Multiple voices and the single individual: Kierkegaard's concept of irony as a tool for reading The Great Gatsby, The Sun Also Rises, Mrs. Dalloway, and Ulysses

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Multiple Voices and the Single Individual:
Kierkegaard’s Concept of Irony as a Tool for Reading *The Great Gatsby, The Sun Also Rises, Mrs. Dalloway*, and *Ulysses*

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Multiple Voices and the Single Individual:
Kierkegaard’s Concept of Irony as a Tool for Reading
*The Great Gatsby, The Sun Also Rises, Mrs. Dalloway, and Ulysses*

Thomas P. Smith

ABSTRACT

The central issue in the works of Danish philosopher and religious thinker Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) takes the form of a question: “What does it mean to become a Christian?” However, Kierkegaard’s ideas exerted influence well beyond Christian circles and have been important to many notable philosophical and literary figures, some of whom chose not to concern themselves primarily with this question (Sartre, Camus, Heidegger, Buber), and some of whom did choose to concern themselves primarily with this question (Tillich, Bonhoeffer, Berdyaev, Marcel). Even though Kierkegaard died in relative obscurity, thanks to posthumous translation of his works into German and to those translations then being embraced by thinkers as diverse as the atheist Sartre and the Hasidic rabbi Martin Buber, Kierkegaard’s writings evolved into a great shaping force in twentieth century philosophy, theology, and literature.

Extending slightly Kierkegaard’s influence, the present study draws upon his concept of irony as indirect communication and upon his concept of the three spheres of existence to engage in close readings of four masterpieces of literature: *The Great Gatsby, The Sun Also Rises, Mrs. Dalloway, and Ulysses*. The four close readings then become a point-of-departure for considering how Kierkegaard’s concept of irony—more
specifically, its three spheres of existence—might apply to the world of present-day scholarship and pedagogy. The close readings of the four novels thus serve to establish the context for the final chapter, which considers how Kierkegaard’s concept of the three spheres of existence might apply to a broader understanding of scholarship and pedagogy.

In addition to offering literary analysis (conventional close readings) of the four novels, the present study also serves as a primer to the theology of Kierkegaard in that the close readings of the novels illustrate various aspects of what Kierkegaard believed to be the three spheres of existence. The study also forwards the action of scholarship and pedagogy by inviting the reader to consider how the three spheres of existence might apply to contemporary scholarship and pedagogy.
CHAPTER 1
AN OVERVIEW OF IRONY
AND
INTRODUCTION OF KEY TERMS
IN THE STUDY

The central issue in the works of Christian thinker and religious writer Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) takes the form of a question: “What does it mean to become a Christian?”\(^1\) However, Kierkegaard’s ideas exerted influence well beyond Christian circles and have been important to many notable philosophical and literary figures, some of whom chose not to concern themselves primarily with the above question (Sartre, Camus, Heidegger, Buber), and some of whom did choose to concern themselves primarily with the above question (Tillich, Bonhoeffer, Berdiaev, Marcel). Even though Kierkegaard died in relative obscurity, thanks to posthumous translation of his works into German and to those translations then being embraced by thinkers as diverse as the atheist Sartre and the Hasidic rabbi Martin Buber, Kierkegaard’s writings evolved into a great shaping force in twentieth century philosophy, theology, and literature. Slightly extending Kierkegaard’s influence, the present study draws upon his concept of irony as

\(^1\) In *The Point of View of My Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard states clearly, “I am and was a religious author, the whole of my work as an author is related to Christianity, to the problem ‘of becoming a Christian,’ with a direct or indirect polemic against the monstrous illusion we call Christendom, or against the illusion that in such a land as ours all are Christians of a sort” (6).
indirect communication and—more specifically—upon his concept of the three spheres of existence to engage in close readings of four modern masterpieces of literature: *The Great Gatsby, The Sun Also Rises, Mrs. Dalloway,* and *Ulysses.* The four close readings that are offered from a Christian point of view then become a point-of-departure for considering how Kierkegaard’s concept of irony—more specifically, its three spheres of existence—might apply to present-day scholarship and pedagogy. Metaphors drawn from the close readings of the four novels thus serve to establish the context for the final chapter, which proposes that scholarship and pedagogy might benefit from applying distinctions relevant to Kierkegaard’s three spheres of existence.

**Defining Irony**

In *Sincerity and Authenticity,* Lionel Trilling asserts, “Irony is one of those words, like love, which are best not talked about if they are to retain any force of meaning” (120). Similarly, in *The Compass of Irony,* D.C. Muecke asserts, “Getting to grips with irony seems to have something in common with gathering the mist; there is plenty to take hold of if only one could” (3). Even though irony has been defined in various ways according to both context and the period in which the definition occurred, it is

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2 Kierkegaard argues that human existence takes shape qualitatively in relation to the “single individual’s” subjective experience within either the “aesthetic,” the “ethical,” or the “religious” sphere of existence. Kierkegaard believes that by making a “leap to faith” from either the aesthetic to the ethical or from the ethical to the religious sphere, the individual experiences a qualitative shift in subjectivity that makes life richer than it was before the leap to faith occurred.

3 Katharina Barbe, in *Irony in Context,* divides the difficulty of defining irony into various contexts in which irony takes shape, including “conversational” contexts (33-60), “irony and jokes” (93-110), and “traditional and literary approaches to irony” (61-72). (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1995)
nonetheless useful here, as a point-of-departure, to attempt to define irony in a general sense and then to move on to consider definitions of various forms of irony.

Incongruity—or disparity—between what is said or written and what is meant is the primary issue in most general definitions of irony. *The Oxford English Dictionary* uses this approach by defining irony as “a figure of speech in which the intended meaning is the opposite of that expressed by the words used” (Second Edition, Volume VIII: 87). *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* offers a more differentiated definition of general irony in that it does not use the specific term “opposite,” but defines “verbal irony” as an expression in which “one meaning is stated and another, usually antithetical, meaning is intended” (635). Again, the primary issue is disparity between what appears on the surface and what the speaker or writer intends. M.H. Abrams, in his *Glossary of Literary Terms*, also cites disparity between what is said and what is meant; he claims that “in most of the diverse uses of the term ‘irony’ there remains the root sense of dissimulation, or of a difference between what is asserted and what is actually the case” (80). *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* asserts also that verbal irony might include understatement—that it might include a situation in which “the expressed meaning is mild and the intended meaning often intense, e.g. Mercutio’s comment on his death wound, ‘No, ‘tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door; but ‘tis enough, ‘twill serve’” (635). *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* also notes that irony as overstatement (hyperbole) can be used to the reverse effect of irony as understatement, as in the “tall tale” of “American folk humor” (635). The context in which the ironic expression occurs thus defines the content for the auditor of the expression. “Inherently, instances of irony can
be either more language-related (verbal irony) or situation-oriented (situational irony)” (Irony in Context 3). The context defining the reception of irony might be one in which the act of speaking is highlighted, or it might be a context in which the act of observing the situation is highlighted, as when an individual observes the irony of a particular set of circumstances in light of what one might have expected. “Irony can arise from explicit or implicit contradiction” (The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics 635). Whether the contradiction is implicit or explicit, then, will define the context within which the irony occurs. The casual inside joke in conversation occurs in an entirely different context than does a serious project of irony created by someone such as a Socrates or a Kierkegaard.

As D.J. Enright observes in his study on irony, the paradox in trying to conduct a study on irony is that the writer on irony risks being misunderstood. “The writer on irony is in a fair way to be disliked for setting himself up as smarter than other people (primarily his valued readers) whereas in reality not only are his intentions inoffensive but, by virtue of their earnestness, more often than not they deter him from being clever at all” (The Alluring Problem: An Essay on Irony 4). In short, irony is often a complex psychological phenomenon, one that lends itself to ambiguity by highlighting the complexity of the relationship between speaker/writer and auditor/reader. Although to be totally misunderstood is rarely a desirable situation, to intentionally and in a controlled way rely upon ambiguity in order to be partially misunderstood can be seen as the ironist’s gift: In being partially misunderstood, she might be able to create a dynamic interaction (dialectical movement), whereas a purely didactic approach might not.
Tragic Irony

Tragic irony is a form of irony that is more “situational” than “verbal.” The term “tragic irony” came into currency in 1833 when Connop Thirwall (1797-1875) introduced the distinction in relation to his broader idea of “practical irony,” which is a form of irony “present throughout life in individuals as well as in the history of states and institutions, and constitutes the basis for tragic irony” (The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics 634). For Thirwall, the “proper sphere of tragic irony” is a situation which presents, on the one hand, “the contrast of the individual and his hopes, wishes and actions,” and, on the other hand, “the workings of the dark and unyielding power of fate” (634). For Thirwall, the poet who conceives of tragic irony uses it as a means to exert “absolute power”: “The tragic poet is the creator of a small world in which he reigns with absolute power over the imaginary persons to whom he gives life and breath according to his own plan” (634). Shakespeare’s King Lear and Beckett’s Waiting for Godot are arguably two archetypal examples of the tragic poet exerting such an absolute power over imaginary persons. The protagonists of these two plays are crafted in such a way that they appear to be paralyzed before the power of tragic irony exerted by the poet over his creations. Among the classical playwrights employing the technique that Thirwall defines as tragic irony was Sophocles. “Sophocles in particular was master of a searing irony which focused attention on the incomprehensible and unjustifiable caprices of fate, and yet the rightness of suffering imposed on the hero is somehow affirmed...Sophocles’ tragic vision traces the working of the will of the gods as it affected the actions of men” (Ironic Vision in Literature 27). Although Sophocles sought to portray the will of the gods in relation to the actions of men, in the tragic irony of
Sophocles, the gods are immune from the judgment of men: “If he presents characters who are unjustly punished, he does not presume to judge the ways of the gods” (27). Tragic irony addresses the riddle of the individual’s relationship to fate—to circumstances beyond the individual’s control. Characters that take shape within the context of tragic irony take shape in a way which foregrounds their failure to overcome circumstances that fall within the framework of happenstance and the unpredictable.

**Dramatic Irony**

Dramatic performances offer unique opportunities for irony in the way that they play upon the relationship between audience and character. In *Irony and Drama: A Poetics*, Bert O. States claims that dramatic irony concerns primarily “the sets of expectations that drama arouses in us as a result of our being creatures of the world before we are ever creatures sitting at a play” (xiv). From Shakespeare’s meta-drama to Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, dramatic irony incorporates the idea that an audience sits before a “staged” performance. “Dramatic irony is a plot device according to which (a) the spectators know more than the protagonist; (b) the character reacts in a way contrary to that which is appropriate or wise; (c) characters or situations are compared or contrasted for ironic effects, such as parody; (d) there is a marked contrast between what the character understands about his acts and what the play demonstrates about them” (*New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* 635). Dramatic tension arises from the contrast between what the

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4 Though dramatic irony is most often associated with the theater and the performance of plays, it can also occur outside of that realm, as when in Genesis 42:7 “Joseph, unknown to his brothers, entertains them in Egypt” (*The Compass of Irony* 105).
audience knows and what the character in question does not know. “Irony is more striking when an observer already knows what the victim has yet to find out” (The Compass of Irony 104). In contrast to “Irony of Events, which needs to be completed by the discomfiture of the victim,…dramatic irony…is immediately ironical and not dependent upon any subsequent ‘reading of the results’” (104-05). Dramatic irony thus presumes predictable knowledge on the part of the audience. “The difference between the effect of Dramatic Irony and the effect of Irony of Events resembles the difference between suspense and surprise” (105). With dramatic irony, the suspense arises from what the audience already knows about the situation at-hand.

Cosmic Irony

In contrast to dramatic irony, which deals with shared knowledge in relation to a staged event, cosmic irony deals with what D.C Muecke calls “Irony of Events” (The Compass of Irony 102-ff). As with irony of events, in cosmic irony “the incongruity is between the expectation and the event,” and “some unforeseen turn of events reverses and frustrates our expectations or designs” (102). Even so, to extend the definition beyond mere irony of events, it is important to consider also that cosmic irony is a more global—more universal—phenomenon. Regarding cosmic irony’s historical and religious dimension, The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics associates the concept of cosmic irony with the philosophy of Hegel and the religious thought of Kierkegaard. Specifically, The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics observes that in The History of Philosophy (1837), Hegel identifies cosmic irony as the “‘crowding of world historical affairs,’ in the trampling down of ‘happiness of peoples,
wisdom of states, and virtue of individuals” (634). Hegel in his “comprehensive view of history” considers cosmic irony to be “an ironic contrast between the absolute and the relative, the general and the individual” (634). Hegel refers to this contrast as the ‘general irony of the world’ (634). Hegel identifies cosmic irony with an unfolding and necessary dialectical process that moves toward an unfolding of the “Ideal” as it moves from “Thesis,” to “Antithesis” and then to “Synthesis.” Hegel sees cosmic irony as part of the cosmic process that unfolds within the context of a necessary dialectical movement of the “System”—the world-historical process of Mind (the Absolute) recognizing itself.

Kierkegaard’s perspective on cosmic irony varies considerably from Hegel’s: Kierkegaard rejects Hegel’s “comprehensive view of history” (including Hegel’s notion of the Absolute unfolding in a necessary dialectical movement from thesis to antithesis and then to synthesis). For Kierkegaard, cosmic irony represents “an absolute and irreconcilable opposition between the subjective and the objective” (634). Hegel’s “comprehensive view of history” is for Kierkegaard a view that unwittingly overlooks the existence of the individual in favor of an overly abstract, contemplative, and detached view of history. As Kierkegaard notes ironically in his journals, “The System [Hegel’s System] ‘goes forward by necessity,’ so it is said. And look, it never for a moment is able to move as much as an inch ahead of existence, which goes forward in freedom” (Journals and Papers, Volume II: 225). Kierkegaard addresses the freedom of the existing individual in order to reject Hegel’s idea of the Absolute as an abstract Ideal in which history, by necessity, unfolds in a dialectical movement. As Steven Emanuel observes, Kierkegaard’s view of Hegel’s dialectical System is that “by viewing Christianity without reference to the existence of the individual, and hence without
reference to the importance of making ethical and religious decisions—that is, by attempting to explain Christianity as a necessary development in the historical process in which the absolute idea realizes itself—Hegel removes what is essential to the possibility of being Christian, and thereby creates the illusion that faith can be reduced to an intellectual exercise, a form of rational comprehension” (Kierkegaard and the Concept of Revelation 31). In contrast to Hegel who considers cosmic irony in terms it being an unfolding of “necessity” as necessity takes the form of a dialectical system, Kierkegaard likens God to a poet who has set the creation free: “The greater the contrasts in the movement [of the poetic creation], the more is irony required to direct and control the spirits that willfully want to change forward. The more irony is present, the more freely and poetically the poet floats above his artistic work” (The Concept of Irony 324). Kierkegaard does not see cosmic irony as an unfolding of a necessary dialectical process; Kierkegaard sees cosmic irony as occurring as an expression of the individual personality’s freedom before the Creator: Kierkegaard sees cosmic irony as the individual’s subjectivity coming to grips with its freedom before the Creator. For Kierkegaard, the individual remains grounded in freedom before God; God “as ironist is the eternal I for which no actuality is adequate” (283). Thus, in contrast to Hegel, Kierkegaard associates cosmic irony with freedom rather than with necessity. In presenting his comprehensive view of history as a dialectical unfolding of Mind, “Hegel could not demonstrate the crucial point: how I, an empirical thinker, am to transform myself into [an] absolute subject thinking pure thought and thus become ‘theocentric’” (Kierkegaard: An Introduction 8). In Kierkegaard’s view, Hegel unwittingly abstracted the individual out of existence: For Kierkegaard whose project was to answer the
question what it means to become a Christian, “as soon as we abstract from the category of the individual, Christianity is abolished” (Kierkegaard and the Concept of Revelation 31). Kierkegaard’s famous parable aimed polemically at Hegel’s abstract philosophical System is the parable of the palace in which the thinker does not and cannot live:

A thinker erects an immense building, a system, a system which embraces the whole of existence and world history, etc.—and if we contemplate his personal life, we discover that he himself personally does not live in this immense high-vaulted palace, but in a barn alongside of it, or in a dog kennel, or at the most in the porter’s lodge. If one were to take the liberty of calling his attention to this by a single word, he would be offended. For he has no fear of being under a delusion, if only he can get the system completed…by means of the delusion. (The Sickness unto Death 176-77)

Kierkegaard takes issue with Hegel and the Neo-Hegelians, arguing that their abstract dialectical system that explains all of history forgets to include the individual existing subject. In contrast to Hegel’s ambitious dialectical system, Kierkegaard, a religious thinker above all else, believes that the freedom reflected in his notion of “God as the poet par excellence” (Rasmussen 55) finds its resolution in the “Absolute Paradox” of the incarnation of Jesus as the Christ:

Generally the poet, the artist, etc. is criticized for introducing himself into his work. But this is precisely what God does; this he does in Christ. And precisely this is Christianity. Creation is really fulfilled only when God has included himself in it. Before Christ, God was included, of course, in the creation but as an invisible mark, something like a water-mark in
paper. But in the Incarnation creation is fulfilled by God’s including himself in it. (*Journals and Papers, Volume II*: 117)

God relinquishes freedom in relation to creation, for a time, and inexplicably (in terms of logic and reason) enters time so that the Absolute Paradox (the Incarnation) might become a means of salvation for the individual⁵. As Joel Rasmussen notes in *Between Irony and Witness: Kierkegaard’s Poetics of Faith, Hope and Love*, Kierkegaard’s poetics is “Christomorphic”: “Kierkegaard considers God a poet in the ‘eminent’ sense, a paradigm in comparison to which every human poet appropriately experiences some anxiety…In Christ, God ‘fulfills’ the poetic production of creation by becoming a part of it in the sense that human poets cannot” (80, 82). Kierkegaard’s specific expression for this paradox of God’s poetic production occurs in the words of Johannes Climacus, the narrative persona of *Philosophical Fragments*: “The god poetized himself in the likeness of a human being” (*Philosophical Fragments* 36). In contrast to Hegel’s concept of cosmic irony as part of a necessary unfolding of the dialectic of history, Kierkegaard advocates a concept of irony in which the individual is paradoxically both free and responsible before God. The individual ultimately strives toward freedom with the help (grace) of God as manifest in the Incarnation. In that sense, Kierkegaard’s poetics is indeed “Christomorphic.”

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⁵ In reference to the Apostle Paul’s claim that in the race of faith “all the runners run the race, though only one attains the goal” (1 Corinthians 9:24), Kierkegaard notes that salvation through faith is available by God’s grace to all, but it is available to only one individual at a time: “God in heaven who in the bliss of that sublime tranquility [of eternity] holds in survey, without the least sense of dizziness at such a height, these countless multitudes of men and knows each single individual by name—He, the great Examiner, says that only one attains the goal. That means, every one can and every one should be this one—but only one attains the goal” (*The Point of View for My Work as an Author* 111-12).
In her work *Fictions of Romantic Irony*, Lilian Furst claims that one “one must come to grips with irony and with romantic irony too if [one is] to understand modern literature” (1). In response to this assertion, D.J. Enright counters with the paradoxical observation, “It could be said that we must come to grips with modern literature if we are to understand irony” (*The Alluring Problem: An Essay on Irony* 15). Paradoxical qualifications aside, the concept of romantic irony finds itself associated most often with German literary theorist Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829). Although others such as Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger (1780-1819) and Johann Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853) were also influential, Schlegel was the “prophet” of German romantic irony and exerted the widest influence amongst those who advocated the practice of romantic irony. “If Schlegel didn’t invent romantic irony, he made it an eminently respectable research topic by giving it a ‘wholly new metaphysical status’ and investing it with ‘an epistemological and ontological function’” (Enright 15). Ernst Behler sees Schlegel as a transitional figure between antiquity and literary modernity: “In varying formulations, Schlegel attempted to rescue the Socratic-Platonic irony of a configurative, indeterminable, self-transcending process of thinking and writing and to integrate it with the modern style of self-reflection and self-consciousness as the decisive mark of literary modernity” (*Irony and the Discourse of Modernity* 82). Lilian Furst notes also that many twentieth century literary critics who deal with irony, such as D.C. Muecke and Wayne Booth, follow the influence of Schlegel in that their broad definitions of what constitutes irony owe at least a little to the influence of Schlegel and his broad concept of what constitutes romantic irony (1).
Furst observes, “Muecke devotes a whole chapter [of his book *The Compass of Irony*] to romantic irony which he regards as an adjunct to General Irony, concerned principally with the ironic contradictions of art” (*Fictions of Romantic Irony* 5). Schlegel’s concept of irony is one that moves beyond considering irony as merely a rhetorical figure: “Schlegel explicitly transcends rhetorical irony and…elevates Socratic irony not only as a play of wit and cunning ignorance, but chiefly as evoking and containing simultaneous feeling for inextricable opposites science and art, the absolute and the relative, impossibility and necessity of a complete communication, freedom and law” (*Romantic Irony* 17). Muecke also tries to situate romantic irony within the larger context of the history of irony: “The first discovery one makes about Romantic Irony, if one starts out with a concept of Romanticism derived from a reading of the French or English Romantics and a concept of irony derived from the corrective ironies of La Rochefoucauld and Swift, Voltaire and Fielding is that it has nothing to do with any simple conventional concept of Romanticism or with ordinary satiric or comic irony” (*The Compass of Irony* 181). Muecke’s notion that romantic irony is “concerned principally with the ironic contradictions of art” is consistent with Schlegel’s view that romantic irony should be associated with the autonomous aspect of both art and artist. As *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* notes with regard to the influence of Schlegel, “The most significant change in [the] meaning [of the term irony] took place in 1797, when Schlegel observed in his *Fragments*: ‘there are ancient and modern poems which breathe throughout, in their every detail, the divine breath of irony’” (634). Schlegel’s influence as literary theorist is arguably linked to his keen insights as to the function of irony within the whole of a work of art: “Schlegel’s most constant description of irony in its literary
and poetic forms is that of a consistent alternation of affirmation and negation, of exuberant emergence from oneself and self-critical retreat into oneself, of enthusiasm and skepticism” (634). For Schlegel and his fellow practitioners of romantic irony (such as Tieck, Jean Paul, Hoffman, and Heine), “irony becomes a conscious form of literary creation, although its prototype was seen, as is now fully recognized, in older European authors such as Boccacio, Cervantes, and Shakespeare. Particular points of ironic contrast, of creation and annihilation, were the relationships of illusion and reality, subjective and objective, self and world, the inauthenticity and authenticity of self, the relative and the absolute” (634). Claire Holbrook notes also of romantic irony that it “argues that life is a process of creation, flux, and becoming and that any perception or representation we have of life must be partial and at odds with the absolutely fluid nature of life” (Irony 183). In terms of how they relate irony to broader issues in both art and life, Schlegel and his entourage conceive of irony also as a defining aspect of art, a sort of dialectical tension within which works of art take shape and by which they assume their place within literary history. As Lowry Nelson Jr. notes in his essay “Romantic Irony and Cervantes,” “One of the great achievements of those we call Romantics was to envisage a general history of literature: a conspectus from Homer to Dante to Shakespeare on up to the very present. The most radical such scheme in its departure from the rhetorical and genre-oriented practice of Neoclassicism was that of Friedrich Schlegel in section “Epocden der Dichtkunst” of his Gesprach uber die Poesie (1799-1800)” (Romantic Irony 15). Schlegel, in “Fragment 116” of the Athenaeum Fragments, identifies romantic poetry with art that is both free and playful:
Romantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry: its aim isn’t merely to reunite all the separate species of poetry and put poetry in touch with philosophy and rhetoric. It tries to and should mix and fuse poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature; and make poetry lively and sociable, and life and society poetical…It alone is infinite, just as it alone is free; and it recognizes as its first commandment that the will of the poet can tolerate no law above itself. The romantic kind of poetry is the only one that is more than a kind, that is, as it were, poetry itself: for in a certain sense all poetry is or should be romantic. (Schlegel, *Schlegel’s “Lucinde” and the Fragments* 175-76)

Schlegel’s influence extended beyond his immediate circle of enthusiasts since the idea of romantic irony extended beyond Schlegel’s initial idea of ‘artistic playfulness” to incorporate also “melancholy and sadness as the mal du siecle (French romanticism), the transitoriness of life (Keats), [and] the perishing of the divine in this world (Solger)” (634). In *A Rhetoric of Irony*, Wayne Booth says that Kierkegaard shares with the romantic ironists the view that irony is ‘absolute infinite negativity’ (93). However, the difference that Kierkegaard sees in his concept of irony from that of the romantics is what he considers to be the “poetic arbitrariness” of German romantic irony as practiced especially by Schlegel in *Lucinde*.

*Kierkegaard’s Differences with Romantic Irony*

Although Kierkegaard admired Schlegel’s innovative approach to aesthetics and theology, Kierkegaard was critical of Schlegel’s view of the relationship of art to
freedom, especially in what Kierkegaard, drawing upon the teachings of his professor Paul Moeller\(^6\), considered to be “poetic arbitrariness” \(^7\) in the form of the abstract detachment of practitioners of romantic irony. Kierkegaard saw romantic irony as a flight from the actual into the world of the imagination, and though he valued the place of imagination in shaping existence, Kierkegaard thought it important to avoid appropriating imagination in an escapist manner, to avoid using imagination to take flight into fantasy and away from actuality. In *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard provides a summary review of Schlegel’s *Lucinde* in which Kierkegaard sees in Julius, the male protagonist, “‘a personality trapped in reflection” (293). According to Kierkegaard, this being trapped in reflection creates a world where “fantasy alone prevails” (292n). For Kierkegaard, romantic irony constitutes a tragic development in its ignoring of the actual in favor of the fantastic—it prefers to the actual a detached and fantastic view of the world that also exaggerates the importance of poet’s “freedom”:

> The tragedy of romanticism\(^8\) is that what it seizes upon is not actuality. Poetry awakens; the powerful longings, the mysterious intimations, the inspiring feelings awaken; nature awakens; the enchanted princess awakens—the romanticist falls asleep. He experiences all this in a dream, and whereas everything was fast asleep around him before, now everything is awakening—but he is sleeping. But dreams do not satisfy. He wakes up tired and torpid, un-refreshed, only to lie down, only to lie

\(^6\) *Between Irony and Witness* 21

\(^7\) *The Concept of Irony* 305

\(^8\) In *The Critical Mythology of Irony*, Joseph A. Dane notes that Kierkegaard sees the terms “romanticism” and “[German] romantic irony” as being “virtually interchangeable” (74).
down to sleep again, and soon he needs to produce the somnambulant state artificially, but the more exaggerated also becomes the ideal that the romanticist evokes.

Romantic poetry moves between two poles. On the one side stands the given actuality with all its paltry philistinism; one the other, the ideal actuality with its dimly emerging shapes. These two elements are indispensable to each other. The more actuality is caricatured, the higher the ideal wells up, but the fountain that wells up does not well up into eternal life. The very fact, however, that this poetry moves between two opposites shows that in a deeper sense it is not true poetry. (*The Concept of Irony* 304-05)

Kierkegaard thus rejects Schlegel’s ideal that romantic poetry be a play of opposites, “of illusion and reality, subjective and objective, self and world, the inauthenticity and authenticity of self, the relative and the absolute” (*The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* 634). For Kierkegaard, the playfulness that Schlegel advocates as the ideal of romantic irony finds itself unwittingly cut off from the actual. Kierkegaard scholar Vincent McCarthy summarizes nicely Kierkegaard’s position on the matter of romantic irony and poetic arbitrariness: The romantic poet “lives in a dream world, at best in a cycle of waking and sleeping. His fault is that he seeks content for his existence in the dreams which are his only actuality; he is never satisfied, and cannot be”

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9 Kierkegaard alludes here to the incident of Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s Well: “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water that I shall give him will never suffer thirst any more. The water that I shall give him will be an inner spring always welling up for eternal life” (John 4:14).
(Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard 10). The dream world of the romantic is for Kierkegaard a retreat from the actual.

In contrast to Schlegel’s view of irony that includes infinite playfulness of opposites such as the absolute and the relative, Kierkegaard’s view of irony is one in which the poet must “master” or control the situation in which the irony takes shape, so that the irony might serve some higher purpose in relating truth indirectly. “According to Kierkegaard, the Romantic abuse of poetry is perpetrated through a deficient understanding of the appropriate use of irony” (Between Irony and Witness: Kierkegaard’s Poetics of Faith, Hope, and Love 23). Kierkegaard views both irony and “living poetically” in terms of the religious possibilities that he feels life might hold: “Instead of the freewheeling form of irony espoused by Schlegel, Kierkegaard thinks irony and the corresponding concept of ‘living poetically’ need to be re-contextualized in terms of the religious life-view. In such a re-contextualization, irony is ‘mastered’ by being applied in service of a higher ethical earnestness, rather than providing merely idle diversions for the poet’s fancy” (23). In Kierkegaard’s view, “living poetically” includes that concrete actualization of self within an ethical framework; this concrete actualization of self involves a consciously adopted and ongoing choice between good and evil (the individual becoming conscious of self in terms of ethical responsibility toward the other).

As Sylvia Walsh notes, Kierkegaard’s expression “living poetically” begins as a critique of the German romantic poets but grows into a concept that includes both the ethical and the religious:

“Living poetically” is an intriguing phrase that Kierkegaard first uses in his early writings to characterize what he regards as an attempt by the
German romantic poets to construct their personal lives in the same manner as they create works of art. Through the exercise of a boundless artistic freedom, he claims, they seek to construct their self-identities through experimentation and play with an infinity of possibilities concocted by the imagination and tried out in a variety of roles and personal experiences with others. Kierkegaard finds this romantic mode of living poetically to be ironic, or negative and non-serious, in its attitude toward actuality, and destructive, rather than constructive, or up-building, in its consequences for the development of human personality and personal relation to others. He thus rejects it in favor of an alternative understanding of living poetically construed in an ethical and religious framework. Unlike its romantic counterpart, this mode of living poetically is one that affirms both possibility and actuality, a sense of our historical situatedness and finite limitations as well as freedom, and the construction of human personality through a process of self-development, rather than self-creation, in relation to the infinite or divine. (Living Poetically 2)

For Kierkegaard, poetry and art ought ideally never to be divorced from the actual, but ought ultimately to serve some higher purpose in helping the individual on the way through challenges presented by the actual conditions of her or his existence.

_Socratic Irony_

Most broad studies of irony refer at least in part to the classical form of ironic discourse practiced by Socrates as he is portrayed in the works of Plato. “The classical
image of irony as a lofty, urbane mode of dissimulation, practiced in conversation and public speech and without one’s own advantage in mind, finds its origin in the Platonic Socrates” (The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics 633). The Platonic Socrates works by means of “dissimulation”: “In front of his conversational partners who claim to know, Socrates professes not to know, but through insistent questioning proves them also not to know, thereby finding a common basis for their quest for knowledge. Hence, Socrates dissimulates not for his own advantage, but for the sake of truth” (633-34). It is this commitment to using irony for the sake of truth that makes Socrates an especially important figure for Kierkegaard:

Why did Socrates compare himself to a gadfly? Because he wanted his influence only to be ethical. He didn’t want to be an admired genius standing apart from the rest, who therefore simply makes life easier for them, for they say, “Yes, it’s all very well for him, he’s a genius.” No, he did only what everyone can do; understand only what everyone can understand. That’s where the epigrammatic quality lies. He dug his teeth hard into the individual, constantly compelling and teasing him with the commonplace. It was thus he was a gadfly, causing irritation through the individual’s own feelings, not letting him go on leisurely and weakly admiring, but demanding of him his very self. If a person has ethical powers, people will gladly make a genius out of him just to be rid of him, for his life contains a demand. (Journals and Papers: Volume 4: 210)

Kierkegaard saw the Platonic Socrates as the model for the project of “indirect communication” in the adopting of pseudonymous voices for his works. By adopting
pseudonymous narrative voices and thus distancing himself from his works, Kierkegaard sought to replicate within a Christian framework the sting he identified with Socrates: “By following such a method, which [Kierkegaard] termed one of ‘indirect communication’ and which was Socratic in inspiration, he sought to enable his readers to acquire a more perspicuous insight into their own situation and motivation, but without the didacticism that was characteristic of ‘objective’ modes of discourse” (Gardiner 38). Kierkegaard took very seriously the observation made in his journals that the Platonic “Socrates’ maieutic skill makes the reader or hearer himself active, and therefore [the dialogues of Plato] do not end in a result but in a sting” (Journals and Papers: Volume 4: 210). Socrates of the dialogues of Plato thus became the inspiration for Kierkegaard’s own project of indirect communication. Not only was the Platonic Socrates the topic of Kierkegaard’s doctoral dissertation (The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates), the Platonic Socrates was also the model after which Kierkegaard fashioned himself in his attempt to “sting” the lukewarm Christendom of his day into considering what it means to become a Christian. In explaining his method of “indirect communication,” Kierkegaard refers to this method as having been derived from Socrates but with the ultimate aim of serving Christianity in light of what it had become as “Christendom”:

Although ever so many parsons were to consider this method [of indirect communication] unjustifiable, and just as many were unable to get into their heads (in spite of the fact that they all of them, according to their own assertion, are accustomed to use the Socratic method), I for my part tranquilly adhere to Socrates. It is true, he was not a Christian; that I
know, and yet I am thoroughly convinced that he has become one. But he was a dialectician, he conceived of everything in terms of reflection. And the question which concerns us here is a purely dialectical one; it is the question of the use of reflection in Christendom. We are reckoning here with two qualitatively different magnitudes, but in a formal sense I can very well call Socrates my teacher—whereas I have only believed, and only believe, in One, the Lord Jesus Christ. (*The Point of View for My Work as an Author* 41)

Kierkegaard’s method of indirect communication was Socratic, but he appropriated it in the service of his ultimate concern: what it means to become a Christian in Christendom. He thus thought of himself as being “like a spy in a higher service, the service of the idea” of what it means to become a Christian in Christendom (*The Point of View for My Work as an Author* 87). Like Socrates, Kierkegaard made himself into a negative (a persona assumed ironically) to bring about the positive (an active engagement on the individual’s part with the question of truth). Socrates was for Kierkegaard the model for his authorship, but Jesus as the Christ was the “ultimate concern” of his life as a religious writer.

*Changing Notions of Irony*

*The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* notes that prior to the late-eighteenth/early-nineteenth centuries, irony was considered primarily as a rhetorical

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10 Paul Tillich’s distinction concerning what constitutes faith, as represented in *Dynamics of Faith*. To open his study in the dynamics of faith, Tillich claims, “Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned; the dynamics of faith are the dynamics of ultimate concern” (New York: Harper and Row, 1957:1).
device: “From the middle ages through the Renaissance and neo-classicism, irony was considered primarily in terms of ‘rhetorical forms,’” and “the basic meaning remained the same,” as is represented by the 1765 definition from a French encyclopedia in which irony was defined as ‘a figure of speech by which one indicates the opposite of what one says’” (634). It wasn’t until the last two centuries that irony became the complex area of study that it has now become with the relatively recent developments such as de Man’s deconstruction and the broader notions of irony offered by critics such as Lionel Trilling and Wayne Booth. Quintilian (circa 35-85 AD) believed that “the common feature of all rhetorical forms of irony is that the intention of the speaker is different from what he says, that we understand the contrary of what he says” (634). In both Rhetoric, Book III and Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle conceives of irony in terms of it being a rhetorical device. “The jests of the ironical man are at his own expense’ (Rhetoric, Book III 1419b7). As ‘the contrary to boastful exaggeration, [irony] is a self-deprecating concealment of one’s powers and possessions; it shows better taste to deprecate than to exaggerate one’s virtues’ (Nicomachean Ethics 1108.19-32). For Aristotle, the prototype of this self-deprecating, “genuine” form of irony was Socrates (New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics 633). It was arguably the advent of German Romantic notions of irony—particularly those of Friedrich Schlegel—that largely initiated the revolution in the way that irony was liberated from being considered primarily as a rhetorical device to it being considered as a dominant concern of both literature and poetics. “Schlegel explicitly transcends rhetorical irony and…elevates Socratic irony not only as a play of wit and cunning ignorance, but chiefly as evoking and containing simultaneous feeling for inextricable opposites science and art, the absolute
and the relative, impossibility and necessity of a complete communication, freedom and law” (Romantic Irony 17). It was also, in a sense, in reaction to Schlegel and the German Romantics (including Solger and Tieck) that Kierkegaard fine-tuned his own theory of irony, and, in reacting to and arguably surpassing Schlegel’s notion of irony, Kierkegaard became not only a significant force in modern philosophy and theology but also a significant force in shaping modern thought in general with regard to the power and importance of irony and indirect communication. Although Kierkegaard’s concept of irony follows Schlegel and romantic irony, Kierkegaard’s concept of irony is more than a reactionary joust with romantic irony; it is an even broader view than Schlegel’s of the place of indirect communication in service of inquiry and artistic expression.

The Unique Contribution of the Present Study

The particular contribution of this study is that it presents in close readings paradoxically positive aspects of four modernist novels that have sometimes been considered to be metaphysically pessimistic—“death of God” literature11, if you will, and it does so with the ultimate goal of explication for religiously-curious scholars as to the

11 In Literary Terms: A Dictionary, Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz claim that literary Modernism includes “the existential vision of an absurdly meaningless universe, the sense of man as trapped at an end-point in history” (165). And, in A Dictionary of Literary and Thematic Terms, Edward Quinn asserts, ”Perhaps the distinguishing feature of modernism is its determination to dispense with the past, in Ezra Pound’s phrase, ‘to make it new.’…Modernism was a response to the shift in thought an belief precipitated by intellectual developments and discoveries associated with, but not limited to, the names Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, and Albert Einstein. Darwin’s Origin of the Species (1859) uprooted the traditional view of ‘man made in the likeness of God,’ replacing it with one of man as the descendent of an ape. Marx’s view of the economic determinism that governed western history and culture directly challenged the idealist philosophy of its time, [and] Nietzsche’s declaration of ‘the death of God’ summarized the dismissal of the very ground of the Hebraic/Christian tradition…” (200).
nature of Kierkegaard’s concept of the *three spheres of existence*. The present study strives to illustrate and then to apply the concept of the three spheres in a way that encourages the reader toward concrete actualization of Kierkegaard’s ideas. I hope that this emphasis on applying the three spheres to everyday scholarship and pedagogy is something that enthusiasts of Kierkegaard will regard with esteem, since Kierkegaard so strongly emphasized the importance of one’s ideas being actualized in a concrete way to shape one’s destiny and the well-being of others (especially in relation to God). In performing the close readings of the four novels, the study also serves as a primer for Kierkegaard studies in that it replicates, at least in part, the process that Kierkegaard uses in his authorship: indirect communication. The readings of the four novels make use of the ambiguity of modernist irony and symbolism in a way that communicates indirectly various aspects of Kierkegaard’s three spheres of existence. This study adopts this strategy not to argue whether the four novels are “religious” or “non-religious” in character, but to illustrate indirectly various aspects of Kierkegaard’s three spheres of existence. The study thus presents an original approach to representing Kierkegaard’s three spheres of existence. More specifically, the study seeks to replicate—at least in part—Kierkegaard’s own method of indirect communication, by achieving a positive close reading of the symbolism of four great works of modernist fiction. The irony is that four novels that have sometimes been read as almost-codified representations of the “death of God” and of the godless state of modern humanity—through the ambiguity

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12 For example, in *Colonial Odysseys: Empire and Epic in the Modernist Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2003), post-colonial theorist David Adams, citing among other works James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, identifies twentieth century colonialism and the British modernist novel with the “metaphysical” problem of the “death of God.” Adams asserts, “Any analysis of the [modernist] novel's involvement in national and imperial culture must also eventually
inherent to their ironic construction—I read symbolically not as representing the death of God, but as works that can be interpreted in a way that ultimately serves Christian theological discourse. Thus, the unique contribution of the study is that it exploits the ambiguity of the texts ultimately to serve optimistic theological discourse in the hope that the present study might make a concrete difference in the world. As Kierkegaard does with his appropriation of irony to comment on what it means to be a Christian, the present study attempts to turn an extreme negative\textsuperscript{13} into a positive. Although some scholars might believe in “codified” readings of modernism—readings that are fixed in place to somehow represent the death of God--, I do not ascribe to that point-of-view and thus move forward in what is my ethical right—namely, to appropriate the ambiguous symbolism of the novels in this study in a way that turns an extreme negative\textsuperscript{14} into a positive\textsuperscript{15} in the way that the study illustrates and supplements Kierkegaard’s theory of the three spheres of existence. The unique contribution of the present study to both account for the way the genre responds to metaphysical questions” (48). In a review of Adams’s book, Jonathan Greenberg summarizes Adams’s position on “metaphysical questions”: “From where, [Adams] asks, do people derive a deep sense of meaning or value when traditional religious answers have been abandoned or discredited? What kinds of human activity can fill this void, which Adams calls, after Salman Rushdie, a ‘god-shaped hole?’” (http://www.brynmawr.edu/bmrc/Spring2005/Adams.htm). In elaborating upon Adams’s book, Jonathan Greenberg explains Adams’s term “reoccupation”: “‘Reoccupation,’ in brief, is the process by which we compensate for the lost totality of a theological worldview with human constructs such as adventure, empire, or indeed fiction itself. As such it is a peculiarly modern process and one that, for Adams at least, seems destined to fail. The recognition of this failure is the primary function of the modernist colonial odyssey” (http://www.brynmawr.edu/bmrc/Spring2005/Adams.htm).

