

# *Either/Or*

Søren Kierkegaard

1843

[Excerpts]

“Personality is only ripe when a man has made the truth his own.”

Here are some papers I found in an old desk:

## THE PAPERS OF ‘A’

Diapsalmata: I’d rather be a swineherd than a misunderstood poet. People are vapid, unreasonable, life is a trouble, I feel trapped, and bored. Alas, the door of fortune does not open inwards so that one can force it by charging at it. Business is silly. If the gods offered me a wish, I’d wish for laughter.

The Musical Erotic: Mozart is brilliant! Especially Don Giovanni! It was Christianity which made sensuousness important by denouncing it. Only music expresses sensuousness. It is best expressed by Mozart, in Don Giovanni, which is BRILLIANT!

Ancient Tragedy And The Modern: Modern drama doesn’t understand suffering quite like ancient drama did.

Shadowgraphs: Here’s my opinion on how sorrow is expressed. Especially in Don Giovanni (v. brilliant).

The Unhappiest One: is the one who always remembers.

On The First Love: I keep on bumping into the play ‘First Love’ by Eugène Scribe. It is really good.

Crop Rotation: If you want to be happy, keep rotating your view of things, like farmers rotate their crops. Learn how to forget.

The Seducer’s Diary: Here’s the diary of Johannes, a rotter who seduces Cordelia, not so much for sex, as for the aesthetic fun of abandoning her later.

## THE PAPERS OF 'B': HIS LETTERS TO 'A'

The Aesthetic Validity Of Marriage: Marriage is really nice.

Balance between Esthetic and Ethical: You have to choose either/or! If you go just for the aesthetic life you choose despair. If you go for the ethical, you do your duty.

Ultimatum: Realise that, against God, you are always in the wrong, which means that you know precisely where you are.

### PREFACE

*Are passions, then, the pagans of the soul? Reason alone baptised?* Edward Young

It may at times have occurred to you, dear reader, to doubt that familiar philosophical thesis that the outer is the inner and the inner is the outer. I myself have always been rather heretical on this point and every time I found a contradiction between what I saw and what I heard, my doubt is confirmed and my zeal for observation increased.

A father-confessor is separated from the penitent by a grille; he does not see, he only hears. As he listens, he forms an appropriate exterior, and consequently, he avoids contradiction. But you, however, see and hear at the same time, and yet are aware of a grille between yourself and the speaker.

Now, I had better explain how these papers came into my possession. About seven years ago I purchased an escritoire from a second-hand dealer here in town. I took to keeping my ready-money in one of its drawers, until, in the summer of 1836, preparing for a trip to the country and with the postilion waiting outside, I found the drawer had jammed. A hatchet was fetched, I struck the escritoire a huge blow, the drawer remained closed, but there sprang open a secret door, and there I found the mass of papers that form the content of the present work.

The papers appeared to be by two authors. The one author I have placed first and called 'A', writes essays on aesthetic matters, and also appeared to be the writer of a series of short aphorisms which I have collected together under the title of 'Diapsalma'. The last of A's papers is a story entitled 'the Seducer's Diary' which A acknowledges merely as being its editor, an old short-story writer's trick. Of the

other writer, the one I have designated ‘B’, one learns that he was called Vilhelm, had been a judge, and that he writes on ethical matters.

As editor I will only append the wish that the book meets the reader in a favourable hour, and that the fair lady reader succeeds in scrupulously following B’s well-intentioned advice.

*Victor Eremita—November 1842*

## PART ONE: CONTAINING THE PAPERS OF ‘A’

### DIAPSALMATA

*ad se ipsum* (to himself)

What is a poet? An unhappy person who conceals profound anguish in his heart but whose lips are so formed that as sighs and cries pass over them they sound like beautiful music. People crowd around and say to him, “Sing again soon”—in other words, may new sufferings torture your soul. And the reviewers say, “That is right, according to the rules of aesthetics.” Now of course a reviewer is just like a poet, except that he does not have anguish in his heart, or music on his lips. Therefore, I would rather be a swineherd out on Amager Island and be understood by swine than be a poet and be misunderstood by people.

O! How unreasonable people are! They never use the freedoms they have but demand those they do not have; they have freedom of thought and they demand freedom of speech.

I don’t feel like doing anything. I don’t feel like riding, the motion is too powerful. I don’t feel like walking, it is too tiring. I don’t feel like lying down, for either I would have to stay down, and I don’t feel like doing that, or I would have to get up again, and I don’t feel like doing that, either. *Summa Summarum*: I don’t feel like doing anything.

There are, as is known, insects that die in the moment of fertilization. So it is with all joy: life’s highest, most splendid moment of enjoyment is accompanied by death.

Besides my other numerous circle of acquaintances I have one more intimate confidant—my melancholy. My melancholy is the most faithful mistress I have known; what wonder, then, that I love her in return.

Old age realizes the dreams of youth; look at Dean Swift: in his youth he built an asylum, in his old age he himself entered it.

I say of my sorrow what the Englishman says of his home: my sorrow is my castle.

I feel as a chessman must feel when the opponent says of it: That piece cannot be moved.

Alas, the door of fortune does not open inwards so that one can force it by charging at it; it opens outwards and so there is nothing one can do.

Of all ridiculous things the most ridiculous seems to me, to be busy. Therefore, whenever I see a fly settling on the nose of such a person, or if he is spattered with mud from a carriage, or a tile falls down and knocks him dead, then I laugh heartily.

No one comes back from the dead, no one has entered the world without crying; no one is asked when he wishes to enter life, nor when he wishes to leave.

Let others complain that our age is evil; my complaint is that it is paltry. It lacks passion. Men's thoughts are thin and flimsy as lace, and the men are as feeble as the girls who make the lace.

Most people pursue pleasure with such breathless haste that they hurry past it.

A fire broke out backstage in a theatre. The clown came out to warn the public; they thought it was a joke and applauded. He repeated it; the acclaim was even greater. I think that's just how the world will come to an end: to general applause from wits who believe it's a joke.

I thought I would resign my post and seek employment with a travelling theatre, the reason being that I had no talent, and so everything to gain.

My thinking is a passion. I am very good at rooting out truffles for others; I myself take no pleasure in them.

If you marry, you will regret it; if you do not marry, you will also regret it; if you marry or do not marry, you will regret both; Laugh at the world's follies, you will regret it, weep over them, you will also regret that; laugh at the world's follies or weep over them, you will regret both; whether you laugh at the world's follies or weep over them, you will regret both. Believe a woman, you will regret it, believe

her not, you will also regret that; believe a woman or believe her not, you will regret both; whether you believe a woman or believe her not, you will regret both. Hang yourself, you will regret it; do not hang yourself, and you will also regret that; hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will regret both; whether you hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will regret both. This, gentlemen, is the sum and substance of all practical philosophy.

In the street everything is quiet; it is Sunday afternoon. I hear clearly a lark, warbling outside a window in one of the neighbouring buildings, outside the window where the pretty girl lives. Far away, from a distant street, I hear a man crying shrimps. The air is so warm, yet the whole city seems dead.

