The indirect communication of the ethical.

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LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ MICROFILMÉE TELLE QUE NOUS L'AVONS RÉCU
THE INDIRECT COMMUNICATION OF THE ETHICAL

by

Katharine Elizabeth Parr

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Department of
Philosophy in Partial Fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

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Katharine Elizabeth Parr

Kierkegaard's journal entries on the subject of communication in *Soren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers* suggest his preoccupation with the idea that ethical matters should be communicated indirectly. Why direct techniques are objectionable, what characterizes direct and indirect communication, and whether indirect communication occurs in works other than Kierkegaard's are problems which do not receive a clear resolution in the *Journals*.

This thesis examines the indirect communication of ethical concerns, addressing the problems of what motivates and what characterizes its use. An analysis of both oral and written examples of direct and indirect communication leads to several key points which lay the groundwork for further discussion of the technique: (1) The ethical involves essential knowledge, knowledge that affects the individual's existence. (2) The universal aspect of the ethical makes it possible to communicate it indirectly, and renders direct communication inappropriate. The communication of ethical guidance should exhibit respect for the recipient's equality with regard to ethical matters by receiving an indirect expression. (3) Communicating ethical guidance directly is inappropriate because it
tends to be ineffective. (4) The distinction between direct and indirect communication centres on the idea that the ethical should be appropriated rather than learned, an idea that affects the relationships among communicator, recipient, and communication.

An examination of Either/Or, Kierkegaard's major ethical work, follows our account of indirect communication. Kierkegaard's indirect technique in Either/Or is revealed to consist in his use of literary technique, a point which leads to the consideration of literary technique as a worthy device for communicating indirectly. I conclude with an examination of "Values Clarification," a moral values education technique proposed by Louis E. Raths et al., as a means of teaching values in the classroom, where I suggest that indirect techniques of communicating ethical concerns offer, in contrast, more appropriate and consistent methods for classroom instruction in values.
Preface

It has been suggested, by both Kierkegaard scholars and by Kierkegaard himself, that in order to understand his writings, one must understand Kierkegaard's indirect technique. The claim seems justified, for Kierkegaard was not preoccupied merely with some abstract idea of communicating indirectly but employed the technique in many of his writings. It seems now to be accepted that his pseudonyms (perhaps the most widely recognized element in his use of the indirect technique) must be acknowledged as being authors in their own right, expressing not Kierkegaard's views but their own, if the reader is not to construe Kierkegaard as contradicting himself from one work to the next.

For the most part, the secondary literature seems to focus its treatment of indirect communication on Kierkegaard's use of pseudonymous authors, on the indirect communication of religious truth, and on the relationship between indirect communication and Kierkegaard's thought. Less attention has been directed to the subject of the indirect technique as it applies specifically to the communication of ethical matters. Furthermore, if a curious reader wished to discover whether indirect communication can be employed without the use of pseudonyms, whether works other than Kierkegaard's may be characterized as indirect, or precisely what renders a communication indirect rather than direct, he would find
meagre assistance in the secondary literature. Both a comprehensive examination of indirect communication of ethical matters, and a detailed discussion of the indirect technique as a means of communicating ethical matters outside the context of Kierkegaard's writings, seem to be absent from the literature. An examination of indirect communication of the ethical which is to some extent practically oriented seemed, therefore, to be a worthwhile pursuit.

I did not set out to construct a communicator's manual concerning the use of the indirect technique. (Nor have I accomplished such a task.) I did, however, set out to undertake an examination of indirect communication of ethical matters which would be grounded in examples, with the hope of clarifying the technique. Determining what distinguishes examples of direct communication from examples of indirect communication, what elements must be present in order that an example be considered indirect, and whether something like the method of communicating Kierkegaard proposes is used by others, were some of the problems that fuelled the following discussion.

I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Harry A. Nielsen, who initially interested me in the subject of indirect communication, provided insight and encouragement, and read numerous drafts. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. John Underwood Lewis and Dr. Timothy L. Suttor, for their comments and encouragement.
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CHAPTER I

The Ethics of Communication

Under the heading of "Communication" in Soren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers¹ are various notes and lectures which deal with the art of communicating. The idea Kierkegaard appears to be greatly absorbed with in these discussions is that ethical matters can be communicated only by means of a sort of teaching technique he calls "indirect communication." What one finds in these pages of the Journals is not a systematically developed doctrine or treatise concerning indirect communication. Kierkegaard's journal entries on the indirect method -- briefly outlined thoughts, lectures, charts, and margin-notes -- are skeletal and often cryptically expressed. But by drawing on these as well as on several other of his works, and by studying examples of direct and indirect communication, the task of piecing together an understanding of the indirect technique of communicating ethical matters and exploring several of its possibilities may be accomplished. To this end, I will give direct and indirect communication a preliminary characterization, and briefly explain several of Kierkegaard's notions related to

the art of communication. In Chapter II, I will examine examples of direct communication of the ethical, and further explore the indirect technique. Chapter III will be devoted to a discussion of Kierkegaard's use of the indirect method in his ethical work, *Either/Or*, to see what insights his use might bring to our understanding of the indirect method. In Chapter IV, application of the technique will be examined.

Kierkegaard's use of the expression, "the ethical", is somewhat puzzling. Perhaps the reason Kierkegaard often uses as a noun what is more usually employed as an adjective has to do with the status he attaches to ethical concerns. The ethical involves essential, or existential, truth; truth that affects the individual's existence. Thus, historical knowledge, scientific knowledge, or mathematical knowledge is not essential knowledge; it does not affect the individual's life in any essential, or fundamental, way. New discoveries in biology may result in cleaner water and so improve one's health, the study of mathematics may sharpen one's thinking, historical knowledge may deepen one's understanding of the plight and concerns of men through the ages. But such knowledge is not, for Kierkegaard, of paramount importance to the individual. Self-knowledge, the knowledge that stems from inward reflection, is the type of knowledge that has a fundamental relationship to the individual's existence. Ethical knowledge is not merely knowledge of oneself that arises from self-contemplation, however. It has to do also with decisive choice and with
action. Mere reflection, even about one's existence, remains in the realm of possibility until the individual makes choices and takes action, thus transforming the possible into the actual. Until one chooses, life is an array of possibilities; one could do this, or that, or perhaps nothing. It is what one actually chooses that makes life concrete. Kierkegaard's notion of the ethical as bound up with inward reflection and decisive choice, then, has little to do with an academic study of traditional ethics. Kierkegaard's rather singular use of the term "the ethical" might be viewed as a way of distinguishing the systems of ethics and the moral arguments the scholar might study from the essential truth the individual arrives at through reflection, decision, and action.

Kierkegaard seems to employ the term "the ethical" with two different (but not unrelated) meanings in mind, but never makes the distinction explicit. An individual has learned, through observations and by example, what his various duties are. Any choices he makes or actions he carries out which have to do with these duties are ethical choices in the sense of having moral significance. These morally significant choices and actions are part of "the ethical" in the wider sense of the term, which has to do with self-knowledge and inwardness. The individual's morally significant actions will very likely be an expression of his broader ethical life.

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3For the latter study, a man's own self "is as material for this study more than sufficient". *Ibid.*, p. 127.
Observation suggests that everyone does not always make the ethical choice or perform the ethical action. Kierkegaard, it seems, would not argue. (If everyone did the right thing or made the right choice, there would be no need for a means of teaching the ethical indirectly.) Yet Kierkegaard does not employ a term which would mean the opposite of "morally correct." Some of the morally significant things I do, however, are ethical (i.e., morally correct), and some unethical (i.e., morally wrong). Both morally right and morally wrong actions or decisions are "ethical" actions, in the sense of having moral significance. We will use the term "unethical" to mean decisions or actions which are morally weighted but which are not considered morally right.

How we can determine whether an action is ethical or unethical might seem to be a problem. Someone might point out, for example, that people hold different values, so that it is a matter of debate as to whether we can say that an action is right or wrong. But the ethical, Kierkegaard writes, "is related to the universally human" and not to the differences between men. What relates ethical concerns to the universal is obligation. "It would be a contradiction of the ethical to speak of being obliged, if every human did not have the conditions for being able if he himself only will." Whereas men differ with regard to talents,

intelligence, wealth, etc., men are equal with respect to the ethical: every man is capable of realizing his ethical tasks. And although each man may meet with different ethical situations, we do have an idea of what constitutes an ethical choice and what looks like an unethical choice. The individual's ability to arrive at decisions that most men would acknowledge as being ethical (as opposed to unethical), then, enables us to call a decision ethical or unethical.

Some of the things an individual does or chooses are morally insignificant or indifferent, and as such, do not reflect on one's character. Whether to drink apple juice or orange juice for breakfast is a question that has no ethical bearing, as is whether to buy a blue sweater rather than a red one, ride a ten-speed bicycle rather than a three-speed, or work as a parole officer rather than a welfare counsellor. Of course, caution is necessary in characterizing such decisions as morally insignificant. If immigrant workers are being underpaid and ill-treated in California orange groves, the decision to drink orange juice rather than apple juice may have ethical significance. If the multi-national corporation which manufactures the ten-speed bicycle also supplies nuclear weaponry to underdeveloped nations, that decision might have ethical shadings also. It may become tricky to decide which choices are morally significant, and which morally indifferent. We will distinguish actions and decisions having no moral bearing from those of morally significant character by referring to them as "non-ethical."
What, for Kierkegaard, constitutes the ethical life, beyond inwardness and decisive choice, we are not informed. What the individual should choose, what he should do, is not revealed. "For the study of the ethical, every man is assigned to himself", and accordingly, Kierkegaard does not provide answers to what are properly each individual's own questions. If the ethical life involves inwardness, "results are only rubbish with which we should not trouble each other." As we shall see, this does not preclude the possibility that one man can help another with decisions relating to ethical matters.

Common uses of "indirect" might at the outset predispose us to understand the phrase "indirect communication" in a certain way. An indirect route to town doesn't take a person straight to his destination; indirect taxes are hidden in the price of goods purchased; an indirect answer to a question doesn't get right to the point; indirect lighting originates from a concealed source and is diffused. We might expect indirect communication to be a roundabout or subtle way of getting a point across, implying or intimating something without stating it outright, relaying a message in which the intended meaning is hidden or not immediately obvious. Although such impressions are not misleading, we will see that the term "indirect communication" as Kierkegaard employs it refers to a technique of communicating which involves more than circuity.

6 Postscript, p. 127.
7 Ibid., p. 216.
In the discussions on communication found in the Journals, Kierkegaard seems to have roughly divided human attempts to verbally communicate something to another person into two categories: direct communication and indirect communication. Each category seems to embrace a range or family of techniques. But Kierkegaard's concern lies with a specific use of indirect communication, where one individual wishes to offer ethical counsel to another. His claim is that if one wants successfully and ethically to offer ethical instruction, the mode of communication employed must be indirect. Kierkegaard notes that the indirect technique has not been employed. He writes that

...the mistake in the modern period is that the ethical and the ethical-religious have been taught, people have been given information about them.  

That is, the ethical has been taught directly, as though in order to understand it, the individual requires something in addition to what he already possesses; as though he requires new knowledge or information about ethical matters. Several examples will be discussed in Chapter II in an attempt to discover what sorts of practices Kierkegaard might object to.

One use of indirect communication, mentioned above, can be characterized in a preliminary way as a technique used by one individual in order to teach the ethical to another. An important use of direct communication, on the
other hand, is to impart knowledge to another individual. Whereas the object of direct communication (what is to be communicated) is knowledge, the "object" of indirect communication is a realization. What preserves the distinction between these types of direct and indirect communication is that a realization does not consist in acquiring new knowledge:

The ethical does not begin with ignorance which is to be changed to knowledge but begins with a knowledge and demands a realization.  

The following line of reasoning indicates in outline form why attempts to teach the ethical directly are wrongheaded: Everyone knows the ethical. No one can teach me what I already know. The aim of ethical instruction is therefore not to convey information or knowledge. But generally, the object of direct communication is knowledge. Therefore communicating ethical matters directly involves a misunderstanding.

The basis for the idea that the communication of ethical matters is not a communication of knowledge is the notion that everyone knows the ethical. The ethical "is indifferently related to knowledge; that is, it assumes that every human being knows it." The individual does not need information

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9Kierkegaard speaks of the object of indirect communication as being a realization (Cf. Journals, Vol. I, p. 272), and elsewhere says that there is no object of indirect communication. (Cf. Journals, Vol. I, p. 285.) We can understand him to mean that there is an object of indirect communication only in the sense of an aim or goal, and not in the sense of an "object of knowledge".

about ethical matters. Kierkegaard sometimes refers to the indirect method as an "art", presumably because it requires a skill and sensitivity which are not required in the direct conveyance of information. In the following passage, he writes about the difference between communicating knowledge and communicating capability:

The military assumes that every country lad who comes into the military service possesses the necessary capacities to be able to stick it out... (in the same way that the ethical assumes that everyone knows what the ethical is). Now the communication begins. The corporal does not explain to the soldier what it is to drill, etc.; he communicates it to him as an art; he teaches him to use militarily the abilities and potential competence he has.

And this is the way the ethical must be communicated. If one begins first of all with a course to instill the ethical into the individual, then the communication never becomes ethical and the relationship is disturbed from the beginning.12

If the corporal tried to teach the soldier to drill by issuing information, the soldier might never become competent at drilling. Knowing the ethical involves a kind of doing in making ethical decisions and ideally, acting on them, so no more can ethical matters be taught by providing information than a soldier can be taught to drill by telling him to assimilate information. The communicator of ethical matters assumes that the individual has a certain competence which enables him to make ethical decisions himself. Because

the communicator is to bring out this competence, Kierkegaard sometimes refers to indirect communication as the "communication of capability." If a communicator does not assume that the recipient of his counsel has the competence to make ethical decisions, and proceeds to teach ethical matters as information, he teaches the individual something he already knows, rendering the act of teaching rather meaningless. The relationship between teacher and recipient then becomes "disturbed", since the communication involves a deception. Because the individual does know the ethical, anyone who tries to teach it directly puts himself in a deceptive or perhaps offensive relationship to his recipient by posing as one who knows something the other does not.

When the aim of communication is to offer ethical counsel, then, the appropriate technique to employ is an indirect one, which seeks to bring about realizations as opposed to attempting to impart the unknown. The ethical cannot be "pounded into" a person, the way arithmetical drills or historical facts might be, by constant repetition, or the way the corporal pounds into the recruit what an army is, and what sentry duty is. The ethical must be lured out of the individual or pounded out of him rather than into him, just as the corporal pounds the soldier out of the farm boy.

