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Philosophy's Cool Place

D. Z. Phillips

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Kierkegaard's Qualitative Dialectic

In the last chapter, I considered reactions to the recognition that philosophy cannot provide a common measure for 'the real'. If a philosophical author cannot give a substantive account of the nature of reality, can that authorship remain a serious one? The Sophists believed that it could not; Socrates thought that it could. If we read Socrates as saying, "There is no general account of reality; we must settle for the understanding that each art provides," this conclusion would not have satisfied Plato. As I have noted, he would want to know whether the arts themselves refer to reality. For Plato, it is not our practices that determine what we mean by reality but Reality that determines what we should say of our practices. Plato seems to seek a vantage point beyond all our practices, one that has been called "the view from Nowhere."¹ But what if, like the Sophists, and perhaps Socrates, we agree that such a vantage point is a fiction? What is the consequence for philosophical authorship?

In this chapter I will explore this question in relation to the pseudonymous works of Søren Kierkegaard. Because the twists and turns in the chapter are many, it may be helpful if I give, at the outset, a map of the terrain I will traverse.

I begin with an account of Kierkegaard's early worries about Socratic irony. At that time, he thought that an ironist is related playfully, and hence superficially, to the ways of living on which he comments. The ironist refuses to commit himself or herself to any of them. Kierkegaard holds that there is something treacherous in wanting to be a mere observer.

1. Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

Second, I discuss Josiah Thompson's claim that the worries Kierkegaard had about Socrates can be directed to Kierkegaard's relation to his pseudonymous works. Is not his attitude, too, one of a playful aesthete? Does not Kierkegaard describe all his pseudonymous works as aesthetic?

Third, I reject attempts by James Conant to deflect Thompson's accusations. Conant suggests that Thompson draws illegitimate conclusions about Kierkegaard's intellectual investigations on the basis of allegations about Kierkegaard's private life, and that confuses 'lower' and 'higher' forms of 'the aesthetic'. I contend that Thompson is attacking Kierkegaard's methods, not his private life. Given the demise of foundationalism, Thompson questions the very possibility of philosophical inquiry. In short, he attacks 'the aesthetic' in an intellectual, that is, 'higher', sense.

Fourth, I discuss my disagreements with Conant about the nature of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship. We both agree that Kierkegaard is concerned with making grammatical distinctions in order to clarify the nature of religious belief. But Conant thinks that the pseudonym Johannes Climacus ends up in self-contradiction and that Kierkegaard, in his *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, wrote works to show why the standpoints expressed in these works must be revoked. I do not accept this claim. A systematic philosophy, such as Hegel's, is certainly revoked, but is this true of the conceptual analysis by means of which this conclusion is reached?

Fifth, I argue that there is not a necessary tension between conceptual analysis and religious belief. A tension arises only if one thinks that conceptual clarity is the same as the personal appropriation of religious belief. Kierkegaard insists that there is an infinite distance between them.

Finally, I claim that a contemplative conception of philosophy is not to be found in Kierkegaard. He is a religious thinker, concerned with specific confusions concerning Christianity. Kierkegaard never doubts the categories of the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious, whereas Wittgenstein wonders at their very possibility. An asymmetry therefore exists between their authorships.

In his early doctoral dissertation, Kierkegaard shared Plato's misgivings about Socrates' conception of philosophical authorship. If each art has its own *logos*, in what sense is the philosopher related to the arts?

Kierkegaard's fear is that he is related to them as a playful aesthete: eluding them without being committed to any of them. For Kierkegaard, this is the 'infinite negativity' Socrates falls into by becoming the victim of his own irony: "The ironist stands proudly withdrawn into himself; he lets mankind pass before him, as did Adam the animals, and finds no companionship for himself... For him life is a drama. He is himself a spectator even when performing some act... He is inspired by the virtues of self-sacrifice as a spectator is inspired by them in a theatre." According to Kierkegaard, such an ironist "lives hypothetically and subjunctively; his life finally loses all continuity. With this he sinks completely into mood. His life becomes *sheer mood*."²

Kierkegaard makes these remarks in a section called "Irony after Fichte," but they also apply to Socrates. As Josiah Thompson has said, "In the last third of the book Kierkegaard turns from a consideration of Socratic irony to the concept of irony itself," but obviously, Socrates is not excluded from that wider context.³ The subtitle of *The Concept of Irony* is *With Constant Reference to Socrates* (Capel translation) or *With Continual Reference to Socrates* (Hong translation). It is also true that, in this section, Kierkegaard speaks of the romanticist rather than the ironist. The romanticist is someone who lives poetically, feeling free to pick up or drop perspectives in the imagination, without being committed to any of them. This cannot be said of Socrates. The point is that at this early stage in his views, Kierkegaard thought that it could. This is the Kierkegaard who writes: "Throughout this discussion I use the expressions *irony* and *ironist*, but I could as easily say: *romanticism* and *romanticist*. Both expressions designate the same thing."⁴ Kierkegaard's challenge seems to be this: if philosophy cannot show us which of our practices refer to Reality or if it cannot show that they all have

2. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony, with Constant Reference to Socrates*, trans. with an introduction by Lee M. Capel (London: Collins, 1966), pp. 300–302.

3. Josiah Thompson, *Kierkegaard* (London: Gollancz, 1978), p. 148.

4. Kierkegaard, *Concept of Irony*, p. 292. Connections between the demise of philosophy's traditional task of discovering the nature of reality and romanticism continue to be drawn. I heard Richard Rorty in a discussion at Claremont say that given this demise, we are called to live as creative romantics, creating meanings for our lives. We are bidden to be poets. The trouble, according to Rorty, is that having to work as they do, few have sufficient leisure for the task. On the other hand, Stanley Cavell, according to Stephen Mulhall, has taken romanticism's conception of a world-creating and self-creating genius "and simply universalised or democratised it by attributing the capacity for such reanimation to anyone possessed of language" (Stephen Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Reclaiming of the Ordinary* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994], p. 166). I do not approve of

their place in a comprehensive metaphysical system that shows the structure of Reality, how can it be related to these practices in anything other than an aesthetic way? The seriousness of this charge is brought home to us if we remember Kierkegaard's depiction of an aesthete in his *Either/Or*:

One is struck by seeing a clown whose joints are so limber that all necessity for maintaining the human gait and posture is done away. Such are you in an intellectual sense, you can just as well stand on your head as on your feet, everything is possible for you, and by this possibility you can astonish others and yourself; but it is unwholesome, and for the sake of your own tranquility I beg you to see to it that what is your advantage, does not end up by being a curse. A man who has a conviction cannot turn topsy-turvy upon himself and all things. I warn you, therefore, not against the world but against yourself, and I warn the world against you.⁵

Commenting on this depiction, Conant says:

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 of 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 preferences vicariously or tentatively entering into experiences or relationships in order to be able to savour certain pleasures, emotions or moods.... [W]e might say that the defining feature of an 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.... Kierkegaard elsewhere... 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.⁶

If, therefore, we claim that to be a philosophical author is to be an aesthete, the author is accused of simply playing with possibilities in his or

these recourses to romanticism. I certainly do not think they are underwritten by philosophy.

5. Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, trans. Walter Lowrie, vol. 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 14.

6. James Conant, "Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors," in *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, ed. Timothy Jessin and Mario von der Ruhr (London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), p. 294.

her work, work that has no character. In his or her work, on this view, a philosopher lives vicariously, entering imaginatively, but not really, into the possibilities and perspectives depicted.

But if Kierkegaard had these worries about Socrates, Thompson had comparable worries about Kierkegaard. These worries centered on the qualitative dialectic exemplified in his pseudonymous works, in which Kierkegaard explores various perspectives from the inside. But how is he himself related to them? Thompson replies that Kierkegaard's "pseudonyms testify to the activity of a powerful aesthete, withdrawn from the actualities of life, which is all philosophy can be once its metaphysical pretensions have been put aside." His conclusion is that in the pseudonymous works "there is an underlying black humour. For finally the joke is on the reader, and the smarter he is, the sooner he realises it. But to see through all the pseudonyms, to recognise that the vision of any one of them is not to be preferred to any other, is finally to join Kierkegaard in his cloister. It is to share with him that peculiarly modern laceration—'I must believe, but I can't believe'—which since his time has become even more painful."⁷

Thompson is denying the *very possibility of authentic authorship in philosophy* after the demise of metaphysics. His challenge deserves serious attention; it cannot be brushed aside. It does not depend on biographical claims about Kierkegaard. Thompson is not arguing that Kierkegaard is an aesthete in his work because he is an aesthete in his private life. But Conant thinks otherwise, posing that such inquiries become "enmeshed in a biographical dispute about what we can conclude about Kierkegaard the author."⁸

Even if this were the basis of Thompson's challenge, it cannot be disposed of as summarily as Conant suggests. He asks: "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 or a hypocrite, but that does not give me a reason to be one as well." Kierkegaard, through depicting aesthetic and ethical perspectives in his pseudonymous

7. Thompson, *Kierkegaard*, pp. 202, 147.

8. Conant, "Putting Two and Two Together," p. 256.

works, hopes to jolt his readers into a realization that they are not leading a Christian life. But, Conant argues, "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."⁹

As a *general* thesis, the complete insulation of the efficacy of a work from the life of an author cannot be sustained. The force of the thesis has to do with an understandable resistance to the lamentable practice of dragging extraneous features from authors' lives into the interpretation of their works. But when this becomes a general thesis, it falls foul of counterexamples. Rush Rhees told me of a poet who was thought to write fine, patriotic verse. It turned out that throughout the time he was doing so, he had been a quivering. It was impossible to read his poems in the same way again. According to the general thesis, we should be able to say that the fine patriotic verse is not vitiated by the facts about his character. Its effect should be the same despite the hypocrisy of the poet. But this is what proved to be impossible: the lines mocked the reader. If Thompson were simply accusing Kierkegaard of hypocrisy, then, contra Conant, finding it established might have a similar effect. The joke would be on us, and the pseudonymous works might mock us with their playfulness.

Nevertheless, the discussion of the relation between a philosopher's work and her or his private life takes us away from the central issue: How is philosophical authorship, as such, taken up into a life? If there were a strict demarcation between an author's work and his or her life, we should be able to say with Andrey Sinyavsky, "You may live like a fool and yet have excellent ideas from time to time."¹⁰ But can we say, "You may live like a fool and be engaged in serious philosophical inquiry"?

Part of the difficulty is to avoid a silly moralism in this connection. Suppose we say that a philosophical life is worth living. This does not mean that there is something independent of philosophy by appeal to which this worth can be established. There is an internal relation between the worth and the inquiry.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 255, 257.

10. Andrey Sinyavsky, *Unguarded Thoughts* (London: Collins and Harvill Press, 1965), p. 7.

In a television interview, I tried to make a distinction between struggling with conceptual issues about worship and struggling to worship. My interviewer suggested that to do so leads to a kind of schizophrenia, a suspect separation between D. Z. Phillips as a philosopher and D. Z. Phillips as a person. The suggestion was a kind of accusation meant to create guilt at the thought that unless philosophy *is* taken up into one's life, it cannot be more than a trivial, marginal pursuit.

'Taken up into one's life', in the interviewer's sense, meant something like the moral and religious benefits of philosophizing on one's own life and the lives of others. The benefits, so conceived, are independent of philosophy and intelligible independent of it. But we are close to the pharisaical suggestion that a moral philosopher should be better than other people and that a philosopher of religion is someone who knows more about God than do other people. It is partly to avoid such suggestions that Rush Rhees says: "Above all one must avoid the suggestion that 'the philosophical life' is the kind of life you must lead if you are to do philosophy: as if doing philosophy and leading the kind of life were distinct or separable. As though it made *sense* to say, 'It is a pity that you cannot do philosophy without going the hard way—or it is a pity that you cannot do philosophy and also lead a life of self-indulgence—but I am afraid there is no other way'. As though the checking of self-indulgence were the *price* that you have to pay in order to be able to do philosophy. All this is nonsense: but it is not easy to make *this* clear."¹¹

By contrast, Rhees emphasizes the kind of *attention* philosophy asks of one. Giving *that* kind of attention to certain problems *is* the philosophical life, and that attention is not easily acquired. According to Rhees: "This is what Wittgenstein implies when he says that in philosophy one has to struggle constantly against a resistance within oneself, which is a resistance of *will*. One is unwilling to let certain ways of thinking go. It was in such connexions also that Wittgenstein said that whoever does philosophy will have to *suffer*." Is not this also why Rhees says, "We may feel that there is something more like an internal connexion between what you are engaged on in philosophy, and the sort of life you lead"?¹² But that "internal connexion" comes about through

11. Rush Rhees, "The Fundamental Problems of Philosophy," ed. Timothy Tessin, *Philosophical Investigations* 17, 4 (October 1994): 577.