In my dream I was taken into the Seventh Heaven, where the gods offered me one wish. “Do you wish for youth,” said Mercury, “or for beauty, or power, or a long life; or do you wish for the most beautiful woman?” For a moment I was at a loss. “I choose one thing—to always have the laughs on my side.” Not one god made answer, but all began to laugh. From this I concluded that my wish had been granted.

## THE IMMEDIATE EROTIC STAGES OR THE MUSICAL EROTIC

### PLATITUDINOUS INTRODUCTION

From the moment my soul was first overwhelmed in wonder at Mozart’s music, and bowed down to it in humble admiration, I have reflected upon that glorious Greek view of the world as “cosmos”, as an orderly whole.

There is a certain view that fortunate concurrences are no more than luck. It thinks it an accident that the lovers get each other, that many a poet or composer could have been as great as Homer or Mozart had only the opportunity offered. But to a high-minded soul such an idea is of course repugnant. Historical fortune consists in the divine conjuncture of historical forces, and here lies the profound harmony that resounds in every work of art we call classic.

And so with Mozart. Immortal Mozart! You, to whom I owe everything, to whom I owe the loss of my reason, the wonder that overwhelmed my soul, the fear that gripped my inmost being; you, who are the reason I did not go through life without there being something that could make me tremble; you, whom I thank for the

fact that I shall not have died without having loved, even though my love was unhappy.

The happy feature of the classic work is the way in which two forces within it absolutely cohere. There was a school of aesthetics which one-sidedly stressed the importance only of form, while Hegel places great emphasis on the importance of subject-matter, however, both go essentially together. Now, it is usually only a single work that stamps the individual poet or artist, as a classic. In Mozart's case that work is *Don Giovanni*—with it he enters that eternity which lies not outside time but within it, and enters the ranks of the immortals.

All classic works rank equally high because each one ranks infinitely high. Nevertheless, there are essential differences. Certain classics have no subject-matter, whereas with others it is a leading part. The first would be the case in architecture, sculpture, music and painting, the second would apply to poetry, taking that word in its widest sense to include all artistic production based on language. It is a unity, an inward mutuality, which is possessed by every classic work.

The most abstract idea conceivable is the spirit of sensuality. But in what medium can it be represented? The medium farthest removed from language. It cannot be represented in sculpture, and it cannot be painted, for it cannot be grasped in fixed contours; it is an energy, a storm, impatience, passion, existing not in a single moment but in a succession of moments. Nor can it be represented in poetry. The only medium that can represent it is music. Music has an element of time in it yet it does not lapse in time except in an unimportant sense. We have the perfect unity of this idea and its corresponding form in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.

My task now is to present the significance of the musical erotic, and what I have to say on this score I owe to Mozart alone.

To maintain that Christianity brought sensuality into the world seems boldly venturesome. But nothing ventured, nothing gained. The proposition that Christianity has introduced sensuality to the world must be understood identically with its opposite, that it is Christianity that has chased sensuality out of the world.

Sensuality had existed previously, but in the Greek consciousness it was the sensuality of the beautiful individual, and, rather than being a dangerous rebel to be kept in check, it was given freedom of life and joy within that beautiful individual. Sensuality, consequently, was not

posited as a principle, rather, sensual love was everywhere as an element. Eros was the god of love but was not in love himself.

I am well aware that I have no understanding of music. I freely admit that I am a layman. I stand outside music and observe it. My country is the land of language, where sculpture and painting, too, are a kind of language, in so far as every way of expressing an idea is a language.

But music is different. Music exists only in the moment of its performance, and always expresses the immediate in its immediacy. But the immediacy thus excluded by the spirit is sensual immediacy, such as belongs to Christianity. Music, as is well-known, has always suspect to the religious zealot. I may simply cite a Presbyterian in one of Achim von Arnim's stories: "We Presbyterians regard the organ as the devil's bagpipes which lull serious reflection to sleep, just as dance benumbs good intentions." But it by no means follows that one must look upon it as the work of the devil.

As for the immediate erotic stages, what I have to say of them in music is from Mozart alone, to whom I owe everything. I should add that I say 'stages', but perhaps I might better use the word 'metamorphoses'. It is the different stages taken together which constitute the immediate stage, the real stage.

Since, however, they have found separate expression in Mozart's music, I shall discuss them separately. But what remains to be explained can only have meaning for the person who has listened and who continues constantly to listen.

First Stage: The first stage is suggested by the Page in Figaro, looked upon as a mythical figure. In becoming more he becomes less, in him the sensual awakens, but desire is not yet awake, it is moodily hinted at. When desire is not awake, the object of desire enchants and entices, yes, almost frightens it. Desire must have air, it must break out. Such is the relation between desire and the desired at a first and at a later stage, so when we later hear of Don Giovanni:

Even coquettes three-score years old  
With joy he adds them to the roll,

... we have the perfect analogy to this.

Second Stage: This stage is represented by Papageno in The Magic Flute. Here, too, of course we must evoke the mythical Papageno and forget the actual person in the play. Here desire awakens, and as one

always first realizes one has been dreaming at the moment of waking, so the dream is over. In Papageno desire aims at discoveries. This delight in discovery is what pulsates in it, is its animation.

Third Stage: This stage is represented by Don Giovanni himself. In Don Giovanni, desire is specified absolutely as desire, it desires the particular absolutely. Desire in this stage is therefore victorious, triumphant, irresistible, and demonic. This is the idea of the spirit of sensuality,

### Sensual Genius Specified as Seduction

When the Don Juan story originated is not known, but it certainly belongs to the Christian Middle Ages. He may be seen as the dissenting, misunderstood, anticipation of the erotic that was manifest in the knight errant and in chivalry. The Middle Ages had to make a discord between flesh and spirit, which Christianity introduced to the world. Don Juan, consequently, is the expression of the demonic in the sensual; Faust is the expression of the demonic specified as the spiritual. When Don Giovanni is conceived in this way, there is meaning and profound significance in everything.

If I imagine him as a real person, the idea that he has seduced 1,003 becomes comic. If Don Giovanni were a seducer in a spiritual sense then it would have been a radical fault in the piece that the heroine in the seduction is a little peasant girl. The aesthetic would require that Don Juan be set a more difficult task. Zerlina is young and pretty, and she is a woman, that is the peculiarity she shares with hundreds of others, but it is not the uncommon that Don Giovanni desires but the general, what she has in common with every woman. For Don Giovanni every girl is an ordinary girl, every love affair an everyday story.

Hear how he plunges into life's diversity, how he dashes himself against its solid dam, hear the festive bliss of enjoyment; hear his wild flight; he hurries past even himself, ever faster, listen, listen, to Mozart's Don Giovanni.

### ANCIENT TRAGEDY'S REFLECTION IN THE MODERN

An Essay read before Symparanekromenoi



If someone said the tragic will always be the tragic, I wouldn't object too much; every historical development takes place within the embrace of its concept. But our age has one great difference from the ancients of Greece; it is more melancholy and hence deeper in despair. Our age is melancholy enough to realize the nature of responsibility.

