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Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors¹

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It is thus left to the reader himself to put two and two together, if he so desires, but nothing is done to minister to a reader's indolence.
Johannes Climacus²

Anything your reader can do for himself leave to him.
Ludwig Wittgenstein³

This paper is a commentary on its two epigraphs. It is about both the reasons why and the ways in which Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein attempt to remain faithful to the injunction expressed in these epigraphs. It is therefore about why their writing comes in the shape that it does.

An academic author writing something which has the form of a conventional scholarly essay about the sorts of matters which most urgently concern either Kierkegaard or Wittgenstein is apt to be struck by some of the ways in which the literary structure of his own performance is at odds with what these authors themselves have to say concerning how such matters ought to be written about. They are difficult masters for someone embarked on the career of a university professor not to betray. No sooner does one begin than one has already failed them. As a brief and immediate demonstration of this point, in the light of my opening epigraphs, I submit the third paragraph of this paper as evidence. It is a typical example of the sort of comic misfit one finds (when

one attempts to write on either Kierkegaard or Wittgenstein) between what one is saying and how one is saying it. For, in the next paragraph, before getting under way – out of a fear that readers may lose their way in this long and complicated paper, hence out of a scholarly anxiety of having left too much for readers to do for themselves – I promptly minister to my readers' indolence and offer a pedantic overview of the contents of the paper as a whole.

The first section of this paper outlines certain strikingly parallel puzzles which arise about how to read Kierkegaard's and Wittgenstein's most famous works – puzzles about why these works assume the form they do and puzzles about how we are to understand the instructions these works furnish concerning how they are to be read. The subsequent two sections of the paper sketch how the puzzle arises within the context of each author's work. The paper then turns, first, to an examination of the philosophical aim of (the relevant portions of) Kierkegaard's authorship, and, secondly, to an examination of the method of a particular Kierkegaardian work (the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*). The paper goes on to suggest that Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* can be seen to have both the same aim (one of providing a mirror in which the reader can recognise his own confusions) and the same method (one of having the reader climb up a ladder which in the end he is to throw away) as a Kierkegaardian work. In conclusion, the paper argues that, for reasons which are internal to that aim, Wittgenstein's later writing embodies a rejection of Kierkegaard's method of philosophical authorship. We can therefore find in his later practice a significant continuity in aim along with an equally significant discontinuity in the form of the investigation through which this aim is prosecuted.

Wittgenstein is reported to have learned Danish in order to read Kierkegaard in the original⁴ and to have remarked that 'Kierkegaard was by far the most profound thinker of the last century'.⁵ One subsidiary aim of this paper is to attempt to account for this tremendous interest on Wittgenstein's part in Kierkegaard's work.⁶ This paper, along the way, marshalls the material for an argument to the effect that Kierkegaard can be seen as having substantially influenced four aspects of Wittgenstein's mature thought: (1) his conception of the intimacy of the relation between meaning and use, (2) his idea of a grammatical investigation, (3) his idea that the aim of a philosophical

work is to take the reader from a piece of disguised nonsense to a piece of undisguised nonsense, and (4) his idea that the correct expression in philosophy is the one which allows one's interlocutor to acknowledge the words offered him as expressing what he wants to say.⁷ Indeed, one advantage of seeing Wittgenstein's work against the background of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship is that it becomes clearer why no one of these four aspects of Wittgenstein's thought can be properly grasped unless it is understood in the light of its connection with the other three.

THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORSHIP IN KIERKEGAARD AND WITTGENSTEIN

In an article entitled 'Authorship and Authenticity: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein',⁸ D.Z. Phillips reflects upon the *form* of the most famous texts that Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein bequeathed to us and upon the conception of philosophical authorship that underlies them. Although he does not formulate the issue in quite the same way as I shall want to, Phillips's interest in the form of these texts involves him in an attempt to take seriously something each of these authors repeatedly insists upon – something which very few commentators on either Kierkegaard or Wittgenstein ever do take seriously (though they often pay some form of lip service to it). I have in mind the repeated insistence on the part of each of these authors that unless we come to terms with his conception of philosophical difficulty – where the pressure of this conception is reflected in the peculiar form of the author's text – we shall fail to encounter his thought. These authors seem to insist that in order for the reader to really understand what he is reading he must also understand why it assumes the form it does. If the reader approaches the text as if it were a conventional philosophical treatise then he will see in the text what one finds in such treatises: a series of arguments in support of particular philosophical doctrines. But both these authors claim not to be putting forward doctrines but rather to be engaging in a particular sort of *activity*. If they are to be taken at their word, therefore, it would seem that it is only in grasping why their texts have the particular shape that they do that we grasp what sort of enterprise it is which they take themselves to be engaged in.⁹ It is thus that we grasp what philosophy, as they practise it, is.

It is striking how the interpretive puzzles surrounding the central works of these two authors seem to closely parallel one another. Yet, before turning to these puzzles themselves, it is worth remarking that there are good reasons why the warnings issued by these authors about how to read (and therefore how not to read) their work have so often been either neglected or dismissed. These reasons can be sorted into three broad categories.

First, there is the very general problem: how is one to take seriously the idea that an appreciation of the form of a philosophical work is essential to an understanding of its teaching? This problem arises in a number of ways. Can one not understand isolated passages (or even large parts) of one of these works without understanding the whole of the work, and without having the slightest clue as to why the whole assumes the peculiar form it does? Is it not possible to understand an isolated passage from one of these works without calling upon an understanding of the work as a whole? Aside from this question, there are questions about how important it is to have a story about the status of the authorial voice. Most commentators on Kierkegaard (if they so much as bother to address the question) have no clear account of how we are to understand the relation between Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms, but they do not take this to affect in any way their ability to offer a reliable exposition of passages put forward in the voice of one of the pseudonymous authors (and, indeed, in most cases they take themselves to be offering thereby an exposition of Kierkegaard's own teaching). Finally, there is the question of how much we should worry about the conception of the form of their work with which these authors themselves operate. Many commentators on either Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* or *Investigations* feel that the instructions these works provide concerning how the work is to be read are at best inaccurate and at worst deeply confused; but these commentators do not take a dismissal of these instructions on their part to hamper in any way their ability to understand the specific doctrines which they claim to find in these works.

Secondly, there is the problem that even if one does not wish to dismiss these instructions, it is not clear how to follow them. Kierkegaard says that not one single word of the pseudonymous authorship is to be ascribed to him.¹⁰ To read one of these works as if he were its author (in anything other than the narrowest legal sense of the word¹¹) is to be involved in a fundamental

misunderstanding of the work. But how else are we to read one of his works? To whom are we to ascribe the thoughts expressed in such a book? And why does he bother to write a book – and why should we bother to read it – if it is his intention, in the end, to revoke it?¹² Wittgenstein concludes the first of his books not only with the Kierkegaardian flourish of revoking the work, but by further declaring everything within the body of the work to be nonsense. But the work does not seem to consist of nothing but nonsense (at least not mere nonsense); it seems to put forth a doctrine which we can understand. Yet the author claims to eschew doctrine in favour of a certain sort of activity.¹³ He describes this activity as one of elucidation¹⁴ and (in the penultimate section of the work) we are told that his sentences are elucidatory only in so far as they enable us eventually to recognise them as nonsensical.¹⁵ But if the final aim is to unveil the entire work as a tissue of nonsense, then we are again left with the problem (even if we are prepared to accept such an account of his aim): how is such a tissue of nonsense supposed to confer enlightenment upon its reader and why has the author bothered to compose it? In his later book, Wittgenstein claims to not be putting forward theses,¹⁶ but to be showing us how to pass from latent nonsense to patent nonsense.¹⁷ Again, it has seemed to many commentators that in saying these things Wittgenstein simply misdescribes his own practice. Others have thought that he thereby contradicts himself (by having advanced a thesis about the impossibility of philosophical theses). And the problem recurs here as well that, even for those who wish to take such remarks to heart, it is by no means clear how we are to go about giving an account of Wittgenstein's later practice that is simultaneously philosophically compelling and consistent with his own descriptions of it.