12. *Ibid.*

the kind of attention philosophy demands of one. This is not to deny that there may be occasions in a person's life when the difficulties faced are both moral and philosophical. Or one might not want to make any distinction. But if one wanted to show the *distinctive* way in which philosophy can be taken up in a person's life, one would not choose *those* examples. This is why Rhees states that "in a sense it is stupid to ask or to speak of *why* philosophy is important. The danger is of confusion in the conception of what you 'get out of it.' The danger of giving attention to what is happening to me, or what is happening to the pupil, and being distracted from attention to what is being discussed, or to the questions that had been asked and are being investigated."¹³

If we now look back at Thompson's skeptical challenge to philosophy, we can see that it is far more serious than one might suppose at first. Thompson is not simply attacking someone he takes to be a hypocritical philosopher. If *that* is what he were doing, we could reply by saying that not all philosophers are hypocritical. Thompson is challenging the *very possibility* of philosophy once one admits that it cannot discover the nature and essence of reality. Once that task is abandoned, investigation degenerates into the ephemeral interests of the aesthete. Thompson establishes this conclusion *not* by reference to Kierkegaard's private life but by reference to the nature of his pseudonymous works.

What makes it difficult to embrace this conclusion is that Thompson does draw on two major incidents in Kierkegaard's life. His purpose in doing so, however, is not to find *external* evidence in Kierkegaard's life for what he finds in his work but to illustrate the *same aesthetic tendencies* that he finds in the pseudonymous works.

The first incident comes from Kierkegaard's childhood. His father had promised to take him for a walk, but it had become too late to fulfill the promise. Instead, the young boy was taken on an imaginary walk by his father in the drawing room. Kierkegaard complained, later, that much of his childhood had been lived in the imagination. Thompson, as we have seen, suggests that Kierkegaard, in his pseudonymous works, is playing with possibilities. In referring to the childhood incident, Thompson is showing that this form of play—that is, the *same* form of play—developed early in Kierkegaard. Thompson is providing

not a confirmation but an early illustration of the imaginative play he finds in the pseudonymous works. That is why there is a continuity in the "singular thought" that appears early and late in Kierkegaard: "Slowly, inevitably, a singular thought has taken root in the young boy's mind. It is not necessary to live in the world. On the contrary, the world—its resistance, its burdens, its conflicting demands—can be transformed. One need only dream. Narcissus has found his solitary pool and Kierkegaard his future: he will be a dreamer."¹⁴ Thompson is not confirming Kierkegaard's vocation by an appeal to something external to it; rather, he is claiming to have located *the birth of that vocation*, in Kierkegaard's childhood. His general claim is that philosophers bereft of a metaphysical vision are fated to become idle dreamers.

The second incident Thompson refers to concerns Kierkegaard's reaction on hearing a poorhouse inmate bewail her want of a certain sum of money. Kierkegaard provided the exact sum with a flourish before vanishing. Later, in tranquility, he indulged in ruminating on the different ways in which the poor woman might have thought of the incident. Thompson's claim is that in these ruminations we have the *same* tendency to live poetically in the imagination that he finds in the pseudonymous works.

Thompson's charge is general and extensive, since he notes that Kierkegaard calls all his pseudonymous works aesthetic. But given Kierkegaard's unflattering depiction of the aesthete, how can any work called 'aesthetic' enjoy intellectual respectability? *That* is the core of Thompson's challenge.

This challenge is not easily deflected. It cannot be achieved, as Conant thinks, simply by not indulging in what he calls "flattening out the category of the aesthetic."¹⁵ Conant's proposed solution simply postpones really facing Thompson's challenge. Conant argues that the category of the aesthetic is flattened out when 'the aesthetic' is equated with 'immediacy'. Within the three categories of 'the religious', 'the ethical', and 'the aesthetic', there are higher and lower levels. Conant endeavors to show what this distinction comes to within the aesthetic category: "The most primitive stage of the aesthetic is, indeed, that of 'immediacy.' In immediacy there is a complete absorption of the self in the object... At this lowest (and, in a sense, purest) stage of the aesthetic, the accent falls totally on the object; the subject plays a purely

13. *Ibid.*, p. 582.

14. Thompson, *Kierkegaard*, p. 40.

15. Conant, "Putting Two and Two Together," p. 309 n. 32.

nominal, spectral role." But if, as Conant notes, the most pure form of the aesthetic is that which is "available to a pre-linguistic infant," the account, rather than falling on the object, falls entirely on the self.¹⁶ This is the kind of immediacy where desire finds its elemental gratification in the organism in which it originates. What of the higher levels? Conant argues:

What has been lost on a great deal of the secondary literature, however, is that this stage (of immediate absorption) does not exhaust the category of the aesthetic; it is only one stage of the aesthetic. In the 'higher' stages of the aesthetic, in which the subject takes up a more reflective attitude towards the object, there is a sense in which the relation (between subject and object) at issue for Kierkegaard still remains a purely contemplative one.... The critical feature that the different stages of the aesthetic have in common is that (as Kierkegaard likes to put it) the accent falls on the object rather than the subject—it is a relation that makes no demands on the subject's mode of existence.... The point of grouping complete immediacy and certain forms of mediation (i.e. forms of 'disinterested reflectiveness') together within a single category is to highlight their common feature: in each case, the subject's attention is directed away from itself and towards the object of its attention.¹⁷