The significance of this brief but adequate account is to illuminate a difference between ancient and modern tragedy which I consider of great importance: the different kinds of tragic guilt.

Aristotle, as we know, requires the tragic hero to have *hamartia* [guilt]. But just as the action in Greek tragedy is something intermediate between activity and passivity, so too is the guilt, and in this lies the tragic collision. If the individual is entirely without guilt, the tragic interest is removed, for the tragic collision loses its power. The tragic hero thus becomes bad. Evil becomes the real object of tragedy. But evil has no aesthetic interest, and sin is not an aesthetic element. If you try to let the tragic take effect inside this isolation, you get the evil in all its baseness, not the properly tragic guilt in its ambiguous innocence.

In ancient tragedy the sorrow is deeper, the pain less; in modern tragedy, the pain is greater, the sorrow less. It is very interesting, from a psychological standpoint, to watch a child when it sees an older person suffer. The child hasn't sufficient reflection to feel pain, and yet its sorrow is infinitely deep. The more clear the conception of guilt, the greater the pain and the less profound the sorrow.

Applying this, then, to the relation between ancient and modern tragedy, one has to say: in ancient tragedy, the sorrow is deeper, and in the corresponding consciousness, too, the sorrow is deeper. For one must always bear in mind that the sorrow lies not in me, but in the tragedy, and that to understand the deep sorrow of Greek tragedy I must enter into the Greek consciousness. The sorrow of Greek tragedy is deeper because the guilt has the ambiguity of the aesthetic. In modern times the pain is greater.

Tragic action always contains an element of suffering, and tragic suffering an element of action; the aesthetic lies in the relativity. This identity is exemplified in the life of Christ, for His suffering is absolute because the action is absolutely free, and His action is absolute suffering because it is absolute obedience.

One might well conclude that the people who developed profound tragedy were the Jews. But Judaism is too ethically developed for this. Jehovah's curses, terrible as they are, are nevertheless also righteous punishment. Such was not the case in Greece, there the wrath of the gods has no ethical character, but aesthetic ambiguity.

In the Greek tragedy *Antigone*, the heroine is not at all concerned about her father's unhappy destiny. Antigone lives as carefree a life as any other young Greek girl; indeed the chorus pities her, seeing her death is preordained, because she is to quit this life at so early an age, quit it without having tasted its most beautiful joys, evidently forgetting the family's own deep sorrow. It gives the soul a keynote, and that is sorrow, not pain. In *Antigone*, tragic guilt focuses on a definite point: that she had buried her brother in defiance of the king's prohibition. This totality makes the spectator's sorrow infinitely deep. So while the Greek Antigone lives a life free enough from care for us to imagine her life in its gradual unfolding as even being a happy one if this new fact had not emerged, our Antigone's life is, on the contrary, essentially over.

## SHADOWGRAPHS [or SILHOUETTES]

A second Essay read before Symparanekromenoi—An entertainment for the mind.

### IMPROVISED ADDRESS

We celebrate, in this hour, the founding of our Society. A year has passed and our Society is still in being. Shall we rejoice at this fact, dear Symparanekromenoi, rejoice that its survival mocks our teaching that everything must end? Then take pity once more upon the world, open yourself again to gather everything in and protect us all safely in your womb! I toast you, dark night, I toast you as victor, and this is my solace, for you make everything shorter, the day, time, life, and memory's tribulation, in eternal oblivion!

It is of the essence of joy to reveal itself, while grief tries to hide, sometimes even to deceive. Joy is communicative, social, open-hearted, and desires expression; grief is secretive, silent, solitary, and seeks to retire into itself. Surely not even life's most casual observer will deny that this is correct. What gives rise to reflective sorrow can lie partly in the individual's own subjective nature, partly in the objective sorrow itself or its occasion. When the occasion for the

sorrow is a case of deception, then the nature of the objective sorrow is such as to beget reflective sorrow in the individual. It is this reflective sorrow I now propose to draw out and render visible, so far as that is possible, in some pictures I call 'shadowgraphs'. So fasten your gaze, dear Symparanekromenoi, upon this inner picture, do not let yourselves be distracted by the exterior.

When you look long and attentively at a face, you sometimes discover that it is as if there were another face within the one you see. This is in general an unmistakable sign that the soul conceals an emigrant who has withdrawn from the outside world to watch over a hidden treasure, and the direction observation must take is intimated by the way one face lies as though inside the other, from which one understands that in order to discover anything one must try to probe inwards.

1: Marie Beaumarchais: We make this girl's acquaintance in Goethe's *Clavigo*. Her story is brief: Clavigo was betrothed to her, Clavigo left her. For love, deception is an absolute paradox, and in this lies the necessity for reflective sorrow. Yet her response is "I shall continue to love him, because his love was stronger, his thought prouder than my weakness and my cowardice. And perhaps it was out of love for me that he left me. How else could he have stopped loving me? Have I stopped loving him? If love has no endurance, what then can endure? He was no deceiver." The peculiarity of her sorrow is the restlessness that prevents her finding the object of sorrow.

2. Donna Elvira: We make this girl's acquaintance in the opera Don Giovanni. She had been a nun and it was from the peace of a convent that Don Giovanni has snatched her. Already from the beginning her love is a despair; nothing in heaven or on earth means anything to her except Don Giovanni. Of course, "He was no deceiver, he had no idea what a woman can suffer. If he had, he would not have left me. He was a man, sufficient unto himself. Is that a consolation for me?" A man is not like a woman, not as happy as she when she is happy, not as unhappy as she when she is boundlessly unhappy because her happiness knew no bounds. "Did he deceive me? No! Had he promised me anything? No! My Giovanni was no suitor, he was a wretched poultry thief; a nun does not degrade herself for the likes of that." Elvira is in distress at sea, her destruction is approaching, but that does not concern her, she does not notice, she is at a loss what it is she is to save.

3. Margrete: We know this girl from Goethe's *Faust*. A young, commonplace girl, not, like Elvira, destined for the convent, yet brought up in the fear of the Lord. What we especially love in this girl is the delightful simplicity and humility of her pure soul. While the Don Juan legend tells of 1,003 seductions, *Faust* tells of only one. Like Don Juan, Faust is a demonic figure, but at a higher level. The sensual only becomes important for him after he has lost a whole world, but awareness of this loss is not erased, it is constantly there, and therefore what he seeks in the sensual is not so much pleasure as distraction.. And where better can this be found than in a young girl? Faust sees that Margrete's entire significance depends on her innocent simplicity. Faust is too great for her, and her love must end by splitting her soul apart. So Faust has abandoned Margrete. Yet there is a tremendous dialectical elasticity in this feeling. Thus is she moved, not by moods, but in her mood, she lacks what might be called the situation of sorrow, for she is not able to sorrow alone. If only, like Florine in the fairytale, she could find some grotto of echoes from which here every sigh could be heard; but in Faust's palace there is no echo-grotto, and he has no ear in her heart.