Thirdly, there is the problem that, when we do try to give an account of one of these texts that places great weight on the text's own conception of what is distinctive about its procedures, this seems to immediately open the work up to further objections. Phillips begins his article by considering such an objection – one which arises in a strikingly similar manner with respect to each of these authors. His treatment of this objection offers a nice way into a consideration of how the problem of authorship unfolds in a parallel manner in the work of Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein. The objection might be summarised in its most general form as

an accusation of *copping out*. The charge, as Phillips first presents it, seems most naturally construed (as the title of his article suggests) as one of a lapse of 'authenticity'. The worry is that there is a tension between what the work preaches and what the author practises. More precisely, the worry is that the form of philosophical authorship to which each of these thinkers claims to adhere debars him from staking himself in ways in which his conception of philosophy (or religion) would seem to call for. We shall see that this worry, at least as it is originally formulated, rests on a misunderstanding. In each case, however, we will find that behind this worry about the authenticity of the author lies a deeper and more fruitful worry: how are we to understand the apparent *abdication of authorship* in these works – the insistence within each of these works that the author puts forward no philosophical views of his own?

THE PROBLEM OF AESTHETICISM IN KIERKEGAARD

The initial worry in the context of Kierkegaard's work, as Phillips develops it, specifically takes the form of a charge of aestheticism. Phillips asks: 'If Kierkegaard, in his pseudonymous works, shows us a variety of perspectives, what is his *own* relation to them?'¹⁸ The worry is that the author lacks the requisite relation; he lacks a perspective that is genuinely his own. He simply flits about from one perspective to another, occupying them in turns. Yet such flitting about appears to be in tension with what his own works seem to teach about the religious life: namely, that it requires resoluteness and decisiveness. Phillips cites Josiah Thompson as a commentator who develops this charge at length.¹⁹ Phillips summarises Thompson's accusation as follows:

In depicting aesthetic, ethical, and religious perspectives in his pseudonymous works, Kierkegaard is simply playing with possibilities. . . . The fact that Kierkegaard is the single author [of all the pseudonymous works] does not imply any single-mindedness in him. On the contrary, the pseudonyms testify to the activity of a playful aesthete, withdrawn from the actualities of life, which is all philosophy can be once its metaphysical pretensions have been put aside.²⁰

Thompson's picture of what aestheticism comes to is drawn primarily from a single one of the pseudonymous works. Before elaborating this criticism, therefore, it might be helpful to summarise how the topic of aestheticism occurs within that work. The pseudonymous author of volume 1 of *Either/Or* is identified (elsewhere in Kierkegaard's work) as an aesthete, and through our participation as readers of this work we are led to see the world through the eyes of an aesthete. Thus the work portrays a character who is an aesthete by providing the reader with a view of such a life from the inside. The implied author of the work is someone whose life consists in playing with possibilities: imaginatively taking up perspectives, assuming the part of different characters and thereby temporarily occupying the roles of a variety of personae, and under such pretences vicariously or tentatively entering into experiences or relationships in order to be able to savour certain pleasures, emotions or moods. The aesthete's life is contrasted, in Volume 2 of *Either/Or*, with that of an ethical individual. In our language, we might say that the defining feature of the ethical individual – that which he possesses and the aesthete lacks – is *character*. For the aesthete's life, as depicted, is devoid of all the exercises through which character is fashioned: the development of intimate relationships and friendships, the elaboration of deeply felt convictions, the pursuit of enduring purposes or goals, a capacity to leave himself vulnerable to disappointment – in short, any willingness or ability to bind himself to a commitment (made either to himself or to others). Kierkegaard elsewhere prefers to put the point more strongly than simply to say that what the aesthete lacks is a fully developed character. He suggests that there is a sense in which what the thoroughgoing aesthete lacks is a *self*. Such a vicariously lived existence consists in a systematic evasion of those moments through which a self is articulated – through which, as Kierkegaard puts it, one *becomes* a self. (It is a feature of the human, as Kierkegaard understands it, to be tempted in some degree to indulge in such evasion. He spies an inclination towards the aesthete in every one of us.) Kierkegaard's word for this process of fashioning a self is *resolution*. It is a process that expresses itself in each of its aspects through the successive modes of choice, commitment and decisive action. Through the portrayal of such a life from the inside, we come to see that these modes of resolution are alien to the aesthete's form of existence.

Thompson's objection to Kierkegaard can now be put as follows:

the author of the pseudonymous authorship turns out himself to be an aesthete. More specifically: one of the aims of the pseudonymous authorship is to reveal the impoverished and self-defeating character of the aesthetic mode of life, yet – and here's the rub – the pseudonymous authorship taken as a whole testifies to the fact that the author of this authorship has not himself advanced beyond the aesthetic mode of existence. Thompson wants to suggest that the author of this authorship is consequently involved in a performative contradiction: on the one hand, he is recommending we advance beyond the merely aesthetic way of life (towards the ethical and the religious), on the other hand, he has devoted the whole of his own life to alternately attempting to give imaginative expression to a variety of different modes of life without decisively embarking on any single one himself. He, therefore, has not himself advanced beyond the aesthetic way of life. His failure to have advanced beyond the aesthetic, Thompson argues, is implicit in the very form of the pseudonymous works through which he enjoins his readers not to remain mere aesthetes.

How damning is this charge? Even if one were to grant it, might one not reply: if the author has succeeded in imparting to me an insight into the unsatisfactoriness of the purely aesthetic mode of life, then, even if he has failed to act on this insight himself, that in no way invalidates the genuineness of the insight he imparts. He may be a fool and a hypocrite, but that does not give me a reason to be one as well. So (in order to hold on to the idea that the author of the pseudonymous authorship is involved in a performance which in some way undercuts the intended teaching of the authorship) Thompson needs to be able to make out that the character of this performance not only furnishes evidence as to its author's impoverished mode of existence but indeed casts a doubt upon the genuineness of the insight it conveys. Thompson's idea seems to be that the insight is supposed to be one which concerns the relative merits of the ethical and the religious modes of existence (over that of the aesthetic), but the character of the authorship reveals that the author lacks the qualifications to embark on such an inquiry (into the relative merits of these modes of existence). What the fundamentally aesthetic character of the authorship reveals is that the author is a stranger to the genuinely ethical or religious life and therefore lacking in authority concerning matters about which he pretends to be an authority.

This way of making out the charge depends upon moving from an observation concerning the authorship, to a claim about the author's life, and then back again to a claim about the authorship.²¹ The first claim depends upon an inference to a conclusion about what kind of a person the author was and what sort of life he led. The second claim depends upon a second inference from these alleged facts about his life to a conclusion about what he could or could not accomplish in his authorship. Phillips's response to Thompson's objection consists mostly in an attempt to block the first inference. I completely agree with Phillips that the inference is an invalid one. First of all, we know a great deal about Kierkegaard's life and much of what we know does not seem to fit Thompson's portrait of him. Secondly (this, I take it, is above all what is moving Phillips), we can see from the work itself (for example, in the various criticisms of the aesthete mounted in Volume 2 of *Either/Or*) a great deal about what kind of a person the author is.²² We can see things about the ethical and religious character of this man – the man who was capable of writing these words – through his work. Thompson, Phillips suggests, blinds himself to this evidence. Phillips concludes a brief survey of some of the evidence as follows: 'The problem for Thompson is obvious: how can the author of this blistering attack on aestheticism be called an aesthete?'²³ But to be someone who is appropriately called an aesthete means, for Kierkegaard, to be someone who *lives* a certain sort of life. Phillips has got himself into the position of feeling that he needs to enter into an argument about what sort of a life it was that the author of Kierkegaard's works actually lived. It has come to seem of critical importance to establish that Kierkegaard himself was not an aesthete. I draw attention to this not because I wish to disagree with Phillips about what the particulars of Kierkegaard's life might have been like, but because I think it is a mistake to think that the main source of Thompson's confusions rest on his first inference. Phillips, in effect, concedes the validity of inferences of the second sort to Thompson and becomes enmeshed in a biographical dispute about what we can conclude about Kierkegaard the author.