Conant's suggestion that the most indulgent aesthete and the most serious, disinterested inquirer should be placed within the single category of the aesthetic because they share a common feature is reminiscent of John Stuart Mill's attempt to contain radically different activities within the category of 'pleasure' by introducing the distinction between higher and lower pleasures. The difficulty for this philosophical strategy is well known: it is not the alleged common category that gives sense to the activities but the activities that give sense to the concepts connected with them. It is not the category of pleasure that throws light on the activities in which we speak of pleasure but the activities which give sense to the assertion that they give us pleasure. Similarly, it is not the category of the aesthetic that illuminates the activity but the activity that shows why we can speak of the aesthetic in connection with it. The qualitative differences are, at the same time, grammatical differences, and these cannot be bypassed by an appeal to an alleged common feature they all share. To place delight in Joe's ice cream and grappling with one's philosophical puzzlement within the

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*, p. 309 n. 32.

category of the aesthetic, on the grounds that to do so highlights a common feature they share—the way a "subject's attention is directed away from itself and towards the object of its attention"—does not seem to be a step toward grammatical enlightenment. The *differences* between the examples are infinitely more important than the supposed common feature invoked, as in Mill's case, to hold a suspect category intact.

Conant states that "Kierkegaard refers to the entire pseudonymous authorship as an aesthetic production. He insists therefore upon the very fact that Thompson wants 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."¹⁸ But before we can conclude that Kierkegaard and Thompson are referring to the very same fact, the same aesthetic relation, we have to ask how each of them understands that aesthetic relation. Once we do so, we see why Conant's distinction between higher and lower levels of the aesthetic does not meet Thompson's challenge.

Thompson's problem is to see how Kierkegaard can call his pseudonymous works 'aesthetic', at the same time as Kierkegaard conducts a blistering attack on the attitude of the aesthete. Conant seeks to reassure us that the attitude attacked belongs to the lower levels of the aesthetic, whereas Kierkegaard's aesthetic belongs to its higher levels. But when we remind ourselves that the lower levels, according to Conant, have to do with immediacy, with the gratifications of a prelinguistic infant, it is clear that the imaginative play of the young Kierkegaard and, even more, Kierkegaard's poetic reflections on the woman from the poorhouse belong to what Conant calls the higher levels of the aesthetic. Further, as we have seen, Thompson sees these examples as the birth and an example, respectively, of the *same form* of poetic play he takes Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works to be. So Thompson's worry about the nature of philosophical inquiry surfaces *within* the higher levels of the aesthetic.

In addition, it is clear that Kierkegaard himself recognizes the dangers of aestheticism *in the realm of the intellect*; in *Either/Or*, as we have seen, he speaks of the readiness, intellectually, to stand on one's head

18. *Ibid.*, p. 258.

as easily as on one's feet, to turn topsy-turvy on any question. No reminder of the lower levels of the aesthetic can deflect a charge of corruption of the intellect. Thompson's challenge is to show why such corruption is not *inevitable* if philosophers pretend that their inquiries can continue, even *after* they admit that they are not discovering the nature of reality. What else can philosophy be but an empty aestheticism?

Conant wants to argue that we may think such conclusions face us only if we ignore the sense in which Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works are 'aesthetic'. Conant's suggestion is, in certain ways, similar to some views of Socrates that we considered in the last chapter. Socrates brought people to see, indirectly, that it makes no sense to seek a conception of reality that transcends our practices. Kierkegaard, like Socrates, is telling us to be content with clarity about the practices we engage in. An aesthetic interest is a disinterestedness in becoming clear about the practices. Thus, if we give proper understanding to the pseudonymous works, we shall come to a fruitful postmetaphysical understanding of philosophical authorship.

There are two observations to be made about these conclusions. First, if this is how Kierkegaard's authorship is to be understood, no contemplative conception of philosophy is to be found in his work, because we can be puzzled about differences between our practices, our modes of discourse, without being puzzled about how discourse is at all possible—the puzzle that is the hallmark of a contemplative conception of philosophy.

Second, even allowing that the philosophy one finds in Kierkegaard has to do with conceptual clarifications in a noncontemplative sense, those clarifications have their place in an authorship that is primarily religious rather than philosophical. But these observations must now be substantiated.

Conant argues that the pseudonymous works are written to be reread. A systematic point of view is elucidated in such a way that we come to appreciate the confusion involved in it. The pseudonymous works invite us to explore them, but in the course of doing so, we come to see why they must be abandoned. Through the abandonment we achieve conceptual clarification.

Conceptual clarification is an activity that is not easy to understand. It is *essentially indirect*. What it achieves is not the refutation of a false thesis but the unraveling of a confusion. A confused statement is not refuted, for its refutation would involve thinking of it as intelligible,

but false; the trouble consists in the fact that an attempt is made to say what does not make sense. The route to the confusion has to be unfolded in such a way that the person no longer wants to utter it. The unfolding is indirect in that one has to begin from where the confused one is.

Kierkegaard had particular confusions in mind. He called them 'the monstrous illusion', by which he meant the pervasive illusion in the Denmark of his day that led people to think they were Christians when they were not. If we accept that Kierkegaard's conceptual clarifications were occasioned by his concern about 'the monstrous illusion', his conception of philosophy in such clarifications is obvious: it is an underlaborer conception of philosophy.

Locke thought that system building was the province of science. In attempting to build metaphysical systems, philosophy was the trespasser. That being so, what task remains for philosophy? Locke's view was that a useful but more modest task awaits it—namely, to be an underlaborer on the sites on which others build and live. Philosophy clears away conceptual confusions to facilitate clear building and clear living. Conceptual underlaborers clear up conceptual confusions on one site after another. If we ask underlaborers where their *own* site is, the question betrays our misunderstanding. It does not make sense to attribute a site to them; their work is occasioned by confusions that occur on *other* sites. Philosophy has no distinctive site of its own, and that is why, on this view, we always have to speak of the philosophy of something or other—philosophy of morals, philosophy of psychology, philosophy of religion, and so on. Kierkegaard's main concern is with confusions about religion. In exploring them, he brings many conceptual distinctions to our attention. We can call them philosophical distinctions if we want to, but Kierkegaard's interest in making them is not primarily philosophical. He is, above all, a religious thinker, which is why, I argue, we do not find a contemplative conception of philosophy in his work. Conant does not see this point because for him, too, philosophy is primarily a matter of clarifying conceptual confusions. The point could be expressed by saying that, as far as the *character* of the inquiry is concerned, Conant settles for Kierkegaard's qualitative dialectic.

