and Hegelian philosopher Johan Ludvig Heiberg.
105. In Euripides' tragedy *Iphigenia in Tauris*, Calchas is the diviner who is to sacrifice Iphigenia on behalf of Agamemnon.
106. See Plato, *Apology*, 36a, in Plato, *Collected Dialogues*, p. 21. Here Kierkegaard follows his edition of Plato's works; according to later editions, the majority in favor of conviction was not three, but thirty.
107. See Plato's dialogue *Phaedo*, 118a, in *ibid.*, p. 98.
108. See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R. D. Hicks, 2 vols, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972 [1925]), vol. 2, pp. 354–55: "Pythagoras was caught as he tried to escape; he got as far as a certain bean field, where he stopped, saying he would rather be captured than cross it, and be killed rather than prate about his doctrines."

Epilogue

1. A reference to the fairy tale "Der Schneider im Himmel" [The Tailor in Heaven] collected by the Grimm brothers in *Kinder- und Haus-Märchen* [Fairy Tales for Children and the Home], ed. J. L. K. and W. K. Grimm, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Berlin, 1819–1822), vol. 1, pp. 177–79. A tailor improperly seats himself on God's

throne and throws a heavenly stool at a woman who stole some laundry. God is displeased and tells the tailor that only he may punish human beings, and furthermore, that if something from heaven were thrown every time there was a theft on earth, not a chair or a stool would remain in heaven. The tailor is then thrown out of heaven.

2. Heraclitus (c. 540–480 BC) was a Pre-Socratic philosopher whose theory that everything was in flux met with misunderstanding. He was said to have deposited his aphoristic work in the temple of Artemis. See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R. D. Hicks, 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972 [1925]), vol. 2, pp. 408–25, where it is stated (bk. 9, §6, pp. 412–13) that Heraclitus deposited his treatise *On Nature* in the Temple of Artemis (Roman, Diana), and that he held that “the sum of things flows like a stream” (ibid., §8, pp. 414–15).
3. Plato translation from Cratylus, 402a, in Plato, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Including the Letters*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 439. Kierkegaard refers to his Greek edition of Plato, *Platonis opera quae extant* [Extant Works of Plato], ed. Fr. Ast, 11 vols. (Leipzig, 1819–1832), vol. 3 (1821), p. 158.
4. W. G. Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie* [History of Philosophy], 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1798–1819); on p. 220, Tennemann writes: “Heraclitus expressed this flux with a visual metaphor: *One cannot go through the same river twice*. A later disciple found this to be too weak and corrected it to say: ‘One cannot even do it once.’”
5. The Eleatics were a Pre-Socratic school of philosophy in the Greek colony of Elea (today, Velia) on the southwest coast of Italy, founded c. 540 BC by the philosopher Xenophanes of Colophon in Ionia, who was often called the first Skeptic because he doubted the validity of human knowledge. Subsequent members of the school included Zeno and Parmenides. The Eleatics stressed being and the absence of change in opposition to Heraclitus’s insistence upon becoming and flux.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

SØREN AABYE KIERKEGAARD was born in Copenhagen on May 5, 1813, the last of seven children. His father, Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard, had fled rural poverty in Jutland as a teenager and eventually established himself as a successful businessman in the capital. After his first wife died childless, M. P. Kierkegaard married Ane Sørensdatter Lund, also from rural Jutland, who had been a servant in the Kierkegaard household. Five of Søren's six siblings died by the time he was twenty-one, and his older brother, Peter Christian Kierkegaard, was the only sibling to survive him. By all accounts, Søren was a precocious and perhaps rather spoiled child. He attended one of the finest private schools in Copenhagen, where he was subjected to the same unrelenting discipline that prevailed at home. Søren was a brilliant pupil, excelling particularly in Latin, and he matriculated at the University of Copenhagen at age seventeen. Officially, he was enrolled in the theology faculty, but during his first years of study at the university he was not particularly focused on theology, and his interests varied widely, ranging from medieval and Romantic literature to philosophy and classics. In 1837, when he was twenty-four, Kierkegaard met fifteen-year-old Regine Olsen, who was to be the love of his life. In September 1840, Kierkegaard and Regine Olsen became engaged to be married, but before long, Kierkegaard was tormented by second thoughts, not merely about marrying Regine Olsen, but about marrying at all. In October 1841, despite his fiancée's tearful and vehement pleas, Kierkegaard finally broke off the engagement. That traumatic event, along with Kierkegaard's fraught relationship with his father, who had died in