Thompson and Phillips share the following assumption: The moral (or religious) claim that the pseudonymous authorship makes upon us is (at least in part) a function of the authenticity of the author.²⁴ I agree with Phillips that Kierkegaard in much of his work wishes to speak to such questions concerning the fit (or

lack thereof) between an individual's thought and the shape of his life. His pseudonymous works are precisely designed to arrange a confrontation between the reader and his life – to trigger an insight on the part of the reader into how he has succeeded in deceiving himself about the character of this relation between what he professes and how he lives. But it does not follow that the efficacy or the genuineness of the confrontations which the work wishes to so arrange therefore ultimately hinges upon a relation that Kierkegaard's own life bears to a mode of life depicted within the pseudonymous authorship. It is a misunderstanding of what kind of a work a pseudonymous work is to think that in order to assess the genuineness of the insight the work confers upon us about our own life, we first need to know a great deal about Kierkegaard's life. Part of the point of interposing the intermediary of a pseudonymous author – enabling the (non-pseudonymous) author to abjure any thought which is expressed in the work as one put forward in the author's (i.e. Kierkegaard's) own name – is to divert attention away from the author and back towards the reader.²⁵ The aim is to present the reader with a mirror: a portrait of an idealised character in whose features he might recognise himself (and thereby recognise his life as he fantasises it to be at variance with his life as he leads it). Kierkegaard traces this fascination in the author on the part of a reader to a desire to evade questions the work has made it more difficult for the reader not to direct at himself.²⁶

Nevertheless, I think a version of Thompson's worry can be formulated which does not turn on a curiosity as to the character of Kierkegaard's life – a version which elaborates the worry instead as an internal criticism of one of the pseudonymous authors. If one wanted to press the charge so that it arises immediately within the work (without requiring a detour via the author's life) a way to put it would be as follows: can the categories of the ethical and the religious be clarified through an aesthetic mode of treatment? More precisely: in so far as the considerations concerning the ethical and the religious are conceived under the aspect of the category of the aesthetic, is the pseudonymous author of a work such as the *Postscript* not involved in a performative contradiction – a contradiction between his (aesthetic) mode of treatment and his aim (to clarify the categories of the ethical and the religious)? The criticism is now directed here not at Kierkegaard, in the first instance, but at Johannes Climacus, the author of the

Postscript. Of course, in so far as it turns out that Johannes Climacus is involved in a confusion, we may in the end want to criticise Kierkegaard as well – not for having lived shabbily but for having written a confused work. This criticism of Kierkegaard turns on the assumption that he is oblivious to the confusion that vitiates Climacus's work. The charge of confusion, however, is to be levelled not at Kierkegaard, but only at Climacus, if the confusion inherent in the structure of the work turns out to be an integral part of the plan of the work as a whole. This will depend on what kind of a work it is that Kierkegaard wished to compose. If, for example, the reader's coming to understand the work depends upon his coming to recognise the confusions inherent in the relation between the work's form and its content, then the confusion at issue will be one that is essential to the structural design of the work.²⁷

Kierkegaard refers to the entire pseudonymous authorship as an aesthetic production. He insists therefore upon the very fact that Thompson wanted to surprise him with: namely, that Kierkegaard's own relation to the content of these works is in a sense a merely aesthetic one – it is that of a poetic or literary author to his poetic or literary creations.²⁸ Though the pseudonymous authorship is an aesthetic production, Kierkegaard claims that it has an *ethical* purpose and that, speaking from the point of view of the aim of the authorship as a whole (as opposed to the point of view of any of the individual pseudonymous authors), there is a sense in which the author of these works (that is, the author behind the pseudonymous authors) is a *religious* author.²⁹ So Kierkegaard wants to claim on behalf of each of his pseudonymous works that it is an aesthetic work by a religious author which serves an ethical purpose.

This allows us to reformulate the charge of aestheticism in terms of a purely internal worry about the coherence of the authorship: how can an aesthetic work serve an ethical purpose? How can the production of an aesthetic work be the expression of a religious vocation? Or, to focus the worry more sharply: How can a merely aesthetic treatment of the ethical or the religious so much as engage its intended object? Purged of its confusions and misunderstandings, this seems to me to be the real concern behind Thompson's worry. It is a worry which a careful reading of a work such as the *Postscript* forces upon one; and it is a worry which few commentators on Kierkegaard have come to terms with.

On the whole, it is one which is at most only dimly perceived by most commentators and even then, usually, quickly suppressed. The result is that most interpretations of the pseudonymous works founder in incoherence. The trouble starts as soon as one attempts to offer an abstract of the argument of a work such as the *Postscript*. One fails to ponder whether the character of a pseudonymous author and the aesthetic form of his work are in tension with the ethical or religious phenomena he seeks to elucidate.³⁰ One assumes that the point of the work can be grasped while dispensing with any consideration of its form. I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that coming to terms with the (reformulated) version of Thompson's worry is an essential precondition to unravelling the more general puzzle about Kierkegaard's authorship with which this paper is concerned: what is the nature of the authorial strategy which underlies the pseudonymous works?

In order to see the force of my reformulation of Thompson's charge of aestheticism, it might be helpful to say a bit more about what characterises the category of the aesthetic for Kierkegaard and how it contrasts with the categories of the ethical and the religious. To express the point in Kierkegaard's terminology: the categories have to do with the relation between a subject and an object. The category of the aesthetic (as opposed to the ethical and the religious) is one in accordance with which one relates oneself to an object in a mode of disinterested contemplation.³¹ This is perfectly compatible with one's being absorbed by or preoccupied with the object to which one relates one's self. The point is simply that one's attention is directed entirely away from 'the subject' – away from one's self and the character of one's relation to the object. One's attention is given over entirely to the object.³² The notion of the aesthetic that is at issue here therefore overlaps to some extent with our ordinary notion of the aesthetic. We sometimes speak of 'taking up an aesthetic attitude towards something' and understand by these words an operation by which the self distances itself from its own moral and practical attitudes in order to contemplate an object in a disinterested fashion. But Kierkegaard's deployment of the category of the aesthetic covers a considerably wider range of territory than what is taken in by our ordinary notion of the aesthetic.

Aesthetic contemplation or reflection for Kierkegaard is, roughly, any mode of thought which is not intimately tied to ethical action or religious practice. The aesthetic is the category of *objectivity*,

the mode of disengaged reflection; whereas the ethical and the religious are the categories of *subjectivity*, modes of relation which turn on the character of one's concern.³³ With respect to the aesthetic, the accent falls on the *what* – that is, it falls directly on the object of one's concern. With respect to the ethical and the religious, the accent falls on the *how* – that is, it falls directly on the character of one's concern (and hence only indirectly on the object).³⁴ To be engaged in forms of thought which do not grapple with 'subjective problems' – which do not play a role in shaping the kind of person one is or in regulating fundamental aspects of one's moral or religious practice – is to be engaged in aesthetic reflection. To say this is not, as such, to enter into a criticism of such a form of reflection.³⁵ It is simply to clarify the conditions for applying one of the categories. The categories themselves carry no evaluative force, positive or negative, at this level of generality.³⁶ The purpose of drawing attention to the categories, Kierkegaard says, is to mark qualitative distinctions. What is a term of criticism, for Kierkegaard, is to say of a particular mode of speech or thought (which purports to treat of the ethical or the religious) that it is *merely* aesthetic. This criticism carries with it the implication that we have here to do with a context in which mere reflection constitutes an evasion of an ethical or religious demand.

This brings us to the following point – one that is largely misunderstood and vitiates Thompson's own attempt to formulate his worry: Kierkegaard's criticisms are never directed at some mode of thought or action which properly belongs to one of the categories (say, for example, to the category of the aesthetic), but rather always at a mode of thought or existence that involves what he calls a 'confusion of the categories'. (He finds such confusion to be rampant.) Every human life will of necessity encompass an aesthetic dimension.³⁷ Someone who attempts to live his life completely in aesthetic terms (such as the aesthete of *Either/Or*), however, will necessarily become involved in confusions. But his confusion is less profound than that of someone who imagines that his life is regulated by the categories of the ethical and the religious but whose life, in actuality, differs only inessentially from that of the aesthete. (It is the latter confusion that Kierkegaard takes to be characteristic of 'the present age'.)