I have, perhaps, already held your attention for too long, dear Symparanekromenoi; the more so since, however much I have spoken, nothing visible has appeared before you. Yet the reason for this lies not in the deceptiveness of my presentation, but in the matter itself and in sorrow's cunning. When the favourable occasion is offered, the hidden reveals itself. This we have in our power, and in farewell we shall let these three brides of sorrow come together, let them embrace one another in a unison of sorrow, let them form a group before us, a tabernacle where the voice of sorrow does not become silent, where the sigh does not cease, because they themselves watch more scrupulously and faithfully than vestal virgins over the observance of the holy rites. Only someone who has been bitten by snakes knows what the victim of a snake-bite suffers.

## THE UNHAPPIEST ONE

A third Essay read before Symparanekromenoi

Somewhere in England there is said to be a grave distinguished not by a splendid monument or sad surroundings, but by a small inscription: 'the Unhappiest One'.

The unhappy person is one who has his ideal, the content of his life, the fullness of his consciousness, the essence of his being, in some manner outside of himself. He is always absent, never present to himself. But it is evident that it is possible to absent from one's self either in the past or in the future. This, then, at once circumscribes the entire territory of the unhappy consciousness. For this rigid limitation we are grateful to Hegel; and now, since we are not merely philosophers beholding the kingdom from afar, we shall as native inhabitants give our attention in detail to the various types which are implied herein. The unhappy person is consequently absent. But one is absent when living either in the past or in the future. The form of expression must here be carefully noted; for it is clear, as philology also teaches us, that there is a tense which expresses presence in the past, and a tense which expresses presence in the future; but the same science also teaches us that there is a tense which is *plus quam perfectum*, in which there is no present, as well as a *futurum exactum* of an analogous character. Now there are some individuals who live in hope, and others who live in memory. These are indeed in a sense unhappy individuals; in so far, namely as they live solely in hope or in memory, if ordinarily only he is happy who is present to himself. However, one cannot in a strict sense be called an unhappy individual, now is present in hope or in memory. That which here must be emphasized is that he is present to himself in one or the other of these forms of consciousness. We shall also see from this that a single blow, be it ever so heavy, cannot possibly make a man the unhappiest of all. For one blow can either deprive him of hope, thereby leaving him present in memory, or of memory, thus leaving him present in hope. Unhappy individuals who hope never have the same pain as those who remember. Hoping individuals always have a more gratifying disappointment. The unhappiest one will always, therefore, be found among the unhappy rememberers. So live well, then, you the unhappiest one! See, language fails, and thought is confounded; for who is the happiest except the unhappiest, and who the unhappiest except the happiest?

Rise, dear Symparanekromenoi! The night has passed, the day again begins its untiring activity, never weary, it seems, of repeating itself for ever and ever.

ON "THE FIRST LOVE"

A comedy by Eugène Scribe

Anyone who has ever had leanings toward creating will have become aware that the creation act is often prompted by little external acts. Eugène Scribe's play *The First Love* has touched my life personally in many ways and in so doing has prompted this little essay, which then is the child of the occasion in the strictest sense! In this story, the girl who was the object of my longings I had known from very early on, but the dissimilar conditions of our lives led to our seeing each other only infrequently.

In my youth, it happened one day that I saw a newspaper announcement for a play called 'the First Love'. The title delighted me and I decided to go to the theatre. The poet could just as well have said "the true love" or titled it "The First Love is the True Love." This play will, I thought, help me to understand myself.

On the day of the performance I was in a festive mood, and with a certain excitement I hurried, joyful and expectant, to the theatre. Going through the door, I glanced up at the first balcony, and what did I see? My own beloved, the mistress of my heart, my ideal—she was sitting there. Involuntarily I stepped back into the darkness of the parquet in order to watch her without being seen. How had she come here? She would see the same play. This was no accident; it was a dispensation, a kindness on the part of the blind god of love. I stepped forward, our eyes met, she acknowledged me. Bowing to her or conversing with her was out of the question. My infatuation had free play. We met each other halfway; like transfigured beings, we stretched out hands to each other; we floated like phantoms, like jinn in the world of fantasy. Her eyes rested soulfully on me, a sigh heaved her breast; it was for me; she belonged to me, that I knew. The curtain was raised. Once again it seemed as if I were peering into a dream when I gazed upon her. I turned around; the play began. I wished to think only of her and of my love; everything that was said in honour of the first love I would apply to her and to my situation. We pledged ourselves with a solemn promise. Just as Emmeline and Charles in the play promise each other to contemplate the moon, we promised to see this play every time it was performed. I have faithfully kept my promise. I have seen it in Danish, in German, in French, abroad and here at home, and have never grown weary of its inexhaustible wittiness, the truth of which no one understands better than I.

Then, some years later, on an excursion to Sjælland I asked the innkeeper to bring whatever books he could assemble. I always observe this custom and have often benefited by it, because quite accidentally one comes upon things that otherwise might escape one's attention. But the first book brought to me was—'the First Love'. This amazed me, since out in the country the Theatre Repertoire is seldom found. But I had lost faith in the actual first love and believed no more in the idea of a first.

In the next town, I visited one of my friends. He was out when I arrived; I was asked to wait and was shown into his study. Walking over to his desk, I found a book lying open—it was Scribe's plays, opened to 'Les premières amours'. Now the die seemed to be cast. I decided to fulfil my promise and write a review of this play. It so happened, strange to say, that my former love, my first love, who lived there in the region, had come to town, not to the capital, but to the small town where I was—and that solidified my decision. I had not seen her for a long time and now found her engaged, cheerful and happy, so much so that it was a pleasure to see. She informed me that she had never loved me but that her fiancé was her first love, and then proceeded to tell the same story as Emmeline, that only the first love is the true love. If my decision had not been firm before, it became so now. But I had to find out what first love means. The confusion is complete, and hence I was compelled to write a review of the play.

## CROP ROTATION

An Attempt at a Theory of Social Prudence

*There is too much of everything. Of love, bread, songs, sweets, honour, courage.  
And figs, ambition, barley-bread, high office and peas pottage.* Aristophanes

People of experience maintain that it is very sensible to start from a principle. I will start with the principle that all men are boring. Or will someone be boring enough to disagree? What wonder, then, that the world is regressing, that evil is gaining ground more and more, since boredom is on the increase and boredom is a root of all evil.

We can trace this from the very beginning of the world. The gods were bored so they created man. Adam was bored alone, then Adam and Eve were bored in union, then Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel were bored *en famille*, then the population increased and the peoples

were bored *en masse*. Then the nations were scattered over the earth, but they continued to be bored.

And think of the consequences of this boredom! Yet what was it that stayed the fall of Rome? It was 'bread and circuses'. What is it people do nowadays? Do they think of ways of diverting themselves? Quite the contrary, they accelerate the ruin. There is a proposal to improve the State's economy through savings. Can anything more boring be imagined?