\textsuperscript{13} Irony that arguably represents metaphysical doubt symbolically in the form of dilemmas faced by characters such as Jake Barnes, Clarissa Dalloway, and Stephen Dedalus.

\textsuperscript{14} (the irony expressed in the novels in representation of metaphysical doubt)

\textsuperscript{15} (the proposal in Chapter 6 that the three spheres be applied in a concrete, actualized way that might make a difference for others)
Kierkegaard studies and to the criticism of the four novels in question is not to achieve a “definitive reading” of the novels or of literary modernism—is not to discover what the novels “mean”: I attempt, rather, to approach the process of close reading in an original way that proves uplifting from a Christian perspective. I also hope that at the same time that the close readings offer those who are curious about Kierkegaard’s three spheres of existence a unique way of better understanding them. Obviously, then, I do not believe—as do Sartre and others of a more metaphysically pessimistic character—that literary modernism somehow announces symbolically the death of God and a human need to move beyond the Christian interpretation of existence; rather, I move forward in the belief that an optimistic embracing of life in the face of ambiguity such as that represented in many aspects of literary modernism (and postmodernism) is not only possible but might also prove to be a vital part of a Christian’s psychologically healthy response to the world of twentieth century (and twenty-first century) literature and art. It is thus important here to supplement this optimistic position by offering a few rhetorical questions with regard to literary modernism and the so-called “death of God.” I hope that these rhetorical questions might offer at least a few individuals the possibility of arriving at a positive way of perceiving the despair so characteristic of modernism and the twentieth century:

Rhetorical Question 1: Is it not at least possible that the despair represented by literary modernism (and sometimes postmodernism) is—as Kierkegaard’s disciple Nicolas Berdyaev asserts—a projection of the malaise of the age that resulted from

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16 In his *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, William Reese observes that “Sartre held God to be an unthreatened awareness, an impossible ideal which humans would like to have for themselves” (265).
individuals, one-by-one, having unwittingly rejected and moved away from God, not of individuals having outgrown the need for God? As J. Norris Beam remarks in the essay “Nicolas Berdyaev’s Critique of Sartre’s Betrayal of Existentialism,” Berdyaev criticizes Sartre for “betraying existentialism” by erecting an ontology of non-being to replace the possibility of an open relationship toward the possibility of transcendence. According to Beam, Berdyaev believes that “‘self-sufficiency’ and ‘self-assertion’ over against God has resulted in a widespread feeling of forlornness in the twentieth century, which [Berdyaev] regards as really the experience of ‘God-forsakenness’” (Beam 2-3; Berdyaev, The Divine and the Human 148).

Rhetorical Question 2: Is it not at least possible—as Martin Buber asserts—to reject any number of objectified (“I-it”) ideas about God yet still believe at the heart of one’s being that one can find deeper meaning in life and can find personal experience of the transcendent by relating to God as “Thou,” by relating to God as Infinite Subject (I and Thou 99-120)? The spiritually optimistic approach of the present study is consistent with Kierkegaard’s thought, since he held that even the phenomenon of despair might be interpreted optimistically: Kierkegaard perceives of despair optimistically, since he asserts that the phenomenon of despair affirms the possibility that human freedom and the human ability to acknowledge God are valid: “Kierkegaard said that man’s despair even indicates his spiritual worth, unlike the animals, because of man’s capacity to exercise freedom in [either] affirmation or defiance of God” (Beam 7). More specifically, in The Sickness unto Death, Kierkegaard affirms man’s “spiritual worth” and freedom in the face of despair by stating, “The possibility of this sickness [despair] is man’s superiority over the animal, and this superiority distinguishes him in quite another
way than does his erect walk, for it indicates infinite erectness or sublimity, that he is spirit. The possibility of this sickness [despair] is man’s superiority over the animal; to be aware of this sickness is the Christian’s superiority over the natural man; to be cured of this sickness is the Christian’s blessedness” (15). The paradox for Kierkegaard is that an extreme negative (despair in the face of freedom and the infinite) can bring about a positive (the individual’s acceptance of the eternal and of deeper self-actualization by way of God’s grace). This study also hopes to turn negative into positive—to offer a Christian perspective on works that might sometimes be considered as “death of God” literature. The study thus moves from the assertion based upon faith that it is at least possible that the individual’s ability to arrive at despair in the face of freedom, as literary modernism so often portrays, ultimately affirms the dignity of the individual as an existing spirit capable of relating to the eternal—of the individual’s freedom and “spiritual worth” before God, as Kierkegaard believes. Important to Kierkegaard’s belief in the spiritual worth of the individual is his notion that the power of reason, in and of itself, is insufficient for arriving at Christian faith, that to do so, one must make the “leap to faith” that occurs in the face of the limits of reason. 18

17 (The term “superiority” is used here paradoxically, since in Kierkegaard’s view this occurs by way of God’s grace in correlation with the individual’s acknowledgment of God and denial of self.)

18 This resembles William James’s idea (expounded upon in “The Will to Believe”) that the religious experience, in the deeper sense, includes not only a rational assent to a set of ideas but also a more differentiated sense of sentiment and will (The Will to Believe, Human Immortality, New York: Dover Publications, 1967). In his work A Kierkegaard Handbook, Frederick Sontag also notes that Kierkegaard’s “appreciation of the limited range of the intellect, and its powerlessness to deal with the ultimate problems of life, increasingly permeated the philosophy of the twentieth century” (12).
Subjectivity and Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of Self

According to Kierkegaard, all manifestations of human reason and all aspects of irony and of faith take shape within the broader reality of three paradoxically-interrelated spheres of existence. These three spheres take shape relative to human subjectivity with respect to one’s existential awareness of both self and self’s place and responsibility toward decisive action within the world. Kierkegaard’s notion of subjectivity resembles Claire Colebrook’s definition: For both Kierkegaard and Colebrook, “whereas individuals are selves with a specific identity and are perceivable as part of the world, the subject is the condition or process of consciousness from which the world or self is constituted. Subjectivity is therefore different from the social, embodied and specific individual; the subject is the point from which society and self is viewed and effected, but not itself an effect” (Irony 184). Kierkegaard’s notoriously challenging expression for this idea of subjectivity is that “the self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation’s relating itself to itself” (The Sickness unto Death 13).

Kierkegaard’s challenging way of expressing his idea of the self is actually ironic. The unusual language is Kierkegaard’s way of engaging in parody of Hegel’s obtuse way of expressing ideas. The passage in its movement from one point to the next parodies the synthetic nature of Hegel’s dialectic:

Man is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to its own itself, or it is the relation’s relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation’s relating itself to itself. A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom
and necessity. A synthesis is a relation between two. Considered in this way, a human being is still not a self (13).

Kierkegaard’s obtuse way of expressing the dynamic quality of self is actually a riddle that he introduces before launching into *The Sickness unto Death*: The key point in the riddle is that the passage ends with the observation that “considered in this way, a human being is still not a self.” J. Preston Cole explains, "If we are to grasp [Kierkegaard’s] understanding of the self, we must unravel that riddle, we must take seriously both the dialectical logic and the ironic fillip” (*The Problematic Self in Kierkegaard and Freud* 11). Cole follows this observation by pointing out also that Kierkegaard’s claim “‘the self is a relation’ implies that self is comprised of at least two elements, and for Kierkegaard these basic components are the classical concepts of body and soul. Here *body* signifies the physical aspect of human being, and *soul* the affective or psychological aspect” (12). But, for Kierkegaard, the self is more than merely body and soul: “as such he is not yet a self” (12). He is not yet a self because “such a being is only an ‘it,’ or at best a ‘me’—a self ‘in the dative case’” (12). For Kierkegaard, the individual ought ideally to become “spirit” to be a self. The self “in the dative case” is a self that remains confined to the aesthetic sphere. As Kierkegaard states later in *The Sickness unto Death*, “The man of immediacy is only psychically [soulishly] qualified…His self, he himself, is an accompanying something within the dimensions of temporality and secularity, in immediate connection with ‘the other,’ and has but an illusory appearance of anything eternal in it. The self is bound up in immediacy with the other in desiring, craving, enjoying, yet passively” (51). For Kierkegaard, such a soulish existence, one that remains confined to the aesthetic sphere of existence—remains “bound up in
immediacy”—remains also in a state of perpetual childhood: “In its craving, this self is dative, like the ‘me’ of a child. Its dialectic is: the pleasant and the unpleasant; its concepts are: good luck, bad luck, fate” (51). Although for Kierkegaard it is not “wrong” to exist in this state when one is a child, to remain in the state of immediacy—to remain confined to the aesthetic sphere—might ultimately lead to an existence that does not reach what is possible for it in either the ethical or the religious sense. “The immediate body-soul relation is not really a relation, but a unity—a psychosomatic unity, so to speak. It is a ‘negative unity,’ as Kierkegaard terms it, but selfhood requires a positive relationship of body and soul, one posited by the self itself” (Cole 12). “If, however, [in contrast to a negative unity], the relation relates itself to itself, this relation is the positive third, and this is the self” (The Sickness unto Death 13). The personality taking it upon itself to act consciously and decisively upon the world in the face of freedom is what constitutes the positive third. Further, Kierkegaard believes that for a self to become qualified as spirit and not merely remain confined to a soulish existence, the self ought to arrive at the “limit” of self as merely body and soul (in Cole’s “psycho-somatic” sense)—the self ought to arrive at the limit of “self in the dative case” in order to reach the point at which a qualitative “leap to faith” might occur. And, both the limit and “the leap” occur with regard to the self’s relationship to “despair.”

**Kierkegaard’s Concept of Despair**

For Kierkegaard, the phenomenon of despair is an extension of anxiety, the natural state of the human being which arises from the individual being unconsciously aware of the finite nature of existence while at the same time longing for the infinite,
longing for the eternal. Kierkegaard believes there is anxiety, tension, in human consciousness that arises in a dialectical movement in relation to freedom. In The Concept of Anxiety, “Kierkegaard as Vigilius Haufniesis describes how the possibility of freedom, with its accompanying sense of responsibility for action, creates anxiety (Angest) in the individual. The individual undergoes a state of gradual awakening, described as ‘dreaming,’ then ‘awakened’ spirit, in which the possibility of freedom, choice, and action ambiguously attracts and repels the individual through the scope of action opened (as the individual gradually becomes aware of the object of the choice and that there is a choice) and the accompanying sense of responsibility” (Historical Dictionary of Kierkegaard’s Philosophy 17). Kierkegaard believes also that the individual’s confronting freedom can lead to a qualitative shift (“leap”) in consciousness (existential self-awareness) that occurs in relation to the individual having chosen a concrete course of action. “Kierkegaard sees the transition to concrete (good or bad) action as occurring in a ‘leap,’ that is, concrete choices occur through free volition and are not an inevitable product or outcome of the previous state by some kind of natural transition, even though he accepts that individuals are burdened to a greater or lesser extent by the ‘necessity’ of factors of environment and heredity which are beyond their control” (17). Kierkegaard believes that anxiety reflects the inherent tension that arises from the individual’s freedom to choose one course of action at the exclusion of all others. Kierkegaard believes that “anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit a synthesis and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold of finiteness to support itself” (The Concept of Anxiety 61). With Kierkegaard, as with Sartre, freedom is prior to being-itself. Freedom is the “abyss”
down into which the spirit looks when facing its own possibility: “Anxiety may be
compared with dizziness. He whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss
becomes dizzy” (61). The dizziness of which Kierkegaard speaks is the dizziness of
freedom, without which no choice of concrete action would be possible, without which
no choice of “good” or “evil” would be possible. This anxiety, however, differs from
“despair,” which Kierkegaard calls “the sickness unto death.”

In the pseudonymous work *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard creates the
narrative persona Anti-Climacus to explain the dialectical nature of despair. According
to Anti-Climacus, despair (*Fortvivlelse*) arises as an advanced form of anxiety, and
Kierkegaard believes that despair is “the further state of the individual who fails to
develop a relationship to the eternal God” (Historical Dictionary of Kierkegaard’s
Philosophy 64). As Julia Watkin explains, Anti-Climacus’ dialectic of despair progresses
in various manifestations from unconscious to totally conscious: “An individual can go
astray in various levels of despair, beginning with unconscious despair, in which a person
is, for a time, superficially happy in a life directed solely toward temporal goals such as

19 It should be noted here that for Kierkegaard one who has made the leap to faith that
takes shape within the ethical sphere “develops a relationship with the eternal God”
indirectly in the sense of honoring others as she honors herself—the “first and great
commandment” (Matthew 22:35-40). As Julia Watkin notes, “Judge William (of
Either/Or) sees the initial choice of the ethical life as something that purifies, matures
and unifies the personality. It even brings the individual into contact with what Bishop
Nikolai Balle in his catechism calls the ‘Eternal Power’ (den evige Magt = God)
underlying all existence” (Historical Dictionary of Kierkegaard’s Philosophy 78).
Although for Kierkegaard one ought to ultimately be delivered from the power of despair
by appealing to God’s grace as manifest in the Incarnation, one is not necessarily
consigned to the flames of hell for failing to do so. Even so, “Kierkegaard makes it clear
that it is possible to relate to God only by way of ethics” (79). One could argue that it is
from Kierkegaard’s influence in this respect that Martin Buber developed his concept of
the “I-Thou” relationship and that Kierkegaard is in some measure indebted to Kant’s
Categorical Imperative, as Ronald M. Green argues in *Kierkegaard and Kant: The
making money or achieving political power. When the goals begin to fail to satisfy, the person tries to deal with the problem as something external needing to be fixed” (64). This, however, is destined to fail, and “it is not until she or he begins to be really unhappy that the despair begins to manifest itself at a conscious level” (64). As Mark Dooley observes in *The Politics of Exodus: Kierkegaard’s Ethics of Responsibility*, Kierkegaard believes that “the despairing individual is one who believes that he or she has the capacity to come into possession of the truth without having recourse to God as the ethical prototype and ideal” (87). According to Kierkegaard, to merely act in conformity with what one thinks are the conventions of society is not in Kierkegaard’s view to consciously adopt an ethical stance, as one can conform to the norms of society and still see oneself as an “it”, as “self in the dative case.” In a passage from *The Sickness unto Death*, the narrative persona Anti-Climacus defines the complex dynamic of the relationship of the failure to become self as actualized personality, as is the case with the despairing individual, who is in a state in which the will is divided, because the despairing individual cannot be something other than himself but still wills to be something other than himself—or despairs over being himself:

A person in despair despairingly wills to be himself. But if he despairingly wills to be himself, he certainly does not want to be rid of himself. Well, so it seems, but upon closer examination it is clear that the contradiction is the same. The self that he despairingly wants to be is a self that he is not (for to will to be a self that he is in truth is the very opposite of despair); that is, he wants to tear his self away from the power that established it. In spite of all his despair, however, he cannot manage
Despair relates more to the individual’s possibility of becoming (and longing to become) a fulfilled personality—relates more to the personality’s potential to act in affirmation of its own potential to be defined as an individual—than it does to an “ontological” condition: “It is important not to interpret despair as a feature of the ontological condition of the human being. It is, rather, a possibility that lies in the synthesis [of self]” (Dooley 88). Anti-Climacus thus refers to despair both in terms of “possibility” and in terms of it being a “misrelation”:

Despair is the misrelation in the relation of a synthesis that relates itself to itself. But the synthesis is not the misrelation; it is merely the possibility, or in the synthesis lies the possibility of the misrelation. If the synthesis were the misrelation, then despair would not exist at all, then despair would be something that lies in human nature as such. That is, it would not be despair; it would be something that happens to a man, something he suffers, like a disease to which he succumbs, or like death, which is everyone’s fate. (15-16)

The paradoxical nature of despair is that it occurs dialectically between the poles of finitude and infinitude, it occurs dialectically as a part of the self being a synthesis of the finite and the infinite, of necessity and freedom. There is a “despair of ‘infinitude,’” in which a person loses contact with the real world. The imagination is essential in helping the individual deal emotionally and intellectually with the world in an insightful way. Yet when it becomes fantastic, the individual may become distorted with respect to the
emotions” (Watkin 64). The despair of infinitude might thus find the personality under the sway of fantastic ideas that lack connection with the actual conditions of her existence: “Infinitude’s despair is to lack finitude...When feeling becomes fantastic in this way, the self becomes only more and more volatized and finally comes to be a kind of abstract sentimentality that inhumanly belongs to no human being but inhumanly combines sentimentally, as it were, with some abstract fate—for example, humanity in abstracto” (The Sickness unto Death 30, 31). Kierkegaard believes that the individual might thus flee from finitude and away from self: “The fantastic is generally that which leads out into the infinite in such a way that it only leads him away from himself and thereby prevents him from coming back to himself” (31). A personality under the sway of this form of the despair of infinitude might seek refuge from self in the false comfort of abstract ideas: “The law for the development of the self with respect to knowing, insofar as it is the case that the self becomes itself, is that the increase of knowledge corresponds to the increase of self-knowledge, that the more the self knows, the more it knows itself. If this does not happen, the more knowledge increases, the more it becomes a kind of inhuman knowledge, in the obtaining of which a person’s self is squandered, much the way men were squandered on building pyramids, or the way men in Russian brass bands are squandered on playing just one note, no more, no less” (31). The despair of infinitude is thus a despair that brings with it a loss of meaningful connection with the physical and practical circumstances of one’s existence.

Whereas infinitude’s despair is to lack finitude, “finitude’s despair is to lack infinitude” (33). As Anti-Climacus expresses, Kierkegaard believes that the personality under the sway of this form of despair will tend to become narrow and indifferent to
issues that ought ideally to be of ultimate concern: “To lack infinitude is despairing reductionism, narrowness. Of course, what is meant here is only ethical narrowness and limitation...the secular mentality is nothing more or less than the attribution of infinite worth to the indifferent” (33). According to Anti-Climacus, this form of despair involves remaining indifferent to whether or not one’s individual existence might have a purpose. Anti-Climacus includes in this form of despair an indifference to one’s individual existence that might manifest itself in one becoming a people-pleaser: “Every human being is primitively intended to be a self, destined to become himself, and as such every self is certainly angular, but that only means that it is to be ground into shape, not that it is to be ground down smooth, not that it is utterly to abandon being itself out of fear of men” (33). In contrast to the despair of infinitude that risks losing itself in abstraction, the despair of finitude risks losing itself in the crowd: “Surrounded by hordes of men, absorbed in all sorts of secular matters, more and more shrewd about the ways of the world—such a person forgets himself, forgets his name divinely understood, does not dare to believe in himself, finds it too hazardous to be himself and far easier and safer to be like the others, to become a copy, a number, a mass man” (33-34). Whereas infinitude’s despair might lead the potential self to disappear into the ether of abstraction, finitude’s despair might lead the potential self to disappear into the crowd.

Kierkegaard believes that it is God who provides the condition in which the personality might exist with an ultimate sense of freedom between the poles of finitude and infinitude, between the poles of necessity and freedom, and thus reach fulfillment in truth. As Mark Dooley explains, “By refusing to accept the condition that God provides in order that truth be realized, a misrelation in the synthesis is formed; that is, the human
being fails to become self-reflective by relating itself to itself in the manner prescribed” 
(The Politics of Exodus 88). Dooley also notes that Kierkegaard’s term for despair “the 
sickness unto death” refers not to physical death, but to the “death of the ‘purely human’ 
self. Repetition [concrete actualization of self], as a process of being born anew to the 
world, can only come into effect after such a death, or a crucifixion of human 
understanding, has taken place” (88). For Kierkegaard, the phenomenon of despair 
ultimately finds resolution in the individual’s repenting of the “purely human” self and 
turning toward God, first in the ethical sphere (by making a qualitative leap to lead one’s 
existence within a consciously-chosen ethical perspective which chooses good over evil), 
then in the religious sphere (by making the qualitative leap that repents of one’s earlier 
self in appealing continually to God’s grace to be freed of guilt [sin consciousness] while 
choosing good over evil). This is consistent with Kierkegaard’s assertion (in the words 
of Judge William) that “in relation to God, [one is] always in the wrong” (Either/Or II: 
351). “The solution to the problem of despair is always, as is pointed out by both Judge 
William in Either/Or and Anti-Climacus in The Sickness unto Death, is to face up to the 
despair, since the attempt to evade it only leads the individual more deeply into it” 
(Watkin 65). Since Kierkegaard’s ultimate concern is what it means to be a Christian in 
Christendom, Kierkegaard’s answer for the problem of despair is the Incarnation of Jesus 
as savior. Anti-Climacus claims that the ultimate answer to the problem of despair is 
found in the “blessedness” of the Christian, which is to be reconciled to God by way of 
the sacrifice of Jesus as the Christ: “The possibility of this sickness [despair] is man’s 
superiority over the animal, and this superiority distinguishes him in quite another way 
than does his erect walk, for it indicates infinite erectness or sublimity, that he is spirit.
The possibility of this sickness is man’s superiority over the animal; to be aware of this sickness is the Christian’s superiority over the natural man\textsuperscript{20}; to be cured of this sickness is the Christian’s blessedness” (The Sickness unto Death 15). Anti-Climacus’ assertion that “to be cured of this sickness is the Christian’s blessedness” stands consistent with Kierkegaard’s ultimate concern of what it means to be a Christian in Christendom in since the Apostle Paul claims in his letter to the Colossians that the blessedness of the Christian is that she or he is reconciled to God: “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now He has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in His sight” (Colossians 1:21-22). Thus, in contrast to Hegel’s abstract concept of Christianity, Kierkegaard’s view of Christianity situates the Absolute Paradox of the Incarnation as the key issue in what it means to be a Christian in Christendom: In Kierkegaard’s “Christomorphic poetics,” the incarnation of Jesus as the Christ becomes the means by which the individual is saved from the power of despair: “The formula that describes the state of the self when despair is completely rooted out is this: in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it” (The Sickness unto Death 14). For Kierkegaard, the problem of despair and of how one ultimately attains reconciliation with existence finds its solution in the “blessedness” of being delivered from despair. The ultimate possibility for concrete actualization of self, for Kierkegaard, amounts to the Christian making an appeal to God’s grace in a passionate act of will that involves the entire personality. Kierkegaard believes that for the individual to move beyond despair, she or he must make the leap to faith.

\textsuperscript{20} The “natural man” (“psycho-somatic” man, in J. Preston Cole’s terminology) is in Kierkegaard’s view confined to the aesthetic sphere of “self in the dative case.”
Kierkegaard’s Concept of the Leap to Faith

As M. Jamie Ferreira comments in the essay “Faith and the Kierkegaardian leap,” the phrase that is popularly associated with Kierkegaard, “the leap of faith,” is actually a misnomer: “The popular association of the [concept of] the leap with Kierkegaard is often couched in terms of the leap of faith. It is worthwhile, however, and interesting to observe, that Kierkegaard never uses any Danish equivalent of the English phrase ‘leap of faith,’ a phrase that involves circularity insofar as it seems to imply that the leap is made by faith” (The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard 207). Even so, Ferreira notes also that Kierkegaard, does “clearly and often” use the Danish term for “leap” [Spring], and Kierkegaard also makes use of “the concept of a transition [Overgang] that is qualitative [qvalitativ]” (208). Kierkegaard makes use of the concept of a qualitative transition especially as it concerns the idea of transition to religiousness, especially to Christian faith. Thus, Ferreira concludes: “even if the concept of a leap of (made by) faith is foreign to the terminology of Kierkegaard, the concept of a leap to faith [Troen] remains central to his writings” (209). The leap to faith is a qualitative transition. Further, the qualitative transition of the leap to faith is one that occurs in the face of objective uncertainty: “When, in his journals of 1848, he speaks of faith as ‘immediacy (or spontaneity) after reflection,’ he makes a clear distinction between an unreflective commitment to ideas and a faith commitment in which the believer has chosen to follow the religious path despite full knowledge of the intellectual problems presented by particular doctrinal statements. Initially faith lies in the certainty of one’s persistence in a faith commitment to God, even though it is impossible to prove that God exists” (Watkin
That faith occurs in the face of objective uncertainty, however, does not mean that
the individual making the leap to faith is being arbitrary or completely non-rational; it
means that one cannot arrive at the leap to faith strictly on rational grounds, one cannot
arrive at faith as an accretion of facts to which one assents by having proven them to be
true merely by means logic and reason. “Kierkegaard aims to show that faith has two
important elements: the subjective element of personal commitment to a particular path in
life, that path is indicated by the intellectual content of the idea or philosophy in question,
and the objective element presented by the content of the idea or philosophy.
Kierkegaard shows that belief in the former sense, of following a path in life, does not
necessarily follow from intellectual commitment to propositions about things, however
wholehearted the commitment to their truth” (82). As Kierkegaard remarks in a journal
entry from 1842, “If faith is regarded merely as knowledge of historical matters, one
quite consistently and simply falls into such ridiculousness as thinking that the question
whether the earth is round or flat is a matter of faith” (Journals and Papers: Volume 2:
6). And, in a journal entry from 1846, Kierkegaard also claims, “Faith is always related
to that which is not seen—in the context of nature (physically contrasted) to the invisible
[Usynlige], in the spiritual context (spiritually) to the improbable” (10). In the context of
Kierkegaard’s ultimate concern of what it means to be a Christian in Christendom, the
“improbable” finds its ultimate manifestation in the “Absolute Paradox,” the Incarnation:
“The historical [condition that is received from God and] that can be an object only for
faith and cannot be communicated by one person to another—that is, one person can
communicate it to another, but, please note, not in such a way that the other believes
it…The heart of the matter [of the absolute paradox] is the historical fact that the god has
been in human form, and the other historical details are not as important as they would be if the subject were a human being instead of a god” (*Philosophical Fragments* 103-04). As Joel Rasmussen explains, Kierkegaard believes that one can arrive at belief in such a paradox only by way of a “leap”:

> When confronted by the absolute paradox the understanding cannot simply ignore it because…the understanding is drawn toward what it cannot think.21 However, because in its absolute expression the paradox of the incarnation is a blatant contradiction—it ‘specifically unites the contradictories’—the understanding is offended but, to think with Kant, is an outrageous contradiction of the rules of the understanding. In order to think, one must employ the understanding. The attempt to think a concept that is self-contradictory is a violation of one of understanding’s fundamental rules. Nonetheless, while the dualism of Kant’s idealism is indeed presupposed as one of the interpretive structures of *Philosophical Fragments*, the figure upon which the whole book turns—the figure of the absolute paradox—defies Kant’s fundamental distinction. Consequently, it is impossible to incorporate the absolute paradox within “rational faith” as envisioned by Kant. (*Between Irony and Witness* 90-91)

In Kierkegaard’s view, the absolute paradox of the Incarnation cannot be explained in terms of “rational faith” because its “historicity” cannot be explained in terms of rational faith. As Johannes Climacus observes, the absolute paradox of the Incarnation involves

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21 According to Immanuel Kant, "Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions, which as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer” (*Critique of Pure Reason* 7).
the person exhibiting faith to “seek historical certainty for that which is absurd, because it involves the contradiction that something which can become historical only in direct opposition to all human reason, has become historical” (Concluding Unscientific Postscript 189). Hence, in terms of Kierkegaard’s ultimate concern of what it means to become a Christian in Christendom, the leap to faith is a leap to faith in the face of the absurd, a leap to faith that occurs at the limit of rational understanding of the historical event of the Incarnation—the Absolute Paradox. In Kierkegaard’s view, one does not become a Christian merely by accumulating an externally imposed set of a rationally ordered facts and details. Further, Kierkegaard also rejects the idea that Christian faith involves a piling-up of good works in hopes of winning favor before God:

Good works in terms of meritoriousness are naturally an abomination to God. Yet good works are required of a human being. But they shall be and yet shall not be; they shall be and yet one ought humbly to be ignorant of their being significant or that they are supposed to be of any significance. Good works are something like a dish which is that particular dish because of the way it is served—good works therefore should be done in humility, in faith. Or it is like a child’s giving his parents a present, purchased, however, with what the child has received from the parents; all the pretentiousness which otherwise is associated with giving a present disappears when the child received from the parents the gift which he gives to the parents. (Journals and Papers: Volume 2: 10)
As with Luther, with Kierkegaard, good works follow from—not lead to—faith, which is seen as a gift from God (as in Ephesians 2:8). Even so, for Kierkegaard, there is also a leap to faith—a qualitative shift—from self constituted within the “aesthetic sphere of existence” (the psychosomatic self in the dative case) to a faith that takes shape within the “ethical sphere,” where one experiences that qualitative shift in relating to God indirectly by means of what Kierkegaard calls “first ethics,” “genuine ethics” that contain “an eternal element” in that they “transcend the community” (Watkin 78). For Kierkegaard, the three spheres of existence—the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious—take shape in relation to the single individual’s making the leap to faith in acting decisively in relation to walking on an ethical-religious path in life.

*Kierkegaard’s Concept of the Aesthetic Sphere of Existence*

As mentioned earlier, Kierkegaard conceives of the aesthetic sphere of existence as the sphere of the “natural man”: the “psychosomatic self,” as J. Preston Cole’s states in his interpretation of the “self as dative” (*The Problematic Self in Kierkegaard and Freud* 16-20). Another term that Kierkegaard uses in relation the aesthetic sphere is “eudemonism,” an approach to life that sees its value merely in terms of the individual attaining happiness in the immediate sense. “The aesthetic element in a person is…the spontaneous and immediate character of a person as it is, un-pruned and undirected, unless of course, like Johannes the Seducer in *Either/Or*, a person tries to consciously direct his or her life solely in aesthetic categories—that is, without reference to moral rightness of action” (Watkin 14). Kierkegaard also believes that such an attempt to live in merely aesthetic categories is not only doomed to fail, but is also “demonic”: “For
Kierkegaard, it is...impossible to live a purely aesthetic life in which the aesthetic itself is
the steering feature of one’s existence. Not only is the aesthete doomed to fail in his or
her attempt to eternalize what is temporal, but from the point of view of ethics, it is also a
life based unjustifiably on natural selfishness” (14). In Kierkegaard’s view, such an
attempt to live merely in terms of the what Cole refers to as the “psychosomatic self”
would amount to one’s developing a self that is missing a critical aspect of what self
might be in terms of self becoming a fully developed personality. “From the point of
view of the way the psyche is actually structured, it means one in fact operates on the
basis of only one side of the self, since the self in its proper functioning utilizes the
possibilities of the ethical and religious life” (14). Kierkegaard defines the “demonic” as
being caught up in a prison of one’s own design, and that this prison, this “inclosing
reserve” [det Indesluttede], is actually a flight from freedom. In The Concept of Anxiety,
narrative persona Vigilius Haufniensis describes the dynamic relationship between
enclosing reserve and freedom: “The demonic is unfreedom that wants to close itself off.
This, however, is and remains an impossibility. It always retains a relation, and even
when this has apparently disappeared altogether, it is nevertheless there, and anxiety at
once manifests itself in the moment of contact [with the good]” (123). For Kierkegaard,
for the aesthete to willfully choose to remain shut up within “enclosing reserve” leads, in
the end, to a loss of freedom: “The demonic is inclosing reserve [det Indesluttede] and
the unfreely disclosed. The two definitions indicate, as intended, the same thing, because
inclosing reserve is precisely the mute, and when it is to express itself, this must take
place contrary to its will, since freedom, which underlies unfreedom or is its ground, by
entering into communication with freedom from without, revolts and now betrays
unfreedom in such a way that it is the individual who in anxiety betrays himself against
his will” (123). As Haufniensis also explains, his use of the term “inclosing reserve” is
meant to express the opposite of freedom, in the sense that freedom offers the individual
an expansive opportunity for the personality (self) to find expression in relation to the
other, whereas, “inclosing reserve’ chooses to remain shut up within itself and therefore
betrays its own possibility for expansive self-actualization in relation to the other:
“Freedom is precisely the expansive. In opposition to this, I maintain that…in an
eminent sense ‘inclosing reserve’ can be used for unfreedom. Generally, a more
metaphysical expression is used for evil, namely, the negative. The ethical expression for
it, when the effect is observed in the individual, is precisely this inclosing reserve” (123-
24). Haufniensis asserts that the demonic personality, by willfully clinging to an
erroneous concept of freedom (as a total lack of ethical commitment) arrives at a position
of self-betrayal: “The demonic does not close itself up with something, but closes itself
up within itself, and in this lies what is profound about existence [Tivalaerselsen],
precisely that unfreedom makes itself a prisoner. Freedom is always communicating
[communicerende] (it does not harm even to take into consideration the religious
significance of the word); unfreedom becomes more and more inclosed [indeslutte] and
does not want communication” (124). Kierkegaard’s demoniac, in a sense, remains
trapped in a hall of mirrors of his own design.

As George Bedell observes, Kierkegaard’s demoniac also shows a tendency to
become “actively destructive in an attempt to obliterate the good” (Kierkegaard and
Faulkner 50). Bedell’s observation rings true in the sense that Johannes the Seducer of
Either/Or I sees the other (the seduced) as a means to an end, as an object to be
dominated and manipulated, and in so doing, engages in an act of destructive defiance aligned with his rejection of the idea of the validity of marriage and the validity of a life cast within the consciously adopted framework of ethical commitment. Thus, in reacting to the idea of ethical commitment, Johannes the Seducer becomes both actively destructive toward the other and actively self-destructive toward his own possibility of becoming a self who is engaged in communicative interaction with the other.

In addition to the aesthetic sphere involving the possibility of self becoming demonic in willfully reacting to the possibility of making the leap to faith to the ethical sphere, Kierkegaard’s idea of the aesthetic sphere includes also the possibility of the individual engaging in a passive distancing of self from both actuality and possibility. “The person in the aesthetic [sphere] finds meaning for his existence outside himself” (*Kierkegaard and Faulkner* 81). Aside from the pursuit of sensual pleasure and of seeing oneself as a passive victim of external forces such as fate and bad luck, this “outside himself” might also include creating aesthetic distance from actuality by fabricating an abstract philosophical system such as Hegel’s. For Kierkegaard, such a comprehensive, abstract system tends to overlook the issue that the individual exists in a given historical context—for Kierkegaard, “the individual cannot possibly exist in isolation from his environment” (83). For Kierkegaard, abstract, rationalistic philosophy tends to remain confined to the aesthetic sphere, in the sense that “life is something to be lived, not something to be studied” (Williamson 6). Quaker scholar William Hubben summarizes this aspect of Kierkegaard’s concept of the philosophy within the aesthetic sphere by stating, “Existence is emphatically not a system of philosophy, or a new view taken of life. Man’s intelligence can never remain outside the totality of life and look upon it as a
spectator may look at something outside himself. ‘Pure thinking,’ says Kierkegaard, ‘is a
phantom.’ Man who merely contemplates a truth is apt to become a ‘traitor like Judas’”
(Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Kafka 37). Though he does not deny that
human reason has a value, Kierkegaard believes that decisive action plays the key role in
constituting a qualitative shift in self—in the personality’s awareness of both self and
self’s place in the world. Passive reflection—in and of itself—is incapable of bringing
about such a shift.

Kierkegaard’s Concept of the Ethical Sphere of Existence

Kierkegaard believes that for the individual to make the leap to faith that takes
shape within the ethical or religious possibilities that life might hold, she must with
passion and as a centered act of the personality take it upon herself to act decisively on
her own behalf in relation to casting her individual existence within an ethical
framework. As Judge William states of this initial decision in Either/Or II, it is not a
question of whether or not one values the aesthetic as enjoyment of pleasure or artistic
production; it is a matter of deciding to choose oneself and thus allowing the aesthetic to
assume its proper place within one’s existence: “In choosing itself, the personality
chooses itself ethically and absolutely excludes the esthetic22; but since he nevertheless
chooses himself and does not become another being by choosing himself, all the esthetic
returns in its relativity…The Either/Or I advance is, therefore, in a certain sense absolute,
for it is between choosing and not choosing” (177). For Kierkegaard, the qualitative

22 Judge William equates the aesthetic sphere with “the indifferent,” with the individual
remaining indifferent to the choice of organizing his existence within a consciously
adopted ethical framework (177).
shift in subjectivity that occurs from the aesthetic to the ethical — the leap to faith that
takes shape within the ethical sphere — occurs not in relation to the individual deciding
rationally upon one ethical code versus another, but in the individual deciding to decide
upon an ethical path (an ethical Either/Or) toward which one constantly strives to perfect
oneself: Judge William continues:

Since the choice is an absolute choice, the Either/Or is absolute. In
another sense, the absolute Either/Or does not make its appearance until
the choice, because now the choice between good and evil appears. I shall
not concern myself here with this choice posited in and with the first
choice; I wish only to force you to the point where the necessity of making
a choice manifests itself and therefore to consider existence under ethical
qualifications. I am no ethical rigorist, enthusiastic about a formal,
abstract freedom. If only the choice is posited, all the esthetic returns, and
you will see that only thereby does existence become beautiful, and this is
the only way a person can save his soul and win the whole world, can use
the world without misusing it. (178)

As Judge William explains, the qualitative shift in subjectivity amounts to deciding to
decide upon a walk in life that gives (either) the ethical (or the religious) a place of
ultimate concern. In doing so in relation to the ethical “Either/Or,” the personality who
makes the leap to faith that takes shape within the ethical sphere might become liberated
from a slavish relationship with the aesthetic and from a false conception of self and its
place in the world. Judge William speaks of a qualification of the aesthetic in its
proper—re-qualified—place, not of a shunning of aesthetic pleasure in favor of a monastic withdrawal from life.