So, roughly speaking, any mode of relating one's self to an object which does not fall under the categories of the ethical or the

religious will count for Kierkegaard as a species of the aesthetic. But, more importantly for our present purposes, that means that most of what we moderns call 'philosophy' will count for Kierkegaard as a species of aesthetic reflection.³⁸ Kierkegaard's primary concern in a work such as the *Postscript* is with what comes to pass when modern philosophy attempts to address itself to that which belongs properly to the categories of the ethical and the religious. What tends to happen, Kierkegaard thinks, when modern (speculative) philosophy attempts, for example, to clarify the category of the religious (and specifically the nature of Christianity) is that it fails to encounter it altogether. His view is that whenever modern philosophy tries to speak to the question of what it is to be a Christian, it unwittingly transforms a religious problem into an intellectual (i.e. epistemic or metaphysical) problem (a problem concerning, say, the sort of evidence upon which one should base one's belief, or how exactly one should best conceive of the difference between the divine and the human). Modern philosophy is, Kierkegaard thinks, thereby constantly mistaking something which properly belongs to the category of the aesthetic (a problem which can be approached through detached reflection) for something which belongs to the category of the religious (a problem which can only be encountered in the context of certain ways of acting).

Having said even only this much about how the 'objective' category of the aesthetic is to be contrasted with the other two 'subjective' categories, I think we are in a position to see what is unsatisfactory about one way in which Phillips attempts to dismiss Thompson's charge of aestheticism:

Contrary to Thompson's suggestion, Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works are not exercises in aesthetic self-indulgence.³⁹ Rather they call for a *disinterested reflectiveness* in the elucidation of different perspectives.⁴⁰ [My emphasis.]

Then, as further rebuttal, Phillips goes on to approvingly quote the following passage from E.D. Klemke:

One of the most impressive features of Kierkegaard's writings is the remarkable *philosophical detachment* with which he wrote. A *high degree of disinterestedness* pervades his writings and displays the *objectivity* with which he could practice even on matters

which have a highly subjective and personal concern.⁴¹ [My emphasis.]

If the worry about aestheticism has to do with whether an aesthetic mode of treatment can properly get the category of the religious in view, then Phillips's and Klemke's remarks, far from resolving the worry, seem only to accentuate it. Their way of turning back the charge of aestheticism depends upon a too narrow construal of the scope of the category of the aesthetic. One wants to agree with them that it does seem appropriate to compliment the author of the pseudonymous works on his 'reflectiveness', 'detachment', 'disinterestedness', and 'objectivity'. These four terms, however, are all hallmarks of the category of the aesthetic for Kierkegaard. The problem is further sharpened when we turn to consider the case of Johannes Climacus who will – in case we fail to notice it – insist upon his own detachment and disinterestedness; then he will proceed to explain to us how any approach to the religious which bears the hallmarks of the aesthetic is doomed to misencounter its object. Phillips's attempt to forestall the charge of aestheticism consequently serves only to highlight further how deeply rooted the problem actually is.

Let us briefly consider the author of the *Postscript*. Johannes Climacus tells us he is not a Christian. Indeed, he is not even interested in becoming a Christian. But he is interested in asking and answering the question: how does one become a Christian? He asks this question from the perspective of someone who is and intends to remain an 'outsider' to Christianity and he wishes to pursue the answer in a 'disinterested' fashion. His own interest in the matter, as he himself explains it, is of a purely objective and impersonal nature. He goes on to develop (in appropriately objective terms) the difference between having a merely objective relation to the truth of Christianity and having a genuinely subjective relation to it. The difference between an objective and a subjective problem, he explains, turns on the character of one's 'interest' in the object one is related to. The genuineness (the 'authenticity', if you will) of a particular subjective relation is a function of how it shapes the character of one's life as a whole. Climacus then explains that the attempt to enter into a purely objective relation to the truth of Christianity involves a conflation of the categories of the aesthetic and the religious. That is, it involves an attempt to enter into the religious life in a disinterested manner;

which is to say, it fails to engage the object it aims at altogether. (For to have the religious in view is to enter into a relation of 'infinitely interested concern'.) Climacus goes on throughout the rest of the body of the work to clarify further that which falls under the category of the religious – i.e. to clarify something which we are told cannot be approached objectively. His procedure is to draw a further host of apparently fully objective distinctions (such as, for example, that between Religiousness A and Religiousness B) and to thereby (allegedly) clarify 'the nature of the truth of Christianity' (and related matters, such as 'how one becomes a Christian') in more and more finely grained ways.

With respect to the case of Johannes Climacus, Thompson's worry (that an aesthetic mode of presentation might undercut the possibility of properly engaging ethical and religious matters which the author purports to address) therefore comes home with a vengeance. The worry is further intensified by the fact that Climacus himself appears to be repeatedly concerned to draw our attention to the very features of his philosophical practice which drive him into the performative contradiction in question. Therefore, although Thompson's charge may have been misdirected as a complaint against Kierkegaard, it seems to raise a perfectly valid worry as to what we are to make of Climacus's performance. We will return to the question of what sort of light such a worry might shed on the character of Kierkegaard's authorship after we examine how a parallel worry arises with respect to the work of Wittgenstein.

THE PROBLEM OF WITTGENSTEIN'S POINT OF VIEW

Phillips investigates a parallel problem which arises in Wittgenstein's work. He approaches the issue by way of an essay by R.F. Holland⁴² which raises a worry about Wittgenstein's writings on religion – one which parallels Thompson's charge of aestheticism. Phillips initially allows the issue to come up here again as an issue concerning how we should understand the relation between the author's work and his life. However, in this case, when he sets about the task of defusing the problem, he insists that Holland's way of attempting to relate the life and the work is based on a misconception. Holland's picture of how (what we know about) Wittgenstein's biography undercuts his philosophy

(in so far as it pertains to the topic of religion), Phillips suggests is based on a misunderstanding of that philosophy. Phillips argues that the biographical question (concerning the nature of Wittgenstein's own personal religious beliefs) has no bearing on an assessment of the philosophical merits of Wittgenstein's discussions concerning the grammar of religious belief.

One point of departure for Holland's worry is a remark made by Wittgenstein in a conversation with Drury: 'I am not a religious person, but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view.'⁴³ Holland wants to take advantage of the happy fact that Drury recorded this remark for the benefit of posterity in order to consider what sort of shadow this remark might be seen to cast over Wittgenstein's philosophical reflections pertaining to topics such as the grammar of religious belief. According to Phillips, Holland's attitude is that, given that we here (and elsewhere) have Wittgenstein's confession that he was not a religious person, everything he wrote about religion should be reconsidered and reassessed in the light of this fact. The worry seems to be that if Wittgenstein himself was without deeply felt religious convictions of his own then how can he teach us anything about religion. This is how Phillips summarises Holland's concerns:

... Holland argues, we have a tension between Wittgenstein's philosophical investigations and the actuality to which he belongs. ... Wittgenstein seems to give an independent sense to 'seeing the world (or seeing life, seeing one's work) from a religious point of view and being a religious person'. Holland has difficulty in seeing how this is possible: 'We are presented with the suggestion that a person's point of view can be religious although he himself is not. But how can a point of view be made religious except by a religion? And must not the religion enter the viewpoint through the mind of the person who is taking this view?' ... If this were our final verdict, Wittgenstein's investigations would make no more contact with religion than Kierkegaard's pseudonyms have contact, according to Thompson, with the subjects they purport to engage with.⁴⁴

The charge therefore is that Wittgenstein's unwillingness to commit himself to some traditional form of religious belief vitiates his attempts to clarify the nature of religious concepts. The structure of Holland's reasoning here has affinities with the argument

by means of which Thompson originally motivates his worry about Kierkegaard. We start from an observation about Wittgenstein's work (it discusses religious topics while sidestepping the question of the author's own religious commitments), then we move to a consideration of the author's life (about which we have reason to believe, drawing on various sources, that it was not the life of 'a religious person'), then we move from the life back to the work and draw a conclusion concerning the integrity of the latter based on facts about the former.