From what I know of politics, it would be an easy matter for Denmark to take out a loan of fifteen millions. Why does no one think of that? We could use it not to pay our debts but for public pleasure. Let us celebrate the thousand-year reign with joy and merriment. There could be bowls of money everywhere. Everything would be free, people would go to the theatre free, have free access to the streetwalkers, take free drives to the park, be buried free of charge, have someone speak over their coffin free of charge. No one need own property. An exception would be made just in my own case, and I personally reserve 100 dollars a day permanently in the Bank of London, partly because I cannot do with less, partly because it was I who came up with the idea. What would this affluence lead to? Everything great would pour into Copenhagen, the greatest artists, actors and dancers. Copenhagen would become another Athens. What would be the result? Men of wealth would all settle in this city, among them very likely the Shah of Persia and the King of England. So here is my second idea. We kidnap the Shah. It may be objected that there would then be rebellion in Persia. In that case, my idea is we sell him to the Turks; they will know how to convert him into cash. Oh that my words might reach your ears, you who sit in high places! But how you carry me away, beautiful, sentimental enthusiasm!

So all people are boring. Idleness, it is usually said, is a root of all evil. To prevent this evil one recommends work. But the choice of remedy and the supposed cause mark the whole thing out as a very lower-class idea. Idleness as such is by no means a root of evil; quite the contrary, it is a truly divine way of life so long as one is not bored. The Olympian gods were not bored, they prospered in happy idleness. A beauty who neither sews nor spins is happy in her idleness, for she is not bored.



Boredom is partly an immediate talent, partly an acquired immediacy. Here the English are, on the whole, the paradigmatic nation. One seldom encounters a born talent for indolence, but one occasionally meets an English traveller who is an incarnation of this talent, for other nationals are always a little more lively, not so absolutely stillborn. So, how to overcome boredom? Here, as everywhere, cool deliberation is clearly called for. My view is expressed in the phrase 'crop rotation'. This phrase might seem to contain an ambiguity, in that it might be taken to involve changing the soil. This rotation is the vulgar, the inartistic method. One is tired of living in the country, one moves to the city; one is tired of one's native land, one travels abroad; one is European, one goes to America, and finally dreams of travelling from star to star. The method I propose consists not in changing the soil but, as in the real rotation of crops, in changing the method of cultivation and type of grain.

Here, straightaway, we have the principle of limitation, which is the only saving one in the world. The more you limit yourself, the more resourceful you become. A prisoner in solitary confinement for life is most resourceful, a spider can cause him much amusement. The more inventive one can be in changing the mode of cultivation, the better. Only when one has thrown hope overboard is it possible to live artistically.

When men come across something unpleasant they always say, 'If only I could forget!' But forgetting is an art that must be practised. Forgetting is the shears with which one clips away what one cannot use. The art of remembering and forgetting will also prevent one's sticking fast in some particular circumstance in life and ensure perfect suspension. So one must be on one's guard against friendship. A friend is not what philosophy calls 'the necessary other', but the superfluous third. But to abstain from friendship doesn't mean that you are to live without human contact. What one must watch out for is never to stick fast, and for that one must have one's forgetting up one's sleeve.

The experienced farmer now and then lets his land lie fallow; the theory of social prudence recommends the same. It is incredible how much significance even an insignificant person can gain through such rational management. Married people pledge love for each other

throughout eternity. Well, now, that is easy enough but does not mean very much, for if one is finished with time one is probably finished with eternity. If, instead of saying “throughout eternity,” the couple would say, “until Easter, until next May Day,” then what they say would make some sense, for then they would be saying something and also something they perhaps could carry out. And how does it go with a marriage? After a little while one party begins to notice that something is wrong; then the other party complains and cries out, and then divorce is not far away.

Friendship is always dangerous, even more so marriage. If you have a wife it is difficult; if you have a wife and children, it is impossible. We have the example of a gypsy woman carrying her husband on her back through life, a wearisome business—for the husband. Take a young man, ardent as an Arabian horse, let him marry, he is lost. But not entering into marriage need not mean that one’s life lacks eroticism. When two people fall in love and suspect they are made for each other, the thing is to have the courage to break it off, for by continuing they only have everything to lose and nothing to gain. It seems a paradox and is so, for feeling, not for understanding.

Never take a job. If one does that, one becomes just a plain John Anybody, a little cog in the machine. One acquires a title, and the law under which one slaves is equally boring no matter whether promotion comes or not.

The whole secret lies in arbitrariness. People think it requires no skill to be arbitrary, yet it requires deep study to succeed in being arbitrary without losing oneself in it, to derive satisfaction from it oneself. You see the middle of a play, read the third part of a book. In this way one derives a quite different enjoyment from the one the author has been so good as to intend for you. One enjoys something entirely accidental, one regards the whole of existence from this standpoint, lets its reality run aground on it. I will give an example. There was someone whose chatter certain circumstances made it necessary for me to listen to. He was utterly boring. Driven almost to despair, I discovered suddenly that he perspired unusually profusely when he spoke. I saw how the pearls of sweat gathered on his brow, then joined in a stream, slid down his nose, and ended hanging in a drop at the extreme tip of it. From that moment everything was changed; I could even take pleasure in inciting him to begin his philosophical instruction, just to observe the sweat on his brow and on his nose.

It is extremely beneficial to let the realities of life neutralize themselves on an arbitrary interest of this kind. You transform something accidental into an object of admiration, and everything in life becomes a gamble. The more one can sustain the arbitrariness, the more entertaining the combinations. Always keep an eye open for the accidental, for even the least significant thing can become a rich source of amusement.

## THE SEDUCER'S DIARY

A certain anxiety grips me in editing this transcript, as I knew the girl of the story. Poor Cordelia! It seems that when Johannes abandoned her, he returned some letters from her unopened, among which was this:

Johannes!

I do not call you 'mine', I realize very well you never have been; and yet I do call you my seducer, my deceiver, my foe, my murderer, source of my unhappiness, grave of my joy, abyss of my ruin. You have presumed so to deceive a human being that you have become everything to me. There was a rich man who had many cattle, there was a poor little girl, she had only a single lamb, which ate from her hand and drank from her cup. You were the rich man.

Your Cordelia

Now let us follow a little of what is left in the papers I have of her faithless Johannes:

April 4th: Caution, my beautiful unknown! Stepping out of a coach is not so simple a matter. I really think I shall seek employment as a footman in a house where there are young girls!

9th: I have seen her, but it's as if I'd seen a heavenly revelation, so completely has her image vanished from me again. She was accompanied by an oldish lady, perhaps her mother.

May 16th: How beautiful it is to be in love! Seducing a girl is no art, but it needs a stroke of good fortune to find one worth seducing.

19th: So her name is Cordelia! Cordelia! That's a pretty name, which is useful, since it is very off-putting to have to use an ugly name in tender expressions. She was walking with two other girls on her left.

All love is secretive, even faithless love when it has the necessary aesthetic element.

20th: Today I learned she the daughter of a Navy captain. He died some years ago, and the mother too. Now she lives with her aunt, and she and the two girls there are taking a course at the Royal Kitchens. It is a very secluded life, so perhaps that is an end of the matter?

23rd: I have to gain access to the house, and for that I am, in military parlance, at the ready.