In qualifying what constitutes the ethical sphere of existence and in differentiating the ethical sphere from the religious sphere, Kierkegaard makes use of two distinctions with regard to ethics (“first ethics” and “second ethics”), and two distinctions with regard to religious life (“Religiousness A” and “Religiousness B”). “In Kierkegaard’s writings, the ethical (det Ethiske) path is explained both in terms of how one sets about it and also in terms of what types of ethical code can be followed” (Watkin 77). For Kierkegaard, the person who has made the leap to faith that takes shape within the ethical sphere has experienced a qualitative shift “from a life lived in light of what one finds pleasurable or otherwise and one lived in light of what is right and wrong” (Watkin 77). “First ethics” belongs to the ethical sphere in that it involves the personality freely choosing to live and act in accordance with an ethical code that relates to God as Eternal/Infinite—“Entirely Other,” in the sense that “in relation to God [one] is always in the wrong” (Either/Or II: 327). The eternal and God are for Kierkegaard related in the sense that the self is capable of transcending self by acting decisively in relation to an ethical reality that exists beyond self and beyond the limitations of an individual existing in time: “The [decisive] moment (Oieblikket) is an atom of time, but it can also become an atom of eternity, in the sense in which the individual, situated in the temporal, but relating to the realm of the eternal, can use each temporal moment in striving to develop the initial potentiality of the eternal or spiritual self, through the ethical-religious choices she or he makes. The individual can also have a code of ethical values that is, by virtue of its transcendence of cultural contexts, eternally valid” (Watkin 76). Kierkegaard believes that first ethics are ethics
that transcend time since first ethics belong to the eternal: they transcend cultural contexts since the individual strives to understand ethics in a way that surpasses conformity to socially imposed conventions (fitting in with the crowd). First ethics are not imposed from without by means of intimidation and fear of punishment or by means of thoughtless conformity to the “tradition of men” (Colossians 2:8). First ethics might be considered a *primordial ethical choice*, as an “Either/Or” that no longer wills to be its former, psychosomatic self: For the aesthete making the leap to faith that takes shape within the ethical sphere, the “act of choosing oneself is possible…only when the rising tide of despair brings the individual to the ‘Either/Or,’ that explosive point where he passionately wills to be his true self and recognizes that such a wish entails the extinction of his old, sick self” (Palmer 99). By deciding to decide upon an ethical path in life, the individual who makes the leap to faith passes judgment upon the psychosomatic self and thus “repenting oneself” in an act of “absolute [infinite] resignation” that results in “the abandonment of the self with respect to the validity of one’s previous way of life” (Watkin 78). In *Either/Or II*, Judge William explains this paradox of receiving a new self in return for the old self:

The person who chooses himself ethically has himself as his task, not as a possibility, not as a plaything for the play of his arbitrariness. Ethically he can choose himself only if he chooses himself in continuity, and then he has himself as a multiply defined task. He does not try to blot out or evaporate this multiplicity; on the contrary, he repents himself firmly in it, because this multiplicity is himself, and only by penitently immersing himself in it can he come to himself, since he does not assume that the
world begins with him or that he creates [skabe] himself. The latter has been branded with contempt by language itself, for we always speak contemptuously of a man when we say: He is putting on airs [skabe sig].

Bit in choosing himself penitently he is acting—not in the direction of isolation but in the direction of continuity. (258)

The ethical self involves a concrete actualization of personality in the way that it differs markedly from the aesthetic self in terms of orientation within the world. Judge William claims that the difference between an ethical and an aesthetic individual is that the ethical individual (acting within repetition of ethical action while seeing himself as a task within the ethical) “knows himself, but this knowing is not merely a contemplation, for then [in contemplation] the individual comes to be defined according to necessity. It is a collecting of oneself, which itself is an action, and this is why I have with aforethought used the expression ‘to choose oneself’ instead of to ‘know oneself’ [in contemplation]” (258). In contrast to the aesthete, in contrast to the “self as dative,” the ethical self, in making the conscious choice of self, moves beyond the tendency to view life primarily in terms of the accidental and fate; rather, he tends to see life in terms of the authentic self that might emerge: “When the individual knows himself, he is not finished; but this knowing is very productive, and from this knowing emerges the authentic individual” (258-59). This striving toward self in terms of actualizing truth is what Kierkegaard identifies as Religiousness A. “Religiousness A…can be found in any culture” and “is seen [by Kierkegaard] as a universal religiosity in which humans are aware of the divine and strive to fulfill its promptings. Thus, Religiousness A might even be found in the life
of a godly pagan\textsuperscript{23} (Watkin 212). As Johannes Climacus expresses it in \textit{Concluding Unscientific Postscript}, “Religiousness A can exist in paganism, and in Christianity it can be the religiousness of everyone who is not decisively Christian, whether he be baptized or no” (495). An assumption of Religiousness A is that the individual can reach God within temporality and fulfill the ethical-religious demand through personal striving” (Watkin 212). The failure to reach God through personal striving, however, Judge William, in \textit{Either/Or II}, identifies with the idea of every individual being guilty before God (“in relation to God, [one is] always in the wrong” (357). As one whose ultimate concern is what it means to be a Christian in Christendom, Kierkegaard sees the idea of “fulfilling the ethical-religious demand through personal striving” to be the limit\textsuperscript{24} of the ethical sphere since what it means to be a Christian is to participate in “Religiousness B” and in “second ethics.” For Kierkegaard, Religiousness B and second ethics involve the individual making the leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere, and this occurring at the limit of the ethical sphere means that “the individual finds it impossible to fulfill the ethical demand and is refereed to Christ in his capacity as Savior” (Watkin 78). As Johannes Climacus states with regard to Religiousness A and Christianity, “Religiousness A…is not the specifically Christian religiousness” because it is not “the paradoxical religiousness” (\textit{Concluding Unscientific Postscript} 493, 494). Even so, Johannes Climacus goes on to note that Religiousness A must precede the leap to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[23] Socrates as represented in the dialogues of Plato arguably embodies Religiousness A in the sense that he dedicates his life to moving in the direction of “Truth.”
\item[24] As the Apostle Paul states with regard for the Christians need for the grace of God in fulfilling the ethical-religious demand, “For all alike have sinned, and are deprived of the divine splendor, and all are justified by God’s free grace alone, through his act of liberation in the person of Christ Jesus. For God designed him to be the means of expiating sin by his sacrificial death, effective through faith” (Romans 4:23-25).
\end{footnotes}
Religiousness B and that there is a difference in the dialectic of Religiousness A and the dialectic of Religiousness B: “Religiousness A must first be present in the individual before there can be any question of becoming aware of the dialectic of [Religiousness] B. When the individual is related to an eternal happiness by the most decisive expression of the existential pathos, then there can be question of becoming aware how the dialectic in the second instance (secundo loco) thrusts a man down into the pathos of the absurd” (494). The leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere occurs in correlation with an “existential pathos” that is a centered act of the entire personality but that is paradoxically brought about by God: God [as Christ] becomes the condition by which the individual might make the leap to faith beyond the limit of the ethical sphere of existence: As Johannes Climacus puts it, “Sin-consciousness…is the expression for the paradoxical transformation of existence,” and “this is the consequence of the Deity’s presence in time, which prevents the individual from relating himself backwards to the eternal [by way of recollection], since now he comes forwards into being in order to become eternal by relationship to the Deity in time” (517). Kierkegaard believes that Religiousness A is initiated from within, and he believes that Religiousness B is initiated ultimately by the Deity, who breaks into time as the Absolute Paradox. As Kierkegaard notes in a journal regarding the limit of the ethical sphere, “The highest expression of an ethical view of life is repentance [striving to act beyond one’s former self], and I must always repent—but precisely this is a self-contradiction of the ethical, whereby the paradox of the religious breaks through, that is, atonement, to which faith corresponds. Speaking purely ethically, I must say that even the best that I can do is only sin; consequently I will repent of it, but even then I cannot actually get around to acting,
because I must repent” (*Journals and Papers, Volume 1*: 402). Thus, the limit of the ethical for Kierkegaard is the point at which the “religious breaks through” as “atonement” in the sense that the individual in becoming a Christian makes the leap to faith to the religious sphere by appealing to God’s grace. In making clear this need for the individual who would make the leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere to appeal to God’s grace, Kierkegaard rests squarely in the Christological tenets of Christian faith in answering the question of what it means to be a Christian in Christendom.

**Kierkegaard’s Concept of the Religious Sphere of Existence**

The ultimate concern of Kierkegaard’s writings, the question of what it means to be a Christian in Christendom, finds its deepest expression in Kierkegaard’s distinction of the religious sphere of existence and the way in which it places emphasis on the Christian way of life as a *walk*, not a set of logically coherent postulates. Kierkegaard emphasizes the point that “the individual must choose the Christian way of life as an existential venture” (Watkin 83). Whereas Religiousness A of the ethical sphere involves an individual striving toward concrete actualization of self within the context of a primordial choice that prefers good to evil and that acknowledges the place of at least one other individual, Religiousness B—which Kierkegaard identifies specifically with Christianity— involves the individual accepting God’s grace, involves her or him accepting that “the individual’s inability to fulfill the ethical demand requires God’s

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25 Religiousness B acknowledges the place of at least one other individual, as in ethical dimension of the life-long marriage commitment mentioned by Judge William in “On the Aesthetic Validity of Marriage” (*Either/Or II* pppp)
saving grace and forgiveness” (Watkin 79). In contrast to the abstract idea of Christianity represented by Hegel and the Neo-Hegelians, Kierkegaard emphasizes the concrete issue of the incarnation of Jesus as the Christ: As Julia Watkin explains, “Initially [within the ethical sphere] faith lies in the certainty of one’s persistence within a faith commitment to God[/the Eternal], even though it is impossible to prove that God exists. Where Christianity is concerned, there is the added burden of the fact that personal salvation is linked to claims made about a historical person, Jesus, of whom it is stated that he is the eternal God now become temporal in the human life of Jesus” (83). Thus, the leap to faith that takes shape in the religious sphere is a leap to faith that occurs in the face of absurdity. Narrative persona Frater Taciturnus claims that such faith in the face of absurdity is like being out upon the “seventy thousand fathoms”: “The believer lies constantly out upon the deep with seventy thousand fathoms of water under him. However long he may lie out there, there is no assurance that little by little he will find himself lying upon land, stretched out at his ease” (Stages on Life’s Way 402). This faith in the face of the absurd Kierkegaard also identifies with sin-consciousness, with the individual responding to the sense of indebtedness to God’s grace: For Kierkegaard,

The paradox of the religious life…is that the closer a person comes to God, the greater the sense of guilt or sinfulness and the apparent distance from God. The individual acquires a deepened consciousness of sin. In Christianity, the individual thus discovers, unlike the Greek [who refers to recollection], that the eternal truth is not to be found within. For Kierkegaard, Christianity as Religiousness B provides an amelioration in that the striving individual is referred to the grace of God through the
work of Christ, though the individual now has to face the intellectual challenge presented by Christian doctrine. (Watkin 213)

Kierkegaard believes that the individual in appealing to God’s grace meets “the intellectual challenge” of the high calling of imitating the Christian ideal as set forth in the Gospel—the high calling of putting others before self. As Sylvia Walsh observes, for Kierkegaard, Christ becomes the prototype for human existence:

Christ serves as the criterion and goal for human existence by being a model for imitation (Efterfolgelse). In Kierkegaard’s view, the relation to the Christian ideality through imitation of Christ as paradigm is a complex, dialectical one characterized by inversion and a need for reliance on Christ as redeemer. In contrast to the medieval conception of the imitation of Christ, which in Kierkegaard’s view held up Christ literally and directly as a prototype for humanity and assumed that we could actually achieve the ideal of resembling him, Kierkegaard maintains that the primary function of the prototype is to teach us how greatly we are in need of grace. (Living Poetically 237)

In referring in this manner to Christ as the prototype, Kierkegaard is likely referring to basic Pauline theology, specifically, to the Letter of Paul to the Colossians, in which Christ is declared to be the prototype (prototokos) for the church:

[God] rescued us from the domain of darkness and brought us away into the kingdom of his dear Son, in whom our release is secured and our sins forgiven. He is the image of the invisible God; his is the primacy over all things. In him everything in heaven and on earth was created, not only
things visible but also the invisible orders of thrones, sovereignties, authorities, and powers: the whole universe has been created through him and for him. And he exists before everything, and all things are held together in him. He is, moreover, the head of the body, the church. He is its origin, the firstborn (prototokos\textsuperscript{26}) from the dead, to be in all things alone supreme. For in him the complete being of God, by God’s own choice, came to dwell. Through him God chose to reconcile the whole universe to himself, making peace through the shedding of his blood upon the cross—to reconcile all things, whether on earth or in heaven, through him alone. (Colossians 1:13-20)

For Kierkegaard, the individual who makes the leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere is both referred to and empowered by Christ as redeemer: “In Kierkegaard’s understanding…Christ is the prototype for human existence, but not simply or directly a prototype. Insofar as he is humanity’s redeemer, he is not in this respect an object for imitation at all. Moreover, in his fulfillment of the ideal, Christ stands at such an infinite distance from all human striving that all direct efforts at resemblance fall infinitely short and are reduced to nothing” (\textit{Living Poetically} 237-38).

Both second ethics and Religiousness B deal directly with Kierkegaard’s ultimate concern: what it means to be a Christian in Christendom. Kierkegaard believes that within the realm of second ethics and Religiousness B one ought to strive toward Christ’s ideal of putting others before oneself, but in doing so, one is referred to God’s grace for empowerment.

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{New Strong’s Exhaustive Biblical Concordance} entry number 4416: “firstborn”
In several journal entries, Kierkegaard elaborates upon this idea of Christ as the prototype. In an entry from 1851, Kierkegaard speaks of the Christian’s striving toward ethical perfection being a matter of recognizing in humility the place of grace: “…Just because grace has been shown to me and I am reprieved, precisely in this lies the requirement to exert myself all the more…If I were to define Christian perfection, I should not say that it is a perfection of striving but specifically that it is the deep recognition of the imperfection of one’s striving, and precisely because of this a deeper and deeper consciousness of the need for grace, not grace for this or that, but the infinite need infinitely for grace” (Journals and Papers, Volume 2: 170). In the religious sphere and with second ethics, the “mild altruism” of Judge William of Either/Or gives place to “acute New testament altruism” and paradoxical affirmation of self through self-denial (“dying to the world”) as the believer gives place in gratitude to Christ as prototokos: “Christianity requires everything, and when you have done this, it requires that you shall understand that you are nevertheless saved simply and solely by grace. This is divine grace, different from the human conception of grace” (169-70). For Kierkegaard, the individual Christian ought never to forget his indebtedness to grace: “Christianity actually begins there where the most enthusiastic person, almost in despair over his sin, with the most intensified zeal stands prepared to sacrifice everything—and lest his zeal become either presumption or actual despair (presumption, as if a man had achieved something himself; despair, that he still is achieving nothing), Christianity wants to humble this zeal and also to bring peace, and now it says: A man is capable of nothing at all—it is grace alone” (171). In the religious sphere, sin-consciousness (an awareness of one’s need for grace), self-denial, and striving toward ethical perfection form the
complex dialectic as “‘despair is…rooted out’ and “the self rests transparently in the
power that established it” (The Sickness unto Death 14). The paradox of both the ethical
and the religious spheres is that one strives toward the ethical while remaining in the
ethical (Watkin 79). Kierkegaard advocates a view of Christianity wherein one strives
toward perfection of self, but not in an attitude of pride over one’s accomplishments;
grace is given by God, but not as a license to sin or to give up on oneself and one’s
possibilities.

In elaborating upon faith that takes shape within the religious sphere, Kierkegaard
in persona as Johannes Climacus of Concluding Unscientific Postscript addresses the
“problem” of how to relate inwardly to Christ who actually existed before one’s time as
the historical individual Jesus of Nazareth. For Kierkegaard, inwardness comprises the
central aspect of faith in the religious sphere with regard to the individual’s subjectivity.
“The concept of inwardness is an important, indeed the central, element in Kierkegaard’s
answer to the question of what is required of subjectivity for it to grasp ‘the’ problem of
the Postscript: the subject’s relationship to Christianity” (Hannay, Kierkegaard 128).
Kierkegaard scholar Alastair Hannay explains also that inwardness as conceived by
Kierkegaard is dynamic, involving tension and conflict—it is not a passive state of
withdrawal: “The inwardness itself…is clearly a mental state involving…some form of
conflict. Indeed Kierkegaard says that it is the ‘tension of the conflict form’
(Modæstningens-Formens Spændstighed) that is the measure of the strength of the
inwardness, and not any direct ‘outpouring’ (Udgydelse)” (126). In Concluding
Unscientific Postscript, Johannes Climacus explains in more detail the conflict and
tension to which Hannay refers—the conflict of inwardness that confronts the individual
who has reached the limit of the ethical sphere and chooses with “infinite passion” to make the leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere. Kierkegaard expresses through the narrative persona Johannes Climacus the holy dread of one who first with infinite passion chose the ethical over the aesthetic but who now chooses to let go of the ethical in infinite passion in making the leap to the religious:

The ethicist had with the passion of the infinite in the moment of despair chosen himself out of the fearful plight of having his self, his life, his reality in aesthetic dreams, in melancholy, in concealment. Fear [dread] from this side can therefore no more be in question; the scene is now the ethical inwardness in an ethical individual. The new fear [dread] must be a new determination of inwardness, whereby the individual in a higher sphere comes back again to the point of revelation, which is the very life of the ethical, which formerly helped to bring about a revelation (while the aesthetic hindered), is now the hindrance, and that which helps the individual to a higher revelation beyond the ethical is something else.

Whoever has had inwardness enough to lay hold of the ethical with infinite passion, and to understand the eternal validity of duty and the universal, for him there can neither in heaven or on earth or in hell be found so fearful a plight, as when he faces a collision where the ethical becomes the temptation. (231)

The individual making the leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere is called to make the leap to the “new paradigm” in the face of objective uncertainty: “This collision confronts everyone [who makes the leap to the religious sphere], if not
otherwise, then through the fact that he is religiously referred to the religious paradigm; that is to say, through the fact that the religious paradigm is an irregularity and yet is supposed to be the paradigm (which is like God’s omnipresence being evidenced by His invisibility, and a revelation through being a mystery). The religious paradigm expresses not the universal but the particular (the irregular, the exceptional, as for example by appealing to dreams, visions, and so forth), and yet it is assumed to be paradigmatical” (231). For Kierkegaard, the “moment of decision” at the leap to the religious sphere is one that requires “divine assistance”: “When I despair [at the limit of the ethical sphere], I use myself to despair, and therefore I can indeed by myself despair of everything; but when I do this, I cannot by myself come back. In this moment of decision it is that the individual needs divine assistance, while it is quite right to say that one must first have understood the existential relationship between the aesthetic and the ethical in order to be at this point; that is to say, by being there in passion and inwardness one will doubtless become aware of the religious—and of the leap” (230-31). In contrast to the leap to faith that takes shape within the ethical sphere in which one chooses oneself, the leap to faith that takes shape in the religious sphere “needs divine assistance.” In terms of his ultimate concern of what it means to be a Christian in Christendom, Kierkegaard’s view on divine assistance being necessary for the leap to the religious sphere is consistent with the teachings of the Apostle Paul in his Letter to the Romans:

> Now all of the words of the law are addressed, as we know, to those who are within the pale of the law, so that no one may have anything to say in self-defense, but the whole world may be exposed to the judgment of

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27 “In relation to God, [one] is always in the wrong” (*Either/Or II*: 351).
God. For (again from Scripture) “no human being can be justified in the sight of God” for having kept the law: law brings only the consciousness of sin.

But now, quite independently of law, God’s justice has been brought to light. The Law and prophets both bear witness to it: it is God’s way of righting wrong, effective through faith in Christ for all who have such faith—all, without distinction. For all alike have sinned, and are deprived of the divine splendor, and all are justified by God’s free grace alone, through his act of liberation in the person of Christ Jesus. For God designed him to be a means of expiating sin through his sacrificial death, effective through faith. (Romans 3:19-25)

For Kierkegaard, to have faith in Christ as redeemer and savior is the ultimate answer to what it means to be a Christian in Christendom. This he identifies with religiousness B and the Absolute Paradox of the Incarnation: “For Kierkegaard the external historical factors of the life of Christ would be just as paradoxical for the first disciples as for those later in history; in either case, the eternal element of Christ’s divinity must be a matter of faith and not empirical or historical observation” (Watkin 56). Kierkegaard also speaks of faith and the paradoxical nature of the Christ event in terms of the assertion that there is no Christianity without “offense”:

Just as the concept "faith" is an altogether distinctively Christian term, so in turn is "offense" an altogether distinctively Christian term relating to faith. The possibility of offense is the crossroad, or it is like standing at the crossroad. From the possibility of offense, one turns either to offense
or to faith, but one never comes to faith except from the possibility of offense.... Offense...relates to the God-man and has two forms. It is either in relation to the loftiness that one is offended, that an individual human being claims to be God, acts or speaks in a manner that manifests God...or the offense is in relation to lowliness, that the one who is God is this lowly human being, suffering as a lowly human being.... The God-man is the paradox, absolutely the paradox. Therefore, it is altogether certain that the understanding must come to a standstill on it. (Practice in Christianity 81)

The leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere concerns the Absolute Paradox specifically in terms of Kierkegaard’s appropriation of the words of Jesus, as in the Gospel of Luke: “Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me” (Luke 7:23). Jesus’ words were a response to John the Baptist’s followers who asked, “Art thou he that should come [the Messiah]? or look we for another?” (Luke 7:20). In a journal entry from 1847, Kierkegaard also identifies the idea of the “offense” with Jesus’ suffering: “The various occasions on which Christ himself says: Blessed is the one who is not offended in me. These passages could be gathered together to show how Christ himself at various points sets the possibility of offenses alongside. For example, as soon as he speaks of his glory, he promptly adds an antidote that he must suffer, and then adds again: Blessed is he who is not offended” (Journals and Papers, Volume 3: 365).

Kierkegaard identifies the idea of suffering and the “offense” in the sense that the person who makes the leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere Kierkegaard believes will suffer inward tension from the Absolute Paradox: “Christ is the paradox; everything Christian is marked accordingly, or as the synthesis it is such that it is marked
by the dialectical possibility of offense…Because of the possibility of offense, Christianity in any case has only single individuals to deal with dialectically, for the possibility of offense separates and isolates each one as the channel to becoming Christian” (370, 371). The possibility of offense confronts the individual believer who would make the leap to faith in that the Absolute Paradox and the inability to prove logically that God exists face the one who would make the leap: “The prospective believer already encounters the problem of not being able to prove definitely that God exists. This is followed by the difficulty that claims concerning divinity are ascribed to a historical person, and historical claims by their very nature are also subject to objective uncertainty” (Watkin 182-83). Julia Watkin goes on to explain that Kierkegaard believes that the historical person Jesus presents additional difficulties: “The matter is made worse, however, in that Jesus of Nazareth does not resemble the human conception of God as being a power. The historical ‘God-Man’ is the one who lived in poverty and died as a criminal” (183). Kierkegaard sees that possibility at offense over the historical person of Jesus as being two-fold: the first aspect of is that the ‘God-Man’ would live in poverty and die as a criminal; the second, “more serious” aspect “is the claim that Jesus is also the eternal God” (183). The problem presented as the dialectical tension in the walk of faith for the believer is that she cannot communicate in strictly rational terms what it is she believes: “The one who would believe must therefore also be able to stay with commitment to the Christian way of life in the face of the offense caused to feeling and reason” (183). Kierkegaard believes that the individual cannot communicate directly the paradoxical nature of Jesus as God-Man any more than Jesus could explain to John’s disciples who the God-Man is. The “doctrine of the God-Man is for [Kierkegaard] the
Absolute Paradox. But the important question for Kierkegaard is the existential meaning of this doctrinal content; the subjective significance which it has in the life of the believer. How does the Paradox determine the mode of existence of the believer” *(Kierkegaard Studies 129)*? For Kierkegaard, then, the inwardness of the individual’s walk in the religious sphere remains crucial to the dynamic of faith.

Kierkegaard identifies this inward dialectical tension in the religious sphere with the concept of “sin-consciousness”: the awareness given by “the Deity in time” of one’s indebtedness to God: As Johannes Climacus puts it, “Sin-consciousness. This consciousness is the expression for the paradoxical transformation of existence” (516). Climacus also identifies sin-consciousness with God’s grace: “…The individual is unable to acquire Sin-Consciousness by himself, as he can guilt-consciousness28 [within the ethical sphere]; for in guilt-consciousness the identity of the subject with himself is preserved, and guilt-consciousness is an alteration of the subject within the subject himself; sin-consciousness, on the other hand, is an alteration of the very subject himself” *(Concluding Unscientific Postscript 517)*. For Kierkegaard, the individual is not mired in morbid self-loathing, because the sin-consciousness amounts to humble awareness of the need for God’s grace: “The opposite of sin is not virtue, but faith” (Watkin 71). Thus, faith within the religious sphere becomes the means by which one is delivered from despair. Kierkegaard’s disciple Paul Tillich refers to this type of faith as “the courage to accept acceptance”—the courage to accept that one is accepted by God: “It is the experience of…the acceptance of the unacceptable sinner into judging and transforming communion with God. The courage to be in this respect is the courage to accept the

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28 Awareness that “in relation to God [one] is always in the wrong” *(Either/Or II: 351)*.
forgiveness of sins, not as an abstract assertion but as the fundamental experience in the encounter with God” (The Courage to Be 165). In contrast to “recollection” as a backwards movement toward the eternal as a recalled ideal, Climacus asserts, “sin-consciousness” (as an awareness of God’s grace) creates the condition for the individual to “come forwards into being in order to become eternal by relationship to the Deity in time” (Concluding Unscientific Postscript 517). Consistent with his ultimate concern of what it means to be a Christian in Christendom, Kierkegaard believes that the individual who makes the leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere responds to the Deity in time by moving in faith to embrace forgiveness and respond to the movement of grace. As Paul Tillich states, “Self-affirmation in spite of the anxiety of guilt and condemnation presupposes participation in something which transcends the self” (The Courage to Be 165). Kierkegaard identifies this participation in something that transcends the self with the Absolute Paradox: The individual “come[s] forwards in order to become eternal by relationship to the Deity in time” (Concluding Unscientific Postscript 517). The leap to faith that takes shape in the religious sphere is one that occurs in the face of objective uncertainty and is made in “infinite passion.” As Paul Tillich explains in A History of Christian Thought, “The religious stage [sphere] is beyond both the aesthetic and the ethical and is expressed in relation to that which interests us infinitely or which produces infinite passion…Kierkegaard makes the following statement which gives the gist of all his philosophical and theological authorship: ‘Truth is the objective uncertainty held fast in the most passionate experience. This is the truth, the highest truth attainable for the existing individual.’ Here he defines faith as well as truth, for this is just the leap [to] faith” (468, 469). For Kierkegaard, the
leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere involves the individual accepting God’s grace in infinite passion, and in this sense, it focuses on the Incarnation to address concretely the question of what it means to be a Christian in Christendom.

Brain McHale’s Rendering of Roman Jakobson’s Concept the “Dominant”

The present study offers close readings of the four novels by examining Kierkegaard’s concept of irony in relation to self-discovery within the context of the three spheres of existence. Deriving from ambiguity within the texts, the study examines individual characters and themes in terms of their relationship to Kierkegaard’s three spheres of existence. In doing so, the study also appropriates and elaborates upon distinctions from Brain McHale’s critical work *Postmodernist Fiction*. Specifically, the present study occasionally appropriates as a tool McHale’s idea that when literary critics typically refer to fiction as being either a “modernist” or “post-modernist,” they distinguish differences in the *dominant* mode of inquiry presented by the fiction with regard to human subjectivity. McHale believes that the concept of the “dominant” within literature and culture can serve as a “tool for describing how one set of literary forms emerge from a historically prior set of forms” (6). McHale derives his rendering of the term “dominant” from Roman Jakobson, who wrote in 1939 that

the dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art; it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure…a poetic work [is] a structured system, a regularly ordered hierarchical set of artistic

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Poetic evolution is a shift in this hierarchy...The image of...literary history substantially changes; it becomes incomparably richer and at the same time more monolithic, more synthetic and ordered, than were the *membra disjecta* of previous scholarship. (Jakobson, quoted in *Postmodernist Fiction* 6)

McHale qualifies—or, “deconstructs”—Jakobson’s definition of the dominant by agreeing that the general idea but also introducing the issue of human subjectivity: “Different dominants emerge depending upon which questions we ask the text” (6). In a broader sense, McHale agrees with and appropriates Jakobson’s basic distinction to assert that what we ordinarily refer to as modernist fiction tends to emphasize—to see as being a *dominant* concern—the issue of how human subjectivity knows and comprehends the world. McHale refers to this mode of inquiry as the “epistemological dominant” (9). Texts that exhibit an epistemological dominant present the reader with “problems in knowing” (10). McHale cites the detective story as the “epistemological genre *par excellence*” (9). In a detective story, the reader must “sift through the evidence of witnesses of different degrees of reliability in order to reconstruct and solve a ‘crime’” (9). To illustrate his point about modernist fiction tending to exhibit an epistemological dominant, McHale offers as an example Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936). McHale claims that “the semantic aspects” of *Absalom, Absalom!* “are organized around issues of epistemological doubt and meta-lingual self-reflection” (8). To illustrate this, he points out that in *Absalom, Absalom!* “the story of the Sutpen family comes down to Quentin Compson and his roommate Shreve in a state of radical incompleteness and indefiniteness—‘a few old mouth-to-mouth tales,’ as Quentin’s father says, ‘letters
without salutation or signature’—its indefiniteness only heightened by the successive interpretations imposed upon it by biased or under-informed or otherwise unreliable informants (Mr. Compson, Miss Rosa Coldfield, ultimately Thomas Sutpen himself)” (8). As with the reader of a detective story, the reader of *Absalom, Absalom!* faces a text that represents “problems in knowing.” The text tends to “simulate for the reader the very same problems of accessibility, reliability, and limitation of knowledge that plague Quentin and Shreve” (10). As with the detective story, the dominant of modernist fiction such as *Absalom, Absalom!* presents the reader with a riddle to solve.

In contrast, with postmodernist fiction, the reader faces a text that represents not problems in knowing, but “problems in modes of being” (10). McHale designates this phenomenon as the “ontological31 dominant of postmodernist fiction” (10). To illustrate his point, McHale offers the example of the science fiction story—the “ontological genre *par excellence*” (16): “Science fiction, we might say, is to postmodernism what detective fiction was to modernism: it is the ontological genre *par excellence* (as the detective story is the epistemological genre *par excellence*), and so serves as a source of materials and models for postmodernist writers (including William Burroughs, Kurt Vonnegut, Italo Calvino, Pynchon, even Beckett and Nabokov)” (16). Like science fiction, postmodernist fiction tends to take shape within the context of a dominant concern that asks the question “what type of world is this?” McHale claims that “postmodernist

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31 Ontology is the mode of philosophical inquiry that attempts to present a systematic account of existence. It asks the question, “What is the nature of things (phenomena) as they exist?” Whereas epistemology strives to better understand how one understands *per se* (it deals with the limits of reason), ontology strives to better understand the conditions of existence. The two modes of inquiry are not mutually exclusive—one will always contain an element of the other—, and it is a matter of emphasis as to whether the inquiry in question is to be considered either epistemological or ontological.
fiction differs from modernist fiction just as a poetics dominated by ontological issues differs from one dominated by epistemological issues” (xii).

In order to elaborate upon subjectivity and the narrative voices of the four novels, the present study employs Brian McHale’s distinction between the epistemological dominant of modernist fiction and the ontological dominant of postmodernist fiction. McHale’s distinction between the dominant of modernist fiction and the dominant of postmodernist fiction provides a useful tool for discussing shifts in narrative voices within the novels. More specifically, the present study applies McHale’s distinction as a tool for analyzing the qualitative shift in subjectivity that occurs from the aesthetic sphere to the ethical sphere and from the ethical sphere to the religious sphere. McHale’s distinction thus serves as a point of reference for discussing how shifts in subjectivity find expression in the narrative voices of the novels. Since Kierkegaard’s theory sets forth the view that there are qualitative shifts in the individual’s subjectivity from one sphere of existence to the next, McHale’s distinction regarding the qualitative shift in narrative voice from modernist to postmodernist fiction provides a scaffold from which to make points regarding subjectivity and narrative voice.

The following diagram (Figure 1) represents visually a synopsis of McHale’s rendering of Jakobson’s term the dominant as McHale applies it to modernist fiction and postmodernist fiction:
Figure 1. McHale’s Rendering of Jakobson’s Term the *Dominant*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>modernist fiction</th>
<th>postmodernist fiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>epistemological</td>
<td>ontological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(presents problems in knowing)</td>
<td>(presents problems in modes of being)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>genre <em>par excellence</em>: detective story</td>
<td>genre <em>par excellence</em>: science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sample queries: ‘How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?‘</td>
<td>sample queries: ‘Which world is this?’ ‘What is to be done in it?’ ‘Which of my selves will do it?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘What is there to be known?’</td>
<td>‘What is a world?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to another?’</td>
<td>‘What kinds of world are there?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘How does the object of knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower?’</td>
<td>‘What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘What are the limits of the knowable?’</td>
<td>‘How is a projected world structured?’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The present study applies McHale’s distinction the epistemological dominant versus the ontological dominant, as a tool for analyzing narrative voice with regard to subjectivity.

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32 (Dick Higgins, *A Dialectic of the Centuries*, quoted in McHale 9)
33 (McHale 10)
34 (McHale 9)
35 (McHale 10)
36 (McHale 10)
37 (McHale 9)
38 (McHale 9)
39 (McHale 10)
40 (McHale 10)
41 (McHale 9)
The close readings of the novels take shape systematically within the context of subjectivity progressing through the three spheres of existence, and McHale’s distinction proves useful occasionally as a point of departure for discussing subjectivity as it concerns shifts in narrative voices in the novels. The last chapter then simply appropriates metaphors from the close readings of novels to engage in analysis the three spheres of existence as they might relate to scholarship and pedagogy.

Overview of the Present Study’s Methodology

Before beginning my readings of the novels, it is important to note that the movement of the argument in the four chapters treating the novels follows a progressive pattern from the aesthetic sphere, to the ethical sphere, to the religious sphere. The argument thus moves progressively through what Kierkegaard considers the “stages on life’s way.” The pattern of organization functions as a parallel structure, to guide the reader’s progression through the close readings of the novels.

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In focusing on the three spheres of existence and subjectivity, the present study also incorporates the idea of indirect communication; I treat indirect communication in relation to both Kierkegaard’s theory and the narrative voices of the four novels under consideration. Kierkegaard models himself after the Socrates of the dialogues of Plato by using indirection to encourage individuals toward inquiry into truth, employing experimental narrative voices that suit the occasion of the message itself⁴². As with

⁴² In Kierkegaard’s Either/Or, the voice of the aesthetic sphere, as represented by the narrative of “The Seducer’s Diary,” is fastidious and restless and fawns over minute details while remaining ethically remote from life. In contrast, Judge William
Socrates in the dialogues of Plato, Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous voices become the occasion for the reader to arrive at self-discovery by means of indirect communication. Because they also employ experimental narrative voices and irony as a means of indirect communication, *The Great Gatsby, The Sun Also Rises, Mrs. Dalloway*, and *Ulysses* offer a suitable occasion to elaborate upon Kierkegaard’s distinctions on subjective truth and on irony within the context of the three spheres of existence. The last chapter appropriates metaphors from the close readings of the novels to illustrate how the three spheres of existence influence contemporary scholarship and pedagogy. In addition to appropriating metaphors from the close readings of the four novels, the last chapter also incorporates ideas from Paul Tillich, Parker J. Palmer, and Paulo Friere to contextualize the three spheres of existence as they occur in contemporary scholarship and pedagogy. The argument thus closes by applying Kierkegaard’s theory of the three spheres of existence to the world of scholarship and pedagogy in a way that encourages open-ended inquiry after the fashion of Kierkegaard’s notion that “truth is subjectivity.”

Even so, it ought to be noted also that the Christian assumptions of Kierkegaard’s theory do not receive “evangelical” treatment in this study. Rather, these assumptions are sometimes secularized in the same sense that Paul Tillich and Nicolas Berdyaev sometimes secularize their existential theology in discussing religion and culture.

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With regard to the broader issues of methodology, the philosophical/theological assumptions and assertions underlying the present study are as follows: *Life indeed* (Either/Or’s “voice” of the ethical sphere) shows a clear mind for organizing details and is direct, forthright.

43 The narrative voices of the four novels sometimes resemble Kierkegaard’s experimental narrative “voices” in *Either/Or* and the other pseudonymous works.
means something, and the single individual’s perspective of faith is the ultimate defining issue in one realizing life’s meaning. And, though there have been recent trends toward nihilism and atheistic socialism in literary studies, philosophy, and theology that might contradict the view presented in the present study, an author still has a right to offer a perspective on literature that formulates itself within the context of a Christian faith, without having to accomplish the impossible and justify that perspective of faith purely by way of logic and reason. Although it is not evangelical in the strict sense of the term, the present study moves from a point-of-view that assumes the Judaeo-Christian perspective to be an important perspective. Even so, the study is not designed to bring offense or to dismiss as altogether irrelevant the perspectives of other scholars who might offer varying points-of-view on the same issue.
CHAPTER 2

THE GREAT GATSBY

AND

KIERKEGAARD’S THREE SPHERES OF EXISTENCE

“Fitzgerald draws a wonderful portrait of his age, but his work is much more than just that... F Scott Fitzgerald should be remembered and valued most for the ‘how’ of his fiction, rather than the ‘what’ of it, namely his style is what makes him exceptional, not his subject matter” (“The Fiction of F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Conference with Professor Jackson Bryer”).

A Brief Overview of Relevant Criticism

For the scholar interested in studies that treat issues relevant to Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby—narrative style, irony, critical reception, or research tools—the following works might prove valuable:

University Press, 1985), and Stephen Matterson’s *The Great Gatsby and the Critics* (Macmillan, 1990).


*A Close Reading of the Novel*

Of the four novels considered in the present study, *The Great Gatsby* arguably offers the most straightforward point-of-departure for this study. This is largely because the novel unfolds within an elegantly designed and simple story, and because the characters—Nick, Gatsby, Daisy, Tom, Myrtle, and Wilson—present a fairly straightforward opportunity to explain more clearly of how Kierkegaard conceives of the three spheres of existence as taking shape in relation to despair. Further, Nick’s role as
“unreliable narrator” offers an opportunity to elaborate upon Kierkegaard’s concept of irony as indirect communication.