Kierkegaard's religious purposes are evident when he writes: "Supposing that . . . a reader understands perfectly and appraises critically the individual aesthetic productions, he will nevertheless totally misunderstand me, inasmuch as he does not understand the religious totality

in my whole work as an author. Suppose, then, another understands my works in the totality of their religious reference, but does not understand a single one of the aesthetic productions contained in them—I would say that the lack of understanding is not an essential lack."¹⁹

I had written, "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 own lives."²⁰ Conant responds, "Phillips gets into a muddle of trying to distinguish Kierkegaard from Wittgenstein." He thinks I make this attempt because of a "misplaced worry: 'The question is how much of what Kierkegaard describes as the illusion is to be described as grammatical?' The correct answer which Phillips feels he must reject is: 100 per cent."²¹

At first it seems that Conant is forming a clear distinction between making grammatical observations and the philosophical or religious purposes for which they are made. But then he says, "That does not mean that Kierkegaard *merely* wishes to draw attention to a confusion of grammar." We now have a distinction between 'drawing attention to a confusion of grammar' and 'merely drawing attention to a confusion of grammar', which presumably Conant takes to be a distinction of substance. But then it turns out, according to Conant, that to talk of 'merely drawing attention to a confusion of grammar' is *itself* a confusion of grammar: the confusion of not realizing that drawing attention to a confusion of grammar "in the relevant sense is not merely about words."²²

I have italicized "in the relevant sense" because Conant, like myself, wants to emphasize the internal relations in Kierkegaard between "drawing attention to a confusion of grammar" and his concern with 'the monstrous illusion'. Conant says that it is a *confusion* to talk of "confusions of grammar" in Kierkegaard "as if this were somehow distinct from a confusion in how his purportedly 'Christian' readership lives. Such confusions of grammar are not mere confusions of gram-

19. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 6.

20. D. Z. Phillips, "Authorship and Authenticity: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein," in *Wittgenstein and Religion* (London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), p. 211.

21. Conant, "Putting Two and Two Together," p. 281.

22. *Ibid.*

mar (because grammar in the relevant sense is not merely about words), but also confusion in life. They are symptoms (and sometimes contributory causes) of soul-sickness." By contrast, Conant thinks that I have missed the internal relation between Kierkegaard's conceptual clarifications and his concern with 'the monstrous illusion' and that I treat them as two separate matters: "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 real 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."²³ But, presumably, it is not *merely* a grammatical one if Conant wants to retain his previous distinctions.

As we shall see in the next chapter, part of the trouble comes from Conant's desire to find too tidy a parallel between Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein. In fact, there is an important asymmetry between Kierkegaard's qualitative dialectic and Wittgenstein's philosophical method. For the moment, however, we can begin to approach these issues by showing why a contemplative conception of philosophy is absent in Kierkegaard's work.

As we have seen, Conant attributes to me a "two-part" view of grammatical confusion in Kierkegaard's inquiries: "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."²⁴ According to Conant, I think the second issue involves a desire in Kierkegaard to push people in the direction of Christianity and that in so doing I share in the widespread misunderstanding of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works in the secondary literature.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 279-80.

Conant gives a good account of the aim of a pseudonymous work: "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 on such a life). 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."²⁵

Rather than say that the purpose of the pseudonymous works is to push people toward Christianity, all I said was that it is Kierkegaard's concern about Christianity which leads him to make the qualitative distinctions that he does. It is important to recognize that this concern gives Kierkegaard's qualitative dialectic its rationale. I had stated: "Kierkegaard's hope was that when aesthetic and ethical perspectives are seen for what they are, those who confused them with Christianity would realise the error of their ways and turn to Christianity. But even if this does not happen, and they preferred to stay where they were, at least the monstrous illusion would have been dispelled. 'Therefore it is possible for misunderstanding to be removed and become agreement and understanding, but it is possible also for it to be removed and to become real disagreement.' It follows that clarity is in 'every man's interest, whether he be a Christian or not, whether his intention is to accept Christianity or to reject it.'"²⁶

So at no time did I suggest that Kierkegaard's qualitative dialectic, of itself, pushes people toward Christianity. I said, explicitly, "It would be problematic to argue that Kierkegaard thought... that philosophical reflection, if carried out with integrity, should lead one to see Christianity as the only adequate positive answer to the question of the meaning of life."²⁷

What I want to emphasize, again and again, is that Kierkegaard's qualitative dialectic gets its purpose, its point, and its character from his religious concern. As Conant recognizes, it is in this context that Kierkegaard wants to deliver people from a confusion of categories:

25. *Ibid.*, p. 279.

26. Phillips, "Authorship and Authenticity," pp. 205-6.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

"But the very specific grammatical confusions to which Kierkegaard wishes to draw attention are ones that 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." So vital is this concern for Kierkegaard that, as Conant says, he would prefer the demise of Christianity to the triumph of 'the monstrous illusion': "Even if the effect of Kierkegaard's authorship were only to completely purge Denmark of all the people who wished to think of themselves as Christians, that would still constitute a significant advance. For it would clear the path for someone someday who did wish to become a Christian. In particular, it would allow it to once again become clear that a Christian is not something one simply is, but rather someone one must become: 'There is really something tragically true in the fact that it would be better if Christianity were not proclaimed at all than that it be done as it is now.... [T]he disaster is that people get used to hearing everything, without having the remotest notion of doing something.'"²⁸

The internal relation between Kierkegaard's qualitative dialectic and his religious concern about 'the monstrous illusion' could not be put more bluntly than when Conant says, "If someone is not confused about the categories and does not pretend to be a Christian then he is not part of the monstrosity."²⁹ And to emerge from the illusion has its point in an *affective* relation in which the unconfused person stands to Christianity. Climacus, in the *Postscript*, puts it thus: "Christianity is subjectivity; an inner transformation, an actualization of inwardness, and... only two kinds of people know anything about it: those who with an infinite passionate interest in an eternal happiness base their happiness upon their believing relationship to Christianity, and those who with an infinite passion, but in passion, reject it—the happy and the unhappy lovers."³⁰

At no time does Kierkegaard doubt the categories of the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. His concern is with confusions between them. His qualitative dialectic is meant to bring out these confusions.