Phillips, as I have indicated, resists Holland's way of interweaving the biographical and the philosophical:

The problems ... [Wittgenstein] wrestled with were conceptual not personal. Thus it is a mistake to suggest ... that a philosophical clarification of the language of Scripture is deficient if one does not respond to it religiously as Kierkegaard did. ... Philosophy is concerned with clarity, not religious confessions. No doubt, if clarity does not lead to confession that is an offence in the eyes of Christianity. But it does not follow that Christianity is an offence to philosophy, or that grammatical clarifications are cheap.⁴⁵

I am in agreement with what I understand to be the central thrust of this passage: an assessment of the integrity of the grammatical distinctions that Wittgenstein draws between religious and non-religious uses of language in no way turns upon a consideration of the character of his own 'personal' religious commitments.⁴⁶ However, to say that 'the problems Wittgenstein wrestled with were conceptual not personal' seems to me to be a potentially misleading way of formulating the point. This invites the impression that the problems were *impersonal*. But it is precisely the sense that there is something amiss in such a formulation that drives Holland into his confusions. Holland's thought goes roughly like this: in so far as the problems have to do with religious belief (and religious belief, properly understood, is far from being a purely impersonal matter) the problems are of a personal and not of an impersonal nature. Holland then proceeds from this thought to a conclusion about what he needs to know about Wittgenstein's life to assess his philosophy. Phillips rightly sees that this thought (as Holland develops it) leads Holland into confusions. However, the problem lies not with Holland's original

thought (as I have just sketched it above) but with the way in which he wants to proceed from it.

With respect to the question whether the problems Wittgenstein wrestles with in his discussions of religious concepts are of a 'personal' nature, there is no progress to be made in simply denying what Holland affirms. For a grammatical elucidation of the differences between religious and non-religious uses of language will be concerned with, among other things, the differences in the ways in which such uses of language bear upon the 'personal'. Whether someone's belief is (properly termed) religious will show up in the way it informs the entire character of that individual's life. It will play a completely different role within this life than that played by any belief in the life of someone who is not a religious person; and it will play a different role within the life of the religious individual than that played (within that same life) by other (ordinary) beliefs. Part of an understanding of what is distinctive about the kind of role a religious belief plays within a human life (or at least so Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein both thought) is an appreciation of how it specifically does *not* enter in the usual ways into the network of impersonal practices (of giving and asking for impersonal reasons) which provides the framework within which ordinary beliefs have their home. In contrast with the sorts of grounds upon which most other sorts of beliefs are justified (or discredited, or ascribed to other people) there is a sense in which it is right to say that the sorts of considerations on the basis of which (properly so-called) religious beliefs are strengthened (or weakened, or ascribed to other people) are of a much more 'personal' nature.⁴⁷

This, of course, does not mean that some people who have (what they take to be) religious beliefs may not go about attempting to justify those beliefs on precisely the same sort of objective, completely impersonal grounds that, say, scientific beliefs are justified. A discussion of this topic would involve us in a consideration of what Wittgenstein calls 'superstition' and what Kierkegaard and Climacus call 'childish Christianity'. It is a common feature of Kierkegaard's and Wittgenstein's understanding of the ('category' or 'grammar' of the) religious that each considers such attempts at a completely objective justification of religious belief to involve various forms of philosophical confusion (which is not to say that they consider such confusions to be limited to philosophers).

Holland's reasons for thinking that the term 'personal' speaks

to a dimension which distinguishes religious belief from ordinary belief are tied to Kierkegaard's reasons for characterising the critical difference between the categories of the aesthetic and the religious in terms of the issue of whether the object of belief properly calls for (what Kierkegaard terms) a 'subjective relation' on the part of the believer. Kierkegaard sees his reader as prone to confuse the task of becoming a Christian with a matter of subscribing to a doctrine or formulating a true theory (about, say, God) rather than as a matter of living a certain sort of life. To see whether someone is a Christian, Kierkegaard says, is not a matter of finding out what sorts of propositions he assents to or what sorts of beliefs he has (or what sorts of justifications he is prepared to supply for those propositions or beliefs), but rather a matter of looking to the way in which his conception of himself as a Christian informs his life.⁴⁸ Almost everyone in the Denmark of Kierkegaard's day thought of himself as a Christian, yet Kierkegaard thought almost no one was. He thought most of his countrymen suffered from the illusion that they were Christians. The main source of this illusion, he says, is the confusion that whether one is a Christian or not is to be established by a purely impersonal or objective fact about one's life (whether one goes to church on Sundays, or has been baptised, or lives in a Christian country and has Christian parents, etc.). Kierkegaard's name for this community of pseudo-Christians, who sustain their belief in their own Christianity through such confusions, is 'Christendom'. This appearance of a set of thriving 'Christian' practices is what he calls 'the monstrous illusion'. Kierkegaard, however, does not take himself to be differing with his countrymen about what the word 'Christian' means. His claim is simply that *by their own lights* – if they reflect upon what it is to become a Christian and if they reflect upon their lives and get into focus how much of a claim Christianity actually exacts upon them – they will find that they are not Christians.⁴⁹ They are tempted into various (categorical) confusions in order to disguise this fact from themselves. But, if provided with a perspicuous overview of the category of the religious, he thinks, they themselves will be in a position to acknowledge their confusions *as* confusions. Phillips is therefore right in thinking that Kierkegaard's procedure here closely resembles what Wittgenstein calls a 'grammatical investigation'.

We can now see why a forced choice between a characterisation of these problems either as 'conceptual' or as 'personal' is

an unhappy one. A grammatical investigation into what is distinctive about religious concepts will want to draw attention to the 'personal' character of many of the considerations which properly bear upon a judicious application of such concepts to an individual human life. But this in no way affects the substance of Phillips's objection to Holland: the criteria by which we should assess Wittgenstein's grammatical investigations into particular religious concepts have to do only with the extent to which the distinctions he draws adequately capture the way such concepts actually figure in our lives (in so far as they do so).⁵⁰ A proper understanding of what Wittgenstein wishes to teach us concerning what is distinctive about the ethical or the religious in no way turns upon a knowledge of what his own deepest or most intimate ethical or religious convictions might happen to have been. I linger over this point because an understanding of no other philosopher's remarks about ethical or religious topics has been thought by his commentators to depend as critically upon a knowledge of his biography as is the case with Wittgenstein.⁵¹ McGuinness's and Monk's widely acclaimed books, for example, are both pervasively informed by the assumption that the key to an understanding of Wittgenstein's thought on such topics depends on a thorough familiarity with all sorts of intimate details about his life.⁵² One begins (as Thompson and Holland do) by noticing Kierkegaard's or Wittgenstein's emphasis on the 'personal' character of the ethical and the religious (and how it is tied to questions about the relation between what an individual says and how he lives) and one slides from there straight into thinking that an appreciation of what they say about the ethical or the religious can only be understood if one knows much more about how the lives of these authors were informed by particular ethical or religious notions.

Is there a cousin of Holland's worry that can be addressed directly to Wittgenstein's thought about religion – without requiring a detour via a consideration of his life? Let us first try the following reformulation of the worry, in order to see why it doesn't work: In so far as the central questions of religion have to do with what one should believe and how one should live and in so far as Wittgenstein's work is silent about such matters, is Wittgenstein's thought about religion not involved in an internal contradiction? How can Wittgenstein's writings instruct us about religious matters without helping us to understand what it is that

we should believe and how it is that we should live? Construed in this fashion, the charge is one which is directed as an internal criticism of Wittgenstein's work: what kind of instruction can the work offer the religiously interested reader if it confines itself to the level of grammatical investigation? But this would only work as a criticism of Wittgenstein's remarks about religion if those remarks aspired to provide religious instruction in the pertinent sense. Since this is not evidently true of Wittgenstein's remarks – Wittgenstein himself certainly disavows any such aspiration – the criticism fails.