Nick Carraway, as “unreliable narrator,” presents the opportunity to expound upon Kierkegaard’s notion of the shortcomings of German romantic irony, which Kierkegaard feels identify romantic irony with despair that takes shape within the aesthetic sphere. Nick is unreliable in the sense that, in him, Fitzgerald renders a narrative persona through whom the story takes shape, and who also tends to present a romanticized version of Jay Gatsby in comparison to his treatment of other characters such as Jordan Baker and Daisy Buchanan. Nick tells the story as if it were in recollection, and in doing so, Nick tends to romanticize44 Jay Gatsby—the principal character, who ends up victim of his own misguided dream. Nick’s tendency to romanticize Gatsby manifests itself early in the novel: In introducing Gatsby, immediately after claiming that Gatsby “represented everything for which [Nick has] an unaffected scorn,” Nick observes still that “there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away” (6). In the course of two sentences, then, Nick expresses that he is both repelled by and drawn toward Gatsby. This resembles the German Romantic ironist’s tendency to cast his subject matter within polar opposites, to cast subject matter as “a consistent alternation of affirmation and negation, of exuberant emergence from oneself and self-critical retreat into oneself, of enthusiasm and skepticism” (The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry

44 Nick’s sarcastic pose creates aesthetic distance and resembles German Romantic irony in the way that Nick ignores historical actuality in favor of an interpretation of events that idealizes Gatsby as the victim of the wrong dream. “Historical actuality...is negated in order to make room for a self-created actuality” (Concept of Irony 275).
Nick’s narrative bias arises, arguably, from Fitzgerald recognizing that a narrator would likely express sympathy toward one who was earlier murdered. Even so, the first chapter and last chapter of the novel beginning with reference to memory provide a framing device for the story by bringing to light the importance of “memory as a trope”—memory as an important rhetorical figure⁴⁵: At the opening of the last chapter, memory as a trope establishes the context for the close of the novel: “After two years I remember the rest of that day, and that night and the next day, only as an endless drill of police and photographers and newspaper men in and out of Gatsby’s front door” (171). Nick’s recalling yet another instance of those around Gatsby failing to perceive the “true” Gatsby⁴⁶ betrays Nick’s own inability to decipher the “truth” about Gatsby. Beyond the natural inclination of memory to bend things in the direction of convenient “truth,” Nick’s persona, in a manner similar to Kierkegaard’s young aesthete in Either/Or⁴⁷, chooses to emphasize and deemphasize events and character traits that suit the purposes of his cynical world view—a world view that, in Kierkegaardian terms, uses irony as existence stance to escape engaging with life in a meaningful way. For Kierkegaard, “irony as existence stance” is distinct from “irony as a tool” of discourse: Socrates of the dialogues of Plato represents for Kierkegaard the positive form of irony as

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⁴⁵ Sipiora, Phillip. ENG 7939 “Hemingway-Fitzgerald” class lecture notes. University of South Florida, Fall 1995
⁴⁶ The partygoers in Chapter 4 offer various theories as to who Gatsby really is and how he got his money, but none of them seems interested in him as anything other than a topic of idle gossip—possibly a “bootlegger,” perhaps a murderer, or maybe even “second cousin to the devil” (65). The last of these reputed theories is arguably merely a reflection of Nick’s sarcasm and thus reveals his disdain for the partygoers and their theorizing.
⁴⁷ In a sense, Nick assumes a narrative persona similar to the young aesthete in Either/Or II whom Judge William claims has “hardened” his “mind to interpret all existence in esthetic categories” (233).
existence stance in that Socrates makes himself into an extreme negative (one who claims to know nothing) in order to bring about a positive: the quest for truth on the part of the auditors of his ironic stance. In contrast, German Romantic irony (as represented by Schlegel and his protégés) represents for Kierkegaard the negative form of irony as existence stance in that Kierkegaard believes that the German Romantic ironist errs by adopting irony as existence stance in a way that “all of historical actuality…is negated in order to make room for a self-created actuality” (Concept of Irony 275). German romantic irony is for Kierkegaard a flight from historical actuality into a self-created dream world—a self-created dream world where historical actuality is displaced by what Kierkegaard believes is “exaggerated subjectivity” (275). Kierkegaard believes that by using the power of imagination negatively to reside in a self-created world, the romantic ironist takes flight from the circumstances of life into the world of imagination.

Kierkegaard sees a need for a balance between imagination and historical actuality:

“Actuality (historical actuality) stands in a twofold relation to the subject: partly as a gift that refuses to be rejected, partly as a task that wants to be fulfilled…When actuality offers itself partly as a gift, the individual’s relation to a past is implied. This past will now claim validity for the individual and will not be overlooked or ignored” (The Concept of Irony 276, 277). In a sense, Nick Carraway, by adopting a cynical stance, resembles Kierkegaard’s romantic ironist who reshapes the past by way of “exaggerated subjectivity.”

Kierkegaard’s concept of romantic irony as existence stance arguably finds its clearest parallel in The Great Gatsby when Nick talks of his past and his motivations. For example, when he describes his past and his reason for choosing his career, a sarcasm
that parallels Kierkegaard’s notion of romantic irony’s “exaggerated subjectivity” creates distance between Nick and the ethical sphere—the sphere where one might choose oneself consciously and one might thus use imagination to set life before oneself as a task and consequently shape goals and responsibilities in relation to others. Nick, however, acts as one who is headed in the opposite direction; Nick projects a cynical stance in interpreting his past:

I graduated from New Haven in 1915, just a quarter of a century after my father, and a little later I participated in that delayed Teutonic migration known as the Great War. I enjoyed the counter-raid so thoroughly that I came back restless. Instead of being the warm center of the world, the middle-west now seemed like that ragged edge of the universe—so I decided to go east and learn the bond business. Everybody I knew was in the bond business, so I presumed it could support one more single man.

(7)

Nick’s cynical perspective toward his past is one that parallels Kierkegaard’s notion of how romantic irony as existence stance can create distance from historical actuality, and Nick’s apparent avoidance of the possibility of ethical responsibility in plotting a course in life brings into light the alienation that many young men experienced in the wake of the Great War. Nick’s detached attitude in relation to his family history and his nonchalance in choosing a career that many would consider an opportunity for prosperity arguably resemble the romantic ironist’s tendency to cast life within the context of a general malaise. Kierkegaard claims that the romantic ironist resorts to “exaggerated subjectivity”—to “subjectivity raised to the second power” and thus negates “historical
Nick acts as one who has lost the courage of self-affirmation which Kierkegaard’s disciple Paul Tillich considers to be a critical element of faith: “Courage as an element of faith is the daring self-affirmation of one’s being in spite of the powers of ‘non-being’ which are the heritage of everything finite. Where there is daring and courage there is the possibility of failure” (Dynamics of Faith 17). Nick does not act as one who finds self-affirmation through courage in the face of “non-being.” Instead, Nick behaves as one who has fallen under the sway of alienation in the face of his experiences in “the Great War.” He thus resembles one who retreats from faith, into “self-seclusion,” Kierkegaard’s “concept of the demonic” (Tillich, A History of Christian Thought 466). Nick acts as if he were using cynicism to brace himself against the world and thus, in Kierkegaardian terms, conducts himself as one who retreats from the possibility of making a leap to faith that might take shape within the ethical sphere. Like the Romantic ironist whom Kierkegaard criticizes for living a dream world, by ultimately arriving at romanticized interpretation of both Gatsby and life in the “haunted East…distorted beyond [Nick’s] eyes’ power of correction” (185). Nick conducts himself as if he were retreating into a world of “poetic arbitrariness,” where “all existence becomes mere sport” (The Concept of Irony 317). Although he claims to be “one of the few honest persons [he] has ever known” (64), his cynical pose in arriving at a hasty conclusion about the general dishonesty of the world might be interpreted as being a means of escape by which he could avoid engaging fully with actuality. He resembles the individual who lies to himself about the true nature of society in order to avoid responsibility for his own actions, one who in exaggerated subjectivity accuses the world of corruption and
dishonesty can thereby avoid responsibility for engaging meaningfully with the actual conditions of the world around him. “It's no secret that a liar won't believe anyone else.” For Kierkegaard, “the individual always has some freedom [to respond to his environment and historical context], and this element of having freedom or choice is linked to the individual’s potentiality for a spiritual existence. The ethical-religious person is...one who is attempting to fulfill the potentiality that lay in the initially given self. The aesthete or pleasure seeker, on the other hand, is one who remains living a half-life based solely on the initially given synthesis of body and psyche and is governed by the emotions rather than by will” (Watkin 231). Nick, in adopting a cynical pose with regard the general dishonesty of the world and the “haunted East,” behaves in a manner similar to the aesthete who unconsciously avoids the potential of making a leap to ethical-religious way of being.

Another occasion in which Nick resembles the aesthete who retreats from the possibility of a leap to faith to the ethical sphere occurs in his relationship to Jordan Baker. In describing his first impression of her, Nick conducts himself as one who would create aesthetic distance from his existence in the way that he presents her as a visual curiosity—in the way that he presents her more as an object than as a person:

I looked at Miss Baker wondering what it was she “got done.” I enjoyed looking at her. She was a slender, small-breasted girl with an erect carriage that she accentuated by throwing her body backward at the shoulders like a young cadet. Her grey sun-strained eyes looked back at

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49 The “initially given synthesis of body and psyche” that J. Preston Cole refers to as the “psychosomatic self” (The Problematic Self in Kierkegaard and Freud 63).
me with polite reciprocal curiosity out of a wan, charming discontented face. It occurred to me now that I had seen her, or a picture of her, somewhere before. (15)

Nick’s relationship to her progresses little beyond this initial curiosity and his finding her entertaining—someone with whom he might pass the time. Nick initially half-remembers her being involved in a controversy of some sort associated with her “sporting life at Asheville and Hot Springs and Palm Beach” but claims that “what it was [he] had forgotten long ago” (23). Later, he reveals that this controversy was that she allegedly cheated in her first golf tournament, that there were rumors “that she had moved her ball from a bad lie in the semi-final round” (62). Although she is reputed to be of questionable character—perhaps even a compulsive liar—Nick offers no direct explanation as to why he ultimately rejects her. He merely rationalizes their relationship as being part of his failure in the “haunted East” and states that “there was one thing to be done before I left, an awkward, unpleasant thing that perhaps had been better left alone. But I wanted to leave things in order and not just trust that obliging and indifferent sea to sweep my refuse away. I saw Jordan Baker and talked over and around what had happened to us together and what had happened to me afterward, and she lay perfectly still listening in a big chair” (185). Instead of conducting himself as one might within the ethical sphere by confronting her on what he suspects is a lie—her claim that she is now “engaged to another man”—Nick meets her lie with a lie of his own, “[pretending] to be surprised” (185). Similarly, earlier in the novel, when confronting the issue of her flawed character, he again rationalizes things by overlooking them:
She was incurably dishonest. She wasn't able to endure being at a disadvantage, and given this unwillingness I suppose had begun dealing in subterfuges when she was very young in order to keep that cool insolent smile turned to the world and yet satisfy the demands of her hard jaunty body.

It made no difference to me. Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply—I was casually sorry\(^{50}\), and then I forgot. (63)

Nick’s actions in relation to Jordan Baker resemble those of the individual who remains confined to the aesthetic sphere, the sphere of immediacy and self-interest, the sphere of abstraction and distant reflection—of rationalized distance from decisive action. “The characteristic of the aesthetic stage [sphere] is the lack of involvement, detachment from existence” (Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought* 465). Nick’s detachment from Jordan, his seeing her as an object of “curiosity” (15, 62) arguably places him in a situation similar to that of the individual who exempts himself from making the leap to faith that might take shape within the ethical sphere, the sphere in which “the attitude of detachment is impossible” (Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought* 466). Nick’s assertions with regard to his feelings for Jordan Baker are suspect in that were he truly “angry, and half in love with her, and tremendously sorry,” he would arguably not “[turn] away” (186); a person in such a situation, rather than retreat into a rationalization, would more likely confront the beloved about the lies and thus allow the possibility of escaping detachment and isolation. If he were, in fact, truly “half in love with her,” in turning away from *her*, would he not also be turning away from *himself*—turning away from the

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\(^{50}\) That she had “left a borrowed car out in the rain with the top down, and then lied about it” (62).
possibility of leading a life of commitment and responsibility in relation to one he loves? According to Kierkegaard, the individual who remains confined to the aesthetic sphere tends to see ethical commitment—“choosing oneself” with existential passion in relation to another individual—as a loss of freedom. Judge William, in *Either/Or II*, addresses the young aesthete on this issue by encouraging him to “choose himself” within the context of the ethical sphere by loving another in existential sincerity. Judge William uses his own marriage as an example by which he might encourage the young aesthete: “there is one thing for which I thank God with my whole soul, and that is that [my wife] is the only one I have ever loved, the first, and there is one thing for which I pray to God with my whole heart, the he will give me strength never to want to love any other. This is a family devotion, in which she shares, because every feeling, every mood, gains higher meaning for me by having her share in it” (*Either/Or II*: 9). Judge William thus explains how the personality might be deepened by decisive and concrete action within the ethical sphere. In contrast, Nick Carraway, in explaining his attraction-to-but-ambivalence-toward Jordan Baker, arguably acts as one who rationalizes his actions while turning away from the possibility of love. Ironically, in accusing her of dishonesty Nick is not being honest with himself.

Jay Gatsby most dramatically represents a life of detachment and isolation—a life confined largely to the aesthetic sphere. In fabricating a life that is merely a reaction to earlier failures, he resembles the aesthete, by effectively detaching himself from both the present and the future—from both actuality and possibility. This aesthetic detachment finds symbolic representation in Gatsby’s carefully staged parties, parties at

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51 In relation to both Daisy and to Dan Cody
which he remains detached and the guests speculate wildly at his “true” identity (52-54). James Gatz, the young man from Minnesota (175), creates a life that takes shape in reaction to two events—in reaction to betrayal by heirs of his mentor, Dan Cody, (heirs who cheated “Jimmy” out of his portion of Dan Cody’s fortune) (107) and in reaction to “the Great War’s” calling him, the “young soldier,” to go “overseas” (88), away from Daisy, the “first ‘nice’ girl he had ever known” (155).

The life that “Jimmy-Gatz-turned-Jay-Gatsby” creates in reaction to these two events resembles the world of the romantic ironist who ‘lives in a dream world…His fault is that he seeks content for his existence in the dreams which are his only actuality; he is never satisfied and cannot be’ (The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard 10).

Gatsby’s lack of satisfaction, his restlessness in reaction to the past and in reaction to a failure to connect meaningfully with the present, takes symbolic shape in three ways: The first is a restless fidgeting: “He was never quite still; there was always a tapping foot somewhere or an impatient opening and closing of a hand” (68). The second is his insecurity over the impact that his carefully crafted dream world might have upon Daisy: “He wants her to see his house” (84). And, when she does see the house, Nick, as narrator, claims that Gatsby “hadn’t once ceased looking at Daisy” and that it seemed he “revalued everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well-loved eyes. Sometimes, too, he stared around at his possessions in a dazed way as though in her actual and astounding presence none of it was any longer real” (96-97).

The third and arguably most important symbol in relation to Gatsby’s lack of satisfaction is his “deification” of the green light at the end of Daisy’s dock. At his first sighting of a
person he presumes to be Gatsby, Nick, as narrator, waxes poetic in observing Gatsby’s “worshipping” the green light:

I decided to call to him. Miss Baker had mentioned him at dinner, and that would do for an introduction. But I didn’t call to him for he gave a sudden intimation that he was content to be alone—he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and far as I was from him I could have sworn that he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward—and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock. When I looked once more for Gatsby he had vanished, and I was alone again in the unquiet darkness. (25-26)

By having him disappear mysteriously into darkness, Nick mythologizes Gatsby and his reverence for the green light. Here, Fitzgerald arguably uses indirect communication (via Nick’s romantic sensibility) to establish the idolatrously elevated character of Gatsby’s vision of Daisy and her world. In idealizing Daisy, Gatsby acts as a slave to his romantic vision of her, as one who unwittingly from within the aesthetic sphere projects his alienation upon the physical world. As Kierkegaard’s disciple Nicolas Berdyaev observes, “The world of slavery is the world of spirit which is alienated from itself. Exteriorization is the source of slavery, whereas freedom is interiorization." Slavery always indicates alienation, the ejection of human nature into the external” (Slavery and Freedom 60). The world of the aesthetic sphere extended beyond the innocence of youth might ultimately become a world of immediacy that reflects alienation over trying to find

52 Kierkegaard refers to “interiorization” as “inwardness” (Journals and Papers, Volume 2: 460-72; Concluding Unscientific Postscript 68-ff).
meaning in relation to material possessions. Kierkegaard believes that within the ethical and the religious spheres, life is set before one as a task, and the task is to know oneself: “the task of life is to become subjective” \textit{(Concluding Unscientific Postscript 151)}. Seeking meaning for life in material possessions Kierkegaard relegates to despair within the aesthetic sphere: “the man of immediacy does not know himself, he quite literally identifies himself only be the clothes he wears, he identifies having a self with externalities” \textit{(The Sickness unto Death 53)}. In a journal entry, Kierkegaard identifies responsibility and fullness of life with the individual abandoning the quest to find meaning in externalities: “After the individual has given up every effort to find himself outside himself in existence, in relation to his surroundings, and when after that shipwreck he turns toward the highest things, the absolute, coming after such emptiness, not only bursts upon him in all its fullness, but also in the responsibility which he feels he has” \textit{(A Kierkegaard Anthology 13)}. The green light arguably symbolizes Gatsby’s “shipwreck”—his failure to find satisfaction in the “exteriorized” world that he has built in reaction to his earlier failures.

More specifically, later in the novel, when Gatsby sees Daisy for the first time after their five-year hiatus and gives her a tour of all of the material possessions he has accumulated, once the awkward formalities are completed, Gatsby remarks to her, “You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock” (98). Gatsby’s reference to the green light arguably identifies his earlier worshipping of the light with his romantically elevated vision of the life he might have had with Daisy—with the idyllic life he hopes yet to have but which seems distant and unattainable. His attempts to attain that dream, however, have amounted primarily to an accumulation of material
possessions with which he hopes to impress Daisy. In this sense, Gatsby acts in manner similar to the “man of immediacy” who within the aesthetic sphere distances himself from both the actual and the possible by identifying himself with externalities.

At the close of the novel, Fitzgerald, using Nick as narrator—via indirect communication—arguably appropriates the green light as a symbol also for the ultimate failure of Romanticism—the failure of the world of “subjectivity raised to the second power”:

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that’s no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther…. And one fine morning—

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past. (189)

Gatsby’s romanticized dream drawn from an idealized past runs tragically aground when it meets with the actuality that Daisy and Tom turn out to be scoundrels. In the face of the threat that Daisy might be implicated in the crimes of hit-and-run and manslaughter, they conspire to betray Gatsby so that they might remain insulated within their world of wealth and carelessness:

Daisy and Tom were sitting opposite one another at the kitchen table with a plate of cold fried chicken between them and two bottles of ale. He was taking intently across the table at her and in his earnestness his hand fallen upon and covered her own. Once in a while she looked up at him and nodded in agreement.
They weren’t happy, and neither of them had touched the chicken or the ale—and yet they weren’t unhappy either. There was an unmistakable air of natural intimacy about the picture and anybody would have said that they were conspiring together. (152-153)

Though the “madman” Wilson is ultimately responsible for Gatsby’s murder (169), Tom and Daisy are by no means innocent. Gatsby’s dream world collapses when it meets with the actuality of cruelty, self-interest, and a misdirected bullet.

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In *The Great Gatsby*, Kierkegaard’s concept of the ethical sphere of existence is most notable for its absence—not its presence—and this is arguably due the concerns of the author and his use of indirect communication to render characters who find themselves alienated in the modern world. Nick (as both character and narrator), Jordan Baker, Tom, Daisy, Myrtle, and Wilson, though they all arguably act in ways that remain confined to the aesthetic sphere, relate also to the ethical, since in some ways represent inversions of the decisive choosing of oneself that Kierkegaard identifies with the ethical sphere of existence.

Like the personality confined to the aesthetic sphere, Nick lacks the decisiveness to “choose himself” within the ethical sphere: he drifts about in life and resorts to cynicism to distance him from the ethical sphere of commitment and responsibility. In contrast to Nick’s detached—almost voyeuristic—relationship to those around him (including Gatsby), for the person who exists “in the ethical [sphere], love overcomes isolation and generates responsibility” (Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought* 466). Nick also serves as an inversion of the ethical sphere in that Nick’s arranging for
Gatsby’s funeral (172), the one clear instance of Nick acting within what appears to be an ethical framework, is tainted by Nick’s adversarial attitude toward “the whole damn bunch” of Gatsby’s associates (162). Rather than claiming to come to Gatsby’s aid out of love or deep concern in seeing to a friend’s affairs, Nick, like the detached and alienated aesthete, romanticizes his actions. Nick claims to come to Gatsby’s aid as one who is the last resort for the abandoned Gatsby: “At first I was surprised and confused; then as he lay in his house and didn’t move or breathe or speak hour upon hour it grew upon me that I was responsible, because no one else was interested—interested, I mean, with that intense personal interest to which everyone has some vague right at the end” (172). By evoking the emotion of resentment toward Gatsby’s entourage, Nick conducts himself in a manner that at least partially inverts choice of duty and responsibility of one who chooses himself in freedom from within the ethical sphere: Nick resembles one who faces “responsibility” by default. Rather than deal with him as he would with a friend, Nick places Gatsby into the vague category “everyone.” Nick behaves as one who is thrown toward responsibility by circumstances, Nick behaves as one who has a “vague” sense of duty and responsibility, but he refracts this vague sense of morality through his Romantic sensibilities, much as he does with the telling of his romanticized tale. Nick identifies with Gatsby as a figurehead who represents the failure of life in the modern era. For example, before launching into his tale, Nick claims that Gatsby “represented everything for which [Nick has] an unaffected scorn” but then goes on to claim that “there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away” (6). Nick’s contradictory views of Gatsby arguably reflect Nick’s failure to
commit and pursue his own goals and aspirations in a responsible manner. By appropriating Gatsby as a metaphor in a cynical interpretation of life, Nick resembles one who wishes to justify his own retreat and alienation in the face of the “restless” state of being which the Great War has invoked in him (7). In Kierkegaardian terms, whatever the justification, the person who remains confined to the aesthetic sphere fails to realize the possibility of a life that might take shape within the ethical sphere: such an individual leads a life characterized by a lack of responsibility and commitment and therefore does not reach his or her potential as a concrete actualized personality. The lack of responsibility and commitment of one who does not choose herself by making the leap to the ethical sphere might thus lead the personality that remains confined to the aesthetic sphere to travel on “a dead-end route that leads to boredom and disgust and deprives life of all meaning” (Hubben 31). Nick’s retreat at novel’s end to the “middle-west” (184) and his accepting failure via the rationalization that Tom, Daisy, Gatsby, Jordan, and he “possessed some deficiency that made [them] subtly unadaptable to Eastern life” (184) resembles the sort of “disgust” at a “life [deprived] of all meaning” of which William Hubben speaks. Confined to the aesthetic sphere, human subjectivity might eventually devolve into nihilism. The personality might devolve in this manner in the sense that a person lacking meaningful connections to other individuals would likely find it much easier to think herself the passive victim of a meaningless life. The personality might thus devolve to the point of thinking that it merely exists, the personality’s connections to

53 With regard to the individual confined to the aesthetic sphere experiencing disgust at a life “deprived of meaning,” William Hubben is perhaps referring to the aesthete of “An Ecstatic Discourse” in Either/Or I, whose lengthy complaint against life includes these assertions: “Laugh at the stupidities of the world and you will regret it; weep over them, and you will regret it too…Whether you hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will regret it either way. This, gentlemen, is the quintessence of all the wisdom of life” (38).
others being perceived as quasi-arbitrary. In contrast, Judge William asserts that the personality that chooses itself freely within the ethical sphere will be more likely to affirm existence within the circumstances of life by using freedom to act upon and shape those circumstances: “When a person has felt the intensity of duty with all his energy, then he is ethically matured, and then duty will break forth within him. The fundamental point, therefore, is not whether a person can count on his fingers how many duties he has, but that he has once and for all felt the intensity of duty in such a way that the consciousness of it is for him the assurance of the eternal validity of his being” (Either/Or II: 266).

Tom Buchanan is the most loathsome of the characters in The Great Gatsby, one who fails to participate meaningfully in the ethical sphere of existence. He not only resembles the individual who remains indifferent to the possibility of a leap to the ethical, but he is also shameless with regard to behavior that exploits the distance that his wealth grants him. More specifically, Tom’s indifference to those around him arguably brings him to the point where he acts as one who relates antithetically to responsibility and commitment. Like the romantic ironist, he fails to see beyond the world of immediacy. He conducts himself as one who participates in the “demonic”—in “self-seclusion”—by “using everyone and everything for [his] own aesthetic satisfaction” (Tillich, A History of Christian Thought 466). Tom’s relationship to the ethical sphere is inverted in the sense that he violates the marriage bond and manipulates those around him. His cavalier attitude toward his affair with Myrtle Wilson resembles the defiance of the ethical sphere exhibited by Johannes the Seducer in “The Seducer’s Diary.” Johannes scoffs at the ethical and sees women as a means to an end: “The banefulness of an engagement [to be
married] is always the ethical in it. The ethical is just as boring in scholarship as in life. What a difference! Under the esthetic sky, everything is buoyant, beautiful, transient; when ethics arrives on the scene, everything becomes harsh, angular, infinitely langweiligt [boring]” (Either/Or I: 367). Tom Buchanan resembles such an individual in defiance of the ethical; he takes Nick to Myrtle’s place as a demonstration of his cavalier attitude toward the responsibilities of the institution of marriage and toward his commitment to his wife, who happens to be Nick’s cousin. “The fact that he had [a mistress] was insisted upon wherever he was known. His acquaintances resented the fact that turned up in popular restaurants with her and, leaving her at a table, sauntered about chatting with whomever he knew” (28). Tom’s indifference to the opinion of others and his cavalier attitude about parading his mistress around town resemble Johannes the Seducer’s cavalier attitude toward the ethical. Kierkegaard believes that the personality confined to the aesthetic sphere tends to see the ethical as a loss of freedom, tends to confuse “liberum arbitrium [the freedom of indifference] with true, positive freedom,” which is to choose oneself in making the leap to the ethical (Either/Or II: 174). Judge William claims that the ethical view of marriage does not mean a loss of freedom, but that the ethical view of marriage qualifies the aesthetic dimension of love, in that the ethical view sees the beauty of love taking shape within a specific historical context:

The ethical view of marriage…has several advantages over every aesthetic concept of love. It elucidates the universal, not the accidental. It does not show how a pair of very specific people can become happy. It sees the relationship as the absolute and does not take the differences as guarantees but sees them as tasks. It sees the relationship as the absolute and
therefore looks upon love according to its freedom; it understands its historical beauty. (305)

Tom’s casual attitude toward infidelity resembles Johannes the Seducer’s attitude toward marriage and the ethical in that both ignore the repetition of “tasks” and sacrificing of immediate desires in favor of obligations to the marriage partner, and both thus overlook the historical specificity—the ethical dimension—of marriage. Tom conducts himself as one who is in defiance of the ethical: he fails to see that his ultimately returning to Daisy does not justify a regular pattern of infidelity. Daisy addresses Tom’s casual attitude toward the concrete actuality of marriage by pointing out how their social life in Chicago became disrupted by one of Tom’s “sprees”: “You’re revolting,” said Daisy. She turned to me and her voice, dropping an octave lower, filled the room with thrilling scorn: “Do you know why we left Chicago? I’m surprised that they didn’t treat you to the story of that little spree” (139).

Even though Daisy does have a point to make on this occasion, her failure to live within the ethical sphere parallels Tom’s failure. Earlier in the novel, she too flaunts her infidelity—apparently in reaction to Tom’s having done so with regard to Myrtle:

As [Tom] left the room again, [Daisy] got up and went over to Gatsby, and pulled his face down kissing him on the mouth.

“You know I love you,” she murmured.

“You forget there’s a lady present,” said Jordan.

Daisy looked around doubtfully.

“You kiss Nick too.”

“What a low, vulgar girl!”
“I don’t care!” cried Daisy and began to clog on the brick fireplace. (122-123)

Although Daisy’s flaunting display gets interrupted by the appearance of her daughter, Pammy, Daisy returns to her attitude of detachment from the ethical by introducing Pammy to Gatsby and Nick: “‘How do you like mother’s friends?’ Daisy turned around so that she faced Gatsby. ‘Do you think they’re pretty’” (123)? In flirting with the danger of being caught with Gatsby, Daisy resembles the individual who within the context of the aesthetic sphere defies the ethical. In addressing the issue of choosing oneself within the ethical sphere, Judge William claims, “Either a person has to live aesthetically or he has to live ethically…It is not a matter of a choice in the stricter sense, for the person who lives aesthetically does not choose” [in the same sense that the person living in the ethical chooses] (Either/Or II: 168). Judge William qualifies this by stating that “the character indelebilis [the indelible character] of the ethical” is that it is “that which makes the choice a choice” (168). In contrast to one who lives as a reaction to the ethical and sees it as a loss of freedom, Kierkegaard believes that the individual who chooses herself after having made the leap to the ethical sphere experiences a qualitative shift in terms of the way she sets her life before her as a task to be realized with passionate concern for her own potential.

Wilson, in his reaction to adultery, is another character who represents an antithetical relation to the ethical. He conducts himself in a manner similar to the personality that succumbs to the exaggerated pathos and immediacy of the aesthetic sphere. Wilson resembles the man of immediacy who “is only psychically qualified” and who sees “his self” as “an accompanying something within the dimensions of
temporality” (The Sickness unto Death 51). Anti-Climacus claims that the “self as dative” is “bound up in immediacy with the other in desiring, craving, enjoying, etc., yet passively; in its craving, this self is a dative, like the ‘me’ of a child; its concepts are: good luck, bad luck, fate” (51). When Wilson learns of Myrtle’s adultery, he behaves in two ways consistent with the man of immediacy seeing himself as the victim of “bad luck” or “fate.” First, he resembles one who “is bound up in immediacy with the other in desiring,” since locks Myrtle into a room where he claims she will “stay… till the day after tomorrow and then we’re going to move away” (143). Imprisoning her is an act of brute force that relates antithetically to the ethical because it does not take into account the dialogue of commitment that comprises the ethical sphere’s relationship to marriage. After Wilson locks Myrtle in the closet, influenced unduly by Tom’s deceiving him into thinking that Gatsby is the adulterous partner to Myrtle, Wilson murders Gatsby (170). In murdering Gatsby, Wilson behaves in a manner consistent with what Anti-Climacus calls “the despair of weakness,” a form of despair in which the personality succumbs to the erroneous belief “that the despair arises from unfulfilled worldly expectations or loss of worldly ‘possessions,’ which may be material or human” (Watts 178). Lastly, Wilson conducts himself as one who has given in entirely to despair within the aesthetic sphere in that he commits suicide: “It was after we started with [Gatsby’s body] toward the house that the gardener saw Wilson’s body a little way off in the grass, and the holocaust was complete” (170). In committing suicide, Wilson symbolizes despair that adopts the extreme opposite of the possibility of the leap to faith that might take shape within the ethical sphere. As Kierkegaard scholar Michael Watts observes in summarizing Anti-Climacus’ position in The Sickness unto Death, “Whether despair is avoidance of an
ethical self or of the genuinely spiritual self, the underlying structure is the same—‘to want to be rid of oneself”’ (Kierkegaard 178; The Sickness unto Death 49). The individual who commits suicide while progressing no farther than the aesthetic sphere negates the possibility of a leap to faith that might take shape within either the ethical or the religious sphere.

In terms of Kierkegaard’s concept of the ethical sphere, Jay Gatsby might be read as an inversion of the possibility of a leap to faith that might take shape within the ethical sphere; he exchanges the actuality of the present for a vision of a past that never really was. As Quaker scholar William Hubben notes in summarizing Kierkegaard’s views on romantic detachment, “Man detaching himself from moral struggle and indulging in the search for beauty and pleasure remains within the realm of unreality and dream…History assumes the shadowlike contours of myth, while reality loses its true character. The aesthete constructs for himself a fictitious world of dreams, lives only in the immediate present, and finds himself ultimately rejected by life’s moral realities” (Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Kafka 31). Like the aesthete who fails distinguish the actual world from a dream world, Gatsby not only wants Daisy to admit that she loves him, he also wants her to deny that she ever loved Tom—something she ultimately fails to do:

“Daisy that’s all over now54,” he said earnestly. “It doesn’t matter anymore. Just tell him the truth—that you never loved him—and it’s all wiped out forever. “

She looked at him blindly. “Why, --how could I love him—possibly?”

54 The adulterous affair in Chicago
“You never loved him.”

She hesitated… (139)

When Tom confronts the situation by stating bluntly to Gatsby “there’s things between Daisy and me that you’ll never know, things that neither of us can forget,” Gatsby witnesses the collapse of his five-year struggle to see the dream become reality. He stands in a situation similar to the aesthete who “finds himself ultimately rejected by life’s moral realities” (Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Kafka 31). From that point on, Tom is master of the situation, and Daisy pleads with him, “Please, Tom! I can’t stand this any more” (142). For Kierkegaard, “the tragedy of romanticism is that what it seizes upon is not actuality” (The Concept of Irony 304). In contrast, the leap to faith that takes shape within the ethical sphere is one that leads the individual to both accept actuality and to act decisively to transform the actual into the possible.

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The issue of how the religious sphere of existence might relate to The Great Gatsby is addressed in the present study in terms of ambiguous symbolism employed by Fitzgerald. By employing ambiguous symbols in relation to characters whose judgment seems questionable, Fitzgerald arguably leaves open the question of a “Transcendent Other” and thus invites the reader to engage in further inquiry on the matter. One might argue from a Kierkegaardian perspective that in doing so, Fitzgerald indirectly interrogates the limitations of the romantic sensibility, with its tendency to retreat into irony as existence stance. One might argue from a Kierkegaardian perspective that Fitzgerald presents a scenario in which one might interrogate the limitations of the
romantic sensibility, and that Fitzgerald does so by way of both symbolism of a spiritual “wasteland” and the words and actions of the minor character Michaelis.

Regarding symbolism of the wasteland, the recurring ashes associated with the city and the “progress” of twentieth century industrialization are ambiguous and from a Kierkegaardian perspective need not be read as representing the “death of God.” More specifically, since from a Kierkegaardian perspective it is impossible to arrive at faith on strictly rational grounds, Wilson’s identifying God with the giant eyes on the sign of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg (167) can be interpreted as representing symbolically the limitations of concepts of faith that arise from within the aesthetic sphere—as well as the limitations of rationalist concepts of God. Kierkegaard scholar Rick Anthony Furtak summarizes Kierkegaard’s position regarding God as “Entirely Other”: “It does not make sense to speak of divinity as if it could be encountered as an object” (Wisdom in Love: Kierkegaard and the Ancient Quest for Emotional Integrity 98). For Kierkegaard, God is both Love and the ground of all that is—including the ground of that which we neither perceive nor understand—and thus stands beyond objectification by human reason.55 “Kierkegaard’s view that love is fundamental to the self informs his reading of the New Testament idea that our being is ‘rooted and grounded in love’: in loving others unselfishly, we also define our own individuality” (Furtak 98). In terms of Kierkegaard’s ultimate concern of what it means to become a Christian in Christendom, one ought to be grounded in love: “to practice Christianity means, above all else, to live in accordance with the conviction that God is love; that is, to follow the promptings of a religious influence which one does not necessarily understand but to which one is

55 See also Martin Buber’s I and Thou (New York: Scribner’s, 1970).
comprehensively indebted. To admit one’s radical dependence upon a God of love, without whom one would be capable of nothing, is not to debase oneself but to make an ennobling concession” (99). In *The Great Gatsby*, the distraught Wilson is a character whose judgments are suspect: After Myrtle’s death, in his distraught state, Wilson confuses a sign featuring a mysterious set of eyes with the image of God. In what might be interpreted as Wilson lashing out resentfully at his failure, Wilson confuses the eyes of T.J Eckleburg’s advertisement with the eyes of God:

Wilson’s glazed eyes turned out to the ashheaps, where small grey clouds took on fantastic shape and scurried here and there in the faint dawn wind.

“I spoke to her,” he muttered, after a long silence. “I told her she might fool me but she couldn’t fool God. I took her to the window—“

With an effort he got up and walked to the rear window and leaned with his face pressed against it, “—and I said ‘God knows what you’ve been doing, everything you’ve been doing. You may fool me but you can’t fool God!’”

Standing behind him Michaelis saw with a shock that he was looking at the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg which had just emerged pale and enormous from the dissolving night.


“That’s an advertisement,” Michaelis assured him.

Something made him turn away from the window and look back into the room. But Wilson stood there a long time, his face close to the window pane, nodding into the twilight. (167-168)
From a Kierkegaardian perspective, one need not see the eyes amidst the ash heaps as a straightforward symbol of a godless, material universe. Rather, one might read Doctor T.J. Eckleburg’s sign amidst the ash heaps as a symbol for the failure of rationalized concepts of God formulated from within the aesthetic sphere. One might see the eyes as a symbol of existence that does not reach its potential as self because it remains confined to the aesthetic sphere. On that issue, Anti-Climacus states in *The Sickness unto Death*, “There is a qualitative difference between God and man that [ought to be] maintained in the paradox of faith” (99). Thus, Wilson’s perspective on “God/the sign” need not be read as a symbolic representation the fate of modern humanity.

From a Kierkegaardian perspective, one might see the ash heaps and the mistaken image of God as representing Wilson’s confused state of being, and, by extension, the confused state of a spiritual point-of-view confined to the aesthetic sphere. Like the man of immediacy of the aesthetic sphere who confuses self with “externalities,” Wilson so identifies his failure as an individual with Myrtle’s adultery that when he discovers her infidelity and subsequently locks her in a room, he is physically ill:

The young Greek, Michaelis, who ran the coffee joint beside the ashheaps was the principle witness at the inquest. He had slept through the heat, until after five, when he strolled over to the garage and found George Wilson sick in his office—really sick, pale as his own pale hair and shaking all over. Michaelis advised him to go to bed but Wilson refused, saying that he’d miss a lot of business if he did. While his neighbor was trying to persuade him a violent racket broke out overhead.
“I’ve got my wife locked in up there,” explained Wilson calmly.

(143)

In contrast to Wilson who resembles the man of immediacy, who remains confined the aesthetic sphere, Michaelis is the only significant character in *The Great Gatsby* who resembles Kierkegaard’s individual who participates in an ethical-religious mode of existence. Michaelis goes out of his way to take action in a time of crisis and he comes to the aid of others by trying to relieve suffering: “Michaelis and [a driver from New York who had stopped] reached [Myrtle] first but when they had torn open her shirtwaist still damp with perspiration they saw that her left breast was swinging loose like a flap and there was no need to listen for the heart beneath” (145). Later, Michaelis again acts out of a sense of responsibility and compassion toward others:

Michaelis and several other men were with [Wilson]—first four or five men, later two or three men. Still later Michaelis had to ask the last stranger to wait there fifteen minutes longer while he went back to his own place and made a pot of coffee. After that he waited there alone with Wilson until dawn. (164)

A little later, still trying to comfort Wilson, Michaelis offers what could be interpreted as the novel’s clearest representation of Kierkegaard’s concept of the religious sphere (reflected in Michaelis’ emblematic name) in that Michaelis exhorts Wilson to seek out God to deliver him from his incoherent ramblings and overwhelming despair:

[Michaelis] didn’t like to go into the garage because the work bench was stained where the body had been lying so he moved uncomfortably around
the office—he knew every object in it before morning—and from time to
time sat down beside Wilson trying to keep him more quiet.

“Have you got a church you go to sometimes, George? Maybe
even if you haven’t been there in a long time? Maybe I should call up the
church and get a priest to come over and he could talk to you, see?”

“Don’t belong to any.”

“You ought to have a church, George, for times like this. You
must have gone to church once. Didn’t you get married in a church?
Listen, George, listen to me. Didn’t you get married in a church?”

“That was a long time ago.”

In terms of Kierkegaard’s view that the self might ultimately be delivered from despair
by making the leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere, Michaelis’ act of
compassion and his exhortation that Wilson appeal to God, juxtaposed with Wilson’s
collapse into the basest forms of failure within the aesthetic sphere (murder and suicide)
could be seen as emphasizing by contrast the individual who ignores the possibility of a
leap to faith that might take shape within the religious sphere. In terms of Kierkegaard’s
concept of the aesthetic sphere, Wilson’s failure in the face of actuality might be
interpreted as representing the sort of despair that leads to destruction of both self and
“other.” In striking out at life in revenge driven by a sense of total failure, Wilson ends at
suicide, that state of being which Kierkegaard calls “the final agony of complete
isolation” (Either/Or II: 246). In his desperation, Wilson destroys first another, then
himself.
Anti-Climacus in Kierkegaard’s *The Sickness unto Death* speaks of a form of despair that is “demonic” because it strikes out to destroy another: “demonic despair is the most intensive form of despair: in despair to will to be oneself…in hatred toward existence it wills to be itself, wills to be itself in accordance with its misery” (73). Anti-Climacus continues, explaining that this form of despair acts out in spite, out of resentment toward its own existence: “Not even in defiance or defiantly does it will to be itself, but for spite; not even in defiance does it want to tear itself loose from the power that established it, but for spite wants to force itself upon it, to obtrude defiantly upon it…” (73). Wilson’s murder of Gatsby followed by his suicide resembles the spite toward existence of which Anti-Climacus speaks. In a sense, it symbolizes the opposite of what Paul Tillich defines as faith—the courage to be in spite of the threat of non-being56: “Courage as an element of faith is the daring self-affirmation of one’s being in spite of the powers of ‘non-being’ which are the heritage of everything finite” (Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* 17). In lashing out in spite at existence, Wilson moves in accordance with Kierkegaard’s demonic conception of despair—despair which ends in “the agony of complete isolation”—Wilson resorts not to “self-affirmation…in spite of the powers of non-being” but to self-negation.