1838, was to remain central to Kierkegaard's subsequent life: his father remained for him a towering and sometimes troubling patriarch, while his former fiancée was his lifelong muse.

In late September 1841, just before breaking off definitively with Regine Olsen, Kierkegaard successfully defended his *magister* dissertation, *On the Concept of Irony*. Now the floodgates of his productivity opened, and Kierkegaard wrote the two-volume blockbuster *Either/Or*, which was published in Copenhagen in February 1843. The true identity of the work's pseudonymous author, "Victor Eremita," was immediately revealed, and Søren Kierkegaard was famous overnight. An almost unbelievable productivity followed: in the ensuing seven years, Kierkegaard published more than two dozen works, all of astonishingly high quality, including such well-known titles as *Repetition* and *Fear and Trembling* (October 1843), *Philosophical Fragments* and *The Concept of Anxiety* (June 1844), *Stages on Life's Way* (April 1845), *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (February 1846), *The Sickness unto Death* (July 1849), and *Practice in Christianity* (September 1850)—all attributed to a carefully chosen cast of pseudonyms. And this does not include the even greater number of works Kierkegaard published in his own name, his many newspaper articles, or the large mass of published material constituting the attack on "Christendom" that marked the final phase of his life, nor does it include Kierkegaard's substantial correspondence or his journals and notebooks, which take up almost nine thousand pages in the definitive English-language edition.

When Kierkegaard died on November 12, 1855, he was only forty-two, a brilliant meteor that had burned itself out. Both quantitatively and, not least, qualitatively, his literary production seems an almost superhuman achievement. Kierkegaard's lifetime straddled the transition from a world usually designated "early modern" to a world essentially "modern": a transition from the Romantic era in literature to the radically different literary world of Ibsen (who was profoundly influenced by Kierkegaard); from a world in which transportation of persons and goods—as well as the dissemination of information—was subjected, as it had been for millennia, to the range and tempo of horse-drawn vehicles and

sailing ships, to a world bound together by railroads, steamships, and the telegraph; from a society still characterized by absolute monarchy, by an established state church, and by substantial restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of religion, to a society governed by a parliamentary monarchy, elected by what was then probably the most inclusive suffrage in the world, a society with broad guarantees of freedom of expression and freedom of religion. Kierkegaard's work reflects his attempt to come to terms with this emerging world, and his investigations of the self, of the role of society, and of the place of religious faith span the chasm from a hierarchical world in which social, civic, and religious order was more or less fixed to the fluid, atomized world that is our own. At his death, Kierkegaard was little known outside of Denmark. Today he is recognized as a founder of existentialism and a major figure in philosophy, theology, and psychology.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

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This translation is based on Søren Kierkegaard's pseudonymous work, *Frygt og Bæven*, text established by Henrik Blicher, Søren Bruun, and Johnny Kondrup, and published by the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre in *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, vol. 4 (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad's Publishers, 1997), pp. 97–210. Some of the explanatory notes are adapted from those by Henrik Blicher and Joakim Garff, and published by the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre in *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, vol. K4 (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad's Publishers, 1998), pp. 101–67. Copyright © University of Copenhagen, 2013.

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Jacket design: Richard Ljoenes Design LLC
Jacket art: The Sacrifice of Abraham, 1635 (oil on canvas),
Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, Bridgeman Images
Book design by Brooke Koven
Production manager: Julia Druskin

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available

ISBN 978-1-63149-831-2
ISBN 978-1-631-49-832-9 (ebk.)

Liveright Publishing Corporation, 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110
www.wwnorton.com

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 15 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BS