30th: Everywhere our paths cross. Today I met her three times. I know of her every little excursion, when and where I shall come across her. But this knowledge is not used to secure a meeting. Instead, I sit at home and practise like a parrot: "Cordelia, Cordelia, my Cordelia, my own Cordelia". A little irony makes this moment's second moment one of the most interesting; it is a spiritual undressing.

5th: She visits the home of Baxter's, the wholesaler. Here I found Edvard, the son of the house. He is head over heels in love with her. He's a good-looking young man, quite pleasant, rather shy, which last I suspect does not hurt him in her eyes. Poor Edvard! He simply doesn't know how to tackle his love.

7th: We are friends now, Edvard and I, true friends of the sort which has not occurred since the days of the Greeks. Although I cannot refrain inwardly from making fun of him, there is something nice about his childlikeness. If this girl would only understand herself, she would have to admit that I am the man for her. Poor Edvard!

July 3rd: Today my eyes have rested upon her for the first time. Her eyes close, and yet obscure forces stir within her. She does not see that I am looking at her, she feels it, feels it through her whole body. Her eyes close and it is night, but inside her it is broad daylight. Edvard must go. He is treading on the boundary.

August 2nd: The moment had arrived. I caught a glimpse of the aunt on the street, so I knew she was not at home. Edvard was at the tollbooth. Accordingly Cordelia must be alone. And so it proved. She sat at the sewing-table, in a simple calico house-dress, fresh as a with a new-plucked rose, though who knows where a young girl spends the night? After some general remarks, I moved a little nearer to her, and then got on with my proposal. One word and she would have laughed

at me; another and she would have been moved; still another and she would have shunned me; but no such word came to my lips. I remained solemnly unemotional and kept to the ritual. “She had known me for such a short time”“ dear God, it’s only on the strait path of engagement one meets such difficulties, not on the primrose path of love.

The aunt gives her consent. I take the girl, she takes me, and now the story begins.

3rd: So I’m engaged; so is Cordelia. Fortunately, I have my uncle’s house. If I want to give a young girl a distaste for being engaged, I need only take her there. So now begins the first war with Cordelia.

Her soul must be moved in every direction, not in sudden gusts, but totally. She must discover this not by way of thought, but in imagination, which is the real means of communication between her and me; for what in man is part, in the woman is the whole. A yawning chasm separates them, terrible to gaze down into. No man dares this leap. A young girl however, might dare it—it is called the Maiden’s Leap. So to the leap; who dares be so ungracious as to separate here what go together? Her leap is an effortless floating. And when she reaches the other side, she stands there again, not exhausted by exertion, but more than usually beautiful, fuller in her soul, she throws a kiss over to us who stand on this side. And truly this girl is erotically intoxicated.

This morning I received a letter from her in which, with more wit than I had given her credit for, her with, she ridicules engagements. I kissed the letter; it is the most precious I have received from her. Just so, my Cordelia! That’s how I want it.

My Cordelia!

In love with myself, that is what people say I am. It doesn’t surprise me, for how could they notice that I can love when I love only you; how could anyone else suspect it when I love only you? In love with myself. Why? Because I’m in love with you, so if I ceased loving you I would cease loving myself.

Your Johannes

What I feared most was that the whole process might take me too long. I see, however, that Cordelia is making great progress; yes, that it will be necessary to mobilize everything to keep her mind on the job.

She mustn't for all the world lose interest before time, that is, before the time when time has passed for her.

My Cordelia!

Love is everything. Thus if another betrothed became convinced there was some other girl he cared for, he would presumably stand there like a criminal and his fiancée be outraged. You, however, I know would see a tribute in such a confession. So when I care about someone else, it is not to convince myself that I do not love her but only you, that would be presumptuous; but since my whole soul is filled with you, life takes on another meaning for me: it becomes a myth about you.

Your Johannes

Yesterday evening the aunt had a small party. I knew Cordelia would take out her knitting. I had hidden a little note in it. She lost it, picked it up, became excited and wistful. This is how one should always exploit the situation. A note of no consequence in itself, read in these circumstances, becomes for her infinitely important. She got no chance to talk with me, as I had arranged it so that I had to escort another lady home.

I have considered gathering material for a book entitled *Contribution to the Theory of the Kiss*, dedicated to all tender lovers. The perfect kiss requires that the agents involved be a man and a girl. A kiss between men, between a brother and sister, that is not a proper kiss. The same is true of kisses that are bonuses from Christmas games. A kiss is a symbolic action which can be classified according to sound.

Sometimes it is clicking, sometimes hissing, sometimes smacking, sometimes popping, sometimes rumbling, sometimes resonant, sometimes hollow, sometimes like calico, and so on. One can classify them with reference to time, the brief and the prolonged. There is also, with reference to time, another classification, only one I really care about. This is the distinction between the first kiss and all others. There is, after all, a difference between spiritual and physical eroticism. Plato really understood love.

The turn must now be made. The unrest increases, the letters cease, the erotic fare is reduced, the love is scorned as ridiculous. Perhaps she goes along with it for a moment, perhaps tries to captivate me with the erotic. She will soon feel that the engagement is too narrow, too confining. Not a few remarks are being let fall on her part that

suggest she is tired of the engagement. They do not go unheeded; they are my operation's scouts in her soul, which give me informative hints; they're the ends of threads with which I wind her into my plan. Soon the bond of betrothal will be broken, and she will be the one who is unloosening it.

Yesterday Cordelia and I visited a family at their summer home. How Cordelia occupies me! Yet the time is soon over, for my soul constantly requires rejuvenation. Now have I, in my relationship with Cordelia, been constantly faithful to my pact? That is to say, to my pact with the aesthetic. Straightforwardly to betray a young girl, that is something I certainly couldn't endure. What makes me strong is the fact that I always have the idea on my side. The engagement itself was interesting precisely in not offering what is ordinarily understood by the interesting. The betrothal bursts, but by virtue of the fact that she herself cancels it in order to raise herself to a higher sphere. So it should be; for this is the form of the interesting which will occupy her most.

September 16th: The bond burst; longingly, strong, daring, divine, she flies like a bird which is allowed now for the first time to stretch its wings. The aunt was somewhat taken aback by the news. However, she is too much the free-thinker to want to coerce Cordelia. Spring is the most beautiful time to fall in love, autumn the most beautiful to reach the goal of one's desires.

Her beauty came from Nature. I thank you, wonderful Nature! Like a mother you have watched over her. Accept my thanks for your care. She was undefiled. I thank you, you people to whom she owed that. Her development was my handiwork, soon I shall enjoy my reward., How much have I gathered into this one moment which is now at hand. Death and damnation if I should fail! ‘

It would really be worthwhile knowing whether one couldn't poetize oneself out of a girl, whether one couldn't make her so proud that she imagined it was she who had wearied of the relationship. It could become a quite interesting epilogue, which in its own right might be of psychological interest, and besides that, enrich one with many erotic observations.

## CONTAINING THE PAPERS OF 'B': HIS LETTERS TO 'A'

### THE AESTHETIC VALIDITY OF MARRIAGE

My Friend! These lines your eyes first fall upon were written last. Their aim is to try to convince you that you are not really an enemy of marriage, but you abuse your ironic glance and sarcastic taunting to make a mockery of it.