Although Wilson resembles one who falls into “the agony of complete isolation”—he is overwhelmed to the point that he ignores Michaelis’ exhortation to seek

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56 Paul Tillich’s concept of faith as “the courage to be in spite of the threat of non-being” is arguably derived in part from Kierkegaard’s *The Concept of Anxiety*, in which narrative persona Vigilius Haufniensis claims, “The only thing that is truly able to disarm the sophistry of sin is faith, courage to believe that the state [of anxiety] itself is a new sin, courage to renounce anxiety [angst] without anxiety, which only faith can do; faith does not thereby annihilate anxiety, but, itself eternally young, it extricates itself from anxiety’s moment of death. Only faith is able to do this, for only in faith is the synthesis eternal and at every moment possible” (117).
out God—, in Kierkegaardian terms, Michaelis could nonetheless be said to represent for
Wilson the possibility of making the leap to faith that might take shape within the
religious sphere. Thus, Michaelis’ name is both emblematic and ironic. It is emblematic
in the sense that “Michael,” the Archangel, is the herald of God, thus implying “Michael
Is.” Michaelis offers a message of religious appeal to Wilson, although this message
does not communicate, as Wilson is too overwhelmed to understand the message. In
terms of Kierkegaard’s distinctions, since Michaelis encourages Wilson to appeal to God,
Michaelis symbolizes the possibility of a leap to faith that might take shape within the
religious sphere. From A Kierkegaardian perspective, then, one might see Wilson as
symbolizing the failure of the aesthetic sphere’s—of the world of immediacy—to
perceive the possibility of the religious sphere. According to Anti-Climacus, despair
turned in upon itself within the aesthetic sphere might be bound to collapse into itself as
the personality confronts overwhelming circumstances: “When immediacy despairs, it
does not even have enough self to wish or dream that it had become that which it has not
become…The man of immediacy does not know himself, he quite literally identifies
himself with the clothes he wears, he identifies having a self by externalities” (The
Sickness unto Death 53). Wilson, the self-consumed man, fails to hear the “herald of
God”—remains trapped within an objectified sense of self—full of self-loathing and
resentment, the “demonic” aspect of “inclosing reserve” within the aesthetic sphere. In
an inversion of the religious sphere, Wilson, whom one might read as the “psychosomatic
self” who becomes the dupe of evil, commits the “demonic” act of murder, of striking

57In The Problematic Self in Kierkegaard and Freud, J. Preston Cole claims that
Kierkegaard’s expression ‘the man of immediacy is only psychically qualified’ (The
Sickness unto Death 51) implies that the self as Kierkegaard defines it extends beyond the
out in resentment toward the world. Wilson’s murder of Gatsby (170) might be interpreted, in terms of Kierkegaard’s concept of the man of immediacy within the aesthetic sphere, as representing a “demonic” act born of hatred that ends at suicide—“the final agony of complete isolation” (*Either/Or II*: 246). In terms of Kierkegaard’s distinctions, one might thus argue that Wilson’s actions invert the religious sphere of existence: Wilson is so overwhelmed by external matters (interpreted as “fate” or “bad luck”) that he fails to comprehend the opportunity to appeal to God, and, instead, in resentment, lashes out at existence itself, both by killing Gatsby and by ending his own life.

“body-soul relation”: “Indeed, the immediate body-soul relation is not really a relation but a unity—a psychosomatic unity, so to speak. It is a ‘negative unity,’ as Kierkegaard puts it, but selfhood requires a positive relationship, one posited by the self itself” (12). Spirit and soul are for Kierkegaard distinct realities. Kierkegaard believes that one is born with a soul, but that one must make the leap to arrive at spirit, “the positive third” (*The Sickness unto Death* 13).
CHAPTER 3

THE SUN ALSO RISES

AND

KIERKEGAARD’S THREE SPHERES OF EXISTENCE

A Brief Overview of Relevant Criticism

For the scholar interested in studies that treat issues relevant to Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*—narrative style, irony, critical reception, or research tools—the following works might prove valuable:

The following studies in style, irony, and narrative voice that might prove useful.


**A Close Reading of the Novel**

Like *The Great Gatsby*, *The Sun Also Rises* also offers an elegant structure within which to perform a close reading relevant to Kierkegaard’s concepts. *The Sun Also Rises* contains characters relevant—at least indirectly—to two of the three spheres of existence, and it too illustrates irony as indirect communication as a possible mode of inquiry presented by the author. And, although *The Sun Also Rises* does not offer characters who might serve as clear representations of the religious sphere of existence, I will contrast this novel with Saul Bellow’s *Henderson the Rain King*, a novel that does offer a character who is relevant to Kierkegaard’s concept of the religious sphere, a character who might be seen as an extension of Jake Barnes, since Henderson finds healing from the wound of the “Fisher King” by both embracing the deeper mystery of existence and reaching out in self-effacing love toward others.

Like that employed by Nick Carraway, the narrative style employed by Jake Barnes serves as the means by which indirect communication occurs. Both styles suit the circumstances presented. Even so, unlike the elevated, relatively polished, “Romantic” style employed by Nick Carraway, the understated style of Jake Barnes takes the form of subdued—perhaps suppressed—plainspoken prose. In addition to creating the impression that Jake is a suppressed personality, the understated style becomes a
rhetorical device for pointing beyond the stated, to the implied and the suppressed. “Hemingway's style has often been described as ‘gritty’; it involves removal of commas and deadpan description of often gruesome events. Hemingway often uses concise, staccato sentences with few authorial comments” (http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/style.html).

In Hemingway, we see a reaction against Romantic turgidity and vagueness: back to basics, to the essentials. Thus his new realism in a new key resembles the old Puritan simplicity and discipline; both of them refrained from exhibiting the sentimental, the relative.

Hemingway's sincere and stern ambition was to approach Truth, clinging to an as yet unwritten code, a higher law which he referred to as “an absolute conscience as unchanging as the standard meter in Paris"
(http://nobelprize.org/literature/articles/hallengren/)

In addition to being a prototypical example of Hemingway’s style, the tone employed by narrator Jake Barnes in The Sun Also Rises suits the emotional suppression of someone in Jake’s situation. Jake’s “wound” is both physical and emotional, and his estrangement resulting from the impact of the Great War places identifies him as the Stoic.

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In The Sun Also Rises, the aesthetic sphere of existence finds it clearest expression in the detached life, alternating between culture and nature58, with the Fiesta ultimately serving—from Jake’s narrative perspective—as a mediating point in the reckless escapism of Jake and his entourage. Jake’s friends conduct themselves consistently in

58 The failure of the entourage to retreat successfully to nature (they bring themselves and their restless personalities along) is arguably Hemingway’s symbolic representation of the failure of nineteenth century Romantic literature in its attempts to recover some sense of the supposed original “purity” of human experience.
manner that symbolizes Kierkegaard’s view that one “who lives aesthetically is not really in control, either of himself or his situation. [The man of immediacy] typically exists ins Blaue hinein, ‘for the moment,’ for whatever the passing instant will bring in the way of entertainment, excitement, interest. Committed to nothing permanent, or definite, dispersed in sensuous ‘immediacy,’ he may do or think one thing at a given time, the exact opposite at another” (Kierkegaard 44). For example, when under the sway of the Romantic novel The Purple Land Robert Cohn impulsively wants to make a trip to South America, Jake rejects the idea as foolish romanticism:

He had been reading W. H. Hudson. That sounds like an innocent occupation, but Cohn had read and reread “The Purple Land.” “The Purple Land” is a very sinister book if read too late in life. It recounts splendid imaginary amorous adventures of a perfect English gentlemen in an intensely romantic land, the scenery of which is very well described. For a man to take it at thirty-four as a guide-book to what life holds is about as safe as it would be for a man of the same age to enter Wall Street direct from a French convent, equipped with a complete set of Alger books. Cohn, I believe, took every word of “The Purple Land” as literally as though it had been an R. G. Dun report. You understand me, he made some reservations, but on the whole the book to him was sound. It was all that was needed to set him off. (17)
The previous passage is dense with issues related to Cohn, Jake, and the aesthetic sphere. The dominant trope—or, rhetorical figure—is prosopopeia\textsuperscript{59}, personification. Rather than being employed in the classical sense of a person represented as an animal, as in “sly fox,” prosopopeia here takes on a form of a narrator’s “mask”—one that is donned by Jake to conceal contempt for Robert Cohn\textsuperscript{60}. Jake’s contempt for the delusional tendencies of those under the sway of romantic literature is obvious. Cohn does appear to be under the sway of aesthetic despair, restless and focused on self in shape-shifting patterns: He “exists ins Blaue hinein, ‘for the moment,’ for whatever the passing instant will bring in the way of entertainment, excitement, interest” (Kierkegaard 44). In contrast, Jake resembles the individual who has made the leap to faith that takes shape within the ethical sphere of existence, in that he prefers a “real”—concrete, actual—relationship to his surroundings, as he notes when he mentions that he “[goes] to Spain in the summertime” [to fish for trout] (The Sun Also Rises 18). Also, the two reasons that Cohn gives for Jake accompanying him are akin to thinking that is rooted in the self-serving dimension aesthetic sphere, where people can be seen as objects to serve one’s desires. Cohn wants Jake to go along because Cohn apparently is not enough of a Romantic to truly go in solitude, and wants someone along who can speak Spanish.

Regarding prosopopeia again, a closer look reveals that Jake overstates his case against Cohn by adopting the mask of sarcasm and later unwittingly discloses his contradictory nature by asking Cohn to provide “dirt” on others so that Jake might use it

\textsuperscript{59} Sipiora, Phillip. \textit{ENG 7939}: “Hemingway-Fitzgerald,” class lecture notes. University of South Florida: Fall 1995. (See also Phillip Sipiora’s forthcoming book on prosopopeia in Hemingway’s fiction.)

for upcoming newspaper stories. In spite of his usual commitment to adopting a sincere and disciplined course of action—one that belongs predominately to the ethical sphere—Jake nonetheless here places himself in service of the “unreal” by asking Cohn for gossip, the demonically-delusional cousin to romanticism. A marker characteristic of the more diabolical aspects of the aesthetic sphere is “self-seclusion. This belongs [specifically] to the aesthetic stage, not going out of oneself, but using everyone and everything for one’s own aesthetic satisfaction (Tillich, *A History of Christian Though* 466). Further, Jake’s sarcastic attack on Cohn, in which he suggests that Cohn should “cheer up” because “all countries look just like the moving pictures,” again reveals Hemingway’s clever use of prosopopeia, the narrator’s mask. Recalling earlier events as he narrates, Jake reveals that part of the reason he treats Cohn with disdain is his jealousy over the discovery of Cohn’s tryst with Brett Ashley (89), thus revealing that Jake’s condescending treatment of Cohn is in many ways more about Jake wrestling with his own inadequacies than about Cohn’s worthiness as either a human being or a literary figure. We often tend to notice the things in others that we most detest in ourselves. Prosopopeia is an excellent rhetorical device for accentuating this paradox, as it makes use of indirect communication. Jake’s narrative persona here foreshadows his closing ambiguous remark with regard to Brett’s assertion that she and Jake “could have had such a damned good time together” (251). Jake’s response “isn’t it pretty to think so?” again brings to light the issue of prosopopeia, causing the reader to question whether or not

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61 Jake does not spend as much time being critical of Cohn’s inadequacy as a writer or artist as he does focusing on Cohn’s weak and vacillating personality. Brett apparently values Jake for his consistency and directness, and Cohn’s wavering, impressionable personality stands over against this.
Jake is being mildly sarcastic\textsuperscript{62} to alert Brett of the insensitivity and uselessness of her remark, or if he is using irony to casually embrace his situation, by donning a mask of Stoic reserve to disguise his pain. And, in spite of the quotation marks that indicate dialogue, the question can be seen as indirect communication with regard to the reader caught in the question. Further, Jake’s persona of one who accepts things with resolve and moves on with determination is undercut by the comic, phallic imagery of the policeman directing traffic: “Ahead was a mounted policeman in khaki directing traffic. He raised his baton. The car slowed suddenly pressing Brett against me” (251). Due to the nature of his wound\textsuperscript{63}, Jake cannot replicate the policeman’s raising of the baton.

Of all the characters in \textit{The Sun Also Rises}, Brett best represents life in the aesthetic sphere. She lives in the moment and is both reckless and restless. For example, following her entrance in which she flits about carelessly and mingles frivolously in the company of several gay men at a nightclub (28), she makes a brief confession to Jake that begins to reveal her restless nature: “Oh, darling, I’ve been so miserable…” (32). Brett resembles the young aesthete who in \textit{Either/Or: Part II} receives Judge William’s chiding observations:

\begin{quote}
You let everything pass you by; nothing makes any impact. But then something comes along that grips you, an idea, a situation, a young [man’s] smile, and now you are “involved,” so at other times you are “at your service” in every way. Wherever there is something going on, you
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{63} Since Jake’s testicles are intact (34) but his penis was severed during the war wound, he can experience sexual desire for Brett but cannot act on that desire in the conventional sense.
join in. You behave in life as you usually do in a crowd. “You work yourself into the tightest group, see to it, if possible, to get yourself shoved up against others so that you come to be above them, and as soon as you are up there you make yourself as comfortable as possible, and in this way you also let yourself be carried through life.” But when the crowd is gone, when the event is over, you again stand on the street corner and look at the world. (196)

The person in the grip of despair associated with the aesthetic sphere is “never satisfied and cannot be” because she “seeks content for [her] existence in the dreams which are [her] only actuality” (The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard 10). At the beginning of Chapter IV, Brett refuses rejects Jake’s kisses, because she claims that because of his wound she does not “want to go through that hell again” (34), “that hell” being her getting sexually aroused without Jake being able to satisfy her through coitus. “Inclosing reserve” is a term that Kierkegaard uses to denote the person limited to the tendency of the aesthetic sphere to see things only in terms of her or his immediate desires or emotions. Brett sees herself predominately as a sexually active being who cannot tolerate a male-female relationship that could not be consummated in sex. Jake’s proposition that they “live together” (62) resembles the ethical either/or of one who “chooses himself” within the ethical sphere: Jake obviously commits himself to Brett outside of the immediate-erotic realm of the aesthetic sphere and in spite of his not being able to sexually consummate the relationship. He shows himself willing to make a commitment that would involve perpetual disappointment in the sexual realm, the realm of the immediate-erotic, the realm of the aesthetic sphere.
Of all the characters in *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake Barnes best represents the ethical sphere of existence. Though he occasionally regresses into the aesthetic sphere—especially in his relations with Brett and Cohn—, he organizes his life within a strict regimen of self-defining behavior and autonomous ethics. For example, in spite of the intoxicated life he and his friends lead, he makes it a point to meet his professional obligations to the newspaper by sending newspaper stories on time (20, 44).

And, Hemingway’s use of Jake’s narrative mask as a means of indirect communication offers the clearest example of Jake’s commitment to behavior that one might argue falls within the ethical sphere of existence. Specifically, Jake’s exposition on the “aficionado” offers treatment of the ideals that Jake seeks to “choose himself” by acting passionately within his own life. His description of how Pedro Romero exemplifies the aficionado reveals indirectly his own ideals for life well lived:

Aficion means passion. An aficionado is one who is passionate about the bull-fights. All the good bull-fighters stayed at Montoya’s hotel; that is, those with aficion stayed there. The commercial bull-fighters stayed once, perhaps, and then did not come back. The good ones came each year. In Montoya’s room there were photographs. The photographs were dedicated to Juanito Montoya or to his sister. The photographs of bull-fighters Montoya had really believed in were framed. Photographs of bull-fighters who had been without aficion, Montoya kept in a drawer of his desk. They often had the most flattering inscriptions. But they did not...
mean anything. One day Montoya took all of them out and dropped them in a waste-basket. He did not want them around. (136)

In his explanation of aficion, Jake notes the flattering inscriptions and thus shows his eye for detecting the psychology of the aesthetic sphere, with its primary concern being immediacy and ego desire. In contrast, aficion brings a sober sense of self-discipline and responsibility. Montoya shows respect for the aficionados because they have discovered their passion in life. “Those who were aficionados could always get rooms even when the hotel was full” (137). There is mutual respect among those who pursue life with a passion that comes from a leap to faith that takes shape in the ethical sphere. This respect Montaya and the other aficionados show also to Jake, who numbers himself among them:

Somehow it was taken for granted that an American could not have aficion. He might simulate it or confuse it with excitement, but he could not really have it. When they saw that I had aficion, and there was no password, no set questions that could bring it out, rather it was a sort of oral spiritual examination with the questions always a little on the defensive and never apparent, there was this embarrassing putting of the hand on the shoulder, or a Buen hombre.” But nearly always there was the actual touching. It seemed as though they wanted to touch you to make it certain.

(137)

Jake also explains that the code of conduct amongst aficionados is one of honor and respect that arises in recognition of the task that the aficion as set before himself.
“Subjective truth” (which Kierkegaard considers to be a “personal commitment to an ethical-religious way of life”), as it takes shape within the ethical sphere, becomes a resonating force around the individual who recognizes that his life has a new context when compared to a life confined to immediacy within the aesthetic sphere. In explaining his respect for aficion, Jake acts as one who values the “experience of being, or living, within truth”:

Montoya could forgive anything of a bull-fighter who had aficion. He could forgive attacks of nerves, panic, bad unexplainable actions, all sorts of lapses. For one who had aficion he could forgive anything. At once he forgave me all my friends. Without his ever saying anything they were simply a little something shameful between us, like the spilling open of the horses in bull-fighting. (137)

Jake’s exposition on aficion emphasizes passion for one’s occupation and mutual understanding of the value of a passion for life. The bullfighter that fights for “commercial” reasons does not possess aficion. The bullfighter that engages in self-serving flattery of others does not possess aficion, as he would likely be a bullfighter engaged in bullfighting because of the popularity and the fringe benefits that it would bring. In contrast, the bullfighter and spectator who understand the bullfight as a worthy

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65 As Kierkegaard scholar Michael Watts explains, by “subjective truth,” Kierkegaard does not mean that truth is arbitrary: “Kierkegaard regards subjective truth as the highest truth available to mankind, and he makes it clear that by ‘subjective truth’ he does not mean that a belief is true simply because one believes it to be true. Instead he is referring to the subjective experience of being, or living, within truth—of immersing oneself in the subjective, inward activity of experientially exploring and discovering truth of one’s own self in the process of existing, which is the process of becoming, a direct personal involvement in the living moment-by-moment process of unfolding reality” (Kierkegaard 82).

66 (Historical Dictionary of Kierkegaard’s Philosophy 259)
occupation because it is a dance with death possess true aficion. It is the existential matter of the occupation that makes it worthwhile—that the bullfighter understands that he faces death and still chooses to live with courage in the face of death. “Courage as an element of faith is the daring self-affirmation of one’s own being in spite of the threat of ‘non-being’ which are the heritage of everything finite. Where there is daring and courage there is the possibility of failure. And in every act of faith this possibility is present. The risk must be taken” (Tillich, Dynamics of Faith 17). This distinction of aficion as recognition of courage in the face of death becomes clearer in Jake’s observations of Pedro Romero, the model of aficion:

I had [Brett] watch how Romero took the bull away from a fallen horse with his cape, and how he held him with the cape and turned him, smoothly and suavely, never wasting the bull. She saw how Romero avoided very brusque movement and saved his bull for the last when he wanted them, not winded and discomposed but smoothly worn down. She saw how close Romero always worked to the bull, and I pointed out to her the tricks that the other bull-fighters used to make it look as if they were working closely. She saw why she liked Romero’s cape-work and why she did not like the others.

Romero never made any contortions, always it was straight and pure and natural in line. The others twisted themselves like cork-screws, their elbows raised, and leaned against the flanks of the bull after his horns had passed, to give a faked look of danger. Afterward, all that was faked turned bad and gave an unpleasant feeling. Romero’s bull-fighting gave
real emotion, because he kept the absolute purity of line in his movements and always quietly and calmly let the horns pass him close each time. He did not have to emphasize their closeness. (171)

Jake explains further the importance of integrity and passion on the par of the aficion, as compared to other bullfighters who lack the passion. Pedro Romero approaches his bullfighting with a passion that is even wiling to risk death before compromising aficion:

Brett saw how something that was beautiful down close to the bull was ridiculous if it were done a little way off. I told her how since the death of Joselito all the bull-fighters had been developing a technic that simulated the appearance of danger in order to give a fake emotional feeling, while the bull-fighter was really safe. Romero had the old thing, the holding of his purity of line through maximum exposure, while he dominated the bull by making him realize he was unattainable, while he prepared him for the killing. (171-172)

In contrast to the bullfighters that simulate danger, Romero faces real danger and confronts the “threat of non-being” with graceful, genuine movements and “purity of line.” Jake expresses here what from a Kierkegaardian perspective might be interpreted as the outer reaches of the ethical sphere. In committing himself to his vocation to the extent that he risks death in performing it well, Pedro Romero stands in contrast to those who merely appear to be committed wholeheartedly. In manner that resembles the individual who within Kierkegaard’s “Religiousness A” dedicates himself in earnestness to the enterprise of living life fully, the aficionado dedicates himself to discovering and living in accordance with what he believes to be possible in an existential sense. As
Kierkegaard scholar Julia Watkin explains, in *Either/Or* “Judge William sees the initial choice of the ethical life as something that purifies, matures, and unifies the personality. It even brings the individual into contact with what Bishop Nikolai Balle in his catechism [in *Either/Or II*: 266-67] calls the ‘Eternal Power’ [*den evige Magt* = God] underlying all existence” (*Historical Dictionary of Kierkegaard’s Philosophy* 78). Even so, from the perspective of Kierkegaard whose ultimate concern is what it means to become a Christian in Christendom, what is ultimately possible for the existing individual is something that lies beyond limits of the ethical sphere and the limits of Hemingway’s existentialism. Kierkegaard’s ultimate concern is to urge the individual to make an appeal to God’s grace by making the leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere, a possibility that in Kierkegaard’s view originates from beyond limits of human reason within the ethical sphere (which include “Religiousness A” and “first ethics”) and which moves from God to the individual who makes the leap to the religious sphere (which includes “Religiousness B” and “second ethics”).

In *The Courage to Be*, regarding the limits of existentialism, 67 Paul Tillich implies that radical existentialism might arrive at *nihilism*—might arrive at a position that ultimately rejects the possibility of transcendence. Paul Tillich’s position is consistent with Dostoevsky’s view that humankind living only for itself ultimately becomes

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67 Sartre wrote a famous essay entitled “Existentialism is Humanism,” and Tillich responds to the basic assertion of this essay in a way that is consistent with Kierkegaard’s views on the religious sphere, Religiousness A (of the ethical sphere) versus Religiousness B (of the religious sphere), and with the Christian view of the limitations of reason (Romans 7:23). For both Kierkegaard and Tillich, in the context of what it means to be a Christian, one ought ultimately to make the leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere—one ought ultimately to trust in God—for life to arrive at its fullest possible state in relation to God as Love—including inner peace (John 14:27)—and for the believer to be reconciled to God (Colossians 1:20).
humankind against God and therefore humankind against itself. 68 According to Tillich, the two extremes of “courage to be as a part” and “courage to be as oneself” are, respectively, overwhelming collectivism such as the ravages of twentieth century Nazism, Marxism, and Fascism and overwhelming negativism of the radical existentialism hinted at in Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre—negativism that might believe itself capable to creating a world merely from an “empty shell,” negativism that might ultimately deny its foundation in “being-itself” (Tillich, The Courage to Be 148-153). From a Kierkegaardian perspective, Jake’s and Hemingway’s existentialist tendencies arguably lean in the direction of the latter—lean in the direction of one being able to accept oneself without acknowledging that the self has an ontologically rooted structure. Tillich states, “Finite freedom has a definite structure, and if the self tries to trespass upon this structure it ends in the loss of itself” (152). Even so, Kierkegaard (as Judge William in Either/Or) acknowledges that one can in courage relate indirectly to God/the Eternal by consciously choosing self while adopting a code of ethics 69 such as that exhibited by the Hemingway “code hero70.” Beyond that, however, as Christian thinkers above all else, both Kierkegaard and Tillich urge the individual to ultimately

68 Dostoyevsky represents this in his works in several places. For example, in The Brothers Karamozov’s “Discourses of the Elder Zosima,” Father Zosima exclaims, “They think to establish themselves in truth and justice, but having rejected Christ they end by bathing the world in blood, for blood seeketh blood, and they that take the sword shall perish with it too. And were it not for the covenant of Christ, they should destroy one another even unto the last two men upon the earth” (411).
69 “Religiousness A” and “first ethics” (see page 51 of the present study)
70 As Dr. Gerald Lucas observes, “Many of Hemingway’s heroes search for a code—values that give their lives meaning. The artists of modernism turned inward to find the truth since the external world was one of chaos. As a result, truth becomes relativistic, subjective, and personal, lacking absolutes. This fluctuating reality becomes the basis of a modernist interpretation of the universe: the construction of reality based upon an individualistic and provisional interpretation of internal values” (http://litmuse.maconstate.edu/~glucas/archives/000355.shtml).
make an appeal to God’s grace and thereby participate in “Religiousness B” and “second ethics.” Consistent with his ultimate concern of what it means to be a Christian in Christendom, Kierkegaard believes that “to be cured of [the] sickness [of despair] is the Christian’s blessedness” (The Sickness unto Death 15). As Kierkegaard scholar Rick Anthony Furtak explains, Kierkegaard believes that the ultimate possibility for the self is to not only be delivered from despair but to also be ‘grounded in God’s love’: “That upon which we are inevitably dependent is not of our own making; love is the creative source from which all things proceed as well as the ground in which they subsist…Kierkegaard’s answer [to the question of how one relates to the “creative source” unfathomable “ground”] is that the phenomenon of love gives us a direct insight into the basic nature of existence: ‘God is Love, and therefore we can be like God only in loving’…Kierkegaard’s view that love is fundamental to the self informs his reading of the New Testament idea that our being is ‘rooted and grounded in love’” (Wisdom in Love 98; Works of Love 36; Ephesians 3:17 KJV). In terms of Kierkegaard’s ultimate concern of what it means to become a Christian in Christendom, the ultimate concern of the Christian ought to be to abide in God’s love (John 15:5), and the ultimate possibility for the self would thus be to appeal to God’s grace and love. As Kierkegaard notes in his journal regarding God as Love: “When I have said that there is a doubleness in this, that he loves and wants to be loved, it should be remembered with regard to the latter that this is again a qualification of his love for the person, because God knows that the highest blessedness for a human being is to come to love God properly” (Journals and Papers, Volume 3: 58).

71 See page 50 of the present study
Although there is nobility in the character of Jake Barnes and he acts in a manner that might be interpreted as courageous similar to the courage of Religiousness A and first ethics, Jake Barnes the “Fisher King” does not ultimately make an appeal to transcendence to receive healing from his wound—he does not ultimately make the leap of faith to the religious sphere of existence. Jake Barnes exhibits the courage to be, but he does not ultimately overcome the wound of the Fisher King. However, as if in answer to Jake Barnes and the Hemingway “code hero”—Eugene Henderson of Saul Bellow’s *Henderson the Rain King* is a Fisher King who begins to be reconciled with self and thus begins to reach back toward the ontological structures of “being-itself”—toward both nature and other human beings. The self becoming reconciled to self becomes a self who reaches out toward others. As Anti-Climacus states, after making the leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere, when despair is overcome by to leap of faith, “in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it” (*The Sickness unto Death* 131). Unlike Jake Barnes and the Hemingway “code hero,” rather than face life in cool reserve, Eugene Henderson makes an advance toward life—an often-awkward advance—but one that ultimately makes an appeal to transcendence to overcome the “wound of the Fisher King.”

Henderson starts his journey in much the same state as that in which Jake Barnes ends his: He is a man given to sarcasm who finds no rest in himself and no peace with the world. Like Jake Barnes, Henderson’s situation is one of unsatisfied desire: “I heard the old familiar voice within. It began to say, *I want, I want, I want!***” (*Henderson the Rain King* 43). Both Eugene Henderson and Jake Barnes are “Fisher Kings” whose unfulfilled
desire needs a remedy before they can embrace life. As in Parry’s (Robin Williams) rendering of the myth in Richard LaGravenese’s screenplay *The Fisher King*, both Henderson and Jake find that life has lost its meaning:

**Parry:** It begins with the King as a boy—having to spend a night alone in the forest to prove his courage so that he could become king. While he was standing there alone, he's visited by a sacred vision. Out of the fire appears the Holy Grail, the symbol of God's divine grace. And a voice said to the boy, "You shall be the keeper of the Grail, so that it may heal the hearts of men."

But the boy was blinded by greater visions, of a life filled with power and glory and beauty. And in this state of radical amazement, he felt for a brief moment not like a boy, but invincible...like God. So he reached into the fire to take the Grail. And the Grail vanished, leaving him with his hand in the fire, to be terribly wounded.

Now, as this boy grew older, his wound grew deeper, until one day, life for him lost its reason. He had no faith in any man, not even himself. He couldn't love or feel loved. He was sick with experience. He began to die.

The wound of the Fisher King is arguably despair over the aesthetic sphere; the Fisher King’s visions of “a life filled with power” blind him because the visions are driven by immediate desires, and he must die to those desires\(^7\) if he is to find the grail and thus attain “God’s divine grace.” For this occasion, God sends a fool to show the Fisher King wisdom. Through the fool, the Fisher King learns that one must find humility and be willing to accept that “God’s divine grace” might show up in ways one might not have

\(^7\) To “repent of self” in its current state is Judge William’s expression (*Either/Or II*: 216-18).
suspected:

**Parry:** One day, a fool wandered into the castle and found the king alone. Being a fool, he was simpleminded, he didn't see a king, he saw a man alone and in pain. And he asked the king, "What ails you, friend?" The king replied, "I'm thirsty. I need some water to cool my throat." So the fool took a cup from beside his bed, filled it with water, handed it to the king. As the king began to drink he realized that his wound was healed. He looked at his hands, and there was the Holy Grail that which he sought all of his life! And he turned to the fool and said in amazement, "How could you find that which what my brightest and bravest could not?" And the fool replied, "I don't know. I only knew that you were thirsty."

Both Jake Barnes and Eugene Henderson share the malady of the Fisher King: they are “sick with experience,” and, for both, the wound is the principle thing to be addressed before they can move more fully toward life. Like Jake, Henderson fought in a world war (4), but that is not “what ails him”: He is a multi-millionaire (3) who finds no pleasure in life and has become a nuisance because of his restless and disruptive behavior:

> In my own way I worked hard. Violent suffering is labor. And, often I was drunk before lunch…I raved at Lily [my wife] in public and swore at her in private. I got into brawls in the country saloons near my farm and the troopers locked me up. I offered to take them all on, and they would have worked me over if I hadn’t been so prominent in the county. Lily came and bailed me out. Then I had a fight with the vet over one of my
In contrast to Jake Barnes, Eugene Henderson expresses the wound of the Fisher King in an outward manner: he progresses in the same manner as one who moves through the aesthetic, to the ethical, and then at last to the religious sphere, and he does so in the same outgoing, imposing manner. Jake maintains a suppressed, unobtrusive “code,” whereas, Henderson blusters through his quest, imposing his large frame and large personality upon whatever and whomever he encounters. In fact, Henderson addresses directly this tendency to be outgoing to the point of bring imposing, when he states, “I am not good at suppressing my feelings. Whole crowds of them, especially the bad ones, wave to the world from the galleries of my face. I can’t prevent them” (53).

During his quest through Africa in search of self and deliverance from the restless inner voice “I want, I want, I want,” Henderson confronts what one might see as the limit of the aesthetic sphere, and he does so by imposing himself upon a tribe he attempts to help:

And I wanted to do something for them—my desire for this was something fierce “At least,” I thought, “If I were a doctor I would operate on Willatale’s [the queen’s] eye.” Oh, yes, I know what cataract
operations are, and I had no intentions of trying. But I felt singularly ashamed of not being a doctor—or maybe it was shame at having come all this way and having nothing to contribute. All the ingenuity and development and coordination that it takes to bring a fellow in the African interior! And then—he is the wrong fellow! Thus I had once again the conviction that I filled a place in existence which should be filled properly by someone else. And I suppose it was ridiculous that it should trouble me not to be a doctor, as after all some doctors are pretty puny characters, and not a few I have met are in a racket, but I was thinking mostly about my childhood idol, Sir Wilfred Grenfell of Labrador. Forty years ago, when I read his books on the back porch, I swore I’d be a medical missionary. It’s too bad, but suffering is about the only reliable burster of the spirit’s sleep. There is a rumor of long standing that love also does it.

(77-78)

This passage reflects in two ways Henderson’s acting as one who has made the leap to faith that might take shape within the ethical sphere. Firstly, he acts as one who recognizes that in the ethical sphere “the individual and duty stand outside one another” (Either/Or: Part II 254), moreover, Henderson acknowledges the gap between his desire to perform an ethical act and his ability to do so. He wishes that he could remove Willatale’s cataract, but he recognizes his inability to do so—wishes that he were a doctor so that he could adequately perform the task. Secondly, in recalling his childhood idol Sir Grenfell, Henderson recognizes that “the ethical is the universal and thus the abstract” (255). Reading books on the back porch and dreaming of far-off adventures is a
different matter from actually making a difference by meeting someone else’s needs within the real-life context at-hand.

Further, like Hemingway, Bellow makes use of indirect communication in the form of prosopopeia\textsuperscript{73}, combined with irony, to show the protagonist at the limits of “self.” However, in contrast to Jake’s suppressed, understated prosopopeia, Henderson’s prosopopeia applies self-effacing sarcasm, a form of irony that in this context implies humility. In contrast to Jake Barnes’ cool reserve, Henderson moves closer to life and in the direction of “Truth.” Henderson’s use of prosopopeia and irony symbolize his failure in the face of life’s ambiguities within the ethical sphere. Henderson appropriates self-effacing prosopopeia to expose how he earlier, in prideful enthusiasm, squandered his chance to rescue the tribe and its cattle from frogs that contaminate their cistern:

I blew on the wick of my device,\textsuperscript{74} to free it from dust (or for good luck), and spun the wheel of the lighter, and when it responded with a flame, I lit the fuse, formerly my shoelace…After this, I had to call on intuition plus luck, and as there was now nothing I especially wanted to see in the external world I closed my eyes and waited for the spirit to move me. It was not yet time, and still not time, and I pressed the case and thought I heard the spark as it ate the lace and fussed toward the powder. At the last moment I took a Band-Aid which I had prepared for this moment and fastened it over the hole. Then I lobbed the bomb, giving it an underhand toss….Then a new motion began; the water swelled at the middle and I

\textsuperscript{73} Sipiora, Phillip. \textit{ENG 7939}: “Hemingway-Fitzgerald” class lecture notes. University of South Florida: Fall 1995.

\textsuperscript{74} An improvised “pipe bomb” made from a flashlight, gun powder, and a shoelace
realized that the thing was working. Damned if my soul didn’t rise with
the water even before it began to spout, following the same motion, and I
cried to myself, “Hallelujah! Henderson, you dumb brute, this time you’ve
done it!” Then the water came shooting upward. It might not have been
Hiroshima, but it was enough of a gush for me, and it started raining frogs’

bodies upward…

I had gotten more of a result than I could have known in the first
instants, and instead of an answering cry I heard shrieks from the natives,
and looking to see what was the matter I found that the dead frogs were
pouring out of the cistern together with the water. The explosion had
blasted out the retaining wall at the front end. The big stone blocks had
fallen and the reservoir was emptying fast. “Oh! Hell!” (77, 78)

The comic timing and hurried, cascading meter, coupled with inverted religious
symbolism, deliver Henderson’s self-effacing, sarcastic description of this attempt to
behave well within the “duties” of the ethical sphere. In attempting to be a hero to the
natives, Henderson ends up being run out of the village. An inversion of God in the
attempt to become a “deliverer,” Henderson creates an upside-down plague of frogs and a
flood, all at once.

Both Jake Barnes and Eugene Henderson suffer from the wound of the Fisher
King. Jake’s physical war wound leaves him with a permanent inability to be satisfied in
the immediate-erotic and the aesthetic sphere75. Even so, Jake moves beyond the
immediate-erotic stage of the aesthetic sphere to the ethical sphere in his recognition of

75 Jake’s penis was severed by a landmine, and his testicles remain intact. Thus, he can
experience sexual desire, but he cannot act on that desire in the conventional sense.
the importance of aficion (171) and in his request that Brett live with him (62). Although Brett rejects the offer (62), Jake is aware of the ethical either/or: of the individual either being conscious of the code by which he orders his life, or of the individual not being conscious of the code by which he orders his life. As Judge William explains with regard to the ethical either/or, “The choice itself is crucial for the content of the personality: through the choice the personality submerges itself in that which is being chosen, and when it does not choose, it withers away in atrophy” (Either/Or II: 163). At the end of *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake Barnes arguably stands at position analogous to Judge William’s ethical either/or, in that it is ambiguous where Jake stands in relation to the ethical either/or of choosing himself in relation to Brett. Although he is conscious of the importance of the ethical either/or, the novel ends at a point at which it is not clear whether he will again “submerge [himself] in that which is being chosen” or whether he will “wither away in atrophy.”

In contrast, Henderson’s wound of the Fisher King eventually leads him to the roots of humanity and to a more fulfilling existence in the ethical-religious sense, as symbolized by one of his favorite expressions: “truth comes in blows” (23-ff). Henderson claims to have arrived at this insight while chopping wood: “A chunk of wood flew up from the block and hit me in the nose…I carried a bruise there for some time…As I felt the blow my only thought was truth…That’s a military idea if ever there was one. I tired to say something about it to Lily; she, too, had felt the force of truth when her second husband, Hazard, punched her in the eye” (23). Unlike Jake Barnes, Eugene Henderson usually expresses his ideas without resorting to avoidant behavior.
As is indicative of the paradoxical nature of the religious sphere, Henderson must find humility in the face of existence before he can grow as a personality and thereby embrace existence more fully. He “must lose himself to find himself” (Matthew 10:39). In both losing himself and finding himself, Henderson must conquer his fear of death and then turn toward nature in a way that embraces both nature and his place as a natural being. In contrast to Jake Barnes whose relationship to nature is one of domination and control—trout fishing, bullfighting—Henderson’s relationship to nature moves from control, to identification, to compassion—compassion toward all creation, including other human beings. As Kierkegaard scholar Michael Watts states regarding to the paradoxical nature of the religious sphere,

When Kierkegaard speaks of the fact that faith requires a ‘leap’ on the part of the individual, he is not talking about any type of ‘blind leap’ or ‘a leap into the dark’ which some forms of existentialism talk about. Rather, the ‘leap’ expresses Kierkegaard’s acknowledgment of the fact that faith is discontinuous with what came before—it is not a development of any sort of potential skill or characteristic that is already present in the individual but a transition to a completely different dimension of consciousness. It is the coming into being of something brand new. (Kierkegaard 89)

Henderson’s transformation in relation to nature symbolizes his coming into a new way of being; he arguably acts as one who has made the leap to faith that brings a qualitative shift in consciousness and a new relationship to the world.

Early in the novel, while he suffers from emotional distress—as a Fisher King for whom “life has lost its meaning”—Henderson treats nature either with hostility or as a
“means to an end.” His treating nature as a "means to an end" takes on the form of his raising pigs to spite his neighbors: “When I came back from the war it was with the thought of becoming a pig farmer, which maybe illustrates what I thought of life in general…The place stank of swill and pigs and the mashes cooking, and dung. Furious, my neighbors got the health officer after me. I dared him to take me to law” (20, 21). Here, Henderson does not embrace nature but exploits it to defiantly upset those around him and draw attention to himself.