13 Ibid., p. 281.
14 Ibid., p. 269.
15 Ibid., p. 269.
Kierkegaard doesn't explain the meaning of the phrase "everyone knows the ethical." Since this idea serves as the basis for the notion that the communication of ethical matters is not a communication of knowledge, it deserves our attention.

One might begin to reassure oneself that one does indeed have an idea what the ethical is by beginning with a catalogue of one's own duties and obligations. The first of my own duties which come to mind involve those ethical ties I'm born into. I am aware of certain ties and obligations towards my parents, siblings, grandparents, and so on. Other ethical ties which come to mind are those I have myself chosen: the contract I signed, the marriage vow I made, and the vows I've made silently to myself. There is a long list of obligations incumbent on me to show up here or there at the appointed time. I have certain duties as a citizen to go out to vote, and to obey the laws of the country. The list could go on, but the idea is that the ethical involves these sorts of duties, obligations, and relationships.

Knowing the ethical doesn't mean having a set of fixed rules or propositions anchored in the back of my mind which will indicate to me how I should act in unlikely or wildly concocted situations. It involves knowing things close to home -- even the mundane. Since one's duties and obligations are so easily catalogued, one might wonder why an individual might find himself in need of being brought to a realization of such day-to-day knowings. If one thinks
of a situation where duties and wishes conflict, it becomes clear that simply being able to list one's duties will not be enough when a choice must be made. My selfish side might urge me to secure what I want before I worry about anyone else. My nobler side might coax me to put another's needs ahead of my own. When faced with ethical (and other sorts) of decisions, it seems that inner tugs-of-war can occur. Although cataloguing one's duties may be simple enough, difficult decisions might have to be made when those duties conflict with each other, or with personal preferences. According to Kierkegaard, it would make little sense to speak of the ethical as involving duties and obligations if it was not the case that each individual had the ability to strive to meet those obligations.\(^{16}\) Noting that conflicts between duties render the ability to catalogue one's duties insufficient, and noting that for Kierkegaard, the individual has the ability to meet his ethical obligations, we can surmise that the claim that everyone knows the ethical means that each individual has the ability to carry on a dialogue with himself in order to reach decisions concerning ethical matters. It does not mean having a collection of finished propositions which guide one's actions, but rather, being in possession of the capability to "figure things out."

If everyone does indeed know the ethical, it might seem that, left to his own devices, each individual will manage to arrive at the morally correct decision. That

\(^{16}\text{Ibid.}, \text{Vol. I, p. 426.}\)
any sort of communication, be it direct or indirect, is warranted might thus seem odd. But a simple and not unusual situation individuals find themselves in -- being pushed for time -- might provide the occasion of need. One voice in the decision-making dialogue might be shut off when a quick decision is called for. Or one voice might be shut off in the hope of denying its nagging existence. In cases like these, the sensitive communicator of the ethical might step in to help the individual to a realization of the ethical. What sort of thing a realization might be is perhaps best illustrated by example.

In the biblical story about Nathan and David, Nathan employs an indirect technique in an attempt to bring David to a realization of the ethical. David had Uriah killed in battle so that he could take Uriah's wife as his own. Nathan relates to David the following story:

There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor.
2 The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds:
3 But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.
4 And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.
5 And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath
done this thing shall surely die:
6 And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.
7 And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man.¹⁷

The indirect technique ends with Nathan's story. David does not appear to associate his actions with the actions of the wealthy man. The wealthy man's injustice enragés David, but he doesn't see that the story applies to him. Nathan resorts to the use of direct communication, saying to David, "Thou art the man," and David realizes that he has been in the wrong. David's realization is a result of measuring his own actions against what he knows to be the ethical. It is clearly not a result of acquiring new information about ethical matters.

The technique Nathan employs will perhaps more clearly emerge as indirect in contrast to several direct examples of communicating ethical matters examined in the following chapter.

CHAPTER II

Communicating the Ethical

Kierkegaard's Lament

Kierkegaard's insistence that the ethical must be taught indirectly is set against his lament that the ethical is taught directly. Direct communication of the ethical, we have said, is the conveyance to an individual of ethical information, of something the individual needs to learn. "Men will not become sober and understand that relatively little knowledge is needed to be truly human," with the result that people don't think about what it means to communicate, but "hasten immediately to the what they wish to communicate."

It is unclear from Kierkegaard's writings precisely what sorts of practices he had in mind as being objectionable. We will explore what kinds of communication Kierkegaard's charge might call into question by examining several examples of direct communication.

In Reconstruction in Philosophy, Dewey talks about the value of moral laws:

A moral law, like a law in physics, is not something to swear by and stick to

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at all hazards; it is a formula of the way to respond when specified conditions present themselves.20

Dewey suggests that moral laws may be useful in guiding one's actions in certain situations, but doesn't refer his reader to any specific moral laws. How judicious it might be to use a formula of any sort as a standard by which to respond to certain situations is a question that might be raised in view of the fact that human situations and experiences are so varied as to suggest that specified conditions will rarely occur. (Perhaps it is this variety or unpredictability of human experience that makes ethical decision-making a problem to begin with.) But there seems to be nothing offensive in Dewey's theorizing. He does not offer information or advice concerning ethical duties or obligations. Certainly the passage cited falls within the range of direct techniques of communication, but it does not suggest an attempt to communicate the ethical. Ethical theory or meta-ethics might be an unlikely branch of ethics to examine in any attempt to provide examples of direct communications of the sort that Kierkegaard would find objectionable.

In his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant aims "to seek out and establish the supreme principle of

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morality." In moral decision, according to Kant, reason takes precedence over desire. Moral actions are motivated not by an end or goal, but by the moral worth of the principle they represent. Thus the value of a moral action is discovered "not in the purpose to be attained by it, but in the maxim in accordance with which it is decided upon." A person asks himself, then, whether he can will that the maxim guiding his actions should become a universal law. Kant applies this principle:

A man feels sick of life as the result of a series of misfortunes that has mounted to the point of despair, but he is still so far in possession of his reason as to ask himself whether taking his own life may not be contrary to his duty to himself. He now applies the test 'Can the maxim of my action really become a universal law of nature?' His maxim is 'From self-love I make it my principle to shorten my life if its continuance threatens more evil than it promises pleasure.' The only further question to ask is whether this principle of self-love can become a universal law of nature. It is then seen at once that a system of nature by whose law the very same feeling whose function...is to stimulate the furtherance of life should actually destroy life would contradict itself and consequently could not subsist as a system of nature. Hence this maxim cannot possibly hold as a universal law of nature and is therefore entirely opposed to the supreme principle of all duty.

We are to see, then, that to take one's own life is contrary to one's duty. This seems, on the surface, to be information

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22 Ibid., p. 67.
23 Ibid., p. 89.
about what is ethical and what is not, and would therefore fall within the scope of direct communications of the ethical.

Kant's overall project should be considered before we attempt a judgement. Kant seeks to clarify the character of moral decisions by examining the features of situations in which moral deliberation occurs. Certain principles are part and parcel of our reason, according to Kant, and he sets out to describe those principles. The passage cited is an illustration of how the principle that one's maxim for action should become a universal law might be applied in a certain situation. Whereas Dewey suggests that a moral law may be useful, Kant goes a step further and provides the measure by which we are to determine what sorts of practices are worthy of becoming moral laws. The measure is the question of whether one might will that the maxim which guides an action could become a universal law. Kant's primary concern, then, is to find the guiding principle of morality. But in his illustration of the principle at work, he offers a general rule saying that suicide is always wrong. His communication is surely a direct communication concerning an ethical matter, and communications of this description are what Kierkegaard has cautioned us about. It is difficult, however, to determine whether this is the sort of direct communication of ethical matters Kierkegaard objected to. Whether all direct communications of the ethical are objectionable is a problem he leaves with us.
Perhaps one of the reasons Kant's passage does not strike us as being particularly objectionable or offensive is that he is saying what everyone has already heard; we are quite accustomed to hearing philosophers make such statements. Yet Kierkegaard has suggested that the very thing that renders direct communications of the ethical offensive is that they communicate something each individual already knows. This guideline does not seem to assist us here, since it is our familiarity with such general "rules" that saves Kant's passage from offensiveness. The level of generality in Kant's application of his principle suggests that we are still in the realm of ethical theory.

Kant's passage is direct in the sense that it straightforwardly communicates the meaning we suppose Kant intended. There is no hidden message here, nothing we are to glean from the passage over and above its expressed meaning. Perhaps more direct would be one individual addressing another; one individual directing his communication to a certain other individual. Kant offers a general rule to a general reader (a reader who is more likely a student of philosophy than a suicidal individual seeking -- or not seeking -- guidance). We might ask how appropriate Kant's general rule would look as a communication to someone who was actually contemplating suicide. Virginia Woolf wrote to her husband about a month prior to her suicide:

I feel certain that I am going mad again: I feel we cant go through another
of those terrible times. And I shant recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and cant concentrate. So I am doing what seems the best thing to do. You have given me the greatest possible happiness. You have been in every way all that anyone could be. I dont think two people could have been happier till this terrible disease came. I cant fight it any longer, I know that, I am spoiling your life, that without me you could work. And you will I know. You see I cant even write this properly. I cant read. What I want to say is that I owe all the happiness of my life to you. You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good. I want to say that -- everybody knows it. If anybody could have saved me it would have been you. Everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness. I cant go on spoiling your life any longer.
I dont think two people could have been happier than we have been.24

I do not cite Virginia Woolf's letter with the intention of suggesting what someone might have said to her had they found her letter, but in order to suggest that Kant's general rule is not the kind of thing one would communicate to an individual in a real life situation. The inappropriateness of Kant's passage in such a situation seems to illustrate its generality, or, perhaps, its impersonal tone. Clearly, Kant was not offering advice to would-be suicides. It may be the impersonal nature of Kant's words that render them unobjectionable. In contrast, we can imagine a situation where one individual directly addresses another in a personal way (what we might call a directed-to communication) on the subject of suicide.

In a black mood, S.S. might hint to his analyst that his life looks so bleak that suicide seems increasingly attractive. His analyst, usually a silent listener, is not only a bit worried that S.S. has serious intentions, but also finds his own ethical sensibilities surfacing with a sort of indignant fervor. He breaks into S.S.'s monologue, pointing out that S.S.'s family would bear the consequences of his action, and that it is therefore selfish and cruel even to consider suicide. We can guess that S.S. might find that his analyst's comments offend him. He might think his analyst is quite right, but having his selfishness revealed so bluntly embarrasses him. This person-to-person communication seems offensive in a way that Kant's passage does not. It seems plausible to suppose that in person-to-person communications like this one, where the communication is direct (i.e., its meaning explicit) as well as "directed-to", it is the universal feature of the ethical that explains the embarrassment or humiliation of the person on the receiving end of the communication -- indicated here by S.S.'s sheepish acknowledgement to himself that his analyst is quite right. It is in part this universal aspect ("everyone knows the ethical"), we have said, that prevents us from being offended by Kant's passage. In Volume II of Kierkegaard's Either/Or, Judge William points out that it is perfectly acceptable to state the universal (for example, it is each man's duty to work to earn a living), but that no one can tell an individual what his particular
duty is (for example, what he should do to earn a living). It is less likely that an author addressing a general readership will offer specific advice than it is for one individual to offer specific advice to another individual, since an author addressing an unknown readership cannot know the particular situations each reader finds himself in. (Put another way, one-to-one communications are more likely to be personal than works addressed to a wide readership.) Thus, it seems that examples of direct communications of the ethical which strike us as being offensive are more likely to occur in one-to-one communications.

In "A Free Man's Worship", Bertrand Russell contends that the choice between worshipping power or goodness affects our entire morality. He writes:

The life of Man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, towards a goal that few can hope to reach, and where none may tarry long. One by one, as they march, our comrades vanish from our sight, seized by the silent orders of omnipotent Death. Very brief is the time in which we can help them, in which their happiness or misery is decided. Be it ours to shed sunshine on their path, to lighten their sorrows by the balm of sympathy, to give them the pure joy of a never-tiring affection, to strengthen failing courage, to instill faith in hours of despair. Let us not weigh in grudging scales their merits and demerits, but let us think only of their need - of the sorrows, the difficulties, perhaps blindnesses, that make the misery of their lives; let us remember that they are fellow-sufferers.

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in the same tragedy with ourselves... be it ours to feel that, where they suffered, where they failed, no deed of ours was the cause; but whenever a spark of the divine fire kindled in their hearts, we were ready with encouragement, with sympathy, with brave words in which high courage glowed.\textsuperscript{26}

The message in this poetically charged passage is clear: man's life is filled with suffering, so it is each man's task to help the other with sympathy, affection, and encouragement, and not to judge his fellow man. We are presented with an ethical exhortation. The tone and style of Russell's language might encourage his reader to take the message to heart, but poetically charged language does not render a communication indirect. Russell's exhortation is surely a direct admonition concerning the proper treatment of one's fellow man. Whether there is anything offensive in this is another matter. Russell does not seem to be theorizing in the manner of Kant and Dewey; he does not seem to be talking about ethics, but rather exhorting us to do the good. A reader's reaction might be: "This sounds very uplifting, but I'm quite aware that this is the way to treat others" -- not a register of offense but of puzzlement. He might wonder about Russell's intent: "Am I personally being advised to behave ethically with respect to my fellow man? Is Russell reminding me in this uplifting style to do as I well know that I ought? I guess on occasion I act as though I don't know this, so

perhaps Russell's words can be taken as a refresher-course."

Our reader would not register this sort of puzzlement when he reads Kant's example of a man considering suicide. Kant's general rule that suicide is morally unacceptable came through, but our reader was quite sure he was not being addressed personally. An ethical exhortation, it seems, is more personal than ethical theorizing.

Thoreau suggests how one should choose one's tasks:

Do a little more of that work which you had sometime confessed to be good, which you feel that society and your justest judge rightly demands of you. Do what you reprove yourself for not doing. Know that you are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with yourself without reason.27

Reading this, our reader might say to himself, "I haven't heard it put quite this way. Thoreau is advising us to take on those tasks which society and I deem to be good (and which are sometimes put off until later)." Our reader registers no offense, finding this passage no more objectionable than Russell's exhortation. He has noticed that Thoreau has advised "us" to do what we hold to be good. Thoreau is communicating, in general terms, what everyone knows -- i.e., the universal.