I will admit that you are not tilting at the air, you are observant, and sometimes you hit the mark. But I will also say that this is perhaps what is wrong with you. Your life will be nothing but approach-runs. What you are drawn to is the first rapture of love. A smile from a pretty girl, a captured glance, that is what your idle imagination is after.

My task here has two parts; to show the aesthetic value of marriage, and to show how the aesthetic element can be sustained in the face of life's manifold obstacles.

I thank God with all my soul that my wife is the only one I have ever loved, the first. What we have is not the dalliance of the first days of infatuation, or attempts at experimental eroticism. And in truth, that she really loves me and that I really love her, are things I have very much at heart. The stability of our marriage has come about only through the continual rejuvenation of our first love; a rejuvenation which does not consist just of regretful backward glance, but is an activity.

You, on the contrary, really live from theft. You creep up on people unawares, steal from them their moments of happiness, their most beautiful moments, put this phantom-image into your pocket and present it whenever you want. Perhaps they lose nothing, but you lose. You lose your time, your peace of mind, your patience to live; for you well know how impatient you are.

Haven't knights and adventurers for centuries withstood unbelievable trials for the hope of the quiet peace of a happy marriage? Haven't novelists and their readers for centuries worked their way through one volume after another to come to a halt with a happy marriage? What is true there is the properly aesthetic element, the fact that love is put



to work. Once there is a proper appreciation of love's own dialectic, of its pathological struggle, of its relation to the ethical, to religion, there will in truth be no need of hard-hearted fathers, maidens' bowers, or enchanted princesses and ogres and monsters to give love enough to do.

First: romantic love. The immediacy of romantic love is revealed by its dependence on natural necessity, while the true eternity in love, as in the truly ethical way of life, is what really first delivers love from out of the sensuous. In this form it can accept the blessing of the Church. The substantial element in marriage is being in love; but which comes first: love, or marriage so that being in love forms the sequel?

Then, now, love in the general sense. For me it is a battle-cry, and although now a married man of several years, I have still constantly the honour to fight under first love's victorious banner. First love is the unity of freedom and necessity; it is immediately secure in itself.

My young friend! Matrimony is the estate well pleasing to God: I know of no place in the Scriptures which speaks of a special blessing for bachelors. The aesthetic in it lies in its infinitude, but its unaesthetic aspect lies in the fact that this infinitude can be finitized. One loves only once in one's life, the heart holds on to its first love, marriage! What does the wedding ceremony do? It offers, first of all, a survey of the genesis of the human race, and thereby it gives the universal and the singular together. The marriage ceremony proclaims the existence of sin, that the Church proclaims the punishment of sin, that the woman shall bear children with pain and obey her husband. (Whether you do her a service thereby I leave undecided, but I believe you have not grasped the full the inner nature of woman, to which also belongs the fact that she is at once more perfect and more imperfect than the man.) So what does the marriage ceremony do? "It brings the lovers to a standstill", you say. Not at all, it lets what was already in motion proceed openly.

Let us now glance at the relation between romantic and married love, since the relation between the natures of the conqueror and the possessor cannot offer any difficulties. Married love begins with the possession and acquires an internal history. It is faithful, so too is romantic love, but now see the difference: the faithful romantic lover can wait, say, for fifteen years, then comes the instant of his reward. A

husband is faithful for fifteen years; yet for those fifteen years he has had possession. At the end of the fifteen years he has apparently come no further than at the beginning, and yet he has lived aesthetically in a high degree. For him his possession has not been a dead property, his possession is something he has constantly acquired. He has fought, not with lions and ogres, but with that most dangerous enemy which is time. Married love, then, has its enemy in time, its victory in time, its eternity in time.

What you despise, therefore, as unavoidable for marriage under the name of habit, is simply the historical side of it, which to your perverted eye takes on such a terrifying aspect.

You happen to limit love to a certain age, to limit the love of one person to a very short time, and then like all those disposed to conquer you recruit for your experiment. But however you turn and twist in it, you must admit that the task is to preserve love in time. If this is impossible, then love is an impossibility. Married love has its conflict in time, its victory in time, its blessing in time. You regard duty as the enemy of love, I regard it as its friend.

Duty is not for me one climate and love another; duty makes my love into the true, temperate climate, and perfection is this unity. Duty here is just one thing, truly to love, with the sincerity of the heart, and duty is as protean as love itself, declaring everything holy and good when it is of love, and denouncing everything, however pleasing and specious, when it is not of love.

In accepting my loving greeting, accept, too, as usual, a greeting from her, friendly and sincere as always. It is a long time since I have seen you in our home. Come when you want, stay as long as you want, always the agreeable guest; go when you want, always well commended.

## THE BALANCE BETWEEN THE AESTHETIC AND THE ETHICAL IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONALITY

What I have said to you so often I say once more, or rather I shout it to you: either/or! There are certain situations in life, and there are certain people where to apply an either/or cannot be. And you certainly use this phrase too often, yet what does it mean to you?

Nothing at all. "Either/or" is my slogan which I shout at mankind, as one shouts "Hip" at a Jew.

Now, if a man could constantly balance on the tip of the moment of choice it would be foolish to say it might be too late for a man to choose. But choice itself is decisive for a personality's content; in choice personality immerses itself in what is chosen, and when it does not choose it wastes consumptively away. Your choice is an aesthetic choice, but an aesthetic choice is no choice. The act of choosing is a literal and strict expression of the ethical.

If you will understand me aright, I could quite well say that in choice it is less a matter of choosing correctly than of the energy, earnest and feeling with which one chooses. So even if a person chose what was wrong, he would still, because of the energy with which he chose it, discover that what he had chosen was wrong. Thus even the humblest individual has a dual existence. The personality, through choosing itself, chooses itself ethically and excludes the aesthetic absolutely; but since it is, after all, he himself the person chooses, and through choosing himself does not become another nature but remains himself, the whole of the aesthetic returns in its relativity. When the choice confronting one is absolute, either/or is also that. In another sense, however, the absolute either/or first appears with the choice, for it is now that the options of good and evil appear.

The reason why someone who lives aesthetically cannot, in a higher sense, give any enlightenment is that he lives constantly in the moment, that his knowing is after all confined constantly to a certain relativity, within a certain boundary.

We come across views of life which teach that one must enjoy life but place the condition for doing so outside the individual. This is the case with every life-view which relies upon wealth, glory, nobility, etc. We meet views of life which teach that one must enjoy life but the condition for doing so lies in the individual. But both life-views agree that one must enjoy life.

Now, living for the satisfaction of one's desire is to enjoy a very exclusive position in life, and God be praised we seldom see it wholly actively practised. But you are a hater of activity; you stick your hands in your pockets and observe life. My young friend, this is the way to become a Nero, if in your soul there was not an original seriousness.