In addition to the “plague of frogs,” Henderson’s hostility toward nature takes on the form of his shooting awkwardly in the direction of a cat left behind by former tenants of Henderson’s who had left in a rush in response to one of Henderson’s tantrums:

They abandoned their cat, and I didn’t want a cat going wild on my place.
Cats gone wild are a bad business, and this was a very powerful animal…I didn’t want to fire more than a single shot. From reading about Pancho Villa I had picked up the Mexican method of marksmanship, which is to aim with the forefinger on the barrel and press the trigger with the middle finger, because the forefinger is the most accurate pointer at our disposal.
Thus I got the center of his head under my (somewhat twisted) forefinger, but my will was not truly bent on his death, and I missed. (90, 92)

Later in his journey toward healing and self-discovery, when he and his guide Romilayu discover a dead body, Henderson identifies himself symbolically with “Lazarus” and thus with resurrection of the dead (Fisher King76):

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76 It is revealed later that the dead body actually is the body of the former king and the precursor of Henderson’s reign as “Sunco”—or, Rain King (Chapter XIX).
I had decided to carry this [dead body] on my back in case we had to run for it…Tears of anger and repugnance began to hang from my eyes. I fought to stifle these feelings back into my chest. And I thought, what if this man should turn out to be a Lazarus? I believe in Lazarus. I believe in the wakening of the dead. I am sure that for some, at least, there is a resurrection. I was never better aware of my belief than when I stooped there with my heavy belly, my face far forward and tears of fear and sorrowful perplexity coming from my eyes. (139-140)

After his symbolic journey into the underworld and his encounter with “Lazarus,” Henderson the Fisher/Rain King is symbolically prepared to later identify with nature in the form of Atti the lioness. Under the tutelage of the ironic “philosopher king” Dahfu, Henderson does not dominate nature; he identifies with nature as he descends to identify with the lioness and imitates her—“transforms” himself into her:

“You must try to make more of a lion of yourself,” Dahfu insisted, and that I certainly did. Considering my handicaps, the king declared I was making progress. “Your roaring is still choked. Of course, it is natural, as you have a lot to purge,” he would say. That was no lie, as everyone knows. I would have hated to witness my own antics and hear my own voice. Romilayu admitted that he had heard me roar, and you couldn’t blame the rest of the natives for thinking that I was Dahfu’s understudy in

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77 In several ways, Dahfu is Henderson’s polar opposite. Henderson actually replaces Dahfu in the ritual of the Fisher King by taking his place in the den with Atti the lioness. Dahfu was educated in the West where he studied medicine (283), Henderson’s ideal. Henderson comes from the West to Africa to become Dahfu’s “pupil” and find healing that will “burst the spirit’s sleep” (76).
the black arts, or whatever they accused him of practicing. But what the
king called pathos was actually (I couldn’t help myself) a cry which
summarized my entire course on this earth, from birth to Africa; and
certain words crept into my roars, like “God,” “Help,” “Lord have mercy,”
only they came out “Hoooolp! “Moooorcy!” It’s funny what words sprang
forth. “Au secours, “ which was “Secoooooor” and also “De
profooooodis,” plus snatches of “The Messiah” (He was despised and
rejected, a man of sorrows, etcetera)… (274)

After his ritual transformation, in which he makes a “leap” from imitation to
identification, Henderson writes a letter to his wife and asks that she enroll him in
medical school: “When I get back, I am going to study medicine. My age is against it,
but that’s just too damn bad, I’m going to do it anyway” (284). Henderson thus acts as
one who sets his life before him as a task that might benefit others.

Although he loses part of the letter—symbolizing that transformation of self will
still involve striving toward being and “Truth”—Henderson still recognizes that his “life
and deeds were a prison” (284). He sees himself as one who has found deliverance from
his former self.

Henderson finds both “courage to be as oneself” and “courage to be as a part,78”
as he moves toward a vocation—a “calling”—that will make a difference in the lives of
others. The symbol of Lazarus is especially appropriate to the “resurrected” Eugene
Henderson: Kierkegaard appropriates the symbol of Lazarus in The Sickness unto Death
in his treatment of despair. In reference to Jesus’ words with regard to Lazarus, “this

78 (Tillich, The Courage to Be 113-54; 86-112)
sickness is not unto death” (John 11:4), Kierkegaard claims “despair is the sickness unto death” (14). Like Lazarus, Henderson experiences a resurrection in terms of his relationship to the world. In contrast to the individual who remains confined to the aesthetic sphere, whose “inclosing reserve” leaves him under the sway of despair, Eugene Henderson is released from his former notion of self and chooses to turn more fully toward life and dedicate himself to making a difference for others.
A Brief Overview of Relevant Criticism

For the scholar interested in studies that treat issues relevant to Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*—narrative style, irony, critical reception, or research tools—the following works might prove valuable:


A Close Reading of the Novel

With reference to Brain McHale’s concept of the dominant mentioned in Chapter 1 and the manner in which it relates to Mrs. Dalloway, it is worth noting here that the first two novels in this study resemble more what one would typically consider “literary modernism” since they both offer an epistemological dominant. However, the second two novels, Mrs. Dalloway and Ulysses are forerunners in what we now consider “postmodern” because they both “foreground” an ontological dominant. Whereas

79 Technically, three, if you count also Saul Bellow’s Henderson the Rain King, which also presents an epistemological “dominant,” as in the missing part of the letter to Lily.
modernist fiction is marked by a dominant that features “textual indefiniteness or incompleteness, [and] epistemological doubt,” postmodernist fiction is marked by “epistemological issues [which are] backgrounded as the price for foregrounding ontology” (Postmodernist Fiction 10, 11). Modernist texts tend to prefer the epistemological dominant and thus tend to take shape in the form of underlying questions such as,

“How can I interpret this world of which I am part? And what am I in it?”

Other typical modernist questions might be added: “What is there to be known? Who knows it? ; How do they know it and with what degree of certainty? ; How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to another, and with what degree of reliability? ; How does the object of knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower? ; What are the limits of the knowable?” And so on. (9)

Whereas the epistemological dominant of the modernist text tends to present the reader with “problems in knowing,” the ontological dominant of the postmodernist text tends to present the reader with “problems in modes of being.” These problems in modes of being, McHale claims, might take the form of the following questions:

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McHale illustrates this point by citing the detective story as the epistemological genre par excellence (9). In a detective story, the reader must “sift through the evidence of witnesses of different degrees of reliability in order to reconstruct and solve a ‘crime’” (9). McHale believes that the modernist texts such as Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom! “are organized around issues of epistemological doubt and meta-lingual self-reflection” (8). Like the detective story, modernist fiction tends to take shape within the context of a dominant concern that asks the question “what is there to be known?”

McHale illustrates this point by citing the science fiction story as the ontological genre par excellence (16). McHale claims that “postmodernist fiction differs from modernist fiction just as a poetics dominated by ontological issues differs from one dominated by
“Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?” Other typical postmodernist questions bear either on the ontology of the literary text itself or on the ontology of the world it projects, for instance: What is a world? ; What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ? ; What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated? ; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects? How is a projected world structured?” (McHale 10)

Unlike *The Great Gatsby* and *The Sun Also Rises*, *Mrs. Dalloway* offers a narrative structure that employs multiple voices through which it tends also to “foreground” ontological issues such as “what is the mode of existence of a text?” and “what happens when different types of world are placed in confrontation?”

Like *The Great Gatsby* and *The Sun Also Rises*, *Mrs. Dalloway* contains paradoxical characters. However, these paradoxical characters take shape within complex movement of time, place, and character—one that includes “stream-of-consciousness” narrative and fragmented time. This increased complexity of narrative voice/ontology offers a highly dynamic possibility for a close reading that deals with irony and the three spheres of existence.

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epistemological issues” (xii). Like science fiction, postmodernist fiction tends to take shape within the context of a dominant concern that asks the question “what type of world is this?”
Regarding the aesthetic sphere of existence, *Mrs. Dalloway* offers more complex opportunities for close reading than the novels considered thus far, since it makes use of dynamic characters/voices in relation to one another—as opposed to the characters of *The Great Gatsby* and *The Sun Also Rises*, that tend to inhabit spaces in isolation/alienation from one another. The paradoxical round-robin of voices/characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* creates a “ghostly” quality in the way that it applies indirect communication, as opposed to the prosopopeia82 more characteristic of the previous two novels. Thus, it makes sense to treat the characters analyzed in terms of the three spheres in a complimentary manner, as opposed to treating them in isolation from one another.

The first relationship to be investigated is that of Richard Dalloway in relation to the public sphere (his political life) and Richard Dalloway in relation to the private sphere (his relationship to Clarissa). Specifically, though one might think that Richard’s position as political figure would place him in an emblematic role within the ethical sphere—the sphere associated with “duty83” and social obligations, Richard Dalloway’s thoughtless traditionalism and unthinking political conservatism reveal that he is actually a ghost-of-a-man in relation to both the political world and his wife. Like shallow twenty-first century coffee shop culture, with its generic “classical” music that is innocuous almost to the point of being unnoticeable, Richard Dalloway seems to have been relieved of soul. His lack of traction in life places him into the company of those who fail to exhibit “the courage to be as a part.”84 He is a man driven primarily by convention and appearances, not a man of action, thus, his profession of political

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83 Judge William in *Either/Or: Part II* serves just such an emblematic role.
84 Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, pages 86-ff
discourse is highly ironic. Woolf scholar Mark Hussey claims that Richard Dalloway—both in his role in *The Voyage Out* and in *Mrs. Dalloway*—represents a type that Woolf’s fiction often critiques” (*Virginia Woolf A-Z* 68). Richard Dalloway is “described by Peter Walsh as possessed of the ‘public-spirited, British Empire, tariff-reform, governing-class spirit’” (68). His commitment to the status quo and British Imperialism mark him as one whose political aims take shape within the aesthetic sphere, the sphere of self-interest and thoughtless conformism. Although there is a place for a conservative politics that takes shape within the realm of the ethical sphere, Richard Dalloway’s brand of conservative conformism resembles the “governing-class spirit” that is more often than not driven more by fear of change—by aesthetic despair—than by commitment to making a difference in the lives of others.

The courage to be as a part is the courage to affirm one’s own being by participation. One participates in the world to which one belongs and from which one at the same time is separated. But participating in the world becomes real through participation in those sections of it which constitute one’s own life. The world as a whole is potential, not actual. Those sections are actual with which one is partially identical. The more self-relatedness a being has the more it is able, according to the polar

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85 In *Destiny of Man* Nicolas Berdyaev claims that there is a tendency toward two extremes in political discourse and that these two extremes tend to occur dialectically and falsely see themselves in exclusion of one another. He refers to these two fallacious tendencies as “the illusion of conservatism” (the illusion that political and social issues remain the same through time, without regard for changes in human needs and consciousness) and “false liberalism” (the erroneous notion that every individual ought to be able to pursue his or her immediate desires without regard for the social conditions at-hand). Drawing from both Marx and Nietzsche in formulating the terms, Berdyaev moves beyond both Marx and Nietzsche by making the claim that both of these political extremes spring from existential fear—from a lack of faith in either self or humanity.
structure of reality, to participate. Man as the completely centered being or as a person can participate in everything, but he participates through that section of the world which makes him a person. Only in the continuous encounter with persons does the person become and remain a person. The place of this encounter is the community. (Tillich, *The Courage to Be* 90-91)

The community is also the realm of the ethical sphere in that the universal concepts of language are realized in “community,” in actual connections between persons who strive to actualize themselves in relation to one another— who strive to realize such universal concepts as “justice,” “honor,” family,” “friends,” etc. Thus, Kierkegaard, through the voice of Judge William, representative persona of the ethical sphere, can say that the ethical…is that whereby a person comes what he becomes. It does not want to make the individual into something else but into the individual himself; it does not want to destroy the aesthetic but to transfigure it. For a person to live ethically it is necessary that he become conscious of himself, so thoroughly that no accidental element escapes him. The ethical does not want to wipe out this concretion but sees in it its task, sees the material with which it is to build and that which it is to build.

Ordinarily we view the ethical altogether abstractly and therefore have a secret horror of it. In that case the ethical is viewed as something alien to the personality, and we shrink from devoting ourselves to it, since we cannot really be sure what it will lead to in the course of time. (*Either/Or II: 253*)
Insofar as he “shrinks from devoting [himself] to [the ethical sphere],” Richard Dalloway is a character that resembles an individual who remains confined to the aesthetic sphere. This resemblance finds representation in his public life by way of his politics tinged with self-interest. An example of this sort of “collectivist” thinking occurs when Richard Dalloway hears from Dr. Bradshaw of the suicide of Septimus Smith. Richard’s response is not one of compassion toward the man or his family; Richard instead resembles one acting within the aesthetic sphere, addressing the issue by refracting it through politics: he refracts the issue through an abstract conversation about a “provision in [a] Bill…concerning the effects of shell shock,”(200) one of which is the suicide of Septimus Smith, who was a person, not an abstract “effect.” Richard Dalloway’s refracting Septimus Smith’s suicide through trivial matters resembles Anti-Climacus description of despair and the “philistine-bourgeois mentality“: “The philistine-bourgeois mentality, that is, triviality, essentially lacks possibility. The philistine-bourgeois mentality is spiritlessness…Bereft of imagination, as the philistine-bourgeois always is, whether alehouse keeper or prime minister, he lives within a certain trivial compendium of experiences as to how things go, what is possible, what usually happens” (The Sickness unto Death 41). Richard Dalloway acts in a manner consistent with the “despair that lacks possibility” that Anti-Climacus associates with the philistine-bourgeois mentality (41), in that he refracts the serious matter of suicide through the trivial issue of a provision in a bill.

With regard to the tensions within the narrative voices of the novel, Richard’s distance from Septimus Smith in his tragedy stands in counter-point to his distance from

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86 Behavior characteristic of the sense of duty and responsibility associated with the ethical sphere
Clarissa in her tragedy. Thus, Richard Dalloway’s “ghostly” nature is represented further by his failure in the personal sphere. His “specular moment” in the novel is his failure to say “I love you” to Clarissa:

Peter Walsh! All three, Lady Bruton, Hugh Whitbread, and Richard Dalloway, remembered the same thing—how passionately Peter had been in love; been rejected; gone to India; come a cropper; made a mess of things; and Richard Dalloway had a great liking for the dear old fellow too. Milly Brush saw that; saw a depth in the brown of his eyes; saw him hesitate; consider; which interested her, as Mr. Dalloway always interested her, for what was he thinking, she wondered, about Peter Walsh?

That Peter Walsh had been in love with Clarissa; that he would go back directly after lunch and find Clarissa; that he would tell her, in so many words, that he loved her. Yes, he would say that. (115-116)

Richard Dalloway’s presence in the life of Clarissa and in the lives of those around him is most notable as an absence—he is a ghost-of-a-man. Richard thinks of telling Clarissa that he loves her, “in so many words,” in reaction to his remembering Peter Walsh once having done so. His reactionary, romanticized version of Peter Walsh connects him to the person in despair who lacks of a true sense of self. Julia Watkin notes, Kierkegaard believes that the person in “unconscious despair” is “for a time, superficially happy in a life directed toward temporal goals such as making money or achieving political power.

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87 Paul DeMan’s term applies here because Richard Dalloway is a presence in the aesthetic sphere by virtue of his absence in the ethical sphere—is a specter. DeMan’s term is connected in the essay “Autobiography as De-facement” to the individual’s recognition of “the impossibility of coming into being” of an exhaustive interpretation of self within a system of language and is thus also connected with the rhetorical figure “prosopopeia.”
When the goals begin to fail to satisfy, that person tries to deal with the problem as something external needing to be fixed” (Historical Dictionary of Kierkegaard’s philosophy 65). In the sense that he fails to see the significance of his place the life of Clarissa, Richard Dalloway resembles the individual who in unconscious despair occupies himself with trivial details and fails to consider deeper issues relevant to the ethical-religious possibilities. Peter Walsh has not played the role in Clarissa’s everyday life that Richard has, but Richard fails to see that. Peter Walsh and Richard Dalloway are diametrically opposed characters in that Peter has been a “presence while being absent” and Richard has been an “absence while being present.” As Judge William notes with regard to personality and the ethical sphere, “The more deeply a man has structured his life ethically, the less he will feel compelled to talk about duty every moment, to worry every moment whether he is performing it, every moment to seek the advice of others about what his duty is. When the ethical is viewed properly, it makes the individual infinitely secure within himself; when it is viewed improperly, it makes the individual utterly insecure” (Either/Or: Part II 255). In contrast to the security of self one experiences within the ethical sphere, Richard Dalloway’s wanting to tell Clarissa that he loves her in reaction to Peter Walsh, in Kierkegaardian terms, identifies him more with the individual who remains confined to the aesthetic sphere than is does with the emblematic role of faithful husband. In a sense, Richard Dalloway acts in manner akin to persons in “unconscious despair,” who find themselves “completely absorbed in one of the multitude of ready-made identities provided by society” (Watts 183).

The counterpart to Richard Dalloway in the aesthetic sphere is Dr. William Bradshaw, who also fails to in his public life and who also lives in terms of “social
decorum" and what he believes others think of him. For example, his insecurity over his public image is symbolized by his resentment toward those whom he considers to be of a higher position socially. “…There was in Sir William, whose father had been a tradesman, a natural respect for breeding and clothing, which shabbiness nettled; again, more profoundly, there was in Sir William, who never had time for reading, a grudge, deeply buried, against cultivated people who came into his room and intimated that doctors, whose profession is a constant strain upon all the highest faculties, are not educated men” (105).

Further, Dr. Bradshaw serves as a counterpart to Richard Dalloway in that he too conducts his profession in a superficial way, out of self-interest, as is often the case for an individual confined to the aesthetic sphere. For example, his failure as doctor to Septimus Smith is linked to his self-interested approach to his profession. This is indicated not only by his being paired with Richard Dalloway in the discussion of the “Bill concerning the effects of shell shock” (200), but also by way of his rationalizations associated with the treatment of Septimus Smith and his other patients, for whom he recommends, “proportion”:

Proportion, divine proportion, Sir William’s goddess, was acquired by Sir William walking hospitals, catching salmon, begetting one son in Harley Street by Lady Bradshaw, who caught salmon herself and took photographs scarcely to be distinguished from the work of professionals. Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalized despair, made it possible for
the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion—his, if they were men, Lady Bradshaw’s of they were women (she embroidered, knitted, spent four nights out of seven at home with her son), so that not only did his colleagues respect him, his subordinated fear him, but the friends and relations of his patients felt for him the keenest gratitude for insisting that these Christs and Christesses, who prophesied the end of the world, or the advent of God, should drink milk in bed, as Sir William ordered; Sir William with his thirty years’ experience at these kinds of cases, and his infallible instinct, this is madness, this is sense; in fact, his sense of proportion. (107-108)

For all his “sense of proportion,” Sir William proves to be of little help in preventing Septimus Smith from jumping to his death in a most gruesome fashion: “He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness” (200). Instead of facing ideally-ethical medical matters as matters unique to the context that actualizes the universal in the concrete, Sir William acts in a manner similar to the individual who in aesthetic despair “remains too deeply rooted in his own mode of life and thought to attempt to liberate himself and seeks instead, by a variety of stratagems, to keep the truth from impinging upon him” (Gardiner 45-46). In Kierkegaardian terms, Dr. Bradshaw’s continually falling back on the idea that cures are a matter of maintaining one’s “sense of proportion” might be read as a
“stratagem” similar to the stratagems the aesthete uses to keep truth from “impinging upon him.”

Dr. William Bradshaw’s relation to Richard Dalloway is paralleled by Doris Kilman’s relation to Clarissa. As with Sir William and his well-read clients, Miss Kilman, in her resentment toward others, acts as one confined to the aesthetic sphere. Although her position as tutor might initially appear to be emblematic of the ethical sphere, her resentment toward Clarissa and her desire to “ruin” Clarissa reveal that she is the most loathsome individual in the novel who is confined to the aesthetic sphere:

But Miss Kilman did not hate Mrs. Dalloway. Turning her large gooseberry-coloured eyes upon Clarissa, observing her small pink face, her delicate body, her air of freshness and fashion, Miss Kilman felt, Fool! Simpleton! You have known neither sorrow nor pleasure; who have trifled your life away! And there rose in her an overmastering desire to overcome her; to unmask her. If she could have felled her it would have eased her. But it was not the body; it was the soul and its mockery that she wished to subdue; make her feel mastery. If only she could make her weep; could ruin her; humiliate her; bring her to her knees crying. You are right! But this was God’s will, not Miss Kilman’s. It was to be a religious victory. So she glared; so she glowered. (135-136)

Miss Kilman’s resentment in relation to Clarissa and Clarissa’s station in life resembles Dr. Bradshaw’s resentment toward those whom he considers to be of higher social standing. Both loathe others in reaction to their own failures, and this active form of resentment resembles in Kierkegaard’s philosophy the demonic aspect of the aesthetic
sphere. As Julia Watkin remarks, Kierkegaard believes that “the good is viewed by the
demonic individual as bad and a threat to freedom” (*Historical Dictionary of
Kierkegaard’s Philosophy* 63). Whereas Clarissa’s dissipation is outward, Miss Kilman’s
dissipation is inward—Miss Kilman’s dissipation is a dissipation of the soul in the sense
that she resembles symbolically the “inclosing reserve” of Kierkegaard’s aesthetic
sphere. Kierkegaard’s narrative persona Judge William asserts, “The individual [who]
rests with confident security in the assurance that his life is ethically structured…does not
torment himself and others with quibbling anxiety about this or that” (*Either/Or: Part II*
257). To resent others in indirect proportion to one’s failure to actualize oneself is
arguably a marker trait of the individual confined within the demonic element of aesthetic
sphere. Whereas the individual acting within the ethical sphere finds self-actualization in
love for others that she expresses through concrete actions, the individual under the sway
of the demonic aspect of the aesthetic sphere might ultimately amount to failure of the
personality to realize selfhood. The self of such an individual might devolve into
resentment; the self might fall into “inclosing reserve.” Kierkegaard believes that
within the aesthetic sphere “what is demonic wants to shut itself up in itself and isolate
itself from the threat of the good” (Watkin 63). Within the context of the personality that
is limited by being confined to the aesthetic sphere, his acting in resentment toward
others might ultimately become a covert way of sabotaging his potential to become a
concrete personality.

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Lucrezia (Rezia) Warren Smith, wife of Septimus Smith, is the character in *Mrs.
Dalloway* who serves as the clearest representative the ethical sphere of existence. Her
constant care for Septimus is represented by Woolf as arising from Rezia’s love for Septimus and from the associated sense of “duty” and “responsibility”:

Mr. Smith was talking aloud to himself, Agnes the servant girl cried to Mrs. Filmer in the kitchen. “Evans, Evans,” he had said as she brought in the tray. She jumped, she did. She scuttled downstairs.

And Rezia came in, with her flowers, and walked across the room, and put the roses in the vase, upon which the sun struck directly, and it went laughing, leaping round the room.

She had had to buy the roses, Rezia said, from a poor man in the street. But they were almost dead already, she said, arranging the roses.

So there was a man outside; Evans presumably; and the roses, which Rezia said were half dead, had been picked by him in the fields of Greece. “Communication is health; communication is happiness, communication—“ he muttered.

“What are you saying Septimus?” Rezia asked, wild with terror, for he was talking to himself.

She sent Agnes running for Dr. Holmes. Her husband, she said, was mad. He scarcely knew her. (100-101)

Rezia Warren Smith’s place within the ethical sphere is symbolized here by her buying flowers from the “poor man in the street,” though the flowers are clearly dying and will serve her little purpose, and by her sending “Agnes running for Dr. Holmes.” The dying flowers also foreshadow that her concern and care for Septimus will ultimately fail. Although noble and worthy, “duty” and “responsibility” cannot ultimately overcome the
power of death and one’s recognition of finitude. According to Kierkegaard, only the leap of faith to the religious sphere can accomplish this. Rezia faces the limitations of the ethical sphere when she asks “why me?”:

But Lucrezia Warren Smith was saying to herself, it’s wicked; why should I suffer? She was asking as she walked down the broad path. No; I can’t stand it any longer, she was saying, having left Septimus, who wasn’t Septimus any longer, to say hard, cruel, wicked things, to talk to himself, to talk to a dead man [Evans] on the seat over there; when the child ran full tilt into her, fell flat, and burst out crying.

That was comforting rather. She stood her upright, dusted her frock, kissed her.

But for herself she had done nothing wrong; she had loved Septimus; she had been happy; she had had a beautiful home, and there her sisters lived still, making hats. Why should she suffer? (69-70)

In spite of the chaos that surrounds her, Rezia Warren Smith honors the ethical either/or, in that, in spite of the chaos, she chooses herself within the ethical: she dusts off and kisses the little girl who runs into her.

Clarissa also faces paradox with regard to the limit of the ethical sphere of existence, by serving as the mediating point in the contrasting roles of the other primary characters. Most significant of these contrasts is her double-bladed relationship to Peter

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88 “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (I Corinthians 15:55)
89 Apparently, this expression is Woolf’s ironic pun on Jesus’ expression “wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it” (Matthew 7:13)
Walsh, her adventurous suitor, and Richard, her less-than-adventurous suitor-then-husband. Regarding Richard, Clarissa recognizes that

no vulgar jealousy could separate her from Richard. But she feared that time itself, and read on lady Bruton’s face, as if it had been a dial cut in impassive stone, the dwindling of life; how year by year her share was sliced; how little the margin that remained was capable any longer of stretching, of absorbing, as in the youthful years, the colours, salts, tones, of existence, so that she filed the room she entered, and felt often as she stood hesitating one moment on the threshold of her drawing-room, an exquisite suspense, such as might stay a diver before plunging while the sea darkens and brightens beneath him, and the waves which threaten to break but only gently split their surface, roll and conceal and encrust as they turn over the weeds with pearl. (30-31)

In counteracting her recognition of finitude, Clarissa foreshadows her later similarity to the individual who recognizes of the limit of the ethical sphere:

Not for a moment did she believe in God; but all the more, she thought, taking up the [drawing] pad, one must repay in daily life to servants, yes, to dogs and canaries, above all to Richard her husband, who was the foundation of it—of the gay sounds, of the green lights, of the cook even whistling, for Mrs. Walker was Irish and whistled all day long—one must pay back from this secret deposit of exquisite moments, while Lucy stood by her, trying to explain how. (30)
Here, Clarissa connects the sense of duty and obligation characteristic of the ethical sphere to the beauty and precious moments of life, but this connection arises from her recognition that, soon enough, life will have passed. This in a sense resembles Kierkegaard’s idea that one might relate indirectly to God/the Eternal through moments within the ethical sphere in expression of Religiousness A, even though ultimately in Kierkegaard’s “Christomorphic poetics\(^{90}\)” it is the Incarnation that brings reconciliation with God and offers the personality complete deliverance from despair and assurance of eternal life (John 3:15; Titus 3:5-7). From a Kierkegaardian perspective, the tragic beauty of Clarissa recognizing she too soon will pass is the tragic beauty of the finite within the ethical sphere. For Kierkegaard, it is the leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere that ultimately overcomes the finite aspect of human existence and the power of despair (1 Corinthians 15:55).

In facing her failure to be like Peter Walsh, Clarissa arguably acts as one who within the context of Kierkegaard’s Religiousness A in noble courage embraces finitude while also recognizing the tragic sense of the world’s beauty—she arrives at a point at which she might acknowledge that her diminishing health leaves her with the challenge of facing with existential gravity her place in the world as that very place fades away. This is why Lucio Ruotolo refers to Clarissa Dalloway as an “existential hero” (Hussey 66). Ironically, when Peter Walsh returns and sees her family life, it is Peter, not Clarissa, who considers himself to be a “failure” in the sense of one’s rising to the truer things of life:

\(^{90}\) (Between Irony and Witness; Kierkegaard’s Poetics of Faith, Hope, and Love 2)
His life was not over; not by any means. He was only past fifty. Shall I tell her, he thought, or not? He would like to make clean breast of it all. But she is too cold, he thought; sewing with her scissors; Daisy would look ordinary beside Clarissa. And she would think me a failure, which I am in their sense, he thought, in the Dalloway’s sense. Oh yes, he had no doubt about that; he was a failure compared with all of this—the inlaid table, the mounted paper-knife, the dolphin and the candlesticks, the chair-covers and the old valuable English tinted prints—he was a failure! (45)

In moving beyond defining herself narrowly in relation to limitations set forth by her earlier rejection of Peter Walsh or her marriage to Richard Dalloway, Clarissa acts as one who “chooses herself” within the context of Kierkegaard’s ethical sphere; she recognize that she is not “Mrs. Dalloway,” nor is she the interpretation of herself into which she is tempted to fall in reaction to her declining health. She stands in the position of the individual who faces the existential limit of her interpretation of self. She faces a situation similar to the individual who confronts the limit of the ethical sphere and the finite nature of human existence, and she thus reaches a place where an individual might embrace the possibility of making a leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere. Even though the narrative voice claims, “not for a moment did [Clarissa] believe in God” (30), Kierkegaard would argue that this very sort of radical skepticism might paradoxically make one a good candidate for the leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere. For example, in a journal entry from 1845 that is entitled “A Proof for the Truth of Christianity,” Kierkegaard claims,
The proof is that many times its most zealous enemies have become its most zealous defenders. With philosophers and others like them the opposite often happens, that the closest adherent becomes an enemy and falls away. The double relationship in Christianity is the very thing that demonstrates its absolute truth, the fact that it goads just as intensely as it attracts. Generally, an adherent’s first relationship is immediately defined as that of a friend, not an enemy; he becomes charmed (he is repulsed by Christianity), and then he becomes bored. It is just the opposite with Christianity. It is so full of meaning that it first repels and then attracts, and the repulsion of the contrast is the dynamometer of the inwardness.

(Journal and Papers, Volume 1: 179)

In a similar context, Kierkegaard notes in a journal entry from 1835, “It is the same with Christianity or with becoming a Christian as it is with all radical cures. One postpones it as long as possible” (168). For Kierkegaard, the Absolute Paradox “repels and then attracts.”

In resembling one who has reached the limit of Kierkegaard’s ethical sphere, Clarissa also confronts the double-bladed nature of her relationship to both Sally Seton and Elizabeth Dalloway. The first part of this paradoxical triad takes on the form of the Sally Seton of the past (a retreat by Clarissa into the world of Romantic imagination) and the Sally Seton of the present (a “real” human being whose abiding within the ethical sphere disrupts Clarissa’s retreat into the Romantic). The Sally Seton of the past is something to which Clarissa apparently clings to brace herself against her
dissipation—memories of a fond youth that never really was—an idealized picture of the past that becomes a tempting means to escape from the present:

[Sally Seton and Clarissa] sat, hour after hour, talking in her bedroom at the top of the house, talking about life, how they were to reform the world. They meant to found a society to abolish private property, and actually had a letter written, though not sent out. The ideas were Sally’s, of course—but very soon she was just as excited—read Plato in bed before breakfast; read Morris; read Shelly by the hour.

Sally’s power was amazing, her gift, her personality. There was her way with flowers, for instance. At Bourton they always had stiff little vases all the way down the table. Sally went out, picked hollyhocks, dahlias—all sorts of flowers that had never been seen together—cut their heads off, and made them swim on the top of water bowls. The effect was extraordinary—coming into dinner in the sunset. (Of course, Aunt Helena thought it wicked to treat flowers like that.) Then she forgot her sponge, and ran along the passage naked. The grim old housemaid, Ellen Atkins, went about rumbling—“suppose any of the gentlemen had seen?” Indeed she did shock people. She was untidy, Papa said. (33-36)

In a sense, Sally Seton of the past represents for Clarissa what the green light represents for Gatsby—an escape from the present “reality.” Sally Seton of the past is exotic, represents adventure, the new, the strange, primeval sexuality, challenging of authority, challenging of family conventions and prim and proper behavior, fun for the sake of fun, and new ideas as a means of escaping thoughtless conventionality. However, like the
green light for Gatsby, Sally Seton of the past represents the Romantic escapism characteristic of Kierkegaard’s aesthetic sphere—Shelly, Morris, and Sally Seton symbolize for Clarissa what she never had the courage to become. Unlike Gatsby, however, Clarissa’s escapist dream collides with a present that offers hope: Sally Seton of the present is, for Clarissa, a metaphor for personality associated with the responsibilities of motherhood—with facing one’s place within the ethical sphere of existence. Such an example of a connection with the ethical might lead Clarissa naturally to thoughts of Elizabeth Dalloway, Clarissa’s link to the future.

In a way that resembles Judge William’s exhorting the aesthete of Either/Or II to embrace the existentially rewarding responsibilities that life within the ethical sphere might offer, the idealized Sally Seton of the past is disrupted as the “real” Sally Seton re-enters Clarissa’s life. Sally Seton of the present has “five sons” (204) and is a married woman in her fifties, Lady Rosseter, wife of an industrialist (204). Sally Seton of the past, this “ghostly” memory to which Clarissa retreats on occasion, represents Clarissa’s failure to find lasting meaning within her occasional retreats to the aesthetic sphere. Sally Seton of the present arguably represents for Clarissa Religiousness A’s truthful and often jarring self-assessment—recognition that the ethical sphere takes precedence over Romantic visions from the past, however tempting they might be. Clarissa arguably faces a situation similar to the individual who through concrete and specific action might choose herself by “repenting” of her earlier self (Either/Or II: 216).

The second part of this triad of symbols of the ethical sphere for takes on the form of the Elizabeth Dalloway of the present (whom Clarissa strives to understand) and the

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91 For example, the “aesthetic validity of marriage” (Either/Or II: 5-145).
Elizabeth Dalloway of the *future* (who symbolizes Clarissa’s tragic relation to the ethical sphere, and who becomes a means of revealing indirectly Clarissa’s recognition of the limit of the ethical sphere). Clarissa strives to relate to Elizabeth, whose time is occupied by the loathsome Miss Kilman: “Clarissa was really shocked [at Miss Kilman]. This is a Christian—this woman! This woman had taken her daughter from her! She in touch with invisible presences! Heavy, ugly, commonplace, without kindness or grace, she know the meaning of life!” (136). Here, Woolf arguably uses indirect communication to reveal that Clarissa’s concern that Miss Kilman will “take her daughter from her” is actually Clarissa’s existential frustration at recognizing that her own dissipation and ensuing death will ultimately leave Elizabeth without a mother—a mother who, after all, says Sally Seton, “was pure-hearted…generous to her friends” (209). For Kierkegaard, the ethical sphere ultimately runs into the limit imposed by time—by one’s recognition of finitude. As Kierkegaard observes in a journal entry from 1850, “The majority of men live from the cradle to the grave constantly on the go and never stopping, in the medium of ceaselessness (temporality, the merely quantified, etc.). Then finally death comes along and stops them—and now they become aware of Christianity, repent of not having availed themselves of it earlier, by means of this repentance achieve a relationship to Christianity, and then die” (*Journals and Papers, Volume 4*: 468-69). Kierkegaard goes on to note that it is not death (as an abstract concept) that is troubling to the “natural man,” but it is “stopping” that is troubling: “The natural man does not fear death more than he fears stopping. Well, death and stopping have much in common. Stopping is comparable to a fish’s being taken out of water and having to breathe in the air. The natural man shudders at this other element, at the enormous power residing in ‘the stop’”
(469). When she contemplates Elizabeth being without a mother, Clarissa arguably reaches a point analogous to the individual who distinguishes between death as an abstract concept and “the stop” as an existential limit.

Lastly, Clarissa must face the double-bladed nature of her interpretation of self in relation to Septimus Smith. This too brings her symbolically to the limit of the ethical sphere in that she identifies herself with Septimus when she learns that he has just died:

   Somehow it was her disaster—her disgrace. It was her punishment to see
   sink and disappear here a man, there a woman, in this profound darkness,
   and she forced herself to stand here in her evening dress. She had
   schemed; she had pilfered. She was never wholly admirable. She wanted
   success. Lady Bexborough and the rest of it… (202)

Clarissa, in thinking that she was “never wholly admirable” and in identifying herself with Septimus Smith’s finitude, paradoxically, faces a situation similar to the individual who, in Kierkegaard’s schema, confronts her own limit within the ethical sphere of existence. For Kierkegaard, recognition of guilt before the Eternal—the limit of the ethical sphere—is ultimately a gift of God’s grace. Kierkegaard believes that “man is guilty, but he is also redeemed from this guilt” (Hubben 48). Kierkegaard believes that “in relation to God, [one] is always in the wrong” (Either/Or II: 351), and narrative persona Johannes Climacus in Concluding Unscientific Postscript identifies redemption from this sense of guilt with Christ as the Absolute Paradox: “The paradox of the forgiveness of sins…is a paradox in the Socratic sense, in so far as it involves a relationship between the eternal truth and an existing individual; it is a paradox sensu strictiori, because the existing individual is stamped as a sinner, by which existence is
accentuated a second time, and because it purports to be an eternal decision in time with retroactive power to annul the past, and because it is linked with the existence of God in time” (201). For Kierkegaard, the leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere of existence is a leap to faith in the face of the absurdity of the incarnation of Jesus as savior. Kierkegaard believes that in Religiousness A the individual moves and acts nobly in choosing herself in concrete actualization of the personality in relationships with other individuals; even so, Kierkegaard believes also that Religiousness B moves from God to the individual in the sense that Eternity breaks into time with the Incarnation. This belief that with Religiousness B the Eternal breaks paradoxically into time is consistent with Kierkegaard’s ultimate concern of what it means to be a Christian in Christendom, in that the Gospel maintains that “while the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:18).

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The character Septimus Smith becomes a trope—a rhetorical figure—for Woolf to represent symbolically the limitations of the ethical sphere and the limitations of what Kierkegaard refers to as Religiousness A. Kierkegaard believes that a “good” person, such as Clarissa is in terms of Religiousness A, cannot in the context of what it means to be a Christian ultimately arrive at “salvation” under her own power; what it means to be a Christian in Christendom is to ultimately make an appeal to God’s grace. For Kierkegaard, the limitations of the ethical sphere imply the need for a leap to faith that extends beyond these limitations, a leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere. Septimus Smith’s wife Rezia arguably represents also the limit of Kierkegaard’s

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92 Assurance in faith of eternal life (John 3:15-16)
ethical sphere’s “duty and responsibility,” in that she acts nobly in terms of Religiousness
A but ultimately fails to prevent Septimus from committing suicide. In Kierkegaard’s
view, it is only the leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere that ultimately
overcomes the overwhelming power of death and the dread associated with recognizing
one’s finitude. For Kierkegaard, whose ultimate concern is what it means to be a
Christian in Christendom, God’s grace is the way by which the individual in faith
ultimately finds victory over the power of death (1 Corinthians 15:55).

Clarissa sees herself as somehow connected with Septimus Smith, and he
represents for her a powerful symbol of the power of death, while he also serves as a
compliment to her concept of the self in dissipation. For Kierkegaard, such a recognition
by the individual of the personality’s need to ultimately identify passionately with
something that transcends self might ultimately offer an opportunity—though it is not
realized in Clarissa’s case—for the leap to faith that takes shape in the religious sphere.
Like the phenomenon of freedom from which human self-consciousness and human
recognition of the inevitably of death arises, the phenomenon of death transcends self in
an archetypal sense: It is impossible to avoid the archetypal nature of death in that death
confronts all individuals. With paradoxical optimism, Kierkegaard sees death for the
Christian as the point at which God’s light shines brightest: In a journal entry from 1844,
Kierkegaard remarks, “There is a beautiful expression which the common man uses about
dying: that God or our Lord ‘brightens’ for him. Accordingly, at the very time
everything becomes darkest—for what is as dark as the grave—God ‘brightens’”
(Journals and Papers, Volume 1: 335). As with the Apostle Paul, for Kierkegaard death
loses its sting (1 Corinthians 15:55\textsuperscript{93}) when the individual makes the leap to faith that takes shape in the religious sphere: “When a man in relating himself to himself absolutely relates himself to God, then all despair is annihilated” (\textit{The Sickness unto Death} 146). Although death is a potentially ugly physical reality—as becomes gruesomely apparent in the suicide of Septimus Smith (\textit{Mrs. Dalloway} 200)—Kierkegaard sees death for the Christian as being the point at which God shines brightest.