What we need is something that has the shape of a worry about whether the character of Wittgenstein's approach to the questions *he himself wishes to address* undermines what he goes on to say about them. What we need therefore is a worry about how a (merely) grammatical investigation can provide the specific sort of instruction to which it aspires. Such a worry is by no means unfamiliar to readers of Wittgenstein. Countless commentators have tended to linger over a worry of this shape, puzzled by remarks such as the following:

In all questions we discuss I have no opinion; and if I had, and it disagreed with one of your opinions, I would at once give it up for the sake of argument because it would be of no importance for our discussion. We constantly move in a realm where we all have the same opinions. All I give you is a method; I cannot teach you any new truths.⁵³

Wittgenstein's claim that '[i]n all questions we discuss I have no opinion' is, as we shall see, strikingly reminiscent of remarks Climacus makes about himself in the concluding pages of the *Postscript*. How can Wittgenstein's desire not to put forward an opinion be squared with an aim to provide philosophical instructions? This worry parallels certain aspects of our earlier reformulation of Thompson's worry about the *Postscript*: is there a tension between what the work itself says about the category of the religious and the relation the work declares itself to bear to that category?

When Phillips first introduces the general topic of his article (i.e. the existence of a parallel problem of authorship in Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein), he seems to have a worry of this sort on his mind:

[H]ow can there be a serious philosophical authorship after the demise of foundationalism? What style can philosophy have? In their struggles with this issue, both writers adopted striking literary devices. Kierkegaard wrote a number of pseudonymous works, claiming that the perspectives elucidated in them were not his, but those of the pseudonymous authors. Wittgenstein presented his work in numbered paragraphs, in which we meet different voices he argues with and voices expressing different perspectives. . . . [I]t has been asked, how can such endeavours constitute serious philosophical authorship? If Kierkegaard, in his pseudonymous works, shows us a variety of perspectives, what is his *own* relation to them? If Wittgenstein introduces us to a variety of voices, how can he have a *voice of his own*? No matter how confused he might be, the foundationalist has a noble aim: he wants to be our guide in helping us to distinguish between the rational and the irrational. Since Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein forsake this task, how can there be a philosophical voice which is no voice in particular?⁵⁴

The worry expressed here is that Wittgenstein lacks a philosophical voice which is properly his *own*. His works, it would seem, are not even attempts to *say* anything to his readers. The *Tractatus*, much to the annoyance of many commentators, seems to be particularly explicit on this point. We are told at the end of the work that what we find within (the body of) the work is nonsense. If this were true, then it would quite literally be the case that there is a sense in which the work aspires to say nothing. And we are told (in the penultimate section) that the reader who understands the author of the work (as opposed to his sentences which are nonsense) will throw away what he finds in the work.

Now here we have a problem that closely parallels the one we encountered with respect to the *Postscript*: what are we to make of an author who seems to disown so explicitly everything which he himself has put forth in his own work? Peter Geach has dubbed this problem (as it arises within the *Tractatus*) *Ludwig's self-mate*⁵⁵: if the doctrines of the work are true then the work has no doctrines. How are we to understand a work that declares itself to be nonsense? This closely parallels the problem of what we might call *Johannes's self-mate*: how are we to understand an author who attempts to illuminate through a philosophical treatise those very matters which he says cannot be so illuminated?

The problem of an apparent self-mate is not generally thought to arise in anything like as tidy a fashion in Wittgenstein's later work. Nonetheless, a version of the same worry is excited by his repeated disavowal of philosophical theses. It raises the spectre of what is sometimes called 'the problem of Wittgenstein's quietism'.⁵⁶ For it can seem as if – despite the disavowal of philosophical theses – any attempt to faithfully summarise the teaching one finds within that work must necessarily involve one in ascribing any number of interesting and controversial theses to its author. Thus it can be equally difficult with respect to the later philosophy to see how Wittgenstein's descriptions of his own practice can be made to square with the substance of that practice.

Although it has shed some light on what is not at issue, the preceding discussion has not gone very far towards positively illuminating what is meant by the latter half of Wittgenstein's puzzling remark: '... I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view.' What sort of point of view does Wittgenstein take 'a religious point of view' to be?⁵⁷ The author who seems to have most influenced Wittgenstein's understanding of the category of the religious is Kierkegaard. It is therefore worth noting that Kierkegaard has a good deal to say about what it is to see a problem from a religious point of view. It is – he tells us in a book appropriately titled *The Point of View for My Work as An Author* – the point of view from which every problem treated in his pseudonymous authorship is seen.

THE AIM OF A PSEUDONYMOUS WORK

In *The Point of View for My-Work as An Author*, Kierkegaard undertakes to describe the authorial strategy that informed his pseudonymous works. This book was in a certain sense a concession on Kierkegaard's part that his pseudonymous authorship had been a failure. It is an attempt to minister to a reader's indolence: to do for the reader part of what had originally been left for the reader to do for himself. It is written out of the fear that the form of elucidation these works had wished to confer would remain utterly lost on their readers. His carefully constructed works were being read and appropriated as if they were ordinary treatises – as if the only difference between a pseudonymous work and a conventional philosophical treatise were that the author

wished for some reason to be cagey about his identity. The point of view for his work as an author, Kierkegaard goes to some trouble to insist in this short book, is one which requires him to abandon conventional forms of authorship and to abjure doctrine. Hence, in his journal, Kierkegaard remarks rather optimistically about *The Point of View*: 'Without this little book the whole authorship would become transformed into a new doctrine.'⁵⁸ (I say 'rather optimistically' because, as far as I can make out, with this little book the whole authorship, by and large, has still been received – and either celebrated or deplored – as a new doctrine.⁵⁹) If the reader fails to appreciate the peculiar exigencies of the point of view in accordance with which the pseudonymous works are authored, then a misunderstanding of the perspective from which the problems are treated is inevitable. The most immediate form of this misunderstanding is the failure to properly distinguish between the point of view of the (non-pseudonymous) author and that of the pseudonym, between the point of view of Kierkegaard as author and that of, say, Climacus as pseudonymous author. Kierkegaard came to think that such a misunderstanding could only be forestalled through furnishing an explicit account of the nature of his point of view as author of the pseudonymous works – one which spells out why it is that these works leave it to their reader to put two and two together.

The point of view of the pseudonymous authorship requires that certain forms of work be left to the reader to do for himself – work that has to do with recognising his confusion *as* confusion. The point of view is a religious point of view in so far as the confusion to which the work is addressed is a religious one: a confusion in how the reader lives and what he (imagines he) values most. His aim in the pseudonymous works, Kierkegaard says, is to show that Christendom is a monstrous illusion. He goes on to say:

[A]n illusion can never be destroyed directly, and only by indirect means can it be radically removed. If it is an illusion that all are Christians – and if there is anything to be done about it, it must be done indirectly. . . . That is, one must approach from behind the person who is under an illusion.⁶⁰

Why can an illusion not be destroyed directly? What can be destroyed directly? The intended contrast here is between an illusion

and an ordinary case of *false* belief. A false belief can be confronted directly. One does this by arguing for the truth of the negation of the false belief. Kierkegaard suggests that this method of direct confrontation is not available to him because there is a sense in which there is no matter of fact or doctrine about which he wants to enter into a dispute with his reader. It is not that his reader has a point of view which he wants to *disagree* with (in the sense of wishing to argue for the negation of that point of view). The problem, rather, is that his reader suffers from an *illusion*. Kierkegaard understands the prospective reader of the pseudonymous authorship to be someone who is in the grip of an illusory point of view. For the point of view the reader imagines himself to occupy is only an illusion of a point of view. To attack an illusory point of view directly is precisely to concede that it *is* a point of view. It is to concede the intelligibility of what is under attack. A direct attack only reinforces one's interlocutor's conviction that what is at issue is a matter about which one can, at least provisionally, agree or disagree. Kierkegaard does not imagine his reader to have a set of false beliefs about Christianity. The problem is rather that he has a set of incoherent beliefs. He is completely confused about what it means for someone to become a Christian. Kierkegaard goes on to say:

A direct attack only strengthens a person in his illusion. . . . There is nothing that requires such gentle handling as an illusion, if one wishes to dispel it. If anything prompts the prospective captive to set his will in opposition, all is lost.⁶¹

The aim is to set free someone who is captive to an illusion. The indirect method does not directly contest the captive's illusion. Rather, it enters into and participates in the illusion. More specifically, much of the pseudonymous authorship is addressed to a reader who fits the following description: '[He] is under the illusion that the aesthetic is Christianity; for, he thinks [of himself] "I am Christian", and yet he lives in aesthetic categories.'⁶² Thus each such work begins by entering into some particular form of the illusion that the aesthetic is Christianity:

So (to stick to the theme with which this work especially deals) one does not begin thus: I am a Christian; you are not a Christian. Nor does one begin thus: It is Christianity I am

proclaiming; and you are living in purely aesthetic categories. No, one begins thus: Let us talk about aesthetics.⁶³

The aim of the work is to lead the captive of the illusion to the point where he himself is able to recognise that that which he is attracted to *is* an illusion. Thus we can see why Kierkegaard would be uncomfortable with the way Phillips puts things when he writes:

Kierkegaard wanted to dispute what he called 'the monstrous illusion', namely the widespread conviction in the Denmark of his day that one could be a Christian simply by being a citizen.⁶⁴

There is a sense in which the whole point of the indirect method is precisely not to *dispute* 'the monstrous illusion'. The strategy is to provide the illusion's captive a mirror in whose reflection he can recognise his own confusions, in whose reflection he can recognise the monstrous illusion as both monstrous and illusory. The burden of recognising himself in the mirror – recognising himself as confused – is what is left to the reader to do for himself.