So then choose despair, since despair is itself a choice. And when one despairs one chooses again, and what then does one choose? One chooses oneself, not in one's immediacy, not as this contingent individual, one chooses oneself in one's eternal validity. Doubt is a despair of thought, despair is a doubt of the personality. In general, one cannot despair at all unless one wants to, but in order truly to despair one must truly want to, but when one truly wills despair one is truly beyond it; when one has truly chosen despair one has truly chosen what despair chooses, namely oneself in one's eternal validity.

In choosing absolutely, then, choose despair, and in despair choose the absolute, for I myself am the absolute, I posit the absolute and am myself the absolute. What I choose I do not posit, for if it were not posited I could not choose it, and yet if it were not posited through my choosing it I would not choose it. No, I choose absolutely, and I choose absolutely precisely through having chosen not to choose this thing or that. I choose the absolute, and what is the absolute?

Anything other than myself I cannot choose as the absolute, for if I choose something else I choose it as something finite, and therefore do not choose it absolutely.

Really it would be possible in this way to offer a highly plausible proof of the eternal validity of personal existence; yes, even a suicide does not really want to do away with his self; he, too, has a wish, he wishes he had another form of his self, and there could well be a suicide, therefore, who was convinced in the highest degree of the immortality of the soul but whose whole being was so confused that he thought to find in this way the absolute form of his spirit.

Love is a choice, and every love has its peculiarity; love of God has its absolute peculiarity, its expression is repentance, and in Christianity that repentance first found its true expression. The pious Jew felt the sins of the fathers weigh upon him, yet he did not feel it nearly as deeply as the Christian, because the pious Jew could not repent it, for he could not choose himself absolutely.

If I do not love Him thus I do not love Him absolutely, not from my inmost being; any other love for the absolute is a misunderstanding since, to take what people usually praise so highly and I myself have respect for, when thinking clings to the absolute with all its love it is not the absolute I love, I do not love absolutely since I love

necessarily; as soon as I love freely and love God, I repent. If evil were not an essential part of me I could not choose it.

We said that every aesthetic life-view was despair; this was because it was built upon what may or may not be. That is not the case with the ethical life-view, for this builds life upon what has being as its essential property. Everyone who lives merely aesthetically has a secret dread of despairing, for he knows very well that what despair brings out is the universal, and at the same time he knows that his life is based on difference. Aesthetes are also afraid that life will lose the diverting multiplicity it has so long as one looks at it as though every single individual lived under aesthetic categories. Someone living ethically has a memory of his life, a person living aesthetically certainly has not.

Now, the life of a mystic is far deeper still. The mystic chooses himself in his complete isolation; for him the whole world is dead and done away with and the weary soul chooses God, or itself. For the mystic, the whole world is dead, he has fallen in love with God. You know what happened to our friend Ludvig Blackfeldt. His misfortune was to become one-sidedly absorbed not so much in Christian as in Indian mysticism. In the Middle Ages, he would undoubtedly have found refuge in a monastery. Our own age has no such expedients. You know he ended by taking his own life.

One can only choose oneself in respect of one's freedom when one chooses oneself ethically; but one can only choose oneself ethically by repenting oneself, and it is only by repenting oneself that one becomes concrete, and it is only as a concrete individual that one is a free individual. This gives the ethical individual a sense of security which someone living merely aesthetically altogether lacks. The person who lives aesthetically sees only possibilities everywhere; for him it is these that form the content of the future, whereas the person who lives ethically sees tasks everywhere.

The ethical is defined as duty, and duty again as a mass of particular propositions, but the individual and duty stand outside each other. A life of duty in this sense is naturally very unattractive and if the ethical did not have some much deeper connection with personal being, it would be difficult to defend it against the aesthetic. The person who regards life ethically sees the universal, and the person who lives ethically expresses his life in the universal. The person who lives

ethically works at becoming the universal man. Someone who lives aesthetically is the accidental man, he thinks he is the perfect man through being the only man.

Now let us compare an ethical and an aesthetic individual. The main difference, on which everything turns, is that the ethical individual is transparent to himself and does not live 'out in the blue' as does the aesthetic individual. The person who lives ethically knows himself. In the course of his life he will develop the personal, the civic, the religious virtues, and his life proceeds through his constantly translating himself from one stage to the next. Give a man energy, passion, and he has everything. So what matters is the energy with which I become ethically conscious, or rather, without energy I cannot become ethically conscious.

I can never be ethically conscious without becoming conscious of my eternal being. That is the true proof of the immortality of the soul.

But here I sit and preach, forgetting what I should really be talking about. The absolute condition for friendship is full agreement in life-view. The life-view in which one is united must be a positive life-view. So receive my greetings, accept my friendship, for although I wouldn't go so far as to characterize our relation in that way, at least I hope that sometime my young friend will be that much older and that I might truthfully use that word. Be assured of my sympathy. Receive a greeting from her whom I love and whose thoughts are concealed in mine, receive a greeting which is inseparable from mine, but also receive one specially from her, friendly and sincere as always. Since our correspondence remains a secret, I observe all the formalities: I wish you farewell as though we were far removed from one another, albeit I hope to see you at my house just as often as before.

## LAST WORD [or ULTIMATUM]

PERHAPS you have the same experience with my previous letters as I have: you have forgotten most of what was in them. However, it is not to write you a new letter I take up my pen, but to send you this sermon I received from an older friend who is a priest in Jutland. I have read it and thought of myself, and thought of you.

The Edifying In The Thought That Against God We  
Are Always In The Wrong

Prayer: FATHER in Heaven! Teach us properly to pray, that our hearts may open to you in prayer and supplication, and may hide no secret wish that we know is not well-pleasing to you, but neither any secret fear that you may deny us anything that is truly to our advantage.

“And when he was come near, he beheld the city and wept over it, saying, the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and thy children within thee: and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another, because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.”

In God’s eternal design the destruction of proud Jerusalem was decided, and salvation hidden from the eyes of its inhabitants. Was the whole nation depraved, were there no righteous in Jerusalem who could stay God’s wrath? Jerusalem’s destruction was a punishment, and it fell with equal severity upon the guilty and the innocent; that is how the Scriptures present it, and the Scriptures say, ‘thou shalt not contend with God.’

But we do not want to believe this. Yet what the prohibition against contesting who is right with God signifies is your perfection, and not that you are a lowly being with no meaning for Him. The sparrow falls to the earth, the lily withers, and they are in the right against God. If man is sometimes in the right, sometimes in the wrong, to some extent in the right, to some extent in the wrong, who is it then but man who decides; but then again, in the decision may he not be to some extent in the right, to some extent in the wrong?

It was from love’s highest and only wish that you might always be in the wrong that you came to the recognition that God is always in the right. When you recognize that God is always in the right, you are standing outside God, and similarly when in consequence you recognize that you are always in the wrong.

But is it not bliss to discover that you could never love as you were loved? That against God we are always in the wrong is, then, an edifying thought, and should it not also be an inspiring one? For what does it express other than that God’s love is always greater than our love? Against God we are always in the wrong; this thought stays the doubt and alleviates its anxiety, it puts one in heart and inspires one to action. Could you wish

that? Your wish must not proceed from dread of the blasphemy of the thought of wanting to be in the right against God.

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