\textsuperscript{93} “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (KJV).
CHAPTER 5

ULYSSES

AND

KIERKEGAARD’S THREE SPHERES OF EXISTENCE

A Brief Overview of Relevant Criticism

For the scholar interested in studies that treat issues relevant to James Joyce, *Ulysses*—narrative style, irony, critical reception, or research tools—the following works might prove valuable:


Scholars interested in exploring indirect connections between Kierkegaard and Joyce might consult the following works addressing Ibsen’s influence upon Joyce: B.J. Tysdahl’s *Joyce and Ibsen: A Study in Literary Influence* (Norwegian Universities Press, 1968), Hugh Kenner’s *Joyce and Ibsen’s Naturalism* (Sewanee Press, 1951), and, lastly, James Joyce’s essay “Ibsen’s New Drama” (in *James Joyce: The Critical Writings*, Cornell University Press, 1989).

*A Close Reading of the Novel*

Like *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Ulysses* offers a complex structure within which to perform a close reading that applies Kierkegaard’s concepts. Like *The Great Gatsby*, *The Sun Also Rises*, and *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Ulysses* contains paradoxical characters—one of which is the text itself, in its contradiction and interrogation of itself. Thus, *Ulysses* takes shape within an even more complex interaction of narrative voice and movement of story than
does Mrs. Dalloway—one that includes both “interior monologue narrative”\textsuperscript{94} and a paradoxical relationship of reader and text. This even more complex narrative voice/story thus offers a more dynamic possibility for setting forth a close reading that deals with irony and the three spheres of existence than any of the other three novels examined thus far. And, of all the novels analyzed in this study, Ulysses illustrates most vividly irony as indirect communication.

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In terms of the aesthetic sphere of existence, this study will consider the three primary characters Stephen Dedalus, Leopold Bloom, and Molly Bloom as individuals, in relation to one another, and in relation to other characters. Further, the text will be considered as a “character” unconsciousness of itself.

Aside from the text itself, Steven Dedalus is possibly the most enigmatic character in Joyce’s Ulysses. The novel starts with Steven confronting the enigma and physical realities of his life, and he does so while confronting aesthetic despair on the part of his roommate/”usurper”, “stately Buck Mulligan” (3). Mulligan conducts a mock mass:

* Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed. A yellow dressinggown, ungirdled, was sustained gently behind him on the mild morning air. He held the bowl aloft and intoned:

\textsuperscript{94}Stuart Gilbert notes that, “following Nature’s method, Joyce [in his use of interior monologue and fragmentary narrative] depicts only the present time and place of the times that are passing, a rapid flux of images. ‘Hold to the now, the here, through which all future plunges to the past’ (Ulysses 153). It is for the reader to assemble the fragments and join the images into a band” (James Joyce’s Ulysses 25).
Halted, he peered down the dark winding stairs and called out coarsely:

--Come up, Kinch! Come up, you fearful jesuit!

Solemnly he came forward and mounted the gunrest. He faced about and blessed thrice the tower, the surrounding land and the awaking mountains. Then, catching sight of Stephen Dedalus, he bent towards him and made rapid crosses in the air, gurgling in is throat and shaking his head. Stephen Dedalus, displeased and sleepy, leaned his arms on the top of the staircase and looked coldly at the gurgling face that blessed him, equine in its length, and at the light untonsured hair, gained and heud like pale oak. (3)

Although Stephen is “Kinch,” the skeptic skeptical of his own skepticism (Gilbert 52), he is offended by Buck Mulligan’s mock Catholic Mass, as the text indicates in Stephen’s perceptions of Mulligan’s “equine” features, “gurgling face,” and “untonsured” hair. The imagery suggests that Stephen is not only offended but also that Mulligan leads Stephen to see him as being temporarily insane, unkempt, and a “horse’s ass.”

Although Stephen demonstrates skeptical tendencies himself and therefore wrestles with the question of religious conviction within the more philosophical dimension of the aesthetic sphere of existence, he does not take the matter of religious conviction lightly, as Mulligan does; therefore, in his offense at Buck Mulligan’s actions, Stephen resembles

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95 “I will go up to God’s altar.” Latin from Vulgate translation of Psalm 43:4 (Gifford 13).
96 Kinch, as in the sound of a knife blade, and as in one who cuts things into pieces in analyzing them (Gifford 13).
97 Lacking shaving of the crown of he head as some monks and priests do
98 As in “foaming at the mouth”
the individual who shows the potential of making the leap to faith that might take shape within the ethical sphere. Mockery such as Mulligan’s is the lowest form of irony—is the “devil’s ministry,” as in Christ being mocked before the crucifixion— and Stephen, in rejecting it, shows the potential of moving beyond his radical skepticism, a skepticism that is arguably resembles despair over the limitations of the aesthetic sphere. In rejecting Buck Mulligan’s mock Catholic Mass, Stephen acknowledges that “religious language, the language of symbol and myth, is created in the community of the believers and cannot be fully understood outside of this community…Only as a member of such a community (even if in isolation or expulsion) can man have a content for his ultimate concern. Only in a community of language can man actualize his faith” (Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* 24). Buck Mulligan’s disrespect for the symbolism of the Mass disturbs something deeper than Stephen’s skepticism—it invokes his troubled memory of the death of his mother, as Mulligan implies when he turns on Stephen and mocks him:

--The aunt thinks you killed your mother, he said. That’s why she won’t let me have anything to do with you.

--Someone killed her, Stephen said gloomily.

--You could have knelt down, damn it, Kinch, when your dying mother asked you, Buck Mulligan said. I’m hyperborean as much as you. But to think of your mother begging you with her last breath to kneel down

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99 Matthew 27:29
100 “Someone” rhymes with “Simon,” Stephen’s father, whose alcoholism and emotional abuse Stephen blames for his mother’s death.
101 Reference to Nietzsche’s “hyperborean” from *The Will to Power*, who is “above the crowd” of Christian morality (*Ulysses Annotated* 15).
and pray for her. And you refused. There is something sinister in you….

(5)

Mulligan’s goading of Stephen concerning Stephen’s failure to grant his mother’s deathbed wish also invokes in Stephen the memory of a dream, as his conscience presses toward what resembles the limit of the aesthetic sphere:

Stephen, an elbow rested on the jagged granite, leaned his palm against his brow and gazed at the fraying edge of his shiny black coatsleeve. Pain, that was not yet the pain of love, fretted his heart. Silently, in a dream she had come to him after her death, her wasted body within its loose brown graveclothes giving off an odour of wax and rosewood, her breath, that had bent upon him, mute, reproachful, a faint odour of wetted ashes. Across the threadbare cuffedge he saw the sea hailed as a great sweet mother by the wellfed voice beside him. The ring of bay and skyline held a dull green mass of liquid. A bowl of white china had stood by her deathbed holding the green sluggish bile which she had torn up from her rotting liver by fits of loud groaning vomiting. (80)

In this opening scene between Buck Mulligan and Stephen Dedalus, the text of *Ulysses* reveals subtly that—whether he chooses to do so or not—brooding Stephen acts in a manner similar to the individual who is poised to make the leap to faith to the ethical sphere. Mulligan’s mockery reminds him of his having played Hamlet by staying too long in black102 and how his skepticism had brought him to despair when he did not honor

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102 Stephen refuses to wear the grey trousers Mulligan offers him, because Stephen takes the part of Hamlet literally, has been mourning his mother’s—not his father’s—death for too long—past the newly relaxed Victorian standards. Stephens adheres to the letter of
his mother’s deathbed request that he pray for her (9). Stephen’s brooding temperament resembles the temperament of the individual confined to the aesthetic sphere of existence— resembles the temperament of the individual confined by “inclosing reserve” (The Sickness unto Death 63-67). As Kierkegaard’s disciple Paul Tillich notes, inclosing reserve is despair turned in upon itself:

The demonic is anxiety about the good. In innocence, freedom was not posited as freedom: its possibility was anxiety in the individual. In the demonic, the relation is reversed. Freedom is posited as unfreedom, because freedom is lost. Here again freedom’s possibility is anxiety. The difference is absolute, because freedom’s possibility appears in relation to unfreedom, which is the very opposite of innocence, which is a qualification disposed toward freedom.

The demonic is unfreedom that wants to close itself off. This, however, is and remains an impossibility. It always retains a relation, and even when this has apparently disappeared altogether, it is nevertheless there, and anxiety at once manifests itself in the moment of contact [with the good]. (The Concept of Anxiety 123)

Stephen’s anxiety over the dream and memory of his mother—over her religious convictions—is similar to the dizziness of despair, as anxiety contacts the “good” and therefore paradoxically offers possibility, via despair. Despair as “aporia”—as dizziness—offers hope of deliverance through the leap to faith, away from “inclosing reserve” of the aesthetic sphere of existence, and toward the actualized love of the ethical

the law for “a son’s deep mourning for his mother (black suit, shoes, socks and tie and a sharply limited social life)” (Ulysses Annotated 15).
sphere of existence\textsuperscript{103}—away from the self-limiting dialectic of “inclosing reserve,” the “neurotic paradox.”\textsuperscript{104} In \textit{Either/Or II}, Judge William, speaking in behalf of a balance between the aesthetic and ethical spheres, claims that

the atheist perceives very well that the way the ethical is most easily evaporated is to open the door to the historical infinity. And yet there is something legitimate in his behavior, for if, when all is said and done, the individual is not the absolute, then the empirical is the only route allotted to him, and the end of this road is just like the source of the Niger River—no one knows where it is. If I am assigned to the finite, it is arbitrary to stand at any particular point. Therefore, along this road one never makes a beginning, for in order to start one must have come to an end, but this is an impossibility. When the personality is the absolute, then it is itself the Archimedean point from which one can lift the world. (265)

Stephen’s uneasiness over the way in which his skepticism clashed with his mother’s deathbed request mirrors the atheist’s uneasiness over being empirically bound to a road whose beginning and end are arbitrary. Within the confines of the aesthetic sphere, choosing one action over against another creates recognition that one has eliminated all other possibilities and therefore invokes anxiety over what is perceived as a loss of freedom. Like Dante’s “shades,” the aesthete and the romantic ironist are tossed

\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Ulysses} is “Bloom’s day” more than it is (not-Saint) Stephen’s day. Bloom’s love for Molly and his genuine sense of compassion toward others offset Stephen’s brooding temperament and thus ultimately bring Bloom to fulfilling the role of Stephen’s “missing father.”

\textsuperscript{104} Jung sees the “neurotic paradox” as that tendency for others to be able to see the very maladaptive behavior that was either entirely or largely invisible to the neurotic—the neurotic’s tendency to be self-defeating and thus bring isolation upon him or herself (“Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious,” \textit{The Portable Jung} 70-ff).
this way or that, depending upon immediate desire and existentially limited perspective of one who remains confined to the aesthetic sphere. If no choice he makes brings ultimate release from recognition of his finitude, all choices might for him become equally vague and arbitrary. In contrast, the individual who makes the leap to faith that takes shape within the ethical sphere “chooses himself” (Either/Or II: 232). The person in the grips of aesthetic despair is likely to seek existential validation that he cannot find through arbitrary judgments. Anti-Climacus describes a state of aesthetic despair that he calls “despair that lacks finitude.” This form of despair lacks connection with the actual conditions surrounding the individual: “When feeling or knowing or willing has become fantastic, the entire self can eventually become that, whether in the more active form of plunging headlong into fantasy or in the more passive form of being carries away, but in both cases the person is responsible. The self, then, leads a fantasized existence in abstract infinitizing or in abstract isolation, continually lacking itself, from which it moves further and further away” (The Sickness unto Death 32). As with the protagonist of Dostoevsky’s Notes from Underground, the issue is not that there is, generally speaking, suffering in the world, but that he is conscious of the fact that he suffers right now, on this occasion. All other suffering is for him remote from the suffering at hand, which becomes the accuser of all “reality.” Like Hamlet, Stephen resembles the aesthete who when confronting death mourns more for himself and his “condition” than for his dead parent: “An individual in despair despairs over something. So it seems for a moment, but only for a moment; in the same moment the true despair or despair in its true form shows itself. In despairing over something, he really despained over himself, and now he wants to be rid of himself” (The Sickness unto Death 18).
In “Proteus” (Chapter 3), Stephen again acts in a manner similar to the individual who arrives at the limit of the aesthetic sphere, as he “[tries] to grasp, whether metaphysically or mystically, the eternal ideas that cast their shadow on the wall of the cave”: 105

Ineluctable modality of the visible: at least that if no more, thought through my eyes. Signature of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot. Snotgreen, bluesilver, rust: coloured signs. Limits of the diaphane. But he adds: in bodies. There he was aware of them bodies before of them coloured. How? By knocking his sconce against them, sure. Go easy. Bald he was and a millionaire, *maestro di color che sanno*. Limit of the diaphane in. Why in?

Diaphane, adiaphane. If you can put your five fingers through it it is a gate, if not a door. Shut your eyes and see. (31)

Stephen here takes on the form of Proteus, shape-shifter, but not in body—in mind: Like the Romantic Idealist, Stephen attempts to but fails to abstract himself out of existence by flitting from one idea to the next, as if the ideas were being-itself. He starts with abstract concepts regarding the physical world—the senses as analyzed by Aristotle (“ineluctable modality of the visible” 106), Boehme (“everything is figured with its own signature”—with its corresponding opposite on the spiritual plane), Berkeley (whose

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105 Plato’s cave in the “Allegory of the Cave” (Gilbert 119). This is the world of Ideas and thus represents soul absent from body, the individual abstracted out of existence, the antithesis of the ethical which realizes concrete actuality in the form of duty and responsibility.

106 Aristotle is thought to have asserted that vision is the “ineluctable”—unalterable—“modality” of the senses in that the ear can alter the perception of sound, whereas the eye must see colors as they are, without altering them (*Ulysses Annotated* 44).
idealism was supposedly refuted by Samuel Johnson’s kicking of a large stone\textsuperscript{107}, and then again to the physical appearance/surroundings of Aristotle (“bald he was, and a millionaire” \textsuperscript{108}). In *Philosophical Fragments*, Johannes Climacus addresses just such a dilemma—the dilemma of being unable to think one’s way to “being itself”:

> Which is first, immediacy or mediacy? Cannot the consciousness…remain in immediacy? This is a foolish question, because if it could, there would be no consciousness at all. But how, then, is immediacy cancelled? By mediacy, which cancels immediacy by presupposing it. What, then, is immediacy? It is reality itself [*Realitet*]. What is mediacy? It is the word. How does the one cancel the other? By giving expression to it, for that which is given expression is always presupposed.

Immediacy is reality; language is ideality; consciousness is contradiction [*Modsigelse*]. The moment I make a statement about reality, contradiction is present, for what I say is ideality. (*Philosophical Fragments* 168)

Just as Kierkegaard rejection of Hegel and the Neo-Hegelians presupposes both existentialist currents of thought in the twentieth century and poststructuralist movement of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, in a sense, Stephen’s failure to think the *ideal* in relation to the actual in the above passage presupposes the postmodernist turn in twentieth century fiction. Both transitions offer a paradigm shift whose concern is an

\textsuperscript{107} Kicking the large stone, Johnson reputedly claimed, “I refute it [Berkeley’s Idealism] thus!”
\textsuperscript{108} (*Ulysses Annotated* 44)
increasingly differentiated view of human consciousness. Both transitions set forth a more dynamic concept of human consciousness: one that takes into the account more fully the complexities of subject-object-interpretation. It is impossible to interpret “Reality-Truth” exhaustively; in order to do so, one would have to utilize language, and language presupposes the “the Fall” of consciousness in that it reveals the split between the ideal and the actual. “A pure existentialism is impossible because to describe existence one must use language. Now language deals with universals. In using universals, language is by its very nature essentialist, and cannot escape it” (Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought* 541). Language has limitations in expressing the experience of the existing individual, who is more dynamic than language is.

In the passage above in which Stephen tries to think being itself, since the text is *foregrounded*, indirect communication poses the question “what happens when different types of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?” (*Postmodernist Fiction* 10). Stephen’s flitting from idea to idea within the context of analyzing his own senses poetically captures the restless quality of a personality confined to the aesthetic sphere. In contrast to Stephen’s flight from the

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109 In letters to Wordsworth, Coleridge, after initial enthusiasm over Romantic Idealism and Hegel, explains why he rejects his earlier Unitarian convictions, by pointing out that human consciousness and the freedom thereof presuppose a Trinitarian structure to one’s perception of the universe. For both Kierkegaard and the later Coleridge, one cannot perceive God directly in the forms of “Nature, “ because the interpretation of the experience is always mediated by the gap created by human consciousness, which creates a third “reality”: subject-object-interpretation. In short, Kierkegaard rejected Hegel and Romantic Idealism for the same basic reason that Coleridge did: both believed that human consciousness is a mediating force in approaching the world of Ideas and that Romantic Idealism is thus logically flawed. For Kierkegaard, “pure thought is a phantom” ()


111 (McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* 9)
particular to the universal as abstract idea, Judge William asserts, “The very moment it is perceived that the personality is the absolute, is its own objective, is the unity of the universal and the particular, that very moment every skepticism that makes the historical its point of departure will be vanquished” (Either/Or II: 265). Although concepts such as duty and responsibility are abstract—are ideals—they take on form within the concrete, the actual in that individuals make use ideals to connect with others in social interaction. Thus, Judge William can claim that the individual acting within the ethical sphere qualifies her relationship also to the aesthetic sphere, transcends it but does not destroy it or reject it.

Unlike Stephen’s brooding intellectualism that arguably resembles the individual who struggles to escape the confines of the aesthetic sphere, Bloom acts in manner similar to the individual whose place within the aesthetic sphere is qualified by his having made the leap to the ethical sphere. The overwhelming issue for Bloom is the question of whether or not his love for Molly will overcome her committing adultery with Blazes Boylan: Bloom faces a situation similar to the individual who within the context of the ethical sphere must choose himself in the face of difficulties touching directly upon the ethical either/or. Marriage is the primary relationship in which individuals who have made the leap to the ethical sphere act concretely within the context of an ethical either/or. Judge William sees marriage as fertile territory for the ethical either/or, in that marriage involves action that simultaneously affirms life within the aesthetic: “I have not

112 The vocations of firefighter and law enforcement officer offer clear illustrations of Judge William’s point: most who pursue careers in these vocations are inspired to do so by the initial “ideals” associated with wanting to make a difference in the lives of others; however, these ideals play themselves out in concrete actions that include multiple instances of courage and compassion. For the firefighter or law enforcement officer, the universal becomes the concrete when a life is saved.
become so spiritual that the worldly aspect of life has no meaning for me. All the beauty implicit in the erotic of paganism has its validity in Christianity insofar as it can be combined with marriage. This rejuvenation of our first love is not just a sad looking back or a poetic recollecting of past experience, whereby one is finally enmeshed—all that kind of thing is exhausting—it is an action…the fresh wellspring of life ought to be kept open as long as possible” (*Either/Or II: 6*). In terms of the individual’s relationship to the aesthetic sphere, Bloom acts as one who lives within the context of the ethical either/or but who occasionally resorts to distraction within the aesthetic sphere to divert attention away from the ethical either/or. Thus, Kierkegaard’s belief that, after the leap to faith, one sphere qualifies another finds a parallel in the way that Bloom makes use of the aesthetic sphere for escapism but ultimately fails in doing so: He returns to Molly. Bloom behaves in a manner parallel to one who, after having made the leap to the ethical sphere, finds that escapism within diversions of aesthetic sphere ultimately fails.

Bloom’s return reveals the overwhelming importance of his love for Molly, and this resembles the qualitatively higher position that the ethical sphere holds in relation to the aesthetic sphere.

For example, as Bloom makes his journey through Dublin, he appropriates aesthetic diversion to distract him from the awareness that Molly is about to commit adultery with Blazes Boylan.

Upholding the lid he (who?) gazed in the coffin (coffin?) at the oblique triple (piano!) wires. He pressed (the same who pressed indulgently her hand), soft pedalling, a triple of keys to see the thicknesses of felt advancing, to hear the muffled hammerfall in action.
Two sheets cream vellum paper one reserve two envelopes when I was in Wisdom Hely’s wise Bloom in Daly’s Henry Flower bought. Are you not happy in your home? Flower to console me and a pin cuts lo. Means something, language of flow. Was it daisy? Innocence that is. Respectable girl meet after mass. Thanks awfully muchly. Wise Bloom eyed on the door a poster, a swaying mermaid smoking mid nice waves. Smoke mermaids, coolest whiff of all. Hair streaming: lovelorn. For some man. For Raoul. He eyed and saw afar on Essex bridge a gay hat riding on a jaunty car. It is. Again. Third time. Coincidence.


In the passage above, the text’s being foregrounded resembles the aesthetic sphere’s tendency on occasion to overwhelm the ethical. The musicality of the passage—the aesthetic beauty of the passage—nearly makes it unintelligible: only the details provided in “traces” within the text make it clear that the stream of consciousness narrative belongs to Bloom. The occasion is Bloom’s visit to a pub (in the lobby of the Ormond Hotel) in which Simon Dedalus, Stephen’s “missing father,” sings and engages in empty chatter shortly after his daughter Dilly Dedalus begged him for money so the family might eat (217). (Though James Joyce possessed a first-class tenor’s voice, he showed a suspicious attitude toward the “purity” of music as an art form; he distrusted the way that people tend to appropriate music as an escapist venture.113 Simon Dedalus singing and chatting

113 In Either/Or I, music in the form of Mozart’s Don Giovanni becomes the art form representative of moods that predominate within the aesthetic sphere, with seductive allure as practiced by Don Juan being the dominant mood of this particular section of
frivolously in a bar while his daughter stands in rags in the street arguably illustrates Joyce’s disdain toward the escapist dimension of music and the escapist culture surrounding music that in Kierkegaardian terms reflects aesthetic despair.) This chapter was dubbed “Sirens” by Joyce because of the seductive allure of music, but the pleasures of the aesthetic sphere (in the form of music) ultimately fail Bloom as a means of evading the issue of the day: Molly’s immanent adultery. The issue of fidelity opposes the ethical either/or, since it contradicts the individual’s existential commitment to live life in reverence of another individual. As Judge William goes as far as to claim that within the context of the ethical sphere it is “as a married man [Aegtemand]” that one “proves himself to be an authentic [aegte] man” (Either/Or II: 125).

Although Bloom’s stream of consciousness flows freely—almost incoherently—in rhythm with the seductive allure of the music of the “Sirens,” his consciousness nonetheless drifts away from aesthetic matters and back to the ethical matters—to Molly and other issues related to her tryst: Bloom drifts to thoughts of his reactionary but limited flirting with Martha Clifford, as the anonymous “Henry Flower,” Martha’s epistolary secret admirer. He thinks of Martha’s epistolary question “are you happy in your home?” and then thinks of Martha Clifford as merely a “flower to console me.” Finally, the illusory and escapist climate of the lair of the “Sirens” gets disrupted by Bloom’s comically portrayed sighting of Blazes Boylan and the partially obscured view of Boylan’s “gay hat riding on a jaunty car.” Although the aesthetic sphere has a place in defining humanity and although music’s place in culture may not be confined to the

*Either/Or* (51-ff). As Julia Watkin notes, “Kierkegaard’s interest in music especially concerns its power to express moods or feelings” (*Historical Dictionary of Kierkegaard’s Philosophy* 170).
aesthetic sphere, issues concerning the duty and responsibility of the ethical sphere qualify and transcend those of the aesthetic sphere. The juxtaposition of Simon Dedalus, Stephen Dedalus’ “missing father” and Bloom, Stephen Dedalus’ “adoptive father,” illustrates the qualitative shift initiated by the leap to faith that might take shape within the ethical sphere. Simon Dedalus, Stephen’s “missing father,” ignores his responsibilities and squanders his time by crooning, drinking, and engaging in empty chatter about music; Leopold Bloom, Stephen’s “adoptive father,” cannot seem to escape his responsibilities in that even his dalliance with Martha Clifford is a reaction to his “violated” love for Molly. Bloom concludes his stay in the lair of the Sirens by passing gas: “Prrpffrrppffft”(238). Joyce’s pun implies that Bloom punctuates his stay by providing a metaphor for the spiritual state-of-being in the Sirens’ lair—a place where “thinking [is] strictly prohibited [where people are] always talking shop. Fiddlefaddle about notes”(236). Moreover, the immediacy of musical “entertainment” cannot liberate Bloom from thoughts that Molly is about to commit adultery, from thoughts that Blazes Boylan, with “gay hat” and “jaunty car,” is now on his way to visit Molly.

The indirect communication of the above passage reveals how Joyce uses irony in relation to rhetorical structure to undercut the place of the aesthetic sphere in relation to the ethical sphere. The comical rhythm and disruptive nature of the text convey Bloom’s disorderly uneasiness over Molly’s infidelity and reveal also his inability to keep thoughts of Molly submerged in his stream of consciousness. Bloom’s physical journey around Dublin leads him away from Molly, to Stephen, then back to Molly, with Stephen—his symbolically adopted son—in tow. In the journey of his mind, however, he cannot escape Molly and the thought of her committing adultery, as he on several
occasions tries to suppress from his stream of consciousness the idea of her pending infidelity. Also, in this particular chapter in the journey, Blazes Boylan, the entertainer and singer, cannot escape Bloom’s notice either, as he coincidentally passes by with “gay hat” and “jaunty car.” For Bloom, in this anxiety-provoking scene, “thinking is” not “strictly prohibited,” though the thoughts are not likely to be especially comforting, given what Molly is planning.

Molly offers an opportunity to expound upon the aesthetic sphere, since she is a character who lives almost exclusively in the sensual world; however, she does, at last, arrive at a position that favors Bloom over Boylan. Just as Bloom’s journey leads him away from Molly and then back to her, Molly’s “journey” leads her away from Bloom then back to him, though her journey, in Kierkegaardian terms, resembles the journey of an individual who remains confined to the aesthetic sphere. Her journey does, however, end at a position that resembles the perspective an individual confronts in making the leap to faith that might take shape within in the ethical sphere.

…the sun shines for you he said the day we were lying among the rhododendrons on Howth head in the grey tweed suit and his straw hat the day I got him to propose to me yes first I gave him the bit of seedcake out of my mouth and it was the leapyear like now yes 16 years ago my God after that long kiss I near lost my breath yes he said I was the flower of the mountain yes so we are flowers all a womans body yes that was one true thing he said in his life and the sun shines for you today yes that was why I liked him because I saw he understood or felt what a woman is and I knew I could always get round him and I gave him all the pleasure I could
leading him on till he asked me to say yes and I wouldn’t answer first only
looked out over the sea and the sky I was thinking of so many things he
didn’t know of… (643)

Molly’s stream of consciousness stands in juxtaposition to Bloom’s earlier
uneasiness in that her exuberance answers his anxiety. She represents the aesthetic
sphere in the sense that she abides in immediacy: Her thoughts are “egocentric—she
thinks of herself, her grievances, her youth” (Gilbert 402). Even so, she is also drawn
toward an “outside force, the attraction of ‘Poldy,’ her Apollo, round whom her thought,
half reluctantly, turns” (402). Nonetheless, her attraction to Bloom—to “Poldy”—is also
slightly egocentric—she “could always get round him” (Ulysses 643). Yet, the innocence
of her immediacy stands in juxtaposition to Bloom’s straightforward manner that
resembles life in the ethical sphere. Johannes Climacus claims that the ethical is
straightforward and concrete: “The ethical as the absolute is infinitely valid in itself, and
does not need to be tricked out with accessories to help it make a better showing”
(Concluding Unscientific Postscript 127). Although Molly resembles the individual who
remains confined to the aesthetic sphere, she does not resemble the “demonic” aspect of
the aesthetic sphere: she is more childlike than malicious, and she does not resemble the
individual under the sway of “inclosing reserve” (The Sickness unto Death 63-67). Molly
is more like an innocent “great Mother of gods” (Gilbert 402). Even so, in choosing
Bloom over Boylan (whom she recognizes as being inferior to “Poldy”114), she resembles
the individual who from within the aesthetic sphere offers a hint of a promise of make a
leap to faith in the ethical sphere, as a response a sense of duty and responsibility within

114 She recognizes Hugh “Blazes” Boylan as an insensitive phony: “Hugh the ignoramus
that doesn’t know poetry from a cabbage” (638).
the context love/marriage. As Sylvia Walsh explains with regard to marriage and the leap to the ethical, “Judge William argues not only that the aesthetic is preserved and ennobled in the ethical but also that it receives its highest aesthetic, or poetic, expression in that form of life” (*Living Poetically: Kierkegaard’s Existential Aesthetics* 99-100).

More specifically, Judge William claims that *time* is the factor that makes marriage in the context of the ethical sphere aesthetically more beautiful than if it were to remain marriage in the context of the aesthetic sphere:

If one traces dialectically and just as much historically the development of the aesthetically beautiful, one will find that the direction of this movement is from spatial to temporal categories, and that the perfecting of art is contingent upon the possibility of gradually detaching itself more and more from space and aiming toward time. This constitutes the transition from sculpture to painting, as Schelling early pointed out. 115

Music has time as its element but has no continuance in time; its significance is the continual vanishing in time; it sounds in time, but it also fades and has no continuance. Ultimately poetry is the highest form of all the arts and therefore also the art that best knows how to affirm the meaning of time. It does not need to limit itself to the moment in the sense that painting does; neither does it disappear without a trace in the sense that music does. But despite all this, it, too, is compelled to

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115 In *Philosophische Schriften* (1809)
116 Kierkegaard scholar Ronald L. Hall, in *Word and Spirit: A Kierkegaardian Critique of the Modern Age*, notes that Kierkegaard thinks of music (without lyrics) as being the representative art of the aesthetic sphere because music lacks “existential immediacy”: “Music has no active voice, no past or future tense, no indicative mood” (50).
concentrate in the moment. It has, therefore, its limitation and cannot portray that of which the truth is precisely the temporal sequence. And yet this, that time is not a disparagement of the aesthetic; on the contrary, the more this occurs, the richer and fuller the aesthetic becomes.

How, then can the aesthetic, which is incommensurable even for the portrayal of poetry, be represented? Answer: By being lived.

*(Either/Or II: 125)*

The aesthetic for judge William attains deeper beauty with repetition of acts of love through time.

What might be interpreted as Molly’s closest movement in the direction of the ethical sphere takes a slightly egocentric turn: When she considers her son Rudy’s death, she becomes avoidant—like Bloom is earlier in relation to her adultery—, not wanting to fall again into the melancholy of “inclosing reserve”: “…that disheartened me altogether I suppose I oughtnt to have buried him [Rudy] in that little wooly jacket I knitted crying as I was but give it to some poor child but I knew Id never have another our lst death too it was we were never the same since O Im not going to think myself into the glooms about that any more…” (640). Her thinking herself “into the glooms” reinforces the theme of despair at the occasion of the death of a loved one, in that Stephen thought himself “into the glooms” earlier—in playing Hamlet by remaining too-long-in-black after his mother’s death.

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In terms of the ethical sphere of existence, the two primary characters Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom can be read as representing a meeting of two spheres: the
aesthetic sphere meets the ethical sphere. Further, the text can arguably be considered to be a “character” that contradicts itself and thereby calls attention to the limits of epistemology and the limits of reason with respect to Religiousness A within the ethical sphere of existence. By disrupting expectations, the text uses indirect communication to foreground “the problem of ‘unknowability’ or the limits of knowledge.”

Bloom and Stephen becomes the means by which Stephen Dedalus might make the leap of faith from the aesthetic sphere to the ethical sphere. Thus, Stephen’s relation to the ethical sphere is mediated by Bloom as “mid-wife.” In “Eumaeus” (Chapter 16), Bloom literally rescues Stephen from the aesthetic sphere in that Bloom intervenes in the brothel to save Stephen from the consequences of excess within the aesthetic sphere:

Preparatory to anything else Mr Bloom brushed off the greater bulk of the [wood] shavings [on Stephen’s clothes] and handed Stephen the hat and ashplant and bucked him up generally in Orthodox Samaritan fashion, which he very badly needed. His (Stephen’s) mind was not exactly what you would call wandering but a bit unsteady and on his expressed desire for some beverage to drink Mr Bloom, in view of the hour it was and there being pumps of Vartry water available for their ablutions, let alone for drinking purposes, hit upon an expedient by suggesting, off the reel, the propriety of the cabman’s shelter, as it was called, hardly a stonesthrow away near Butt Bridge, where they might hit upon some drinkables in the form of a milk and soda or a mineral. (501)

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117 (McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*)
Although Molly resembles the individual who remains confined to the aesthetic sphere, her relationship to the ethical sphere is a presence by means of being an absence. It is her absence and the thought that she is about to commit adultery that in part reveals the ethical side of Bloom. Although Bloom tries to divert himself during his daylong journey through Dublin, his thoughts at various points in the journey inevitably return to Molly. For example, in reference to “Lestrygonians” (Chapter 8), Harry Blamires asserts, “It is characteristic of Joyce’s pathos and irony that Bloom’s touching, nostalgic memories…of Molly the young wife, in the home and in the street, in the kitchen and in the bedroom, should be…entangled with his recollections of the men who admired her too intimately” (The New Bloomsday Book 59). Bloom’s “entangled recollections” reflect his anxiety over Molly’s impending rendezvous with Blazes Boylan. And, in spite of this anxiety, to Molly Bloom returns (546)—both physically and spiritually—even though he knows she has committed adultery. Bloom’s complex relationship to Molly reflects the complex relationship of the single individual to of the modern world:

In his cultural background, his psychological attitudes, his material condition, Bloom can be read as an Everyman figure—l’homme moyen sensuel—whose life reflects the traumas of the modern world from which Ulysses emerged. He is also a complete man, as Joyce explained in a conversation with his Zurich friend, Frank Budgen. “I see [Bloom],” Joyce said, “from all sides, and therefore he is all-round, in the sense of your sculptor’s figure. But he is a complete man as well—a good man.” (James Joyce A to Z 19)
And, part of the “traumas of the modern world” is marital infidelity, and Bloom, the “good man”/Everyman responds with an attitude of forgiveness mixed with complex ambiguity, since he never actually says to Molly “I forgive you”: He merely returns to their home at 7 Eccles Street and to their everyday life, as if nothing happened (456-ff).

However temporary the answer might be, the ethical sphere provides as an answer to the brooding, the “inclosing reserve,” of the aesthetic sphere in that one’s personality becomes actualized in relation to others rather than falling into itself, in despair. Rather than see himself as a passive victim of Molly’s infidelity, Bloom takes it upon himself to forgive her and move on with their life together. In this sense, he resembles the individual who “chooses himself” in relation to another, in spite of the faults or shortcomings of the other.

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In much the same manner that the issue of transcendence remains ambiguous in The Great Gatsby, Ulysses also stands in an ambiguous relationship to transcendence and Kierkegaard’s concept of the religious sphere of existence. More specifically, Stephen, Dedalus finds no lasting answer to the religious doubt and radical skepticism that set upon him when he earlier refused to pray for his mother at her deathbed, and Stephen’s mother haunts him much as Hamlet’s father’s ghost haunted him. Considered from a Kierkegaardian perspective, Stephen’s mother becomes a rhetorical device for leaving open to inquiry the question of faith within the religious sphere. More specifically, the ghost of Stephen’s mother can be read as an inversion of the Christian concept of the Holy Ghost, and instead of being delivered from sin, Stephen becomes troubled by doubts over his failure to kneel and pray for her on her deathbed (7).
The vivid image of Stephen’s mother’s death first appears in Chapter 1 (“Telemachus”) in the context of Stephen brooding like Hamlet; the description appears twice within the first nine pages and is nearly identical both times:

In a dream, silently, she had come to him, her wasted body within its loose graveclothes giving off an odour of wax and rosewood, her breath, bent over him with mute secret words, a faint odor of wetted ashes. (5)

Ghostly imagery prevails on page 9, as the text repeats the sentence above, then provides adds a section that moves into Stephen’s brooding mind:

In a dream, silently, she had come to him, her wasted body within its loose graveclothes giving off an odour of wax and rosewood, her breath, bent over him with mute secret words, a faint odor of wetted ashes.

Her glazing eyes, staring out of death, to shake and bend my soul. On me alone. The ghostcandle to light her agony. Ghostly light on the tortured face. Her hoarse breath rattling in horror, while all prayed on their knees. Her eyes on me strike me down. *Liliata rutilantium te confessorum turma circumdet: iubulantium te virginum chorus excipiat*

[May the glittering throng of confessors, bright as lilies, gather about you. May the glorious choir of virgins receive you\(^\text{118}\)]

Ghoul! Chewer of Corpses\(^\text{119}\)!

No, mother! Let me be and let me live! (9)

Stephen’s being deeply troubled over his failure to pray at his mother’s deathbed places him in alignment with the individual who remains in the aesthetic sphere, but who

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\(^{118}\) Latin: A layman’s prayer as part of the Catholic “Prayers for the Dying” (Gifford 19).

\(^{119}\) “Chewer of corpses, “as in eating the body of Christ at Holy Communion.
shows an ambiguous relationship to Religiousness A. Stephen is not indifferent to Religiousness A, and he conducts himself as an individual who stands on the verge of facing the ethical either/or “guilty/not guilty,” which Judge William identifies with the concept that “in relation to God [one] is always in the wrong” (*Either/Or II*: 351) and with the leap to faith that takes shape within the ethical sphere: Judge William claims, “To be sure, the ethical individual dares to employ the expression that he is his own editor, but he is also fully aware that he is responsible, responsible for himself personally, inasmuch as what he chooses will have decisive influence upon himself, responsible to the order of things in which he lives, responsible to God” (260). In facing the ghost of his mother, Stephen stands in a situation that resembles the psychological state of the individual who holds simultaneously an ambiguous relation to both the ethical and the religious spheres, and this occurs by way of Stephen’s mother’s ghost serving as the mediating force. One could even interpret Stephen’s mother’s absence in death as a symbolic inversion of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Further, in the hallucinogenic atmosphere of the chapter “Circe” (Chapter 15), the text inverts also the historical-actual of Stephen refusing to pray for his mother, and Stephen’s mother insists on praying for Stephen:

STEPHEN

(eagerly) Tell me the word, mother, if you know now. The word known to all men.

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120 Rather than deliver Stephen from despair (*The Sickness unto Death* 15), she “haunts” him in a manner similar to the ghost of Hamlet’s father (9).
121 Joyce scholar Don Gifford asserts that the word is “love,” and that “Stephen seems to regard the question ‘What is the word known to all men?’ as a mystery (41; 474). The key to the mystery seems to be not the word itself but the word made-manifest. Only in
THE MOTHER

Who saved you the night you jumped into the train at Dalkey with Paddy Lee? Who had pity for you when you were sad among the strangers? Prayer is allpowerful. Prayer for the suffering souls in the Ursaline manual and forty days’ indulgence. Repent, Stephen.

STEPHEN

The ghoul! Hyena! 123

THE MOTHER

I pray for you in my other world. Get Dilly to make you that boiled rice every night after your brainwork. Years and years I loved you, O, my son, my firstborn, when you lay in my womb…

THE MOTHER

(with smouldering eyes) Repent! O, the fire of hell!

STEPHEN

(panting) His noncorrosive sublimate! 124 The corpsechewer! Raw head and bloody bones.