Phillips's sense that there is a dispute at the bottom of the matter is fuelled by his sense that he can specify what the dispute is about: namely, whether 'one could be a Christian simply by being a citizen'. But if there were such a specifiable dispute in the offing, the direct approach would no longer be blocked. Kierkegaard could directly state his reasons for thinking citizenship does not suffice to make one a Christian. I am inclined to think Kierkegaard would say that he has no dispute at all with someone who *actually* thinks one can be a Christian simply by being a citizen. There is nothing to dispute here because the word 'Christian' has been reduced to a homonym – it is used by this person in a way which differs completely from any way in which Kierkegaard himself wishes to use the word. There is nothing to disagree about because the appearance of a disagreement here comes about through the word's being used to mean entirely different things.⁶⁵

Kierkegaard assumes that most of his readers, if forced to reflect upon the matter, will see that what they want to be able to claim about themselves when they say that there are Christians involves a great deal more than their merely being citizens. The question is: what justifies the application of such a term to their lives? Kierkegaard takes it for granted that his readers do not really wish the words 'Christian' and 'citizen' (or 'Dane') to be synonyms; this is not what they *want* to mean by the word 'Chris-

tian'. The problem is that – to the extent that this word means anything at all when applied to their lives (which it mostly does not) – being a citizen is roughly all it can mean. Thus, without realising it, to the extent that they mean anything when they say of themselves that they are Christians, this is roughly all they *do* mean by the word. In order for the word to have a religious meaning when they apply it to themselves their lives would first have to undergo a radical transformation.

If forced to reflect upon their lives, Kierkegaard thinks his readers can be brought to see that, if pressed, they would be at a loss to say what licenses the claim that they are Christians (unless the claim is based on something like their citizenship). His aim is to bring his readers to see that (if they reflect carefully about what they want to mean when they say of themselves that they are Christians) they do not mean by their words what they want to mean. What they want to mean is at odds with what they say.⁶⁶ They have an incoherent desire with respect to their words – and, in particular, with respect to the word 'Christian'. They want to use the word in its religious sense and, at the same time, use it in such a way that it has application to their present lives. It is not that they mean something determinate but somehow flawed by the word. It is rather that they mean it incoherently: their use of the word hovers indeterminately between aesthetic and religious categories without respecting the conditions for the application of either. To put the point in the vocabulary of later Wittgenstein, they want to be both inside and outside the religious language-game at the same time.⁶⁷ What they should say about themselves (in so far as they participate in the monstrous illusion), if they want to use the word to signify a religious category, is: we are not Christians. This is what Kierkegaard's indirect method aims to show its reader: that he is not a Christian.

There are obstacles which stand in the way of his bringing his readers to see this about themselves. There are a great many words which have a specifically religious meaning – words such as belief, authority, obedience, revelation, prayer, silence, awe, wonder, miracle, apostle, and so forth. These same words, however, can be used in contexts in which they take on a different meaning. They can be used to express very different concepts – concepts which do not have a religious import. The word 'belief', used in an ordinary context, has an epistemic meaning. Its grammar is related to that of (it is, in a sense, halfway between) concepts

such as opinion and knowledge. Its application, in ordinary contexts, is tied to concepts such as evidence and probability. The word 'belief', however, can also be used in a context where it has a specifically religious meaning. It can be used as a synonym for 'religious faith'. Used in this way, Kierkegaard thinks, it expresses a completely different concept – one which does not stand on a spectrum somewhere between opinion and knowledge, one whose application is not tied to concepts such as evidence and probability.⁶⁸ When Kierkegaard says things like 'Christianity is not plausible' or 'A Christian does not believe on evidence' or 'Religious faith excludes doubt', he does not take himself to be entering claims about the kind of evidence which grounds religious belief. He takes himself to be marking off the religious category of belief and isolating the junctures at which we are prone to confuse the religious category with an epistemic (i.e. aesthetic) category. This procedure of drawing categorical (Wittgenstein would call them grammatical) distinctions is in service of clarifying the specifically religious (or, in some cases, ethical) uses of concepts.

The thought that a great deal of philosophical confusion can be traced to a failure to distinguish carefully between religious and non-religious concepts which are denoted by the same words ('belief', 'revelation', 'miracle', etc.) places Kierkegaard in a tradition of thought that runs through Lessing and Kant. It is one of the few traditions of thought that Wittgenstein seems to have been eager to inherit. Lessing developed such distinctions in great detail with respect to a number of religious concepts and the distinctions he develops recur repeatedly in Kant,⁶⁹ Kierkegaard⁷⁰ and Wittgenstein.⁷¹

The problem is that it is not always easy to command a clear view of when a concept is being applied in a religious (as opposed to a non-religious) sense. As we have already seen, Kierkegaard's way of referring to the sort of confusion we enter into in such cases (when we take ourselves to be employing an ethical or religious concept, but no ethical or religious sense can be made of our use of it) is to say that we have fallen into 'a confusion [or conflation] of the categories'. His name for the procedure he employs for unravelling such confusions is 'qualitative dialectic'. A 'dialectical' examination of a concept shows how the meaning of the concept undergoes a shift – and therefore, properly speaking, what concept it is that shifts – as the context in which it is employed is changed. Qualitative dialectic is the study

of the decisive (or qualitative) shifts to which the meaning of a concept is subject as its employment shifts from an aesthetic, to an ethical, to a religious context. A religious inflection of a concept is only able to have its sense within the context of a certain sort of life. Sometimes, therefore, Kierkegaard (or one of the pseudonymous authors) will want to paint a particularly vivid picture of what a Christian life would look like – what a life would be like that can only be understood in terms of Christian categories. The point is to contrast that life with the life of a reader who imagines himself to be a Christian. It is only in that other life, Kierkegaard wants to show, that 'the Christian categories have their full, mutually implicating meaning, and apart from it they may have any or none'.⁷²

Kierkegaard's contemporaries are able to deceive themselves into thinking they are Christians because in the course of their lives they frequently employ (apparently) religious concepts. The question Kierkegaard wishes them to focus on is not whether they have a use for such concepts, but *how* they use them. Only if their life as a whole has a certain shape – only if, as he likes to say, it is one which 'is lived in religious categories' – do those concepts, as they employ them, have a properly religious meaning. What he suspects about the lives of most of his contemporaries is that these concepts, as they employ them, either have an entirely different (non-religious) meaning – or, in many cases, no meaning whatsoever. The attraction to the use of such concepts is often tied, he thinks, to the user's wish to sustain for himself the illusion of being a Christian. Kierkegaard's sense of the difficulty of his project is tied to a suspicion that his reader may have deeply entrenched motives – motives which he conceals from himself – for not wishing to clarify for himself what it is that he means when he employs such concepts. The pseudonymous authorship is specifically directed to such a readership – one which has an investment in mystifying the meaning of religious concepts.