We can imagine a situation in which our reader, O.F., would feel offended. O.F. has been unemployed for several months, and spends most of his time watching television --

ironic, thinks his friend, since O.F. was so opposed to watching television in his college days that one summer he initiated a campaign to discourage people from turning their television sets on. As O.F. recites the plot of a 1958 movie he has seen at least three times, his friend breaks in and says, "Why don't you volunteer some of your time to the Centre for Alcoholism? That was your field before you were laid off, in fact one of your causes a few years ago. That's all you used to talk about... how society neglected to study and treat alcoholism as though it were contagious... Now all you talk about are old B-grade movies. You know what's important, why don't you do it?" O.F., of course, is hurt. (We can see how gentle Thoreau's passage might look to O.F. now.) O.F.'s friend feels rather badly for being so harsh with his old friend, but thinks to himself, "It had to be said. Someone had to jolt him out of his complacency."

But perhaps O.F. could have been treated more gently. Someone might have said, "Sorry, I'll have to hear the plot of that movie tomorrow -- right now I have to get to the Centre to do some counselling. Did I tell you I've volunteered eight hours a week?" Or he might have said, "I can't make it to the Centre today. Could you fill in for a few hours?", hoping that O.F. would remember his priorities once back in the stream of things. Or he might have said, after listening to O.F. explain the plot of the movie, "That reminds me of your situation. Remember when you were so wrapped in a good cause that you hardly had time to sleep?" If O.F.'s
friend was not already a volunteer at the Centre, he might have signed up, "communicating" by example and in silence. This sort of ethical example-setting, where language drops out, is viewed by Kierkegaard as an appropriate means of communicating the ethical. He refers to it as "upbringing",\textsuperscript{28} which suggests a method of teaching ethical ideals to children. But nothing would seem to prevent people from setting an example for adults (except, perhaps, impatience).

Person-to-person communications, then, seem to hold the greatest possibility for offense. Yet one-to-one situations also seem to offer the possibility of communicating indirectly. The examples we have examined from Kant, Russell, and Thoreau are direct communications of the ethical, but inoffensive. It is not just offensiveness, however, that renders direct communications of the ethical inappropriate.

In \textit{Marriage and Morals}, Russell advises his reader what is required in romantic love:

\begin{quote}
...love itself is worthless when it is merely possessive; it is then on a level with work which is merely pecuniary. In order to have the kind of value of which we are speaking, love must feel the ego of the beloved person as important as one's own ego, and must realise the other's feelings and wishes as though they were one's own.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

If everyone knows the ethical, the question arises as to

\textsuperscript{28}Journals, Vol. I, p. 279.

what purpose such information might serve. If I already know the ethical, I possess the capability to decide whether or not there is an "ought" which demands that I treat another's desires and emotions as though they were my own.

(Kierkegaard calls this capability "oughtness-capability."\textsuperscript{30}) Russell's advice might not arouse offense. But his advice concerning something the reader does not need to be informed of provides us with an opportunity to suggest that such a communication would serve no practical purpose. If Russell intended to change the view of someone who differed with him concerning the requirements of romantic love, it is doubtful that the passage cited would be enough to coax him out of his belief. A defensive response would seem more likely. In The Point of View for My Work as an Author, Kierkegaard points out that

\begin{quote}
a direct attack only strengthens a person in his illusion, and at the same time embitters him. There is nothing that requires such gentle handling as an illusion, if one wishes to dispel it. If anything prompts the prospective captive to set his will in opposition, all is lost. And this is what a direct attack achieves...
\end{quote}

Although the illusion Kierkegaard speaks of here is Christendom, and although the term "direct attack" seems too strong a phrase to accurately express Russell's intent,


Kierkegaard's view that setting out to change someone's view head-on is not the best way to accomplish the task seems to apply here too. If one's intent is to convince someone of the error of his ways, then, communicating directly is inappropriate because it is ineffective. In addition, providing information about ethical duties gives the recipient a detour from what he should be busy at. Kierkegaard writes:

Since the emphasis must fall absolutely upon "You shall," there can be no communication of knowledge at all...for if I am supposed to get to know something first of all, then this "shall" is not foremost, not absolute.32

Kierkegaard is not proposing that one should act first and think later, but rather, that information about the ethical, information the individual does not require, takes the emphasis away from the task of realizing the ethical.

J. L. Mackie, in Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong, argues that morality must be created rather than discovered since there are no objective values. Mackie provides us with several intriguing examples of direct communication. His advice is a departure from the sorts of ethical norms represented by Kant and Russell.

Having explained various theories of ethics, Mackie goes on to outline a moral system. On the subject of truth-telling and lying, Mackie writes:

On an assumption that the normal and proper state of affairs is that people should live as members of various circles, larger and smaller, with different kinds and degrees of cooperation, competition, and conflict in these different circles, the appropriateness of telling the truth becomes disputable.  

He suggests that lying may be the only way, in certain situations, to maintain one's privacy. Keeping silent when asked a question, he points out, might imply an answer anyway, and a lie might be "the only practicable alternative to an undesirable revelation of the truth."  

Mackie advises his reader of the pragmatic aspects of lying:

> Your enemies will believe what you say only if you generally tell even your enemies the truth... Since a fair proportion of lies will in time be discovered to be such, anyone's credibility in falsehood, in any particular circle, is an expendable asset. A prudent man will not squander his limited stock of convincing lies, but use it sparingly to the best effect.

A lie won't serve its purpose if it's not believed, so care should be taken in dispensing it, according to Mackie.

On the right to commit suicide, Mackie writes:

> The right to life has as a corollary the right to end one's life, though this... is not absolute: others may have claims that tell against suicide when it would be preferable from the agent's own point of view. Still, there is no difficulty in describing circumstances in which

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suicide would be permissible. Nor can there be anything morally wrong in assisting a genuinely voluntary suicide.\textsuperscript{36}

Clearly, the reader is being given suggestions concerning what may be considered morally acceptable. It should be added that regarding his sketch of a moral system, Mackie is concerned less with the particular conclusions he has arrived at than with the method implicit in his treatment.\textsuperscript{37} It is the method implicit in his treatment, or perhaps the attitude implied by his treatment, that is of concern to us, too. Even taking into the account the fact that Mackie does not view his moral statements as absolute, they nevertheless strike one as attempts to suggest what is ethical, and therefore, as direct statements of the ethical.

Mackie's moral judgements may strike us as rather more offensive than Russell's. Both Mackie and Russell communicate directly, and both communicate something about ethical concerns. The most obvious difference between the examples is this: whereas Russell offers traditional wisdom familiar to our ears, Mackie offers judgements that go against the grain of Western moral tradition. According to Kierkegaard, one of the reasons direct communications of the ethical indicate a misunderstanding is that everyone knows the ethical.\textsuperscript{38} Thus it would seem that direct communications of the ethical should be as offensive to us

\textsuperscript{36}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 196.

\textsuperscript{37}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 199.

\textsuperscript{38}\textit{Journals}, Volume I, p. 268, p. 271.
as direct communications of the unethical. Yet we find Mackie's advice more offensive than Russell's. If everyone knows the ethical (right as well as wrong), communicating ethical matters directly involves an odd misunderstanding (and questionable usefulness). When the content of the communication goes against tradition, the misunderstanding is much more obvious; hearing the offbeat is more likely to jolt us. In theory, ethical as well as unethical communications involve a misunderstanding, and are therefore inappropriate in varying degrees. How specific or personal the communication is, we have said, can affect its offensiveness, and one-to-one communications will tend to be more personal. Mackie, like Russell and Thoreau, is addressing a general readership, not one individual, yet his advice seems more specific. Mackie indicates that there is a process of weighing and balancing conflicts, an idea which strikes an accord with the notion discussed earlier, that when making ethical decisions, the individual is often confronted with the necessity of choosing between conflicting interests. Lies may be morally right, Mackie suggests, when there exists a conflict between telling the truth and guarding one's privacy, and this sort of conflict arises from the normal states of affairs people find themselves in -- in competition and conflict as well as in cooperation with others. For a suicide to be morally acceptable, Mackie points out, the rights (or "claims") of others must be considered. Although Mackie does not undertake such a
task, he holds that there would be no difficulty in describing circumstances in which suicide would be morally acceptable. The conflicts, Mackie's moral advice confronts are indeed the sorts of conflicts an individual might face in his ethical decision-making. But offering resolutions to such conflicts is out of place if the individual has the capacity to weigh conflicts and choose for himself. Mackie has, in effect, outlined the sorts of decisions individuals find themselves faced with, and proposes what it is they should choose. Russell and Thoreau seem to offer more "abstract" advice. Thus, the personal nature of direct communications of the ethical (and thus the degree of offensiveness) which we attributed to one-to-one communications may emerge in situations which are not person-to-person.

In "Decisions to Terminate Life and the Concept of Person", Michael Tooley discusses what circumstances render the "termination" of human life morally acceptable, and explains what considerations must be taken into account. One consideration is whether the organism in question is a person. Although he discusses the concept of person at some length, Tooley wishes to leave open the question of what characterizes a person, and cautions that until some sort of consensus is reached, an acceptable account of what conditions justify the termination of life cannot be

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developed.

Even though the concept of person adequate for discussion of euthanasia is left open, Tooley manages to suggest what circumstances render euthanasia morally acceptable. Infants are only potential persons, and as Tooley views terminating the life of potential persons as a "morally neutral" act, infanticide is morally acceptable. He maintains that even if one holds that human infants are persons, or that it is wrong to destroy potential persons, there are at least three situations which would justify ending the life of an infant. One case is a situation in which the infant has a brain defect of the sort that will prevent it from developing into a "person":

To decide when this is true would require a precise understanding of the properties something must have to be a person. Until this is done one can hardly be very confident about classification in individual cases. But there surely are such cases. And in these cases it would seem that there is no moral objection to terminating the life of such a human, since in doing so one is destroying neither a person nor even a potential person.

Tooley gives his reader a general moral "okay", reserving particular decisions for a time when those properties necessary to qualify something as a person are decided. We can guess that this will be a difficult task. One might be hesitant about listing the properties an individual must

\[40\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 80.\]

\[41\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 80.\]

\[42\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 81.\]
have in order for him to be called a person, if only for fear that some property might be left off the list, allowing strange creatures to be called persons, or for fear that some property might be included on the list which would deny someone's personhood. But it seems to be a confusion that we don't already know what persons are. Listing properties seems to be no more essential in distinguishing persons from non-persons than is listing the chemical properties of salt in order to distinguish it from minnows. (More on this confusion later.)

Another case in which Tooley views it as morally justifiable to end the life of an infant is one in which the infant is suffering and will continue to suffer, and where

...it seems virtually certain that it either prefers death to continued existence or will do so as soon as it becomes capable of having such a desire. In such a case termination of the infant's life is akin to voluntary euthanasia and thus surely justified. 43

Tooley has argued earlier that voluntary euthanasia is ethical. Even if one granted him this for the sake of argument, one would want to ask how appropriate it is to refer to taking the life of an infant who might later desire death as being akin to voluntary euthanasia. We might want to call it guesswork euthanasia. How will I know that an infant will prefer death later, when he is old enough to view that as a possibility? Ethical decisions are often

43Ibid., p. 81.
made with varying degrees of uncertainty, but here I would be ending another's life on the basis of my own guesswork. I may read about growing numbers of people who are prepared to do away with themselves in the most efficient ways in the event that their pain becomes so terrible that it outweighs their desire to live. But I also read newspaper accounts of suffering people determined to live. On the basis of such varied accounts, I might at least take up a wait-and-see attitude, until the infant can decide for himself. The question I must put to myself is whether I can justify acting on guesswork in order to an end an infant's suffering. I might have to admit to myself that I just don't know, that I can't see a clear pathway to the justification of such an action.

Nor do I know what "properties" an organism must have in order for it to qualify as a person. Indeed, the ways of speaking I am familiar with suggest that those whom Tooley would designate "non-persons" or "organisms" are more usually considered to be people. Overhearing an orderly say that it would be a blessing if the life-support system in Room 200 broke down, someone might respond, "No! That's my sister in there!" And, brain functions notwithstanding, relatives and friends do not refer to someone as "that organism at Memorial Hospital" or "that vegetable who was formerly my uncle", even though the person has been in a coma for a year. Although nothing suggests that an individual in a catatonic state is any more comfortable at room temperature than in freezing weather (he never says so, never
shivers), a blanket is added at night, the furnace left on when the rest of the household is out. Tooley's use of the word "person" suggests that several everyday uses of the word must be changed in favour of "potential person", "organism", "non-person". He seems to view person as a concept to which we can attribute certain properties and characteristics. If we view the word "person" as a word having a variety of uses, rather than trying to view it as a fixed list of properties possessed by all people through various stages of life, we get into fewer difficulties in deciding who (or what) is a person and who (or what) is not.

Tooley's judgements register high on the offense scale. He offers specific advice, quite different than Russell's exhortation, and in addition, he communicates the unethical. Because Tooley seems to depart from the usual uses of the word "person" and because he seems to ignore tradition (we note that euthanasia and infanticide are currently listed as crimes) it is difficult to imagine how he might have communicated indirectly rather than directly in his article. Kierkegaard consistently makes reference to indirect communication of the ethical (as opposed to the unethical), and what constitutes the ethical is roughly agreed upon by people. When a philosopher breaks with tradition, it is rather difficult to say how he might have communicated his ideas indirectly. Certainly he would refrain from directly stating the circumstances under which he viewed it as ethical or unethical to undertake certain actions. But offering
a parable, as Nathan does in his conversation with David, would be ruled out, since a break with tradition would mean that parables along the lines of what he wanted to communicate would be scarce or non-existent, and if suitable parables were concocted, the reader might completely miss the point. It seems to be the universal aspect of the ethical that makes it possible to communicate it indirectly.

Turning our attention away from the realm of philosophers doing ethics, we might want to consider statements we come across in daily life which at first glance appear to be attempts to directly communicate the ethical in a manner which might be construed as offensive. Children are instructed, for example, never to betray a friend, not to tell tales, to be considerate of others' feelings, to obey their parents, etc. We need to ask whether, if the ethical is to be communicated only indirectly, it follows that such statements should be avoided. Upon consideration of the possible functions of such statements, it would appear not, although it seems that there are less direct ways to communicate these codes of conduct. A parent's statement to his child, "You shouldn't have lied to your friend", might be a scolding, or a reminder of something the child has already learned -- a reminder of how he felt when his friend lied to him, or a sort of summary of what the child has been taught indirectly by example, through fairy-tales, or through experience. "Have you apologized for lying to your friend?", a less direct way of conveying the message, might serve the same purpose. Selecting the appropriate Aesop's fable at
bedtime would be still less direct. But to suggest that even the most direct of these communications ("You shouldn't have lied to your friend") is objectionable might be to overlook the variety of roles a statement like this can perform.