28. Conant, "Putting Two and Two Together," pp. 280, 325 n. 76.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 321 n. 66.

30. Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 51.

As I have said, the conceptual distinctions made in the course of these clarifications may be called philosophical. Yet there is a problem in giving the dialectic overall a philosophical character, for philosophy itself is simply one subject within it.

Climacus, the pseudonymous author, is a philosopher who is not a Christian. Nevertheless, he is portrayed as having an interest in Christianity. So Kierkegaard, a religious author, creates Climacus, a philosophical author. At the end of his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Climacus, in an appendix, tells us that the work is to be revoked. But in what sense? *That* is the vital question as far as Kierkegaard's relation to philosophical authorship is concerned. My view is that Kierkegaard the religious author makes Climacus the philosopher, who is not a Christian, tell us that his work is to be revoked, put aside, because it cannot answer a *religious* question: "I, Johannes Climacus, now thirty years of age, born in Copenhagen, a plain man like the common run of them, have heard tell of a highest good in prospect, which is called an eternal blessedness, and that Christianity will bestow this upon me on condition of adhering to it—now I ask how I am to become a Christian."³¹

Conant thinks that we are brought to see that the work must be revoked *philosophically*. He claims that it ends up in self-defeating confusions and contradictions. But viewed philosophically, this simply does not happen; rather, the work provides philosophical insights about the grammar of religious belief that are similar to those which Wittgenstein provides, which is not surprising given Kierkegaard's influence on Wittgenstein. But because Kierkegaard's primary interests are religious, Climacus's philosophical insights are brought into a final relation with what they cannot do—namely, make one embark on becoming a Christian. In his qualitative dialectic, Kierkegaard, because of his religious interest, gives pride of place to what philosophy *cannot* do. He does not give pride of place, as Wittgenstein does, to what philosophy *can* do. This is why we have to conclude that a contemplative conception of philosophy is not to be found in Kierkegaard.

The path to this conclusion is a complicated one, because Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authors create their own pseudonymous authors and pursue their own objects of criticism. Climacus, a philosopher, who is not a Christian, criticizes philosophical hubris with respect to Christianity. The main object of criticism, in this respect, is Hegel's

31. *Ibid.*, p. 545.

System, the example, *par excellence*, of metaphysical ambition. Kierkegaard joked about how fortunate Hegel was to have been born late enough to see Reality reach its culmination in his own System! The System provides a higher form of understanding that transcends Christianity. Yet, it cannot be said, so far, that Climacus is critical of *any* form of philosophy, given that he himself is a philosopher and that his criticisms of Hegel's System are themselves philosophical.

But the plot thickens, since in the course of these criticisms, Climacus comes to conclusions which refer to philosophical tendencies with respect to religion that are far more extensive than Hegelianism. Climacus distinguishes between objective problems and subjective problems with respect to Christianity. "The objective problem consists of an inquiry into the truth of Christianity. The subjective problem concerns the relationship of the individual to Christianity. To put it quite simply: How may I, Johannes Climacus, participate in the happiness promised by Christianity?"³² Climacus brings out the confusion of treating the subjective problem as though it were an objective one. This confusion is philosophy's main contribution to 'the monstrous illusion'. Although this is Climacus's philosophical view, according to Conant, it is one with which Kierkegaard agrees. Conant brings out well the kind of confusion attributed to philosophy:

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).³³

The plot thickens further. Climacus criticizes not only Hegel's System but also other tendencies that confuse religious and aesthetic categories. But these criticisms are themselves philosophical and are, therefore, in Kierkegaard's terms, aesthetic. But Conant wants to say that

32. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

33. Conant, "Putting Two and Two Together," p. 261.

these philosophical criticisms, in turn, end up in confusion and contradiction. He argues that they involve a metaphysical view which Climacus himself has seen through. How can Conant say this? He does so by changing a conceptual (or grammatical) observation made by Climacus into a philosophical thesis. In short, Conant becomes an illusionist of the kind of contribution which Kierkegaard says that modern philosophy makes to 'the monstrous illusion'.

Climacus points out that within Christianity there is talk of a renunciation of the understanding. He is reminding us of a religious conception. An example would be the way in which Job renounces the understanding offered to him by his Comforters. Such a renunciation is expressed further in his ability to say, "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Philosophy or philosophically informed theologues ignore this notion of renunciation in the construction of theodicies.

When a philosopher provides this reminder in the way Climacus does, he or she is not laying claim to a 'higher understanding' that transcends Christianity but, rather, making a grammatical observation about religious belief. But Conant turns Climacus's insight into a metaphysical theory: "This plea within the body of the book on behalf of a renunciation of the understanding comes in the form of a doctrine as to the true nature of Christianity, thus in the form of 'higher understanding.' We are invited to think that we can get a glimpse into the nature of something which the human understanding is unable to grasp." On such a reading, all Conant can see here is "a self-defeating attempt to penetrate the incomprehensible by trying to smuggle in a glimmer of comprehension." As a result, "The *Postscript* begins as an attempt to distinguish between 'subjective' and 'objective' problems.... But it comes to seem as if this task of demarcation presupposes the existence of a category of problem that reason cannot penetrate; it seems as if we need to mark out that which reason can comprehend from that which it cannot."³⁴

Here, Conant has equated "a renunciation of the understanding" of which Christianity talks in *specific* religious contexts with a general metaphysical theory, hence the ready comparison with the *Tractatus*:

The *Tractatus* begins as an attempt to clarify the logical structure of language. But this seems to presuppose that we be able to draw a limit to

thought—to mark out those thoughts that can be accommodated by the logical structure of language from those that cannot. Both works thereby invite the reader to enter into a perspective from which it seems that there is something that reason *cannot* do.... Yet it also comes to seem as if the very philosophical exercise of identifying the limits of thought itself imparts to us a glimmer of comprehension into that which is incomprehensible; itself, it shows us the truth of thoughts which are logically unthinkable and hence incapable of being coherently stated.³⁵