It is the apparent availability of religious concepts which fuels the monstrous illusion which Kierkegaard calls Christendom. Kierkegaard's contemporaries frequently employ words such as 'belief', 'authority', 'revelation', etc. in the course of their daily lives. As we have just seen, Kierkegaard thinks it is the fact that such apparently religious concepts pervade their modes of speech and thought which obscures the extent to which these concepts are without religious significance for them. Kierkegaard wants

his readers to closely examine their lives to see what sort of roles such concepts actually play there and to see to what extent their lives are in fact regulated by such concepts. He thinks that if they examine what they take themselves to mean when they say of themselves that they 'believe in the truth of Christianity', they will find that they are confused. They think perhaps that what they must mean is that they have evidence for their belief; but, Kierkegaard thinks, if they are forced to ponder with sufficient care anything which might play the role of such evidence, they will find that – given our ordinary standards for what counts as a rationally justified belief – the available evidence will not (and, indeed, should not) satisfy them. Kierkegaard traces the interest among his contemporaries in a search for a privileged form of evidence (miracles, testimony, revelation, scripture, etc.) to secure their 'religious belief' in part to the fact that the only concept of belief which does have application to their lives is one which is tied in these ways to evidence.

For Kierkegaard, if a reader is to enter into a dialectical investigation into the meanings of the purportedly religious concepts which the reader himself employs in the context of his life, the reader must reflect not only (in an impersonal way) on the possible meanings of the concepts but also on the ways in which these concepts actually do (or do not) shape his life. Kierkegaard sees his prospective readers as having mastered elaborate strategies for avoiding such reflection (most notably, speculative philosophy) – strategies for cultivating forms of reflection that corrode their capacity to bring the texture of their own lives into imagination. The attraction of philosophical mystifications of the religious life, he thinks, is the evasion of a further task – one which demands more than mere reflection. The wish to perpetuate certain confused uses of ethical and religious concepts is tied to a desire to evade the ethical and religious demands that a clear command of the grammar of these concepts would bring into view. Thus in order for the reader to see what he himself means (and fails to mean) by certain concepts he must examine the way he himself lives. There is much that opposes such an examination of the details of one's life and ensures that it will go against the grain. The natural grain of his (purportedly Christian) reader's reflection, Kierkegaard assumes, will always be in a direction that will spare him the task of heeding Christianity's call that he change his life.

Kierkegaard's grammatical investigations must therefore con-

tend with his readers' attraction to certain forms of confusion. How much a grammatical investigation goes against the grain depends in part on how much someone has invested in a particular form of confusion. Wittgenstein will also speak of his investigations as going against the grain.⁷³ Phillips tries to identify an asymmetry here between Kierkegaard's procedure in the pseudonymous works and Wittgenstein's procedure in his later work. The way he does so seems to me to underestimate the parallel and to miss what it is that Kierkegaard thought would most meet with resistance in his readers. Phillips writes:

What needs to be emphasised is that Kierkegaard is not simply clearing up grammatical confusions but, in depicting aesthetic, ethical, and religious perspectives, challenging people about the meaning of their lives.⁷⁴

Phillips's sense that Kierkegaard is – in addition to clearing up grammatical confusions – trying to 'challenge people about the meaning of their lives' is tied to the assumption that his overarching aim is to push people in the direction of Christianity. This is a widespread misunderstanding. It rests upon a conception of religious authorship that is foreign to Kierkegaard. The sense in which Kierkegaard understands his purpose in the aesthetic works to be a religious one has to do with the task of clearing up confusions about what sort of life a religious life is (and thereby clearing certain obstacles from the path of his readers if they wish to embark upon such a life).⁷⁵ The aim of the authorship is to mark out the path of such a life more clearly. That is the most a religious author can do. If the authorship were successful in its aim, what this would mean with respect to the majority of his readers is simply that they would no longer pretend that they are Christians.⁷⁶ To imagine that he can help his reader further along than this by somehow nudging him in the direction of the Christian life would be, by his own lights, to fall into confusion about what sort of religious assistance one person can provide another.⁷⁷

Phillips's way of posing the issue makes it seem as if, in the pseudonymous works, Kierkegaard is doing two separate things: (1) clearing up certain grammatical confusions, (2) challenging his readers to examine their lives. And so now it can seem as if there is an asymmetry between Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein:

Wittgenstein does the first of these things but not the second. But the very specific grammatical confusions to which Kierkegaard wishes to draw attention are ones that can only come into focus for the reader through an examination of his own life – through the realisation that religious categories do not have the weight in his life which he fantasises they do. The confusion cannot come into view for the reader unless he is brought to challenge himself about how he lives.

This suggests that what asymmetry there is here (in terms of how much one of these two authors 'challenges us about the meaning of our lives') turns on what sort of role a particular confusion plays in a reader's life. Kierkegaard is after a form of confusion that dramatically shapes his reader's lives. Is that never the case with the confusions which preoccupy Wittgenstein? The *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein says, has an ethical point. The same might be said of the later work as well.⁷⁸ What is the ethical point? If there is anything to the parallel with Kierkegaard, then the moral imperative which informs Wittgenstein's writing (both early and late) should be understood at least in part in the light of a demand upon the reader to examine his life with words. And this, surely, is not a matter of simply looking at words. The grammatical confusions Wittgenstein uncovers in our thought are ones that have their source, in part, in the shoddiness of our attention to what our words mean and to what we mean by our words. But this failure of attention to how we speak cannot be separated from a failure to attend to the various ways in which we act. It is the same failure which Kierkegaard sees as fuelling his reader's resistance: a failure to bring one's life properly into imagination. For what is at issue is not only what our words mean, but what *we* mean by our words. The avoidance of confusion here can only be attained by being vigilant about the extent to which we mean what we say. But since it is the heart of Wittgenstein's teaching (as much as it is Kierkegaard's) that these words draw their meaning from the ways in which they figure in our lives, the task of struggling to avoid such confusions cannot be separated from a form of vigilance which is directed towards how we live. Hence Wittgenstein's notebooks are littered with reflections on how the difficulty of his investigations is connected to the difficulty of various forms of self-knowledge (the capacity to be honest with oneself, to acknowledge one's temptations, to bring one's own life into imagination, etc.). Some aspect or other of that connec-

tion is the topic of numerous remarks. (A small sample: 'You cannot write anything about yourself that is more truthful than you yourself are',⁷⁹ 'Nothing is so difficult as not deceiving oneself',⁸⁰ 'If anyone is *unwilling* to descend into himself . . . he will remain superficial in his writing',⁸¹ 'Working in philosophy . . . is really more a working on oneself',⁸² 'That man will be revolutionary who can revolutionize himself'.⁸³ The shoddiness Wittgenstein uncovers in how we speak and think he takes to be tied to a shoddiness in how we live.⁸⁴ Hence he writes:

The sickness of a time can only be cured through an alteration in the mode of life of human beings, and it is only possible for the sickness of philosophical problems to be cured through a changed mode of thought and of life, not through a form of medicine that a single individual has invented.⁸⁵

Phillips gets into the muddle of trying to distinguish Kierkegaard from Wittgenstein on this score by quoting a series of passages from O.K. Bouwsma that culminate in the following misplaced worry: 'The question is how much of what Kierkegaard describes as the illusion is to be described as grammatical?'⁸⁶ The correct answer, which Phillips feels he must reject, is: 100 per cent. But that does not mean that Kierkegaard *merely* wishes to draw attention to a confusion of grammar – as if this were somehow distinct from a confusion in how his purportedly 'Christian' readership lives. Such confusions in grammar are not mere confusions in grammar (because grammar in the relevant sense is not merely about words), but also confusions in life. They are symptoms (and sometimes contributing causes) of soul-sickness. Phillips is misled by Bouwsma into thinking that part of the illusion has to do with a grammatical issue and then a separate part of the illusion has to do with a religious issue. But the only religious issue that the pseudonymous authorship wants to raise for its reader is simultaneously a grammatical (or, in Kierkegaard's parlance, 'dialectical') one: namely, the fact that an examination of the reader's life will reveal that it is not one in which, as it is presently constituted, a religious issue can find a foothold. The 'monstrous illusion' is therefore at bottom a grammatical one. It is the illusion that one can avail oneself of religious categories simply by using certain words, that the words carry their (religious) meanings with them, regardless of how they are used.