Those whose education in values was partly a matter of classroom indoctrination might recall the ethical being communicated directly. Clearly, a teacher who expounds on virtue, good deeds, and duties communicates directly. (It would depend on circumstances whether we would view this as offensive.) But methods other than indoctrination are now being used in North American schools. Beginning in the early 1960s, moral values education, a blanket term for a variety of theories and methods concerning the teaching of values in the classroom, captured the interest of North American school systems. A reading of some of the literature suggests a movement away from ethical indoctrination in favour of methods of teaching that appear to be less direct. The emphasis of many of these methods seems to be on learning to reason well rather than on providing students with information or with teachers' opinions. Although such methods are less direct than indoctrination, the teaching of reasoning has little in common with Kierkegaard's notion of indirect communication. The classroom may no longer be an appropriate place in which to ferret out examples of direct communications of the ethical, but with an exception, contemporary methods of teaching values seem unlikely to provide examples of indirect communication either. The
exception, one of the teaching methods advanced by moral values education proponents, "Values Clarification", seems worthy of examination as an indirect technique. This will be undertaken in Chapter IV.

Direct communications of the ethical emerge, as we have seen, where philosophers write about ethics as well as where individuals address one another. It is difficult to say what sorts of communication Kierkegaard objected so strongly to, but we have suggested that the possibility of offense is increased under certain conditions. First, the less general a communication is, the more likely it is to cause offense. Second, the less universally held the content of the communication, the greater the possibility of offense.

It might be objected, "Arguments leading to direct communications of the ethical, like Tooley's, for example, do no harm; they do not prevent the individual from making ethical decisions for themselves. Perhaps such arguments are not ideal methods of communicating ethical matters, but surely there is nothing insidious about them. Reading several points of view concerning a moral issue might even assist the individual's decision-making by suggesting various alternatives to him, initiating consideration of aspects he has neglected to take into account." Such an objection perhaps overlooks the powerful influence a logically sound argument might exert. Mackie, for example, has made a reasonably convincing case for the acceptability of lying, if one attends solely to his logic, "but his case
is convincing only on practical grounds. He has pitted the practical against the ideal, advising that it is not wise to tell too many lies, since credibility is expendable, but not because telling lies to serve one's own purposes violates any ethical ideal. And the ethical, at least in Kierkegaard's view, is an ideal one must constantly strive to realize.

There are other reasons to have misgivings about the appropriateness of communicating the ethical directly. First, a direct approach detracts from the recipient's dignity. It implies that (a) he does not have the capability to make his own decisions concerning ethical matters, and (b) that whoever tells him what is or is not ethical is superior by virtue of this knowledge, and thus violates any notion of equality with regard to ethical matters. A man's ethical life is not measured by how much knowledge he possesses concerning the ethical, by how much information he has digested on the subject. For Climacus (the pseudonymous author of the Postscript), existence is not a matter of stretching oneself out into the objective realm, but of inward reflection. It is not a matter of gathering the ethical judgements of others. An individual who communicates essential truths in a direct manner treats the recipient as though he is not an equal, an existing subject who must undertake his ethical tasks himself.

Because the ethical involves inward reflection, a direct approach might unnecessarily confuse the recipient.
The consideration of myriad alternatives involved in a moral issue is not of paramount importance to the individual's ethical decision-making; an ethical decision is not a research project involving investigation of the "experts'" opinions. Some of the considerations discussed in arguments about moral issues might be mere trifles in comparison with the momentous, living considerations that will actually bear on an individual's decision. The privacy I would attempt to protect by telling a lie, for example, might be a niggling consideration when I put it next to an ethical commitment I've chosen -- the promise of honesty in my work, the promise of "honour" in a marriage vow, a silent promise to myself to strive for honesty. The introduction of considerations that do not actually come up in my own ethical decisions might only sidetrack me.

Perhaps many of the considerations or possibilities the direct communicator of the ethical proposes will not benefit the recipient because the way of life the individual has committed himself to limits the possibilities he will consider. Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authors express their interests, concerns, and theories from the viewpoint of one mode of existence (aesthetic, ethical, or religious). Each pseudonym is presented as a normative type -- one lives purely aesthetically, another ethically, another religiously -- and is therefore an ideally construed type, rather than the more complex sort of arrangements most

of us are. 

Although few of us are likely to be fully represented by these ideally construed types, our decisions are shaped by the type we strive to be. Since each mode of existence has different answers to questions concerning what one ought to do, an individual's alternatives are limited by the mode of existence he has chosen. 

Choosing one mode of existence over another does not in itself resolve all of the alternatives. But having chosen the ethical mode, for example, the individual commits himself to striving to base his choices on ethical rather than aesthetic concerns.

According to Kierkegaard, "direct communication presupposes certainty." When the ethical is prescribed, that suggests that it is something absolute, as if there are guarantees regarding the ethical. The implication that there can be certainty with regard to the ethical seems to do an injustice to the notion of a human being always in process of coming to be, who must constantly make choices, and discard or renew them. An analogy between Climacus' definition of subjective truth and ethical decisions might be instructive here. Climacus defines essential truth in the Postscript: "An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth..." 

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45 Ibid., p. 28.
46 Ibid., p. 28.
47 Postscript, p. 182.
regard to essential knowledge; when I make an ethical decision, I'm not sure intellectually that it's the right decision -- indeed, such a decision might defy logic or practicality. Yet the individual who has made an ethical choice may embrace his decision as though it were a certainty: he can commit himself to his decision. Inward commitment cannot be communicated directly; the ethical must be appropriated, not merely understood.

Direct communications of the ethical, then, detract from the recipient's dignity, muddy the waters, imply a certainty that doesn't exist with regard to ethical matters, and overlook the fact that mere understanding is not enough, that an essential feature of the ethical is that it must be appropriated. Kierkegaard's alternative to direct forms of communication will be discussed in detail in the following section.

The Indirect Technique

Although many of Kierkegaard's journal notes concerning indirect communication are rather cryptic, we can see that there are specific elements that distinguish direct from indirect communications. It appears that these elements have to do with the relationships among the communicator, the receiver, and the communication.

1) The deception

According to Kierkegaard, the communicator, if he wishes to communicate the ethical, must do so indirectly. If he attempts to communicate it directly, he poses as one who
knows something the receiver is ignorant of. He thus places himself in a deceptive relationship to the receiver. Kierkegaard claims, however, that indirect communication too involves a deception:

All indirect communication is different from direct communication in that indirect communication first of all involves a deception—simply because an attempt to communicate the ethical directly would mean to deceive. 48

The deception involved in an indirect communication, then, must be different. The indirect communicator deceives in order to avoid a less attractive deception. The deception involved in communicating indirectly seems to lie in the indirect strategy itself. The following example will perhaps indicate one sort of deception that is involved in the indirect method.

In Plato's Euthyphro, Socrates encounters Euthyphro, who is about to charge his father for the murder of a field labourer. The labourer is a murderer who died while bound and lying in a ditch, where he had been left by Euthyphro's father while the latter went to seek advice on what to do with his captive. Euthyphro's family has accused him of being impious for prosecuting his father, which demonstrates, according to Euthyphro, "how little they know what the gods think about piety and impiety." 49 Socrates uses indirect


tactics in an attempt to bring Euthyphro to an awareness that the distinction between piety and impiety on which he has based his decision to prosecute his father is not a clearly conceived one. Socrates does not go about his task by directly instructing Euthyphro that prosecuting his father is a transgression of his duties. He rather asks Euthyphro whether he is not afraid that what he is doing might be impious. Euthyphro assures Socrates that he knows what is impious and what is pious. Socrates assumes the position of one who is ignorant of these matters, and allows Euthyphro to take the position of one who is well informed by asking Euthyphro to enlighten him. It becomes evident that clarifying the notions of piety and impiety is not as easy as Euthyphro had believed.

Euthyphro does not arrive at an ethical realization in the presence of Socrates, as David does in the presence of Nathan. Neither is the reader of the dialogue witness to Euthyphro's realization. But Socrates appears to have cleared the way for Euthyphro to reach an awareness by demonstrating to him in an indirect way that the notions which guided his decision to prosecute his father were not easy to define.

The deception involved in Socrates' technique is quite simple. Socrates encourages Euthyphro to tell him about the notions of piety and impiety, knowing Euthyphro will be unlikely to produce satisfactory definitions. He deceives Euthyphro by pretending that he believes Euthyphro knows about these matters. Thus he knowingly protects Euthyphro
from the humiliation he might experience were Socrates to
directly accuse Euthyphro of acting unethically.

Although both direct and indirect techniques of
communication involve a deception, then, the nature of
the deceptions differ. One involves an offensive stance
assumed by the communicator, violating the notion that the
ethical involves essential knowledge, with regard to which
men are equal. The other involves a strategy which prevents
offense or embarrassment before the communicator.

The device Socrates employs in the Euthyphro dialogue
to prevent offense is irony. In The Concept of Irony,
Kierkegaard writes that one manner in which the ironist
expresses himself is by entering into a relationship of
opposition to what he wants to call into question. But if
the irony which constitutes the deception in the Euthyphro
dialogue lies in Socrates' claim that he is ignorant of the
meaning of concepts like piety and impiety, one might think
that Socrates actually does know their meaning. That is
not the case, however. Kierkegaard explains that

...when Socrates said he was ignorant,
he was nevertheless in possession of
knowledge, for he had a knowledge of
his ignorance. This knowledge, however,
was not a knowledge of something, that
is, it had no positive content, and to
this extent his ignorance was ironic. 51

50 Soren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Irony, trans. Lee
M. Capel (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press,
1962), p. 266.

51 Ibid., p. 285.
Socrates is aware that he doesn't know definitions of piety and impiety which sufficiently explain them, whereas Euthyphro thinks he does know something he really does not. Thus, Socrates enters into a relationship of opposition by asking Euthyphro to enlighten him. The irony employed by the communicating ethicist is not, however, merely a certain manner of turning a phrase. The individual who has "essential irony" rather than merely being capable of expressing himself ironically, "has it all day long", writes Climacus. 52 Such an ironist is aware that inwardness cannot be directly taught.

Both indirect and direct communications of ethical concerns, then, involve a deception. When the communication is indirect, a maieutic relationship between communicator and receiver takes the place of a direct relationship.

ii) The Maieutic

The indirect communicator strives to maintain a maieutic, rather than direct, relationship to the receiver of the communication. Kierkegaard writes:

To stand - by another's help alone

and

To stand alone - by another's help. The latter is the maieutic relationship; therefore there is also the ironical in the formulation; whereas the first formulation is a direct relationship and a direct statement. 53

52 Postscript, p. 450.

The irony in the formulation "to stand alone - by another's help" seems to lie in the notion that in order to stand alone, the help of another is required. Both the Euthyphro and the Nathan examples have provided an indication that assistance with regard to ethical matters is sometimes required. One individual may coax another along to a realization concerning ethical matters, but any feeling of indebtedness on the part of the receiver would be out of place, since the ethical knowings and the realization belong to the receiver; they are not given to him. It would be out of place, too, for the receiver to become a disciple or follower of his teacher, since that would rank one person over another in the order of ethical knowledge -- an order that does not exist. According to Kierkegaard, it is either competence or authority which singles out an individual as a teacher. But where the ethical is concerned, "one person cannot have authority in relation to another."\(^{54}\)

The qualities that might put one person in a position to help another in ethical matters are merely accidental -- one individual might be more experienced than another, wiser, or a clearer thinker.

Kierkegaard continues his note on the maieutic relationship:

But if he is going to stand alone - by another's help, then he must by no means have any conception of this other as advantageous, for this advantageous idea usually becomes a hindrance to his

\(^{54}\)Ibid., Vol. I, p. 272.
If the communicator were perceived as one who had superior ethical knowledge, the emphasis in the communication would slip away from the receiver and towards the communicator. But it is the receiver who is to be emphasized in communications of the ethical. "The communicator disappears, as it were, makes himself only to help the other become." In the Postscript, Climacus discusses admiration as a deceitful relationship when someone "is supposed to be great in connection with what is universally human." Since the ethical is universal, the relationship between individuals in the communication must be maieutic. Standing "by another's help alone" is not standing alone at all. The communicator does not fade into the background when ethical concerns are directly communicated because the receiver becomes indebted to him for his newly acquired knowledge.

The Socratic situation discussed in Philosophical Fragments, where truth is not learned as new knowledge but is to be found within each individual, is described by Climacus as a sort of remembering or bringing to consciousness of what is already known. Although coming to a realization

57 Postscript, p. 320.
of the ethical is not to be confused with the doctrine of Recollection, the situation is similar to that regarding the ethical in that the individual already has knowledge of the ethical. Accordingly, the relationship between the truth-seeker and the Socratic midwife is maieutic rather than direct. Socrates, writes Climacus,

...was by the God forbidden to beget...
for between man and man the maieutic relationship is the highest...\(^5^9\)

The type of instruction attributed to Socrates and the type of instruction fit for ethical matters both begin with the assumption that the individual does not require new knowledge or information. When ethical matters are concerned, men are essentially equal, and this is to be reflected in the mode of communication.

iii) The Appropriation

The relationship of the receiver to the communication, when the communication is indirect, is a relationship which does not hold in a direct communication. If the indirect communication is successful, the receiver appropriates what has been conveyed to him in a way the receiver of direct communication does not. It is difficult to imagine someone appropriating historical or scientific knowledge, or knowledge about economics or accounting, in the same sense in which the individual can appropriate something communicated about ethical matters. The student who learns the colours

\(^{5^9}\) Ibid., p. 13.
that comprise white light merely has to understand what "red", "orange", "yellow", and so on, refer to. Although appropriating the ethical includes understanding the sentences the communicator utters, something more is required.

Kierkegaard calls the process of appropriating the ethical "double-reflection." In the first of two reflections on what is communicated, I note what is said, and my ability to do this seems to consist in understanding the language being spoken. But in the second reflection, I must relate to myself what has been said; I must reflect on how it applies to me. The biblical example of indirect communication discussed earlier proves to be a useful illustration of an instance where double-reflection does not occur. Nathan tells David the story about the wealthy man who takes the poor man's only lamb. The story "registers"; David understands the story, and is outraged. In a direct communication, all there would be for David to do would be to understand the story and perhaps see to it that the wealthy man was duly punished. But Nathan is trying to communicate something indirectly, and ideally, David would associate his own actions with those of the man in the story, realizing that what is being said applies to him. Kierkegaard writes:

Since ethically there is no direct relationship, all communication must go through a double-reflection; the first is the reflection in which the communication is made, and the second is that in which it is recaptured.60

David does not recapture the communication; he does not seem to consider how it applies to him. Nathan finds it necessary to directly communicate to David that the story is a sort of parable about David himself. When the communication is indirect, the type of comprehension associated with direct communication does not suffice in bringing the receiver to a realization of the ethical.