But, as H.A. Nielsen has shown, "The Unknown of the *Fragments* should not be run together with *epistemological* unknowns or unknowns such as Kant's Ding-an-sich or the Unknowable in Herbert Spencer's *First Principles*."³⁶ Nielsen's insight needs to be applied to the *Postscript* too. Commenting on Nielsen, I said:

If we want to know what it means to speak of human inadequacy before God, we must examine, not epistemological theories, but how such talk enters the believer's life. Further, if we were trying to convey the sense of such a notion to a would-be believer "it would be beside the point to offer him a proof that some generalized or metaphysical limit of thought exists, such as 'the mystical' or 'the unsayable' in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*." Climacus says categorically that God cannot be known by metaphysical proofs. To think otherwise, he claims, is to be in the grip of conceptual confusion. Yet "at the same time he speaks *knowingly* of this Unknown in expressions drawn from everyday religious language." Climacus, it seems, is trying to clarify what it means to talk of an Unknown God by placing such talk in its natural setting.³⁷

Yet, even if I could persuade Conant of *this* conclusion, so wedded is he to his thesis that the *Postscript* must end in some kind of self-refutation that he could counter it by proposing a contradiction of another kind:

The concern of the book, we are told repeatedly in the body of the work, is to explain what is involved in 'the subjective problem' of Christianity—to explain what it is for someone to become a Christian. Yet according to the doctrine (apparently) propounded in the body of the

35. *Ibid.*, p. 292.

36. H. A. Nielsen, *Where the Passion Is: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1983), p. 75 n.

37. D. Z. Phillips, "Critical Notice," review of *Where the Passion Is* by H. A. Nielsen, and *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript* by C. Stephen Evans, Humanities Press, 1983, *Philosophical Investigations* 9, 1 (January 1986): 73. Evans is tempted by the view that the infinite God is something to be known by us but lies on the other side of the epistemological limits that mark our condition.

work, "only two kinds of people can know anything about it": "those who with infinite passionate interest" devote their lives to it and "those who with an opposite passion, but in passion, reject it". Thus Climacus—as someone whose relation to Christianity is purely theoretical (who is 'completely taken up' with *thinking* about it and who has failed to develop any practical relation to it 'either positively or negatively')—is an author who, by his own lights, cannot 'know anything about' the matter which his work is ostensibly devoted to illuminating.³⁸

I want to insist that Climacus's *philosophical* (grammatical, dialectical) insights involve no such contradiction. Climacus brings out well what 'acceptance' or 'rejection' of Christianity involves. He insists that they involve passion, which he wants to contrast with what philosophy often turns them into: theoretical acceptance or rejection of the proposition 'God exists' or 'Jesus is the Son of God'. For this reason, it is misleading to describe Climacus's relation to Christianity as theoretical. Climacus is engaged in conceptual elucidation. Such elucidation does not entail that the philosopher who provides it must *himself* or *herself* either passionately accept or passionately reject Christianity. To argue otherwise is to argue that we must passionately accept or reject any belief we clarify. This raises the whole question of the place of the *Fragments* and the *Postscripti* in Kierkegaard's dialectic. To ask what we are to make of Climacus is to ask what place philosophy occupies in that qualitative dialectic. One cannot answer that question without invoking the use Kierkegaard is making of his pseudonymous author.

Nielsen suggests that since Christianity asks for obedience, to analyze that demand philosophically and not obey is a contradiction, because Christianity "admits of two and only two responses from the person who hears of it: either acceptance of its proposal or else offence."³⁹ Notice that we are now speaking from within a Christian perspective. So is O. K. Bouwsma, it seems to me, when he says: "We get, accordingly, a grammatical elaboration of the language when what is required is obedience and surrender. The elaboration is cheap in that one can indulge in that and enjoy at the same time one's intellectual respectability."⁴⁰ Grammatical elucidation and a qualitative dialectic are not forms of religious surrender, but why should they be? The prob-

38. Conant, "Putting Two and Two Together," p. 289.

39. Nielsen, *Where the Passion Is*, p. 89.

40. O. K. Bouwsma, "Notes on Kierkegaard's 'The Monstrous Illusion,'" in *Without Proof or Evidence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), p. 77.

lems that occasioned them came *from philosophy*, and if Climacus is a serious philosopher, it will be seen in terms of what he does with these issues *in philosophy*. This was something Conant explained earlier when he emphasized the aesthetic character of Kierkegaard's inquiries, but he seems to have forgotten it now. He says of Climacus's claim to understanding, "It is an illusion because it furnishes its captive with only the appearance of ethical and religious progress unaccompanied by significant inner or outer change."⁴¹ Philosophical insight is often spiritually important, with respect to belief *and* atheism, but it is not *that* kind of spiritual or ethical progress.

Nielsen is tempted by the Christian response to philosophy expressed by Bouwsma. He suggests:

The character of the religious demand illustrates how Christianity can become an offence to a philosopher. It can generate a kind of offence of its own in a person who prides himself on being able to appraise a thought at arm's length. This he can do when the thought in question is, for example, a scientific hypothesis and the kinds of possible response number more than two. There the response need not be charged with personal passion, and someone's dismissal of the hypothesis or suspension of judgement about it, may be methodical and dispassionate all the way. The Absolute Paradox, on the other hand, disallows that kind of response. Any reaction short of unconditional acceptance betrays a personal affront.⁴²

I repeat my reaction to it, because it is relevant to what I am discussing:

Here again, it seems to me, religious and philosophical considerations are run together. When a philosopher tries to be clear about the character of a scientific hypothesis, he is not doing science, himself testing the hypothesis as a scientist would. The philosopher, it might be said, is keeping the scientific hypothesis at arm's length. A philosopher may also try to be clear about the character of the response Christianity calls for. In doing so, he is neither making nor rejecting the response himself. He keeps the response at arm's length. Further, to avoid certain confusions, he may want to bring out the differences between responding to a proposed scientific hypothesis, and responding to the challenge of Christianity. Here he is keeping both responses at arm's length, and bringing out the conceptual difference between them. As a philosopher, he may see that the religious challenge is such that it demands

41. Conant, "Putting Two and Two Together," p. 292.

42. Nielsen, *Where the Passion Is*, pp. 89–90.

more of him as a person, but whether he responds or not does not have a bearing on the philosophical enterprise. Failure to respond does not entail a personal affront in him as a philosopher. Further, if he does respond, it does not follow, for him, as a philosopher, that "all (his) reason stands for gets shoved onto a siding."⁴³

We think otherwise about the fate of reason only if, like Nielsen and Conant, we keep moving forward and backward between the demands of philosophical inquiry and the demands of religious belief.