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the experience of love can the word know to all men truly be known” (Ulysses Annotated 221).
122 “Roman Catholic religious order for women devoted to the teaching of young girls and the nursing of the sick” (Gifford 517).
123 Arguably another allusion to cannibalism and the body of Christ/the body of Stephen’s mother, in that Don Gifford notes, “The hyena is accustomed to live in the sepulchers of the dead and to devour their bodies” (Ulysses Annotated 518).
124 A “sublimate” is a chemical substance formed as a result of sublimation, a chemical process by which solid is converted directly to gas without passing through the stage of being a liquid. Don Gifford claims that Stephen here refers to God’s “fires of hell, which punish sinners without consuming or destroying them” (Ulysses Annotated 518).
THE MOTHER

(his face drawing near and nearer, sending out an ashen breath)

Beware! (she raises her blackened withered right arm slowly


towards Stephen’s breast with outstretched finger) Beware God’s


hand!

(A green crab with malignant red eyes sticks deep its

grinning claws in Stephen’s heart.)


STEPHEN

(strangled with rage, his features drawn grey and old) Shite!


BLOOM

(at the window) What?


STEPHEN

Ah non, par exemple!\textsuperscript{125} The intellectual imagination! With me all

or not at all. Non servium!\textsuperscript{126}…


THE MOTHER

(wrings her hands slowly, moaning desperately) O Sacred Heart of

Jesus, have mercy on him! Save him from hell, O Divine Sacred

Heart!

\textsuperscript{125} Don Gifford notes that this is the French equivalent of the exclamation ‘Good heavens, no!’ (\textit{Ulysses Annotated} 518).

\textsuperscript{126} Don Gifford explains that this phrase is Latin and means ‘I will not serve.’ Gifford also explains, ‘The phrase is traditionally assigned to Satan at the moment of his fall, after Jeremiah 2:20: “and thou saidst, I will not serve” (\textit{Ulysses Annotated} 518).
STEPHEN

No! No! No! Break my spirit, all of you, if you can! I’ll bring you all to heel!

THE MOTHER

(in the agony of her deathrattle) Have mercy on Stephen, Lord, for my sake! Inexpressible was my anguish when expiring with love, grief and agony on Mount Calvary!

STEPHEN

Nothung!127

(He lifts his ashplant high in both hands and smashes the chandelier. Time’s livid final frame leaps, and in the following darkness, ruin of all space, shattered glass and toppling masonry.)

In the dramatic exchange above, Stephen resembles the individual who in Kierkegaardian terms stands in an ambiguous relationship to “the despair of defiance.” Paradoxically, however, Stephen also resembles the individual who faces the possibility of repentance and the leap to faith that acknowledges the ethical before leaping to the religious sphere. (For Kierkegaard, Religiousness A is a necessary condition for Religiousness B, so he believes that one must encounter the ethical before one can leap to the religious; however, neither Kierkegaard in his journal nor his narrative personas rule out the possibility that the individual might acknowledge that he is “in the wrong” in

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127 Don Gifford explains that this German word is an allusion to “Needful,” the magic sword in Wagner’s Der Ring des Nibelungen. “In Die Walkure (1854-56), the second of the four operas in the Ring, Wotan, the king of the gods, has planted it in the heart of a giant ash tree (‘ashplant’)”(Ulysses Annotated 518). Stephen evokes the phrase here to call his ashplant into action before he strikes the chandelier.
relation to God while also making the leap that makes an appeal to God’s grace and thus arrive at the religious sphere; in fact, the “Sinner’s Prayer” of Protestantism accomplishes just that, as does the Catholic “Prayer of Extreme Compunction, ”which Stephen’s mother attempts to perform on his behalf: both prayers acknowledge guilt before God and make an appeal to God’s “saving grace.”) Stephen is of a double-bladed nature in relation to defying his mother’s wish.

In Kierkegaard’s *The Sickness unto Death*, Anti-Climacus associates “the despair of defiance” with the devil:

First comes despair over the earthly or over something earthly, then despair of the eternal, over oneself. Then comes defiance, which is really despair through the aid of the eternal, the despairing misuse of the eternal within the self to will in despair to be oneself. But just because it is despair through the aid of the eternal, in a certain sense it is very close to the truth; and just because it lies very close to the truth, it is infinitely far away. The despair is that the thoroughfare of faith comes also through the aid of the eternal; through the aid of the eternal the self has the courage to lose itself in order to win itself. Here, however, it is unwilling to begin with losing itself but wills to be itself…

The devil’s despair is the most intensive despair, for the devil is sheer spirit and hence unqualified consciousness and transparency; there is no obscurity in the devil that could serve as a mitigating excuse. Therefore, his despair is the most absolute defiance. (67, 42)
In the preceding passage from “Circe,” Stephen resembles the individual who in defiance wills to be himself in that Stephen identifies himself with the devil by invoking the Latin phrase *non servium* [“I will not serve,” attributed to the devil in Jeremiah 2:20]; however, this defiance exhibit by Stephen is ironically undercut by Stephen’s consciousness actually being the force behind him wrestling with the issue of submitting to God’s grace. Thus, Stephen behaves not as one who defies God, but as one who in frustration leaves the issue unresolved and who thus remains haunted by it.

Johannes Climacus claims, “Christianity…requires that the individual should venture all [in passion]. This is something that a pagan can do; he may, for example, venture everything on an immortality’s perhaps. But Christianity also requires that the individual risk his thought, venturing to believe against the understanding (the dialectical)” (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript* 384). One could argue that when Stephen in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* vows to “fly by the net [of] religion” (252), this includes only his concept of Religiousness A,128 which from a Kierkegaardian perspective would amount to believing that there is no ultimate answer in the “religion of immanence,”129 but this would not mean that an individual in Stephen’s position would not be able to make the leap to “believe against the understanding” (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript* 384). Stephen’s claiming in a conversation with Haines to be

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128 Kierkegaard believes that because Religiousness B originates with God and moves toward the individual who makes the leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere, it is paradoxical and one cannot arrive there by way of “the dialectic” of reason (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript* 493-ff).

129 Johannes Climacus claims that as immanent religion, “Religiousness A is not the specifically Christian religiousness” (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript* 493).
skeptical about his own skepticism\(^{130}\) would leave open the matter of there possibly being something available for Stephen in terms “paradoxical religion” or Religiousness B, which Johannes Climacus calls “Christianity proper” (493). As Julia Watkin explains in summarizing Johannes Climacus’ discourse in *Philosophical Fragments*, “Where Christianity is concerned, the individual is like a blind person, needing the restoration of sight. The individual had the condition of seeing initially but is to blame for the loss of sight. The individual in Christianity thus needs the God and Savior to provide the condition for leaning truth, including the truth that the individual is in untruth (i.e., sin)” (*Historical Dictionary of Kierkegaard’s Philosophy* 194). Rather than admit to guilt before God and appeal to the savior as his mother’s hallucinatory image urges him to do, Stephen smashes the chandalier with his ashplant (walking stick); thus, Stephen’s mother’s prayer has no effect beyond reminding Stephen that the truest thing he has ever known is “a mother’s love.”\(^{131}\) Stephen stands in an ambiguous relation to the “Absolute Paradox,” since his mother’s words in the hallucination end by her merging personalities with Christ on the cross, as she claims “Inexpressible was my anguish when expiring with love, grief and agony on Mount Calvary” (475). Stephen has known earthly love in

\(^{130}\) When Haines asks Stephen if he believes in god, he expresses his skeptical dimension and, with self-effacing irony, refers to himself as “a horrible example of free thought” who is the “servant of two masters, English and Italian” (a “crazy queen” and the Pope) (17). Addressing Stephen’s tendency to be skeptical of his own skepticism, Buck Mulligan jokes that Stephen is of a “jesuit strain” (rigorous in faith), but that the strain was “injected the wrong way” (7).

\(^{131}\) In Chapter 1 (“Telemachus”), Stephen associates the image of his dying mother with thoughts of how her love was the only “true” thing he had known: Ugly and futile: lean and thick and a stain of ink, a snail’s bed. Yet someone had loved him, borne him in her arms and heart. But for her the race of the world would have trampled him underfoot, a squashed boneless snail. She had loved his weak watery blood drained from her own. Was that then real? The only true thing in life?” (23)
his mother’s compassion but makes no appeal to God’s saving grace, though that is what she wishes for Stephen.

In *Ulysses*, the brilliant use of irony and indirect communication takes on the form of “Joyce’s voices.” Like Kierkegaard in his pseudonymous works, in *Ulysses*, James Joyce makes use of multiple voices and does so within a complex psychological labyrinth of characters that reflect the complexities of human experience. The juxtaposition of multiple voices, the contradictory nature of the voices, the text interrogating itself in different voices—all within a day’s journey through Dublin—form a metaphor for the human quest for “Truth” and for freedom in a world of increasing chaos, superficiality, and potential confusion. Although written over eighty-five years ago, James Joyce’s *Ulysses* speaks in voices that have sounded beyond its particular time and place—in voices that still speak to us now and will likely speak for generations to come.

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132 A term coined by Hugh Kenner and the title of his the groundbreaking book on Joyce’s paradigm-shifting contribution to narrative voice and fiction.
CHAPTER 6

APPLYING THE THREE SPHERES TO SCHOLARSHIP AND PEDAGOGY:

IMPLICATIONS AND

RAMIFICATIONS OF THE STUDY

In the four illustrative close readings, I have attempted to demonstrate Kierkegaard’s concept of the three spheres of existence. I will proceed now to implications/ramifications of my study by offering a point of view on how one might apply Kierkegaard’s theory of the three spheres of existence to scholarship and pedagogy. More specifically, in the conclusion of my study, I will suggest how applying Kierkegaard’s theory might prove valuable to scholarship and pedagogy.

Scholarship-Pedagogy and Kierkegaard’s Aesthetic Sphere

In the aesthetic sphere of scholarship, criticism, and pedagogy, four distinct possibilities arise:

* The Scholarship of Self-Interest
* The Scholarship of “Proteus”—the scholarship of fear and self-doubt
* The Scholarship of Arbitrariness and Ethical Indifference
* The Scholarship of Abstract Detachment
Buck Mulligan’s irreverent display of his knowledge of Latin and the Catholic Mass could serve as a metaphor for the scholarship of self-interest (Ulysses 3).

Mulligan’s mockery of the Catholic Mass merely serves self-interest and ego desire in that he knows that it will annoy Stephen Dedalus and will thus put Mulligan in a position of advantage as the “usurper” (19) of Stephen’s thoughts with regard to Stephen’s dead mother (5) and Stephen’s uneasy relationship with the Catholic faith. In the same way Buck Mulligan’s relationship to Stephen Dedalus is shaped by a self-centered will to control and manipulate, the scholarship of self-interest is scholarship driven by ego desire and by a self-centered wish to be in control and to receive praise from one’s peers.

Although ego-related issues can arguably never be eliminated from one’s approach to scholarship, criticism, and pedagogy, the “controlling spirit” of ego-driven scholarship must be overcome sufficiently in order for one to operate in either the ethical sphere or the religious sphere. One ought ideally to strive to operate within a sphere that qualifies one’s ego desires rather than one that remains dominated ego desires. For example, striving to challenge stereotypical views of the student-teacher relationship would offer more possibilities than would assuming a role that sees the teacher as being a dispenser of information. “For many of us, ‘education’ has come to mean a scramble for information, which leads to grades, which lead to a diploma, which leads to a job” (Palmer 1). This “objectified,” stereotypical view of education is limited and is the product of the scholarship of self-interest. Education within the ethical and religious spheres would challenge such stereotypical notions; education limited by ego desire associated with the

133 Because he is skeptical even to the point of questioning his own skepticism, Stephen Dedalus does not grant his mother’s dying wish that he kneel and pray with her (Ulysses 5).
aesthetic sphere would not. A leap to faith that takes shape within the ethical sphere of scholarship would arguably imply one striving to overcome limitations imposed by the scholarship of self-interest that might occur within the aesthetic sphere. In the same sense that Eugene Henderson of _Henderson the Rain King_ strives to overcome his ego-driven notion of Self in order to move more creatively toward life, to realize Self within the scholarly world and to move beyond the cage of the aesthetic sphere, one ought ideally to strive to overcome limitations imposed—either consciously or unconsciously—by ego desire.

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The scholarship of “Proteus”—the shape-shifting scholarship of fear and self-doubt and the ugly sibling of the scholarship of self-interest—is my term for scholarship that arises also from ego desire but is further limited by pathological nature of its motivation. Like Proteus—and the voices within Chapter 3 of _Ulysses_—who cannot assume a constant form and must thus continually change to adapt to the occasion at-hand, the scholarship of fear and self-doubt is driven by external factors that seem to be beyond the individual’s control. For example, a lack of self-confidence might lead graduate students and other fledgling scholars to mimic ideas of thinkers who are considered significant in contemporary scholarship. Rather than risk looking foolish by interrogating challenging or dubious assertions by professors or other authority figures, students might shape themselves in thoughtless conformity to ideas with which they have not fully engaged. Driven by fear and self-doubt, students might exaggerate the power that a professor or other noteworthy figure wields over them. The professor herself would likely remain unaware of this—at least until the compromised quality of the
student’s work made it apparent that something was amiss. Exposure of the limitations of one sphere of existence might result in a comical or tragic collision of values and motives associated with one or more of the other spheres of existence. In this case, the student’s fear and self-doubt might give rise to a comical relationship to the ethical sphere with its commitment to “duty” and “responsibility.” (A true sense of duty and responsibility never arises from fear and self-doubt but from a healthy sense of one’s place in relation to others and society, and from the courage to embrace that place.) If the student or fledgling scholar in question were to recognize that this fear and self-doubt might create a comical relationship between the actual and the possible, she or he might thus make to leap of faith toward realizing a scholarship that occurs primarily within the ethical sphere. Otherwise, he or she might be destined to follow a scholarly path characterized primarily by conformity. Thus, the concept of the scholarship of fear and self-doubt implies a culpable ignorance: this culpable ignorance involves the individual being ignorant of the impact that fear and self-doubt might exert upon her scholarship, criticism, and pedagogy. Overcoming the ignorance would improve the quality of workmanship of her scholarship in that it would be less likely to be limited by issues related to personal psychology and ego development. Changing oneself continually in thoughtless conformity to “the dog of the day” is a different matter from addressing currently relevant trends within one’s discipline. In the terminology of Paul Tillich, scholarship that might be driven by fear and self-doubt would arguably be more likely to manifests itself as a lack of “the courage to be as a part” (The Courage to Be 90-ff). Issues of fear and poor self-esteem might ultimately overwhelm one’s ability to contribute meaningfully to the discourse community. Scholarship confined to the
aesthetic sphere might thus tend to limit possibility for both the individual and discourse community.

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The scholarship of arbitrariness and ethical indifference is my term for another form of learning that—like the scholarship of Proteus—might also arise from both fear and self-interest taking shape from within the aesthetic sphere. Scholars, critics, and teachers who might fall prey to this particular mode of scholarship, criticism, and pedagogy would be those who might engage in arbitrariness and indifference not because of “situational ethics,” but because of a misplaced notion of Self in the world. They might be tempted to mistake ego desire for the world-itself. If in scholarship one were to move from a perspective that either consciously or unconsciously privileges ego desires over the broader context of the relationships student-teacher/scholar-discourse community, it might amount to engaging in scholarship that eventually nullifies itself. This would occur in the same sense that a child’s view of the ethical ideally retreats eventually from “wishful thinking” and does so in direct proportion to her or his growing concept of the world and its social constraints. Children develop a sense of Self that starts from immediacy and that in healthy development ideally grows into a more differentiated, less ego-driven view of both Self and other. The “immediate, erotic stage” of the aesthetic sphere comes naturally to the child, but, to realize their potential, scholars might strive to grow beyond the ego-driven desire to be “children of immediacy.” As myopic ideologies driving the commercial aspects of education continue to be broadcast
over the popular media, the temptation to fall into this ego-driven mode of scholarship arguably increases: It is arguably easier to rationalize seeing education primarily in terms of one’s immediate desires when one’s students are encouraged so often by popular “objectivized” notions of education to do the same. However, two wrongs do not make a right, and to submit oneself in resignation to the prevailing “banking concept of education” might ultimately mean that the individual risks engaging in ego-driven scholarship that might betray his or her vocation. In much the same sense that Gatsby mistakes his romanticized, child-like view of Daisy for the world-itself and thus ends up being betrayed by his own vision, if scholars, critics, and teachers were to mistake ego desire for the world-itself, they might risk leading a professional life that would betray itself when it collided awkwardly with the ethical sphere of existence.

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The present study uses the term the scholarship of abstract detachment for disconnected scholarship that fails to consider the concrete and actual conditions of the matter at-hand. Scholarship of this type might resemble what Paulo Freire refers to as the “banking concept of education,” which results in an abstract, disconnected concept of education.

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134 (It is increasingly common for colleges and universities to “market” themselves on television, radio, and the Internet by implying or stating directly “come to our school so that you can increase your income and thus have your heart’s desires.” Though an increase in income might be one of the fruits of education, it is by no means the most valuable one, and to see it as such is a betrayal of both wisdom and one’s possibilities in life.)

135 See also Nicolas Berdyaev’s *Slavery and Freedom*, in which he discusses from a Kierkegaardian/Kantian perspective objectification of knowledge as a possible aspect of self-enslavement (New York: Scribner’s, 1944: 73-ff).

136 Chapter 2 of Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* exposes this increasingly popular view that the teacher’s “task is to ‘fill’ the students with the contents of his narration—contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity.”
education in which the teacher’s “words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity” (http://www.webster.edu/~corbetre/philosophy/education/freire/freire-2.html). Setting on a pedestal the abstract ideal of education and subsequently viewing students as objects to be filled with a fixed portion of knowledge presented by an absolute authority (the teacher) might subordinate the individual student to an abstract ideal, and might either overlook or deny the importance of the individual’s experience and interpretation.

Within the context of Kierkegaard’s idea that “thought does not posses reality by way of a presupposition” (The Concept of Anxiety 11), if scholarship and pedagogy were to privilege the ideal and abstract at the expense of the actual, it might also unwittingly confine itself to the aesthetic sphere. In a similar way, criticism and scholarship that might hold up an abstract ideal and then unwittingly create a “false dilemma” by judging the world for not realizing this ideal would run the risk of remaining confined to the aesthetic sphere. To the extent that these “ideals” might be merely a projection of a desire for power and control, this form of criticism and scholarship might tend to remain confined to the aesthetic sphere. For example, a scholar who might judge Hemingway or Jake Barnes for not being a twenty-first century feminist (as he imagines one to be) or a socially progressive thinker (as he imagines one to be) might, because of ideological bias, make little contribution toward serious criticism and scholarship. In its most limited form, such criticism might become merely a projection of desire for a particular form of social change as an abstract ideal and would thus remain confined to the aesthetic sphere—the sphere where abstract reflection and one’s immediate desires might

137 The “ideal” never contains the “actual” in all its ambiguity.
ultimately conflict with a potential for concrete actualization of personality. Although in some contexts it might be important to the scholarly community to foreground Hemingway’s tendencies toward misogyny or to challenge his portrayal of certain aspects of society, for a scholar to merely judge Hemingway for not reaffirming her position on feminism or social theory would risk falling into a solipsism similar to that of the personality who remains confined to the aesthetic sphere and thus thinks of ideas primarily in terms of her immediate desires—in terms of what might benefit her.

Scholarship-Pedagogy and Kierkegaard’s Ethical Sphere

In the ethical sphere of scholarship, criticism, and pedagogy, I propose that three distinct possibilities might arise:

- **Scholarship as Vocation—or “Calling”**
- **Scholarship as Self-Examination**
- **Scholarship as Service to Others**

In contrast to Nick Carraway, who chooses his occupation because “everyone [he] knew was in the bond business,” scholarship as vocation would ideally move from the belief that one might find a place in this world that suits one’s character and one’s talents and that this place might include noble activity that benefits both other individuals and society. In the same sense that Eugene Henderson moves closer to Self by deciding to become a doctor and thus reaching out towards others, if the scholar were to see her scholarship, criticism, and pedagogy as a “calling,” this might open a realm of possibility not available to the scholar who was confined to the aesthetic sphere. Scholarship as

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138 *The Great Gatsby*, page 7
139 *Henderson the Rain King*, pages 284-85
vocation might choose to teach not *in reaction to* circumstances but *in spite of* circumstances. “Courage as an element of faith is daring self-affirmation of one’s own being in spite of the powers of ‘nonbeing’ that are the heritage of everything finite” (Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* 17). Scholarship as vocation would ideally strive to see itself as altering circumstances into something they might not otherwise be without the creative input of the parties involved; scholarship as vocation might thus choose consciously to express itself within the context of striving to benefit fully from the student-teacher dialectic. Scholarship as vocation might thus be more likely to *act upon* rather than *in reaction to* circumstances. Within the context of scholarship as vocation, altering for the better the conditions within which one learns-teaches might thus becomes a predominate concern. Being-toward-an-aim might thus imply making a difference for other individuals. Taking it upon oneself to better the place in which one learns-teaches might thus become the form in which “concrete actualization of Self” could occur within this potential manifestation of the ethical sphere of scholarship.

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In a manner similar to the way in which Pedro Romero holds himself accountable to the idea that constant improvement is important (*The Sun Also Rises* 171), scholarship as self-examination might hold itself accountable to the idea that constant self-improvement is valuable to enhancing the experience of teaching and scholarship. Further, like Pedro Romero, scholarship as self-examination might strive to avoid looking for approval from others as a measure of success (172). Rather, scholarship as self-examination might see the journey toward excellence as the goal and might recognize the importance of being in the moment in relation to others and one’s vocation. In this sense,
scholarship as self-examination might also strive to realize “concrete actualization of Self in relation to others” as is characteristic of Kierkegaard’s concept of the ethical sphere. Self-discipline and self-examination might thus become internalized in the form of existential experience; the scholar who would strive to progress within this realm might eventually move from apprentice to journeyman by virtue of existential experience. Rather than see the rules and conventions of the scholarly domain as being an “evil outside other” (Kristeva) or an inconvenience, scholarship as self-examination might see them as an occasion for either self-improvement or for avoiding the possibility of living in bondage to bureaucratic procedure. In contrast to scholarship that might take shape within the aesthetic sphere where authority might be seen as a loss of freedom and a possible source of “punishment and limitations,” scholarship as self-examination might see authority as if it were a necessary yet alterable “reality,” one in need of constant interrogation and revision to suit the exigencies of the moment. Excellence, then, might become the goal, rather than obligation to avoid punishment for falling short of an ideal or obligation to gain approval from others by standing out from the crowd.

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In the sense that for Kierkegaard the ethical sphere of existence takes the form of a “concrete actualization of self in relation to others,” scholarship as service to others might seem to be the most obvious form of scholarship within the ethical sphere. Even so, service to others might often get overlooked, in that ideologies that shape academic life and scholarship might sometimes run counter to this intuitively obvious “mission.” Specifically, ideologies that inform the administrative and socio-political quest for

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absolute standards and measures of academic and professional performance might unwittingly run counter to scholarship as service to others. As Kierkegaard’s disciple Nicolas Berdyaev observes, “The objectivization of Sobornost [spiritual communality], the transference of it to social institutions, has always meant slavery. The spell and slavery of collectivism is nothing else than the transference of spiritual communality, fellowship, universality, from subject to object, and the objectification either of separate functions of human life or of human life as a whole” (Slavery and Freedom 201-02).

Objectifying sometimes-subjective matters such as the quality of an individual’s scholarship and translating them to yearly-compiled numbers on a bell curve might, in the long run, prove contrary to scholarship as service to others in that it might perpetuate an illusion that one could actually count high enough to arrive at truth. Scholarship performed as service to others might ideally mean that individuals were accepted as individual personalities with inherent dignity and with individual idiosyncrasies: Ideally, individuals—including their desire to strive toward excellence—might be held in higher regard than numbers on a bell curve. Ideally, education as service to others might strive to recognize more fully that human behavior is ultimately too complex and ambiguous to be objectified and assigned to clearly defined points on a bell curve. The community of scholars might thus recognize that it is impossible to quantify quality. Scholarship as service to others might thus involve a community of individuals who work in unison to arrive at a broader understanding of both their individual potential as scholars and their contribution to the broader conversation and to the task at-hand. The environment of scholarship as service to others might thus offer a more dynamic experience and create broader possibilities that might not be available not available to “objectivized”
scholarship. In the same sense that Leopold Bloom, the “good man,”\textsuperscript{141} strives to accept others on equal terms, so scholarship as service to others might enable scholars to strive to better understand both individual personalities and the situations in which these personalities operate.

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Teaching/Learning and Kierkegaard’s Religious Sphere

In scholarship, criticism, and pedagogy in terms of the religious sphere, I propose three distinct possibilities that might arise for the Christian\textsuperscript{142} teacher-student:

- Teaching/Learning as Open-Ended inquiry
- Teaching/Learning as “Courage to Be as Oneself”
- Teaching/Learning as “Courage to Be as a Part”

As a mode of scholarship in the same context as scholarship as service to others, teaching/learning as open-ended inquiry might strive toward equality and understanding. Christian scholars who might ideally realize this mode of teaching within the Quaker concept of community, with the importance that the Quaker approach places on meeting as single individuals striving to arrive at “truth” before God. As Parker J. Palmer asserts in the essay “Meeting for Learning: Education in a Quaker Context,” There are too many educational institutions where truth is not the point! Perhaps the image of a ‘meeting for

\textsuperscript{141} “I see [Bloom],” Joyce said, “from all sides, and therefore he is all-round, in the sense of your sculptor’s figure. But he is a complete man as well—a good man” (Fargnoli 19).

\textsuperscript{142} Although these modes of teaching-learning might be imitated in a secular sense (as Parker J. Palmer proposes), in terms of Kierkegaard’s ultimate concern of what it means to be a Christian in Christendom, the religious sphere includes “Religiousness B” and “second ethics,” and both of these distinctions are for Kierkegaard unique to the Christian experience in that they are realized through God’s grace in the act of the Incarnation (Watkin 76-79).
learning’ will remind us of forgotten depths in the educational process, just as the silent meeting for worship once stood as a rebuke to ways of worship which put the human before the divine” (Palmer). In what Kierkegaard would arguably consider to be scholarship confined to the aesthetic sphere, “when we anticipate and predict one another’s responses, we kill off the novelty which infuses authentic education” (Palmer). However, in scholarship as open-ended inquiry, “the image of meeting urges us to encounter each other as strangers whenever we meet. For we are strangers to each other and to ourselves—unable to reveal at any moment all that we hold within. When we meet to learn with the openness which we bring to a stranger, teaching and learning are enriched” (Palmer). In the sense that Leopold Bloom strives to meet others with an open mind as he makes the journey through Dublin, in scholarship as open-ended inquiry the teacher-learner might ideally be open to revelation (the inner light) but would also accept that “learning happens between persons and not simply within the learner” (Palmer). The inquiry for such a group of teachers-learners would occur in dialogue, and the dialogue would ideally develop from within a context of equality and thus presumes that “among members of the meeting there is equal opportunity for light or insight” (Palmer).

143 Though as a Jew he is an outsider at Paddy Dignam’s Catholic funeral, Bloom meets the occasion with an open mind and even ponders the significance of the symbolism of the funeral (Ulysses 96).
Unlike the "banking concept of education," teaching-learning as open-ended inquiry might strive to move beyond objectifying knowledge and to meet others in a way that honors Christian community and up-building (1 Corinthians 13):

The encounter between persons in a meeting for learning is deepened and disciplined by a “third party” to the dialogue—whether that be an idea, a text, some data, or a concrete experience. This “third thing” mediates the relation between selves. It saves the dialogue from becoming a simple sharing of subjectivities. The common text—a poem, for example—has an irreducible reality of its own. And this reality is capable of breaking through the closure and deadlock [that] can sometimes occur in a simple dialogue. It enables the participants to speak and to listen to something outside of themselves. (Palmer)

The “third party” is a term secularized by Palmer to describe truth that emerges via a paradigm shift through open-minded dialogue, but ideally for the Christian teacher-learner this “third party” would be edification and wisdom brought about by the Holy Spirit. Teaching/learning as open-ended inquiry might also ideally require a willingness to face vulnerability and to place trust in the community of learners. “One of the basic disciplines of an experience-based meeting for learning is to claim only what one knows, and no more [not to assign validity to an idea merely because it came from a reputable

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144 Paulo Freire’s term for knowledge and education perceived as a collection of facts with little or no existential connection to the community of learners (Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Chapter 2).

145 The Quaker concept of the third party in dialogue during a meeting refers to the “inward light” (or revelation) from God’s Holy Spirit and the subsequent sharing of this revelation in the meeting. The other members, believe the Quakers, would ideally receive confirmation in their spirits (a feeling of peace/insight that also had its source in the Holy Spirit).
source, and not to in fear cover one’s ignorance on a subject by creating a red herring to deflect attention away from one’s ignorance]. Think of what could be gained if we could adopt the discipline in education! The greatest gain would be the legitimate exposure of doubt and ignorance, of what whole range of questions and quandaries which motivate inquiry but which we often suppress for fear of appearing unlearned” (Palmer). Unlike the political views of Richard Dalloway, which merely reaffirm the status quo within the context of a ‘governing class spirit’ (Hussey 68), teaching/learning as open-ended inquiry might be willing to accept that a journey toward “Truth” and wisdom might involve deep personal crisis and a subsequent change in one’s perspective on life. Ideally, the community of teachers-learners ought to be willing to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). In the context of Kierkegaard’s “Christomorphic poetics” (Rasmussen 83-ff), God’s Incarnation as Jesus the Christ becomes the qualifying event in what it means to be a Christian in Christendom; the person who participates in Religiousness B and second ethics can, by God’s grace, act within God’s love: “Just as Christ’s entrance into the world of spirit is what creation is in the physical world—so also the Holy Spirit is the sustenance in the world of the spirit, i.e., the concept of sustenance” (Journals and Papers, Volume 1: 127). Kierkegaard alludes here to the Gospel of John in which Jesus tells his disciples first that He is the “true vine” (John 15:1) then later in the same

146 In Ephesians Chapter 4, the Apostle Paul encourages the beloved community to grow together in the common bond that is their relationship to Christ: “And these were [Christ’s] gifts: some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip God’s people for work in his service, to the building up of the body of Christ. So shall we all at last attain to the unity inherent in our faith and our knowledge of the Son of God—to mature manhood measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ. And we are no longer to be children, tossed by the waves and whirled about by every gust of teaching…No, let us speak the truth in love; so shall we fully grow up into Christ. He is the head, and on him the whole body depends” (Ephesians 4:7-16).
discourse tells them that he “will send an Advocate—the Spirit of truth” (John 15:26).

For the Christian teacher-learner, the sustenance to which Kierkegaard refers implies that God’s love might be both the prototype and the source of strength by which this prototype might be imitated.

Arguably, the most important aspect of teaching/learning as open-ended inquiry for the learner-teacher might occur in the phenomenon of the group in a bond of God’s Love experiencing a qualitative shift: Since meeting ideally occurs within a context of equality, the roles of teacher and student ought thus to become interchangeable. In teaching-learning as open-ended inquiry,147 “the roles of teacher and student [would] continually move from one person to another, and it [would] be impossible at any moment to anticipate who will be teacher next” (Palmer). As Kierkegaard notes with regard to Christ as the prototype [protokos] for the believer, “All true effort to help begins with self-humiliation; the helper must first humble himself under him he would help, and therewith must understand that to help does not mean to be a sovereign but to be a servant, that to help does not mean to be ambitious but to be patient, that to help means to endure for the time being the imputation that one is in the wrong and does not understand what the other understands” (The Point of View for My Work as an Author 27-28).

If emphasis were placed on meeting in love, this might also include a paradigm shift that would move beyond the teacher or student being reduced to being a member of a quasi-organized herd. In fact,

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147 The term is used here in a way that is interchangeable with the Quaker concept of “meeting for learning.”
the teacher will...have expert resources on the subject. The question is how to nurture and encourage the expertise of others. The most difficult task in teaching is to give away what you have, without making students feel like the resentful recipients of welfare. And the teacher must also be expert in helping to build a group which can be trusted by its members. In this kind of education, the role of the teacher gains in subtlety and significance what it loses in visibility. (Palmer)

The aspect that might most clearly qualify scholarship as open-ended inquiry as scholarship that occurs within the religious sphere of existence and the context of Religiousness Band second ethics might be that the individual who might engage meaningfully in scholarship as open-ended inquiry would strive to find her “true” self by denying herself (Matthew 10:39). In doing so, she might thus move existentially in the direction of “Truth” and wisdom. The community of scholars might thus replicate the “beloved community” of the Gospels and the teachings of the Apostle Paul, who encouraged individuals within the beloved community to avoid being judgmental and to grow spiritually by “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15).

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The last two modes of scholarship to be proposed within the context of learning-teaching within the religious sphere in this study, teaching/learning as “courage to be as oneself” and teaching/learning as “courage to be as a part,” are derived from Kierkegaard’s disciple Paul Tillich’s rendering of concepts either explicit or implicit to Kierkegaard’s thought. These concepts might take shape within the religious sphere to

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148 (Tillich, *The Courage to Be* 113-ff)
149 (*The Courage to Be* 86-ff)
the extent that they also occur within the broader context of grace, which Tillich calls “the courage to accept acceptance.”150 Both the courage to be as a part and the courage to be as oneself encounter limitations if they are not qualified within the context of the courage to accept that one is accepted by God. The courage to be as oneself finds its theological correlative in the view that “every human soul has an infinite value” (*The Courage to Be* 87). The individual, in faith, affirms self as “courage to be, in spite of the threat of nonbeing” (89) by making a leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere. The self however, is never a self apart from its world and thus might ideally strive toward a balance of the courage to be as oneself and the courage to be as a part:

…The self is self only because it has a world, a structured universe, to which it belongs and from which it is separated at the same time. Self and world are correlated, and so are individualization and participation. For this is just what participation means: being a part of something from which one is, at the same time, separated…The identity of participation is an identity in the power of being. In this sense the power of being of the individual self is partly identical with the power of being of his world, and conversely (*The Courage to Be* 87-88, 89).

Eugene Henderson faces this paradox during his journey into the symbolic underworld, as he imitates the lioness in the lion’s den (*Henderson the Rain King* 262-ff). The paradox of self and world finds its deepest expression after the leap to faith that takes shape in the religious sphere where “courage to accept acceptance” can occur:

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150 (*The Courage to Be* 155-ff)
Courage [to be] is the self-affirmation of being in spite of the fact of nonbeing. It is the act of the individual self in taking the anxiety of nonbeing upon itself by affirming itself either as part of an embracing whole or in its individual selfhood. Courage always includes a risk, it is always threatened by nonbeing, whether the risk of losing oneself within the whole of things or of losing one’s world in an empty self-relatedness. Courage needs the power of being, a power transcending the nonbeing which is experienced in the anxiety of fate and death,\textsuperscript{151} which is present in the anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness,\textsuperscript{152} which is effective in the anxiety of guilt and condemnation.\textsuperscript{153} The courage which takes this threefold anxiety into itself must be rooted in a power of being that is greater than the power of oneself and the power of one’s world. (The Courage to Be 155).

By making the leap to faith that takes shape within the religious sphere, the Christian attains ‘justification through faith’ (164). “Accepting acceptance though being unacceptable is the basis for the courage of confidence” (164-65). By thus embracing one’s self and one’s place within the world, the individual might be able to create meaning in the world by acting confidently upon the conditions of the world in a way that might benefit both self and others. “Self-affirmation in spite of the anxiety of guilt and condemnation presupposes participation in something that transcends the self” (165).

\textsuperscript{151} such as that symbolized by Clarissa Dalloway identifying herself with Septimus Smith at the time of his suicide (Mrs. Dalloway 202-03)
\textsuperscript{152} such as that symbolized by the Hemingway code hero being afraid of the dark
\textsuperscript{153} such as that symbolized by Septimus Smith’s hallucinations regarding his part in the death of his close friend Evans (Mrs. Dalloway 100)
Although teaching/learning from within this context is a “high calling,” there are instances of such a calling that have exerted a strong influence upon the scholarly community. The life and teachings of Mother Theresa and the activism and pedagogy of Paulo Freire are two clear examples. Both Mother Theresa and Paulo Freire embraced life with a confidence and humility that made a difference for others. In having done so, they might serve as an inspiring example for all teachers, but for Christian learners/teachers in particular they offer the hope that one might grow into the full stature of Christ (Ephesians 4:13).

Kierkegaard implies in his thought that God is in charge of irony, and that love of all varieties and the creativeness associated with human consciousness and personality arise from freedom—and in the face of the single individual’s dread—or “anxiety” in reaction to freedom. For Kierkegaard, to be human means to be a single individual first, a member of society and the ethical sphere second, and a member of the “crowd” third—a member of the ‘crowd’ only as a consequence of the “fall of Creation.” Gatsby’s flight into a past which never really was, Hemingway’s confusing of God and Élan—life energy—and the “ghosts” crying out to be freed and escaping only

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155 For more on human personality, freedom, and creativeness, see Berdyaev’s *The Meaning of the Creative Act* (New York: Collier Books, 1962).
157 In his diary, Kierkegaard sums up nicely his mission as a satirical persona in making the claim, “’The crowd’ is essentially what I am aiming my polemical arrow at, and it was Socrates who taught me to do so. I want people to sit up and take notice, to prevent them from idling away and wasting their lives” (104).
158 In his diary, Kierkegaard claims, “’The crowd’ is essentially what I am aiming my polemical arrow at; and it was Socrates who taught me to do so. I want people to sit up and take notice, to prevent them from idling away and wasting their lives…I will call attention to the crowd of their ruination” (*The Diary of Soren Kierkegaard* 104).
momentarily from the “texts” of both Woolf and Joyce all point beyond themselves—to
another implication: These novels striving to create their way in the direction of “Truth”
implies that the leap to faith (“the courage to be”) might take the form of creative self-
expression. Scholarship, criticism, pedagogy, and literature are all a part of human
creative self-expression and might thus take shape in a meaningful way that, in faith,
overcomes “anxiety,” which arises from courageously recognizing and embracing this
freedom.

As Kierkegaard thought as early as the 1850s, this is indeed both an age of irony
and an age of despair, and arguably the best way escape the confines of that “reality”
within the academic world is for the individual to make a leap to faith to a new way of
being in scholarship and criticism. This new way of being might be one that strives to
create its way toward “Truth” in the spirit of open-ended inquiry and is thus willing to
risk being vulnerable so that it might bring into light a broadened understanding of both
self and others. The new, more individuated threads of discourse that literary
criticism/cultural studies create—in whatever forms they might take shape—might
ultimately be threads that strive to meet the shifting needs of human consciousness,
especially as this consciousness continues to become increasingly differentiated. These
more differentiated threads of discourse might also include a broader understanding of
complex multicultural influences. The artifacts of literary and cultural history take shape
as both artistic creations and tools to be appropriated by the individual who might

159 See also Kierkegaard’s essay “The Present Age.”
160 See also The New Being, Paul Tillich’s sequence of sermons delivered at Union
Theological Seminary in New York. Faith implies that one adopt a “new way of being,”
one that is conditioned be a new relationship with Being itself.
appropriate them to arrive at a broader understanding of what it means to exist: the responsibility—the stewardship—is ours. Humanism, in the traditional sense, might have died, but we live on as human beings and ought thus to continually strive toward a more differentiated view of ourselves and of the place of literature and the arts within the broader scope of existence. As we continue to re-define ourselves, Kierkegaard’s thought might prove to be only a passing phase of this increasingly differentiated view of existence and culture, but it might also become a critical part of the transition to a more differentiated view of existence. It might thus be important that learners/teachers continue to appropriate Kierkegaard’s distinctions in order to address and perhaps even surpass philosophical and theological inconsistencies in the lingering “Neo-Hegelian” threads of academic discourse. In doing so, the scholar ought ideally to exercise compassion toward others while also recognizing the limitations of scholarship, criticism, and pedagogy confined to the aesthetic sphere of existence.
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