Kierkegaard suggests that the proper role of direct communication is the conveyance of knowledge, which involves objective thought.61 Objective thought, however, turns its attention away from the thinking individual, since the type of knowledge associated with objective thought is not essential or existential knowledge. Thus the appropriation process that ideally occurs in indirect communication seems precluded when the ethical is taught directly, as though it were something to be learned. Kierkegaard writes that "objective thought translates everything into results, and helps all mankind to cheat..."62 When results are communicated, the need to ask oneself how what has been communicated applies to oneself becomes unnecessary. The idea that another individual can offer the results of what is properly each individual's task -- making ethical decisions -- does not fit well with the notion of a human being who is "constantly in process of coming to be",63 for whom an

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62 Postscript, p. 68.
63 Ibid, p. 68.
essential part of existence resides in choosing. The skilled communicator of ethical matters seems to understand that if the communication itself is to be ethical, it must be made in a way that allows the recipient to doubly reflect on it.

The ethical has to do with the subjective, rather than the objective, realm. What is communicated is, in a sense, inwardness; the communicator does not attempt to inform, but to encourage the receiver to appropriate what he conveys:

The reception of inwardness does not consist in a direct reflection of the content communicated, for this is echo. But the reproduction of inwardness in the recipient constitutes the resonance, by reason of which the thing said remains absent...inwardness is when the thing said belongs to the recipient as if it were his own - and now it is his own.64

The recipient's relationship to what is conveyed in the ideal indirect communication, then, is a relationship peculiar to the indirect technique. Double reflection is necessary in order to render the thing said the recipient's own.

iv) Reduplication

Just as, ideally, the receiver of indirect communication appropriates in a special way what has been conveyed, the communicator has a similar task. While the receiver should reflect on how the communication applies to him, the communicator should be aware that he is not exempt from the demands of the ethical. He must existentially "reduplicate" what he teaches. This is not required of the communicator

64 Postscript, p. 232.
of information. No one would be expected to reduplicate what he knows about history or accounting. The master of the indirect technique must "reduplicate what is communicated" or "teach in actuality" what he hopes to convey:

Actuality is the existential reduplication of what is said. To teach in actuality that the truth is ridiculed, etc., means to teach it as one ridiculed and scoffed at himself. To teach poverty in actuality means to teach it as one who is himself poor...⁶⁵

The idea seems simply to be that one should "practice what he preaches", something that is not required of an individual who communicates information which does not apply to the individual's existence in a fundamental way. When the content of the communication concerns ethical matters, however, preaching without practicing what one teaches results in hypocrisy or even comedy.

(v) Summary

Several key points have emerged concerning the method of communicating ethical matters Kierkegaard offers as an alternative to direct techniques. First, teaching ethical matters inappropriately involves offense, whereas teaching it indirectly involves a strategy which prevents offense. (One such strategy is the use of irony.) Secondly, the relationship between communicator and receiver should be maieutic. And thirdly, the receiver of indirect communication needs to appropriate what has been communicated. The

sum of these aspects of indirect communication seems to be the ideal communication of ethical matters. The idea that the receiver needs to appropriate what has been conveyed might be viewed as the focal point of the other aspects of indirect communication. Although we would not want to label a communication direct because the receiver failed to come to an ethical realization, we can say that if a communicator of ethical matters does not take into account the notion that the ethical must be appropriated, the relationship between communicator and receiver will likely be direct. The notion that the ethical must be appropriated has its basis in Kierkegaard's characterization of ethical knowledge as essential knowledge. Essential knowledge must be appropriated existentially.
CHAPTER III

The Indirect Technique in Either/Or

Having discussed at some length the indirect technique Kierkegaard outlines in his Journals, we will explore the question of how the technique is employed in one of Kierkegaard's works. Our discussion will focus on Either/Or: A Fragment of Life, which was written several years prior to the notes in the Journals.\textsuperscript{66} While the chronology of authorship steers us away from wording our question as "how adeptly theory was put to practice" (since theory followed practice), we can nevertheless consider the use of indirect communication in this work, as it seems apparent that the idea of an indirect method of communication had been established in Kierkegaard's mind as he set out to write Either/Or.\textsuperscript{67} In what sense Either/Or may be characterized as indirect will be the question that guides the following discussion.

The selection of Either/Or as the focus for this

\textsuperscript{66}Either/Or was published in 1843, preceding the writing of Kierkegaard's notes on indirect communication in the Journals by about four years.

\textsuperscript{67}Indirect communication is discussed with reference to Either/Or by Climacus in the Postscript. Although it is not impossible that it was only in hindsight that Climacus saw Either/Or as indirect, this observation, taken together with certain techniques in Either/Or which seem best characterized as indirect, suggest that the notion of indirect techniques of communicating was indeed established in Kierkegaard's thoughts as he wrote Either/Or.
discussion is based upon two considerations. As the first in a series of pseudonymous works it seems a logical starting point. And, in the continuation of a discussion about communicating ethical concerns, Kierkegaard's major ethical writing, a work which goes no further than the ethical, promises to be a more appropriate work to examine than the pseudonymous religious works.

Although there is no severe shortage of discussions on indirect communication in the secondary literature, those discussions which consider the technique as it is employed in Either/Or are few. In the latter, the consensus seems to be that Either/Or is rendered indirect by virtue of the presentation of two alternative life views by pseudonymous authors, which the reader is left to choose between. Whether there are other elements in Either/Or which contribute to its indirectness is a question which fuels the present examination.

Briefly, Either/Or consists in: (1) a preface written by Victor Eremita, who explains how he came across the essays and letters which he has edited and published, (2) a group

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68 Point of View, p. 18.

69 This conclusion was drawn from a reading of the following:


of papers written by a young aesthete the editor refers to as "A". These papers include "The Diary of a Seducer", written, according to A, by Johannes "The Seducer", and (3) two very long letters written to A by an older friend, Judge Wilhelm (dubbed "B" by the editor in order to strike a balance), along with a sermon written by a pastor who is a friend of the Judge's.

The Aesthetic and the Ethical

As an aesthete, A's concern is with the life of pleasure. We learn that such a life is filled with melancholy, but A savors even that. Judge Wilhelm writes that "the aesthetic in a man is that by which he immediately is what he is."70 The immediate (or nature) is experience before it is transformed by thought. But man is more than what he immediately is. A very brief interpretation of Kierkegaard's definition of man in The Sickness Unto Death71 might be that not only does man have the kind of self which relates itself to itself (this becomes clearer if we think of the sorts of dialogues one can have with oneself) but also, he has a relationship to that self which carries on these dialogues; an opinion of how he feels about being the kind of self he is. Along with the purely immediate, then, we are bound to include reflection in a description of the


human self. A, even though his main pursuit is of enjoyment, can't extinguish the reflecting aspect of himself. He finds he cannot be his own immediacy. In Mozart's "Don Juan", A discovers that art is the immediate; immediacy is immediately presented. But because language involves reflection, it cannot express the immediate. The closest A can come to being his own immediacy is to make his life an art in an attempt to create the kind of fusion between reflection and immediacy that he discovers in "Don Juan."

The skills involved in making his life an art are suggested in A's essay entitled "The Rotation Method", where he explains the importance of varying the kinds of enjoyment he experiences (for example, by going to the middle of a play) and of remembering and forgetting in order to control his enjoyment. Through this variation of experience and the employment of his finely honed skills of remembering and forgetting, A alternates his life between immediacy and reflection.

In order to take pleasure in the immediate, A finds it necessary to avoid making choices. To choose entails excluding one or more possibilities. But A wishes not to exclude any possibilities; the actualization of a possibility means regret for every excluded possibility. He writes:

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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.  

And so it is with any choice. The trick is to avoid making decisions, to which end A claims to live aeterno modo, avoiding the either/or of decisive choice, and thus avoiding the "two-fold regret" experienced by those who choose.  

Living aeterno modo, A wants to experience all of life without committing himself to anything in life. Of course, he does make choices. But they are arbitrary and indifferent ones:

After a time it frequently happens that I have completely forgotten the reason which led me to do this or that, not only in connection with trifles, but also in connection with the most momentous decisions.

It doesn't matter much whether it is "this" or "that" which is chosen. The irony in A's wish not to choose is that he does choose not to choose decisively between possibilities; he passively takes his pleasure, and thus has chosen a certain way of life. A's attempts to live in the realm of possibility mean that his life is only a possibility. His life is an existential possibility that "needs to be ethically worked up," writes Climacus.  

It is Judge Wilhelm

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76 Ibid., Vol. I, p. 38.
77 Ibid., Vol. I, p. 32.
78 Postscript, p. 226.
who takes upon himself the challenge of ethically working up A's life.

Judge Wilhelm is intent upon convincing A to change his way of life. He describes his own (ethical) life, writing of his experiences to explain what life is like when it is lived ethically; he admonishes and begs, and even resorts on occasion to name-calling. In both of his long letters, he tries to make it clear that the aesthetic is not obliterated when one chooses the ethical.

For A, the phrase "either/or" signifies indifference ("you will regret both"). For the Judge, the phrase carries the force of the ethical life, where decisive choice is paramount. Aesthetic choice, in the eyes of B, is no choice. "Either/or" means for Judge Wilhelm "the reality of the act of choice"; it signifies the choice between choosing and not choosing. The choices of the aesthete are choices of the moment which do not commit him through to the next moment. Thus, they contribute nothing in the way of determining his character through time. In this sense, A has no self. Louis Mackey explains:

Decisive choosing binds the chooser to the consequences of his choice, either permanently or for a specified period of time. Ethical choice takes the form of vow or public contract; it is decisive because it decides a man's character for the future; it defines him in advance.

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81 Louis Mackey, Kierkegaard: A kind of Poet, p. 42.
Only that man has a self whose personality is continuous through time, and this requires that he be willing to put his future in trust by means of his choice.  

In the Judge's words, the ethical man chooses himself. But this self-choice is not only a determination of his character through the future. In choosing himself, the individual also shoulders the responsibility for his past -- which includes accepting responsibility for his wrongdoings and errors. "Only when I choose myself as guilty do I choose myself absolutely", declares Judge Wilhelm. Choosing oneself means repenting, if one chooses oneself as guilty:  

Only when in his choice a man has assumed himself, is clad in himself, has so totally penetrated himself that every movement is attended by the consciousness of a responsibility for himself, only then has he chosen himself ethically, only then has he repented himself...

Repeating his past and defining his future through choice, the ethicist makes his life concrete. The aesthete, on the other hand, sees his future as an array of possibilities and can't even remember why he has made this or that decision in the past. A's life was filled with melancholy and despair, but the Judge has more actively despairs. He has chosen himself, and through this choice, he reveals.

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82 Ibid., p. 42.  
83 Either/Or, Volume II, p. 221.  
84 Ibid., Vol. II, p. 252.  
himself. He takes marriage to be the highest way in which he may reveal himself. The vow he takes defines his duties for the future, thus giving definition to his self. A, in not choosing, has "concealed" himself; he has hidden himself in endless possibilities. When "either/or" is a matter of indifference, the individual hides even from himself.

Appropriation: The Judge's Technique

Judge Wilhelm's letters may not immediately strike one as paradigms of the indirect technique discussed earlier. There is no evidence, for example, of the Socratic technique employed in "Euthyphro", where Socrates deceived Euthyphro in order to help him to an ethical realization. Indeed, whereas Socrates' deceptive device was a means of avoiding offense, the Judge claims his purpose is "to accuse you [A], to make you feel in every way that you are the accused party." A man who writes to his recipient, "in many ways you are after all a terrible person", might not be expected to have mastered the indirect technique.

This accusing Judge, however, is aware of the importance of A's appropriating rather than merely noting the content of his letters. He writes:

You know well how the Prophet Nathan behaved when the king was willing enough

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86 Postscript, p. 227.
87 Ibid., p. 227.
88 Either/Or, Volume II, p. 177.
to understand the parable the prophet set forth but was not willing to understand that it applied to him. So to make the application plain Nathan said, "Thou, O King, art the man." Thus I too have constantly sought to remind you that what is said is about you, that to you it is addressed.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, Vol. II, p. 5.}

Nathan's statement, "Thou art the man", marked the transition from an indirect way of communicating to the direct. The Judge wants to ensure that A never misses the point that his letters apply to A. He reminds him of this with comments like, "Let me talk to you as I never would do if anybody else were listening", and "I am writing only to you and about you."\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, Vol. II, p. 210, 194.} The goal of an indirect communication is to bring the individual to a realization. To this end, the receiver must be aware that the communication applies to him. The Judge seems aware of the importance of this, but goes about urging A to appropriate by directly telling A to apply to himself what is communicated.

But the project the Judge has undertaken is significantly different from the realizations Nathan and Socrates sought to encourage, and perhaps this helps to explain the Judge's seeming lack of finesse. Whereas Nathan and Socrates were attempting to communicate to David and Euthyphro respectively the error in a particular set of actions, the Judge is attempting to persuade A of a more "overall" error. He writes to A:
That which is prominent in my either/or is the ethical. It is therefore not yet a question of the choice of something in particular, it is not a question of the reality of the thing chosen, but of the reality of the act of choice. This, however, is the decisive thing, and it is to an apprehension of this I would strive to arouse you...  