Why does Climacus think that the whole work must be revoked? It is not because his philosophical conclusions are self-defeating. Rather, it is because Kierkegaard has made his pseudonymous author ask a religious as well as a philosophical question.

As we have seen, Climacus's response to the philosophical confusion of thinking that Christianity is some form of metaphysics, a philosophical thesis of some kind—a confusion that is philosophy's *distinctive* contribution to the monstrous illusion—is to show that "Christianity is subjectivity, an inner transformation." But Climacus *also* asks how *he* is to become a Christian. Climacus sees that his philosophical conclusions do not meet, and were not meant to meet, that problem, although clarity will help in appreciating what the problem is. And that is Climacus's role in Kierkegaard's qualitative dialectic—to bring out the limits of philosophy with respect to becoming a Christian. Giving the philosopher Climacus this role shows why Kierkegaard does not have a contemplative conception of philosophy.

Recalling the first chapter, one may say that philosophically Kierkegaard remains within the Socratic task, which, incidentally, he regarded as the highest achievement of philosophy. He endeavors to become clear about the categories that are found in our thinking, such as the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. He exposes the confusion of trying to turn religious belief into a philosophical thesis. Yet, as Kierkegaard insists, clarity about such matters is still an infinite distance from religious faith. It is Climacus the philosopher who revokes the claim that philosophy can do more than clarify in this context.⁴⁴

Kierkegaard's *Postscript* shows how philosophy may be an offense to Christianity if it claims to be the basis or even the rival of the salvation

it offers. When philosophy seeks to appropriate *religious* concerns, "the assistant professors want to swallow an existential thinker in order to obtain blood and life—warmth in paragraphs for a while."⁴⁵

But even within a conception of philosophy that settles for marking conceptual differences, the *Postscript* does not show that Christianity is an offense to philosophy. The claim that it *must* be an offense is made by Michael Weston in his illuminating study of Kierkegaard. He argues that Kierkegaard would "object to the sort of 'distance' which appears required by [philosophy's] form of discourse. That discourse has, in attempting an 'exposition' of the existential dialectic and so a direct communication,⁴⁶ presupposed a position *outside* it in 'disinterest'. But such a position is subject to ethical criticism itself; it is inappropriate for an existing individual, and so inappropriate *tout court*."⁴⁷ But Weston's worries come from confusing religious and philosophical issues. If a philosopher says that "God's ways are above human understanding" is a grammatical remark, he is not claiming to understand God's ways. Rather, he is claiming to locate and clarify the place that the remark has in religious life and to mark it off from others with which it may be confused.

Yet, none of this shows that philosophy is not more than conceptual clarification or that we must settle for a noncontemplative conception of philosophy. Weston speaks of philosophy seeking a position *outside* existential dialectic in 'disinterest'. He is correct. That wider context is defined in terms of philosophy's fundamental concern not simply with marking off different modes of discourse but with the question of how discourse is possible at all. I will say more about this distinction in the next chapter, but at this stage I want to respond to the view that my distinction is an unreal one. It may be argued that since proper attention to language games involves attending to the ways they are interwoven into human life, attention to language games simply *is* attention to discourse. But difficulties about language itself are not the same as difficulties that involve confusions *between* different uses of language. For

43. Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, ed. and trans. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), p. 646.

46. Surely Weston should have said "objective" rather than "direct." Philosophy is a form of objective inquiry whose methods, as we have seen, are, of necessity, indirect rather than direct.

47. Michael Weston, *Kierkegaard and Modern Continental Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 176.

43. Phillips, "Critical Notice," pp. 70–71.

44. I am grateful to Michael Lottit for emphasizing the point.

example, in dealing with the latter, you take for granted that the person you are teaching differences to can already speak. But in being puzzled about language, what is being taken for granted? Skepticism, at its deepest, as Plato knew, is skepticism about the possibility of discourse. These matters are easily confused, because part of the reason for confusion about the possibility of discourse may well reside in the kind of attention or lack of attention given to specific modes of discourse.

Absorbed as he is in clarifying categories for religious purposes, these wider issues are of little interest to Kierkegaard. Of course, a philosopher may think, because of his conception of what it means to *say* something, that nothing religious can be said. But the contemplative movement of thought, even when it reaches a conclusion I disagree with, is not from a concern about religion to the need for conceptual clarification but from a concern about the possibility of discourse to what can be said of religion.

With respect to Christianity, Kierkegaard thinks we ought to be happy or unhappy lovers. For a religious author, that is as it should be. He protests against the confusion involved in the fact that genuine acceptance or rejection of Christianity in the Denmark of his day had been replaced by a "strife-waged *pro* and *contra*" devoid of passion. Such contentions move in a vacuum. Kierkegaard asks, For whose sake do they do all this?

Wittgenstein, too, addressed the passions, but without meddling with them. It is as though Weston asks for whose sake he does all this. The answer is, for his own sake and for that of anyone else who both wonders at and is puzzled by the possibility of discourse—wonders at and is puzzled by what it means to say something, the various forms that saying something may take, and how these have their sense in the hubbub of voices that are found in our discourse. If Weston says that the understanding this may bring is "inappropriate for an existing individual," what sort of judgment is that? If the judgment is saying that philosophy is not a form of salvation or a substitute for religion, Wittgenstein would agree. Otherwise, Weston's remark would simply be a refusal to let the interests of human beings be the ragged, mixed phenomena they are. Among the oldest of these is the desire for the distinctive kind of understanding that philosophy can provide in the account it tries to give of reality.

Kierkegaard did not want the sense of Christianity confused with the sense of other things, but he did not question the sense that he saw in Christianity and those other things. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, wonders at the possibility of there being sense in things at all. As we shall see in the next chapter, therein lies the authorial asymmetry between them.