The Judge wants to convince A to choose good and evil; to choose a life where good and evil acquire meaning. He is not attempting to guide a man who lives his life under ethical categories to correct a slip-up in his ethical decision-making. In his letters to A, the Judge is trying to show A what a whole life view looks like, rather than trying to straighten him out regarding an ethically misguided action, or accusing him of being ignorant as to what is or what is not an ethical choice. In fact, A can't slip up in his ethical decision-making: his life is lived outside the categories of ethical concerns. The difference in the Judge's task perhaps calls for his different tactics. Moreover, the relationship between A and B perhaps qualifies the Judge's blunt tactics. Climacus writes, "the relationship between the Judge and the aestheticist... made it natural and psychologically correct for the Judge to admonish." The Judge knows A quite intimately. His letters are fuelled by long talks he and A have had. He knows considerably more about A than the reader can learn from a reading of A's

93 Postscript, p. 263.
essays. Thus, the Judge's admonitions might not be as offensive to A as the reader might construe them to be. The sort of paternalism that is evident in the Judge's letters, too, makes it seem natural for the Judge to scold and admonish. What is meant by Climacus' statement that it is "psychologically correct for the Judge to admonish" is difficult to determine, but certainly it is psychologically understandable that he do so, since A has directed his highly polished daggers of sarcasm towards the Judge's views of life.94

From the Journals we learned that since everyone knows the ethical (i.e., has the ability to make ethical decisions), it is unethical to inform an individual of his ethical duties, or to inform him that his actions are unethical. That the Judge feels it unethical to tell a man his particular duties is evident in his story about a man (whom he refers to as "our hero") who consulti an aestheticist and an ethicist for advice. The Judge finds it acceptable for an ethicist to state "universal" duties, but not to tell a man his specific duties ("the particular"). Duty, according to Judge Wilhelm, is the universal and the particular.95 That it is every man's duty to work for a living, for example, the Judge deems universal; it applies to all men. The specific calling a man chooses is his particular duty. The ethicist, according to Judge Wilhelm, may state universal

94 A has, for example, been sarcastic about marriage. Either/Or, Vol. II, p. 7.
duties, but

More he cannot say, for the ethical as such is always abstract and there is no such thing as an abstract calling for all men; he [the ethicist] presupposes, on the contrary, that every man has a particular calling. What calling our hero should choose the ethicist cannot inform him.\textsuperscript{96}

The "hero", then, is left with the task of deciding for himself what his specific duties are. The only advice the ethicist will offer is that he should work for a living, that he should marry, etc. Although Judge Wilhelm does not hesitate to speak of universal duties, the notion that each man has the capability to decide what is or is not the ethical seems to come out intact. The intent of the Judge's letters seems not to be to provide information concerning what is or is not ethical (such information would signal that he were trying to communicate the ethical as though the individual needs to learn something more in order to make ethical decisions), but rather, to describe what life looks like when it is lived under the restraints of the ethical, in an attempt to show A what is chosen when decisive, absolute choice is opted for.

One of the demands placed on the indirect communicator, which was discussed earlier, is that he "redundicates" what is communicated. It is clear enough that the Judge does energetically "practice what he preaches"; that he lives the life he recommends to A. His awareness that he must himself

\textsuperscript{96}Ibid., Vol. II, p. 296.
exist in what he pours out in his letters is suggested in his comment, "Respiration is a word which indicates the flowing back of that which first had flowed out", something he feels he has accomplished in writing his letters. 97

The Judge, then, seems to be sensitive to some of the intricacies involved in communicating. He is aware that the receiver must appropriate what is communicated, and that it is wrongheaded for one man to tell another what choices he should make. Although his method is quite different from that of Nathan or Socrates, so too is his objective. His letters seem to lean towards the indirect, although they do not look like the paradigm of indirect communication we find in Socrates' dialogue with Euthyphro.

To this point, the question of in what sense the Judge's letters to A are indirect as they apply to A has been considered. Either/Or as a whole was presumably intended for the reader, and not for A. So whether one wishes to argue that the Judge's letters are indirect or not, the possibility that the work as a whole is best characterized as indirect remains to be examined.

Pseudonyms: Distance and Deflection

The use of pseudonyms in Either/Or seems to be the most obvious element to examine in any discussion of Kierkegaard's use of the indirect technique. If the reader is to appreciate the use of pseudonyms as a device for communicating indirectly, pseudonymous authors A and B must be understood.

97Ibid., Vol. II, p. 156.
to be more than mere names Kierkegaard used to disguise his identity. In his Foreword to the work, Howard A. Johnson writes about the pseudonymous authors:

> Behind each pen name lies "a subjectively actual personality", created by Kierkegaard; to be sure, but created not to be simply a mouthpiece for Kierkegaard's own convictions, but rather to represent the convictions of a young romanticist, in Part I, and those of a mature ethical idealist, in Part II.98

If the reader is able to accept these pseudonymous authors as personas in their own right, in the manner in which he might accept the usual conventions of the novel (one does not, for example, identify a character who speaks in the first person with the author) he will also be likely to accept that it is not Kierkegaard but Judge Wilhelm who is out to persuade A to change his ways. Thus, Kierkegaard cannot be said to communicate directly to A, and nor of course to the reader. This may be quite obvious, but I mention it in order to point out that Kierkegaard has, through the creation of these two personas, taken several steps away from his reader. Judge Wilhelm does not address the reader, nor does Kierkegaard, who is one step again removed from the reader. Kierkegaard even further distances himself from his reader by establishing Victor Eremita as editor. Although today's reader sees Kierkegaard's name on the jacket of Either/Or, the early publication divulged no such

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If the reader takes A and B to be the authors of their respective works, and Victor Eremita as responsible for editing and publishing, nowhere will he find himself being directly addressed. "The fact that there is no author", writes Climacus, "is a means of keeping the reader at a distance." There is even a certain distance maintained between the reader and the pseudonymous (as distinct from the actual) authors. Although they pour out their life views, they are really quite anonymous. All we know about them are their respective life views and something of their personalities, which really flow from their ways of life. We do know a bit more about B than we do about A: B is a judge in the lower courts, married, name of Wilhelm, friend of A. That we know a bit more about Wilhelm seems only fitting, as the ethical emerges as a more concrete way of life than A's life of imaginative possibilities. Even if the reader were to feel he were being addressed, then, he would have difficulty in deciding "who" it could be who addressed him. No one seems to be speaking to the reader, with the exception of Victor Eremita, who is a pseudonym as well. A's papers were previously unpublished, and so perhaps were never intended for the public eye. And the Judge, as he himself insists, writes only to A. Of course, the work does address the reader somehow, but never head-on.


\(^{100}\)Postscript, p. 226.
Double-reflection, an essential element in the successful indirect communication, seems to be allowed for in Either/Or by the deflected manner in which the work addresses the reader. The reader may readily understand the content of what the Judge conveys to A. If he first gets caught up in A's world of possibilities, and then finds himself caught up in the Judge's picture of the ethical life, relating to himself what is being communicated to A, the appropriation of what is being communicated becomes possible. The reader is given room to go through the second step of the two-step appropriation process by virtue of the fact that he is never directly addressed. If the reader is to make anything of the work on a personal level, he must apply to himself what he reads. As Judge Wilhelm points out, "the most interesting reading is that in which the reader is to a certain extent productive." 101

Although the ethical may be outwardly expressed in one's actions (signing a contract, taking a public vow), the "invisible" aspects of the ethical life (reflecting, deciding), have to do with inwardness, with the passional rather than indifferent reflection that goes on in the individual when he turns his attention towards himself. The "productive" reader will reflect, but not merely on the content of what is communicated. He will make it his own. Of course, Kierkegaard could not ensure that his reader would appropriate the communication. Climacus hints that the reader is given

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more than mere "elbow room" to doubly-reflect on the works of A and B. He writes of Either/Or:

If it has any merit, this will essentially consist in not giving any result, but in transforming everything into inwardness: in the first part, an imaginative inwardness which evokes the possibilities with intensified passion, with sufficient dialectical power to transform all into nothing in despair; in the second part, an ethical pathos, which with a quiet, incorruptible, and yet infinite passion of resolve embraces the modest ethical task...102

The works of A and B are to evoke in the reader something akin to what the reader sees in the inner workings of their lives; to coax him to passionately reflect inwardly, not just to intellectualize, about the aesthetic and the ethical ways of life. That the lives of A and B are illustrated rather than described by an outsider or by the presentation of their views in the form of argument perhaps encourages the reader to become caught up in the life of each. The alternative to Kierkegaard's indirect approach might have been to confront the reader with an account of the misguided aesthetical life and of the superiority of the ethical life. But Kierkegaard was sensitive to the fact that a direct approach would meet with a will set in opposition103 rather than with inward reflection. The reader, being addressed through a sort of filter-system of pseudonymous (and anonymous) authors, is left to confront himself.

102Postscript, p. 227.
103Point of View, p. 25.
The Choice: How Technique Coaxes the Reader

Both the title and the structure of Either/Or suggest that the reader is to make a choice. The choice confronting the reader is viewed by McInerny as the most obvious instance of indirect communication in Either/Or. He explains:

The reader was to be drawn into the discussion, have his passional nature involved in the stakes, so that a subsequent choice would be existentially meaningful. The choice, be it noted, is not contained between the covers of the work.104

McInerny further states that "there is no indication of which position is more worthy of choice."105 Were the book to contain an explicit indication of which position the reader should choose, the impact of that suggestion might prevent him from reflecting on the matter himself. Victor Eremita points out that in novels in which characters stand for opposing views of life, the reader is often informed that one has convinced the other, rather than the views being left to "speak for themselves", and sees it as fortunate that the reader is not informed whether A or B manage to convince the other.106 The reader will see what he is choosing when he chooses the ethical, and what he is excluding. But if truth is inwardness, as Climacus insists, then to present the reader with results would be misguided.

104 Ralph McInerny, "Ethics and Persuasion", p. 228.
105 Ibid., p. 229.
That the views presented are allowed to "speak for themselves" does not exclude the possibility that something persuasive goes on between the covers of Either/Or. That Judge Wilhelm has the last word is not insignificant. The Judge, Climacus says, "answers and corrects every misdirection in the first part."\(^{107}\) The reader cannot miss, then, that he is being taken in the direction of an upward progression from the aesthetic to the ethical. Perhaps the most compelling bit of persuasion begins even before the Judge has his word. In "The Diary of a Seducer," the aesthetic is taken to its limits by Johannes the Seducer. Victor Eremita points out that the notion of seduction is suggested in the essay about "Don Juan" and in "Shadowgraphs,"\(^{108}\) and that the Diary is the realization of an idea A savoured.\(^{109}\) But A feels anxiety even when he thinks about the Diary, and finds something revolting in Johannes' behaviour.\(^{110}\) A strives to alternate between the immediate and the reflective: "his life had been an attempt to realize the task of living poetically,"\(^{111}\) and he manages to transform his experience in a fashion A might envy. Like A, Johannes avoids making possibilities actual, and this fact is not missed by A, who writes that Johannes's

\(^{107}\) Postscript, p. 264. \\
\(^{109}\) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 9. \\
\(^{110}\) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 304. \\
\(^{111}\) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 303.
Johannes's life is untraceable because, like A, he lives in the world of possibility, concealing himself because he refuses to make possibilities realities. If A is frightened by the insidiousness of the aesthetic life taken to its extreme, one can imagine how the reader might react. If the reader is a bit put off the aesthetic life by the diary of Johannes, he is well prepared to receive the Judge's alternative. Although the reader is left to choose on his own, then, he is indeed given subtle guidance.

To restate an earlier point, however: the reader can't point to whoever it is that is coaxing or persuading him. The problem of "who wrote what" in Either/Or seems to add the final touch to a technique which distances the reader and deflects the communication: "The Diary of a Seducer" might have been written by A, as Victor Eremita suggests; the works of both A and B might really be the writings of one author, a notion Eremita can't quite dismiss; and the reader might wonder if that one author is Eremita himself. There seems to be no way to conclusively settle these puzzles. One can assume that the book was not intended to encourage the reader to worry about these details. But the mystery does seem to add a final stroke to the anonymity of the various authors, so that in the end, the reader is left with his own reflections, double-reflections, and choices.

with no one in particular to credit for stirring him. Victor Eremita's suggestion that one man wrote both the essays and the papers might have a function, other than mystification: it hints at the possibility that a man could live or at least think through both the aesthetic and the ethical. Of course, this is the inward journey the reader is to take as he reads *Either/Or*.

**Summary**

Clearly, *Either/Or* may be characterized as indirect by virtue of the presentation of two alternative life views by pseudonymous authors, which the reader is left to choose between. In this we have not gone much further than the secondary literature. But precisely how the use of pseudonyms and the presentation of opposing life views renders the work indirect has been clarified. We have seen, too, that contrary to McInerny's view that the reader of *Either/Or* is not given any indication concerning which life view is more worthy, subtle but persuasive appeals are contained within the covers of the book.
CHAPTER IV

Applications and Concluding Remarks

We have seen that the technique for communicating ethical guidance which Kierkegaard proposes as an alternative to direct techniques involves more than circuitry. There are specific elements which render a communication indirect, elements which have to do with the network of relationships among communicator, receiver, and communication. The idea that the receiver must existentially appropriate the communication seems to be the factor which shapes these relationships. The importance of appropriation stems from Kierkegaard's characterization of ethical concerns as involving essential knowledge, as involving inward reflection rather than outwardly-directed investigation.

The examination of Either/Or in Chapter III demonstrated that Kierkegaard employed indirect communication in that work, and that his technique consisted largely in his use of pseudonymous authors. Indirect communication is clearly not restricted to oral discourse. Indeed, literature suggests itself as a promising vehicle for indirect communication of ethical matters, an application of the technique we will briefly explore.
Literary Technique and Indirect Communication

In the preceding discussion of Kierkegaard's use of the indirect technique in Either/Or, the use of two devices emerged as central: distancing and the creation of personas. These are devices more familiar to the world of fiction than to philosophy. What renders Either/Or indirect is the distance created between author and reader by virtue of the creation of personas, and the subtle guidance offered to the reader faced with choosing between two life views. For the most part, then, the indirect technique in Either/Or is accomplished through Kierkegaard's use of literary technique.

By the term "literary technique" we mean here what Mark Schorer, in his essay "Technique as Discovery", defines as "any selection, structure, or distortion, any form or rhythm imposed upon the world of action."\(^{113}\) Thus, according to Schorer, anything in fiction is technique which is not what he calls the "lump of experience itself."\(^{114}\) We cannot say of a writer, then, that he has no technique.\(^{115}\) Thus we would not equate indirect communication with literary technique, since surely not all works of fiction are indirect. But some uses to which literary technique may be put render a work indirect.


\(^{114}\) Ibid., p. 67.

\(^{115}\) Ibid., p. 67.
It is perhaps unusual to find literary technique employed in a work of ethics. Just as fiction seems a more likely home of examples of indirect communication than the history of philosophy or philosophical journals, fiction is also considered the usual domain of literary technique. (As Schorer points out, technique is not supplementary to fiction, but primary.) 116 An author's directly stated philosophical or moral views in works of fiction would not be kindly received by readers or critics who expect works of art rather than persuasive arguments or statements of belief. The artist is expected to make his point, if he wishes to make a point at all, with a certain finesse, using the tools of his trade -- in fiction, literary technique. Whereas directly communicated opinions are not unexpected in textbooks, lectures, articles, essays, and so on, but are the norm, the literary critic might be inclined to condemn similar assertions in a work of fiction as "authorial intrusions." Although the distinguishing characteristic of the Victorian novel was the presence of the author, "ever poised to intrude a comment, to interpret the characters, or to write an essay on cabbages and kings," the author in modern fiction has disappeared; 117 he no longer tends to interrupt his work with explicitly stated judgements or

116 ibid., p. 67.

opinions; he no longer intrudes himself into his art. This is of some interest here, since if an author uses tools of literary technique rather than didactic assertions to convey his meaning, his work will tend towards the indirect. That the author of the Victorian novel interrupted his work with direct judgements suggests we should not expect all works of fiction to be indirect. Certain selections and structures (certain literary techniques) will be more suitable for communicating indirectly than others.

To undertake a thorough examination of which uses of literary technique (e.g. the selection of point of view, choice of structure, tone, and characterization) might be most suitable for the purpose of communicating indirectly is beyond the scope of this thesis. We can at least suggest that such an examination would be possible.

Norman Friedman's essay, "Point of View in Fiction", describes a progression through eight categories of point of view. The differences between each of the categories described by Friedman centre on what we might call the author's visibility in his work, which affects his distance from the reader. In editorial omniscience, for example, the author intrudes his comments into his work. (An author might moralize or condemn, in his own voice, when he uses the editorially omniscient point of view.) In the


category Friedman refers to as "I' as Witness", the author gives up his own voice and assigns the story-telling to a first-person narrator who is a character within the story, thus giving up his omniscience regarding the other characters in his work.\(^{120}\) (We might still find direct statements of opinion, but they would be attributed to the narrator, rather than to the author.) In the point of view called "the Camera", the author, aiming to transmit a "slice of life", virtually disappears.\(^{121}\) We can surmise from our earlier examination of Either/Or that the less visible the author's presence, the greater the distance between author and reader, thus the more indirect the work. Of course, more than distance would have to be considered in an author's selection of point of view, as one point of view might put the author at the greatest possible distance from his reader, but render it extremely awkward to communicate his meaning. (The "camera", for example, merely records, giving the author little room to convey meaning in a manner which will appear realistic. He can no longer get at what his characters think unless they reveal their thoughts through dialogue, and one supposes that the use of structure and symbolism in order to convey meaning would be severely restricted.) Friedman argues that to each category of point of view belongs a probable range of functions.\(^{122}\) For example, neutral omniscience, where

\(^{120}\) Ibid., p. 125.

\(^{121}\) Ibid., p. 130.

\(^{122}\) Ibid., p. 132.
the author intrudes, but impersonally and in the third person, is the logical choice "if the author's superior and explanatory tone is to dominate the perception and awareness of his characters..."\(^{123}\) Such a judgemental point of view would probably not be ideal if the author wished to communicate indirectly.

This bit of literary theory has been mentioned in order to suggest that certain applications of literary technique might emerge as most adaptable to communicating indirectly. Whether certain uses of literary technique other than point of view might prove to be more suitable for communicating indirectly than others will not be touched on here. Leaving literary theory aside, we will move now to an examination of a work of fiction in which there are hints of the author's concern with the ethical, in order to suggest what possibilities fiction might hold as a means of communicating the ethical indirectly.

Erskine Caldwell's short story, "Saturday Afternoon", is about a small-town butcher, Tom Denny, who enthusiastically joins one hundred and fifty or so townspeople in the lynching of a black man named Will Maxie. Although my intention is not to undertake an exhaustive literary analysis of this story, a discussion on the subject of Caldwell's use of point of view will perhaps suggest how his literary technique may be construed as a means of communicating indirectly.\(^ {123}\)

\(^{123}\) Ibid., p. 133.
The point of view in Caldwell's story is that of someone who is acquainted with Tom Denny and the town, but who is not included in the action of the story. He is not a character who describes his own participation in the action. But neither is the point of view that of an omniscient narrator capable of delving into the characters' minds and switching from one character's mind to another. The reader is not offered Denny's deepest thoughts and feelings, but must glean from his actions and habits, his self-created environment, and bits of dialogue, what Denny is like. The narrator is like an invisible witness, since Tom Denny is unaware of his presence. As a witness, he cannot relate to his reader what goes on in Denny's mind, but can relate only what Denny reveals of himself.

In "Point of View in Fiction", Friedman describes editorial omniscience, where the narrator not only reports "what goes on in the minds of the characters, but...also criticizes it."[^124] The distinguishing feature of the editorially omniscient point of view, according to Friedman, "is the presence of authorial intrusions and generalizations about life, manners, and morals, which may or may not be explicitly related to the story at hand."[^125] This point of view would not seem ideal for communicating indirectly. I quote Friedman to suggest an alternative to Caldwell's use of point of view. If Caldwell's narrator reported and criticized Denny's thoughts, along with the events that

[^124]: Ibid., p. 121.
[^125]: Ibid., p. 121.
transpired, the story would have been quite different in
tone and content. Caldwell might have begun his story
by declaring that there are wicked men in the world, and
that his intention was to show the reader one of them. Or
he might have begun by expressing his concern about lynchings,
going on to tell a story about one in particular, and
condemning the participants. Since the editorially omni-
scient point of view is common, it is evident that not all
literary technique is appropriate for the purpose of
communicating indirectly.

That Caldwell is concerned with communicating something
to do with ethical matters is indicated in his use of
character and setting. Tom Denny is closely connected with
a fly-ridden, foul-smelling butcher-shop: he is its co-
owner. He also provides the whole town with much of its
nourishment, which suggests Caldwell's wish to convey the
idea that Denny's mentality is one that has been distributed
throughout the town. Even though the narrator describes
Denny and even the lynching in an offhand tone, the fact
that the character Caldwell focuses on is a sloppy butcher
with unsanitary habits hints at Caldwell's earnest concern
with the type of individual who participates in a lynching.
This "selection" is an element of Caldwell's literary
technique.

The narrator in the story speaks flippantly, his tone
close to amusement. Yet the reader is able to detect
Caldwell's seriousness: That Caldwell does not share Tom
Denny's values is clear, but this is conveyed not by means
of moral summary, but through his choice of character and setting. The deception Kierkegaard speaks of in connection with communicating indirectly seems to be present here in the contradiction between tone and content. The narrator's offhand, understated tone disguises Caldwell's serious concern with his subject.

The reader learns a good deal about Tom Denny from his actions and habits. That the fat, lazy flies which thrive in his shop come in through the unscreened back door, not through the front door, which is properly screened, is instructive: it creates an impression of a man who is concerned only with appearances. As long as his customers do not see that the fly population is avoidable, Denny is unconcerned. Tom places a rump steak on a meat block to rest his head on while he snoozes. The tobacco juice dripping onto the rump steak is not a matter of concern either, since "most people cleaned their meat before they cooked and ate it, and it would all wash off."\(^{126}\)

Will Maxie, the victim of the lynching, is a "good negro" who minds his own business and offends no one. According to Tom's partner, Jim Baxter, Will "said something to Fred Jackson's oldest gal down the road yonder about an hour ago."\(^{127}\) The real motivation for the lynching emerges a bit later: "Will could grow good cotton" by taking the


\(^{127}\) Ibid., p. 168.
grass out of it, and makes too much money doing so.128

The crowd makes a celebration of the lynching, drinking whiskey and soft drinks. They poke Will with sticks, chasing him up the road. He is chained neck and foot, set on fire, and shot at with forty rifles. Tom and Jim have to rush back to town to take care of Saturday business, so they miss seeing Will being hanged on a gum tree. Tom goes from taking part in butchering Will to his work at the shop, where he performs his work as matter-of-factly as he participated in the lynching. He handles business that afternoon the way he does every other; the lynching has not affected him. The butcher-shop dialogue which occurs in the opening paragraphs of the story is repeated after the lynching. There is a crowd gathered at the shop, as there was at the lynching, which sets up a correspondence between the lynching and the mundane routine of shopping for meat:

There was a big crowd staking around on the street to do their weekly trading, and they had to have some meat. You went into the butcher-shop and said, "hello, Tom. I want two pounds and a half of pork chops." Tom said, "Hello. I'll get it for you right away." While you were waiting for Tom to cut the meat off the hunk of rump steak you asked him how was everything. "Everything's slick as a whistle", he said, "except for my old woman's got the chills and fever pretty bad again."129

The repetition of what appears to be the standard butcher-shop

128Ibid., p. 169.

129Ibid., p. 170.
dialogue indicates the sameness of Tom's life and the
dullness of Tom himself. The "excitement" of a lynching
changes nothing. It is just another Saturday afternoon.
Even the meat Denny sells his customers is the same; pork
chops are cut from rump steak.

The quality of the language in the story -- the short,
simply-structured sentences, and the frequent repetitions,
reflect the quality of Tom's experience and lend the story
its mood. The following passage occurs after the lynching
scene, and long after the fact that Tom is the butcher has
been established in the opening paragraphs of the story:

Tom was the butcher. He did all the
work with the meat. He went out and
killed a cow and quartered her...You
told Tom what you wanted and he gave
it to you, no matter what you asked
for.\textsuperscript{130}

The simplified language, and repetitions like this one,
help to convey the shallowness of Tom Denny without the
use of explicit judgements. It is the narrator who makes
these repetitions, suggesting that his sensibilities have
been dulled after witnessing the horror he has described in
his offhand way.

Never is the reader informed directly of Denny's
thoughts, not even through dialogue. The one statement of
Tom's mood at the lynching has impact, being the only such
statement in the story: "Tom was feeling good."\textsuperscript{131} There

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., p. 170.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., p. 170.
is no added judgement, and no qualification. Denny's consciousness is thus portrayed without the use of direct judgements, and even without violating his privacy by revealing thoughts that an average onlooker would not be privy to. Caldwell's indirect technique seems partly to consist in this sort of restraint.

That Caldwell has made Denny an owner of the butcher-shop may be significant. The slovenly environment Tom has created for himself implies a certain responsibility which would not suggest itself were he a mere employee. The implication one seems justified in drawing is that Tom is responsible for his interior state as well as for his external environment. The reader, then, is not to think Tom is a helpless product of his environment and his society's norms, but rather that he is responsible for his actions. What seem to justify drawing this conclusion are the connections Caldwell makes between what goes on at the butcher-shop and the lynching. For example, there is a crowd gathered at the butcher-shop just as there is at the lynching, and Tom's job of slaughtering cows is described immediately after the lynching scene. Caldwell hints that we are to make these connections by the manner in which he juxtaposes the events in his story; by the manner in which he structures his work.

Caldwell's literary technique renders the story indirect in its method of communicating the ethical. The disguising of his serious intent, his use of language, character, and setting, and the structure of the story all work together and render the use of direct methods unnecessary.
In the Socratic and biblical examples discussed earlier, the receiver was an active participant, visible to us as onlookers. Caldwell's story is a different sort of example of indirect communication: the receiver is not included in the story. But it is clear that Caldwell's story leaves room for the double-reflection necessary for the receiver to come to a realization of the ethical. Caldwell's technique does not violate the notion that everyone knows the ethical; there are no indications that he poses as an authority on ethical matters by making direct judgements. Even his narrator refrains from direct tactics, so the story is twice removed from being direct.

Indirect communication and literary technique have in common a certain restraint, but clearly the motivation involved in each is significantly different. The indirect technique is a tool for those concerned with communicating the ethical ethically, whereas (although we would not want to rule out the possibility that writers of fiction are motivated in kind), aesthetic concerns determine technique in fiction. It might prove worthwhile to examine what several writers of fiction have written concerning their craft in order to suggest why literary technique is a useful tool for communicating indirectly.

In the following passage, Flaubert indicates that he does not believe he has a right to communicate in a way that we would call direct when he writes fiction:

...I do not recognize my right to accuse anyone. I don't even think
that the novelist should express his own opinion of the things of this world. He may communicate it, but I don't want him to state it. (This is part of my own particular aesthetic doctrine.)

The similarity between the indirect technique and the restrictions Flaubert believes the writer of fiction should adhere to is fairly clear. Both the communicator of the ethical and the writer of fiction, when they find themselves in a situation where they wish to communicate certain things, find it inappropriate to do so directly. But it is for ethical reasons that the communicator of ethical matters finds it inappropriate to communicate directly, whereas Flaubert views his self-imposed restrictions as motivated by aesthetic concerns. (Flaubert's aesthetic doctrine, though, does seem to include non-aesthetic concerns.)

Ford Madox Ford expresses his objections to direct forms, writing that the novelist must never "propagandize":

...If, however, your yearning to amend the human race is so great that you cannot possibly keep your fingers out of the watchsprings there is a device that you can adopt.

Let us suppose that you feel tremendously strong views as to sexual immorality or temperance. You feel that you must express these, yet you know that...you are a supreme novelist. You must then invent, justify, and set going in your novel a character who can convincingly express your views. If you are a gentleman you will also

invent, justify and set going characters to express views opposite to those you hold... 133

The technique Flaubert advises is similar to Kierkegaard's technique in *Either/Or*, where Kierkegaard creates two personas to represent two different views of life. Aesthetic considerations, then, restrain the writer of fiction from expressing his views on ethical or other matters directly. Literary technique becomes the writer's tool for conveying meaning indirectly. In *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard employs literary devices: distancing and the creation of personas. That his indirect method in *Either/Or* consists largely in his use of literary devices may appear to be so obvious that it usually goes unsaid. What is interesting is that Kierkegaard uses devices normally employed for aesthetic reasons as tools for communicating the ethical ethically. Fiction may be better adaptable to communicating the ethical than the conventional forms the philosopher might be inclined to employ.

Moral Education and Indirect Communication

Indirect communication was characterized in a preliminary fashion in Chapter I as "a technique used by one individual to teach the ethical to another." Teaching in this context has emerged as reminding, intimating, persuading, conveying indirectly -- but never informing. For some, the

phrase "teaching the ethical" will no doubt bring to mind the current controversy concerning how classroom instruction in moral education should be undertaken.

Kierkegaard's concern with the ethical mode of existence and with the communication of ethical matters suggests that his thoughts might be considered as a possible contribution to the theory or practice of moral education. Yet the only published article I can find which addresses the subject of Kierkegaard and moral education in the classroom does not find in his works much in the way of a contribution to the field of moral education. In "Soren Kierkegaard's Ethical Sphere and Moral Education", Jane Funk Irvine examines the question of whether Judge Wilhelm's description of the ethical mode of existence can be applied to moral education. She sees in the Judge's letters, however, a certain bankruptcy, interpreting Judge Wilhelm as suggesting that there are no standards by which to measure moral choices, and that what is chosen is of no consequence. Yet we have seen that neither Judge Wilhelm nor Kierkegaard holds this view. It is the universal which provides the gauge by which we may measure our choices. The notion that Kierkegaard's thought might provide a contribution to the field of moral education cannot, then, be dismissed on the basis of Funk's conclusions. I do not propose to


135 Ibid., p. 62.
develop a theory of moral values education based on the indirect technique. But by examining Values Clarification, a widely used method of teaching moral values, the possibilities of indirect communication as a means of classroom instruction might emerge.

Louis E. Raths, Merrill Harmin, and Sidney B. Simon propose a method of teaching values called "Values Clarification" as an alternative to persuading children to adopt certain values. Common means of persuasion, according to Raths et al., involve the use of religious dogma, cultural norms, rules and regulations, emotional pleas, and argumentation. Values Clarification is proposed as a method for teaching values in general, but ethical or moral values are included among the sorts of values the method purports to teach.

"Value" is used in Values Clarification to denote "those beliefs, purposes, attitudes, and so on that are chosen freely and thoughtfully, prized, and acted upon." Not all purposes, attitudes, and so on are viewed as values; Raths et al. concede that people have purposes, aspirations, beliefs, and feelings that do not constitute values. (Thus a feeling of hatred would not be considered to be a value, although if I reflected on that feeling and its

137 Ibid., p. 38.
138 Ibid., p. 30.
object, I might find I hold a certain value I wasn't aware of.)

Raths et al. claim that their concern is not with offering a method of instilling certain values, but with teaching "the process of valuing", which involves choosing values freely after consideration of alternative views, "prizing" or being happy with the choice and willing to affirm it publicly, and acting, or doing something with the choice. The result of these processes are values, according to Raths et al. They believe that goals, aspirations, attitudes, interests, feelings, beliefs, convictions, activities, and worries often indicate values which a child may not be explicitly aware that he holds. This, however, suggests an ambiguity in their use of "values." A value is chosen freely, prized, and acted on, according to the account of the process of valuing offered, yet feelings, beliefs, worries, etc., can indicate the presence of values that are not fully articulated -- presumably, values that have not been thoughtfully chosen and acted upon. This seems to involve a contradiction. The ambiguity in the use of "value" in the account of Raths et al. will here be resolved by using "Value" to denote a value that has resulted from the valuing process -- a consciously held Value.

The purpose of the Values Clarification method is to help students make clear to themselves what they value. Its

139 Ibid., p. 30.
140 Ibid., p. 33.
intent is not to persuade children to accept certain values and to reject certain others, but to encourage them to choose their own. It is based

...on a conception of democracy that says persons can learn to make their own decisions. It is also based on a conception of humanity that says human beings hold the possibility of being thoughtful and wise and that the most appropriate values will come when persons use their intelligence freely and reflectively... 141

Values Clarification, then, seems at first to be based on a notion which conforms to Kierkegaard's insistence that each individual possesses the capability to make his own ethical decisions, and that this capability should be respected.

Kierkegaard insists that teaching the ethical does not involve the communication of information or knowledge. Raths et al. write:

...the clarifying strategy requires a different orientation; not that of adding to the child's ideas but rather one of stimulating him to clarify the ideas he already has. 142

Values Clarification, then, does not involve the communication of knowledge or ideas. Raths et al. seem, as Kierkegaard does, to view the teaching of ethical matters as requiring a different strategy than the teaching of other subjects.

141 Ibid., p. 39.
142 Ibid., p. 54.
Values Clarification employs the "clarifying response" in order to encourage students to think about their Values without at the same time approving or disapproving of these Values. The clarifying response is really a carefully selected question. It is initiated by something a student says or does, and results in a short question-answer dialogue. An effective clarifying response most notably avoids moralizing, criticizing, or evaluating, entertains the possibility that the student will not think about his values, and is usually oriented to the individual rather than being directed towards a group of students. A clarifying response is used in situations in which there are no "right" answers (which for Raths et al. include moral questions), and is deemed inappropriate for directing a student towards a predetermined answer.

Values Clarification is intended to be a neutral means of teaching values -- that is, the teacher's Values are not to be instilled in the student. In Values and Teaching, thirty clarifying responses are suggested. Among the responses suggested are the following:

Is this something that you prize?  
Are you glad about that?  
Did you consider any alternatives?  
Did you have to choose that; was it a free choice?  
Do you do anything about that idea?  
What other possibilities are there?  
Do you have any reasons for (saying

\[143\] Ibid., p. 53.  
\[144\] Ibid., p. 54.
These questions may appear to be relatively innocuous. But what Raths et al. do not note is that, although teachers are cautioned against voicing approval or disapproval of the statement which initiates questions like those above, and of the student's response to the teacher's question(s), these questions themselves seem to imply that certain Values are important. The method is not a one-time effort, and the frequent repetition of such questions might convey to students that "prizing", being happy, choosing freely, acting in accordance with the Values they choose, reasoning, and considering all possible alternatives are things they should value. There seems to be nothing objectionable in most of the Values these questions imply, particularly if it is remembered that Raths et al. are addressing the problems of teaching all sorts of Values, not solely ethical ones. But the use of the questions listed above could well suggest to a student that certain ethical Values are held by the teacher, not because of what the questions, taken in themselves, might imply, but by virtue of the manner in which they are put to use. A student might notice that the clarifying response, "Do you do anything about that idea?" is asked of him when he says he thinks it important to help people in financial need, or that young people should do more to help elderly people who have difficulty in doing some of their daily errands, and not when he says that the refugees

\[145\] Ibid., pp. 56-62.
his church sponsored should take the lowest paying and least desirable jobs in order to show their gratitude, or when he says that he hates his sister. I am not suggesting that the fact that the use of clarifying responses implies certain values renders them inappropriate responses to certain statements. I am rather suggesting that to suppose that these questions serve only to encourage students to clarify their values, without in any way conveying the teacher's Values, may be an erroneous supposition on the part of Raths et al.

If objective certainty with regard to ethical matters is indeed impossible (a point discussed in Chapter II), then asking a student to give reasons for moral judgements and asking how he knows his judgement is correct might mislead him. Also, asking a student (who may well have already decided what to do in a situation involving an ethical decision) to consider alternatives or other possibilities meets with the same objection we discussed earlier: the mode of existence the individual has already chosen (aesthetic, ethical, religious) may shape his decisions by eliminating certain possibilities, so to ask him to run through these other alternatives could be a futile exercise. Whether questions like "What other possibilities are there?" and "How do you know it's right?" would be deemed objectionable would depend a great deal on the situation and on the statement that initiated the teacher's question. The point is that even with these seemingly innocuous questions, caution regarding their use would be advisable if the communication
is to serve its purpose.

One of the clarifying responses listed above seems to be the most likely to be used with regard to moral Values. Raths et al. suggest that when a child makes an ethical judgement, the appropriate response is to ask how he knows that his judgement is correct. They offer the following dialogue as an example:

Teacher: "I see you're hard at work on that project, Jimmy."
Student: "It's not good to be lazy, you know."
Teacher: "How do you know it's not good?"
Student: "Everybody knows that. My parents always say it."
Teacher: (Walking away) "I see."

Jimmy's reply to his teacher's question ("everybody knows that") seems reasonable enough; perhaps he thinks the idea that it's not good to be lazy is common-sensical. But the teacher presumably wants him to consider whether he really thinks it's not good to be lazy, or whether he is merely accepting his parents' or society's values. Perhaps the most obvious similarity between the method this dialogue suggests and the ideal indirect communication we have been discussing is that both leave room for double-reflection. Jimmy is left to ponder the teacher's question, if he cares to. He has not been given any ethical information, nor has he been given the impression that the teacher is superior.

\[146\] Ibid., p. 62.
\[147\] Ibid., p. 62.
to him regarding the ethical. The restraint that emerged as an element of the indirect technique in Kierkegaard's Either/Or and in Caldwell's "Saturday Afternoon", and which also seemed to be operating in the Socratic and biblical examples, seems to be present in the dialogue between Jimmy and his teacher. But the restraint employed here seems extreme.

In the ideal indirect communication sketched in Kierkegaard's Journals, the receiver of the communication is left to appropriate what has been communicated, and the communication encourages such appropriation. In the Nathan and David example, the parable would have been reflected on, and David might have realized that it applied to him, even if Nathan had not changed the mode of communication and addressed David directly. In the Euthyphro example, Socrates communicates to Euthyphro that there is some question about whether he is doing the right thing, without accusing Euthyphro of acting unethically. In Either/Or, Kierkegaard presents the reader with a picture of what life is like when lived under both aesthetic and ethical categories, yet not without persuasive devices. In "Saturday Afternoon", Caldwell portrays the mentality of a lynch, but refrains from making direct moral judgements, conveying his meaning through literary technique. But in the dialogue between Jimmy and his teacher, we are left wondering what has been communicated. The teacher's question could suggest several things to Jimmy: It might suggest that the teacher believes it is not so bad to be lazy; or that the teacher is ignorant of
a bit of wisdom he sees as being common sense, something everybody knows; or that Jimmy should think about why it is not good to be lazy, since he can't at first think of a good reason. Jimmy might come up with various reasons for something he had previously never come up with reasons for ("I'd never get my homework done if I were lazy, and then I'd be in trouble.") Whatever Jimmy arrives at, it will not be the result of any information the teacher has presented him with, and in this sense perhaps the communication is indirect. If Jimmy understands what the reader of Values and Teaching is to understand, that the teacher is saying, "Think about whether it's not good to be lazy," he might make a timeworn cliche his own. If he does so, it would seem that he is not appropriating something that has actually been communicated to him. The teacher is not trying to influence Jimmy to decide that laziness is right or wrong, if he is communicating in the spirit that Raths et al. advise. He is merely trying to ensure that Jimmy knows what he himself thinks, not what he has been told. Both Nathan and Socrates seemed to have more persuasive tasks in mind. In contrast, Values Clarification seems to be Value-neutral, with the exception that the questions used as clarifying responses may imply certain Values themselves. Any persuasiveness appears to be unintentional. Whereas in the examples we examined earlier, the message conveyed seemed to be "think about this," clarifying responses seem only to say "Think!"
The difference between Values Clarification and the indirect technique involves the difference between having nothing to actually communicate regarding how to live and having something to communicate regarding how to live. Values Clarification preserves the negative elements of indirect communication -- the restraint, the respect for the recipient as an individual who is capable of making his own ethical decisions. But clearly, something drops out: any (intended) content. Thus we wonder whether Values Clarification communicates anything at all, except perhaps inadvertently.

The theory underlying Values Clarification necessarily rules out the (intentional) teaching or communication of the ethical through "upbringing"; through setting an example. To teach the ethical by means of example involves passing on those values we deem worthy of passing along (the universal). But Raths et al., perhaps fearing that the conception of democracy they speak of will clash with universal ideals, would have to rule out this method of communicating ethical matters. In fact, their method of teaching seems impossible to carry through consistently. Teachers are to encourage a student to clarify his own Values without conveying their personally held values or society's values. Yet even a teacher's daily habits (being in class on time, being kind to each student, showing concern) will reveal his Values. Raths et al. take the democratic ideal (freedom of choice) to the extreme: to ensure that each student chooses his Values freely, he must be protected from the influence of ethical ideals.
Clarifying responses are not always quite as neutral as the dialogue between Jimmy and his teacher suggests. But generally, the Values Clarification method only inadvertently communicates anything (i.e. the values implicit in the clarifying responses). The Values Clarification method seems to be an indirect method for encouraging students to sort out their values, but is not designed to coax, something the other examples we have characterized as indirect seem intended to accomplish. Thus it does not appear to be the sort of technique Kierkegaard had in mind, but seems, at least, to be a technique he might well have welcomed over doctrinaire methods of teaching values.

It is clear by now that Kierkegaard's notion of indirect communication of the ethical rests heavily on the notion that there are universal ideals which are worth passing along, and that the rejection of this notion puts teachers of moral values in a strange situation, one in which they must not convey the traditional values which they can't help but convey in their daily situations. In contrast, we can see that Kierkegaard's ideal notion of communicating ethical matters embraces rather than rejects the universal. Indeed, the universal makes possible the communication of something rather than nothing when the subject is the ethical. (In Chapter II, it was noted that it is difficult to say how Tooley might communicate indirectly because of his radical break with traditional values.)

Any classroom method of teaching moral education that
would approximate Kierkegaard's notion of indirect communication would be based on the principle that each individual possesses the capability to make ethical decisions. (Raths et al. embrace this principle, but perhaps over-protectively.) It would follow from this principle that direct communication of ethical matters would be inappropriate, as it would suggest that someone else has found it necessary to make the individual's decision. The principle implies that there are ethical standards. If there were none, "ethical decisions" would be a meaningless phrase. If we had no idea whether a decision was ethical or non-ethical, it would be strange to say that each individual is capable of making ethical decisions. If we could not distinguish between ethical and unethical decisions, the phrase would be equally puzzling.

Kierkegaard's notion of indirect communication, it seems, would be attractive to those moral values educators who reject doctrinaire methods of teaching values in the classroom. Admittedly, it would not appeal to those who would operate on the assumption that there are no ethical standards, or on the assumption that those ethical standards should not be passed along. An extensive examination of indirect communication as a means of teaching values in the classroom will be left for moral education theorists. We have at least countered Irvine's dismissal of the applicability of Kierkegaard's thought to the field of moral values education.
Retrospect

The examination of the Values Clarification technique provided an opportunity for a retrospect concerning some of the key insights developed in our discussion of indirect communication. We have found examples of indirect communication in a variety of sources: the Bible, a Socratic dialogue, Kierkegaard's major ethical work, and fiction. Because this examination has taken us rather a long way from our starting-point, I will offer a brief summary of some of the conclusions or suggestions which emerged during the course of this study.

First, although it is difficult to identify the direct communications Kierkegaard found objectionable in his own day, the offensiveness of a direct communication of ethical content is related to its degree of specificity or its personal nature, and to its relationship to the universal. Secondly, direct communications of the ethical which provoke no offense are nevertheless inappropriate because they muddy the waters, presuppose certainty, overlook the importance of assimilation or appropriation of the communication, and disregard the dignity of the recipient. Third, appropriation, not information, is the most significant aspect of an indirect communication. Both Kierkegaard's insistence that the ethical should be communicated indirectly and the choice of the means by which this is to be accomplished are grounded in the significance of making the thing said one's own. Fourth, Kierkegaard's indirect technique in Either/Or consists in his use of literary technique, a point which led
us into a brief examination of literary technique which suggested that fiction provides a useful vehicle for communicating the ethical indirectly through the written word. Finally, indirect techniques might provide a suitable means of communicating the ethical in classroom situations. But to carry out such techniques consistently presupposes that there are universal standards worth passing along, and then "the ethical must be communicated as an art, simply because everyone knows it."  

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