The peculiarity of essential truth.

Arthur Froese

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THE PECULIARITY OF ESSENTIAL TRUTH

by

Arthur Proese

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submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Department of
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ABSTRACT

THE PECULIARITY OF ESSENTIAL TRUTH

by

Arthur Froese

Under the pseudonym Climacus, Kierkegaard conducts a philosophical examination on the question of the human condition as regards an existing human subject's relation to the Truth about himself. This takes place in the brief first chapter of the Philosophical Fragments. Using Socrates as the prototype of the serious learner, the author spins out a distilled version of both pagan and Christian perspectives on the question, and the answer emerges as a dichotomy. It becomes clear that the dichotomy cannot be resolved since existence does not offer definitive instruction to those concerns within the ethico-religious sphere.

Without defending his uncompromising respect for the idea that the kind of truth at issue is governed by objective uncertainty, Kierkegaard ends the chapter leaving his reader to consider the conclusions of the "Project of Thought:" there are two, and only two, ways in which an individual is related to the essential knowledge regarding his existence—either the individual is in possession of the Truth in the first place (Plato's doctrine of Recollection) or he exists in Error in need of a Redeemer (the Gospel of the New Testament).

In this study I attempt to demonstrate the exhaustiveness and mutual exclusiveness of Kierkegaard's dichotomy and thereby support his conviction that the essential truth pertains in a personal way to an existing human subject. How so? Well, if someone can come up with a third position the
personal nature of ethico-religious concern will have been undermined. At the same time, anyone who professes to know something for certain on matters concerning the ultimate worth of human existence or the notion of a general human task, should be suspected of knowing more than a human is in a position to know.

Three modern thinkers—Nietzsche, Sartre, A. J. Ayer, are briefly examined with special attention paid to those passages in their works in which I see the author making an effort to "aufheb" ethical and religious understanding. I determine that the authors' truths are not of an "essential" quality and therefore attempt to demonstrate that their respective positions do not escape the alternatives presented in the "Project of Thought."

I summarize this study by reviewing the key feature of "essential truth"—that it pertains in a personal way to the learner. In that way it might be understood as a special and peculiar kind of truth.
I should like to dedicate this philosophical effort to my mother's love, my father's courage and Prof. Nielsen's patience. Mrs Fotheringham's assistance and generosity will be long appreciated.

A. F.
CHAPTER I

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE "PROJECT OF THOUGHT"

The cornerstone upon which this thesis will be built comes from the pen of Kierkegaard's pseudonym, Johannes Climacus. Climacus is the author of two works, *Philosophical Fragments* (1844) and the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments* (1846). These two works are generally regarded by scholars as Kierkegaard's most philosophical writings.

There is evidence of a twofold strategy in Climacus' work. On the one hand it can be seen as an attack on Speculative Idealism—the popular philosophical movement of our author's day. Reference is made repeatedly and sometimes contemptuously to this philosophy as "the System." Speaking of the *Fragments*, the author makes an immediate effort in his preface to deny any affiliation with the popular thought:

> It does not make the slightest pretension to share in the philosophical movement of the day...¹

Perhaps at bottom Climacus' hostility toward epoch-making philosophical systems was based on the idea that an individual's primary concern should be with real life, not with speculative thought. Certainly he had observed how commonly the two become confused. This confusion, in which an individual might forget himself in an all-encompassing system of philosophy, Climacus sought to remedy. Secondly, the two works attempt the continuation of an


1
analysis of human existence which Kierkegaard had already begun in what was known as his aesthetic writings. The new step in this analysis was ultimately intended to express anew the qualitative distinction between paganism and Christianity. The question of the truth of Christianity is however not raised.

But in order to avoid confusion, it is at once necessary to recall that our treatment of the problem does not raise the question of the truth of Christianity. It merely deals with the question of the individual’s relationship to Christianity. It has nothing whatever to do with the systematic zeal of the personally indifferent individual to arrange the truths of Christianity in paragraphs; it deals with the concern of the infinitely interested individual for his own relationship to such a doctrine.

The academic question of the reason for Kierkegaard’s many pseudonyms has been raised repeatedly within the circle of Kierkegaardian scholarship. Many opinions have been voiced. We have a partial explanation from Kierkegaard’s own pen:

My pseudonymity or polynymity has not had a casual ground in my person..., but it has an essential ground in the character of the production, which for the sake of the lines ascribed to the authors and the psychologically varied distinctions of the individualities poetically required complete regardlessness in the direction of good and evil, of contrition and high spirits, of despair and presumption, of suffering and exultation, etc., which is bound only ideally by psychological consistency, and which real actual persons in the actual moral limitations of reality dare not permit themselves to indulge in, nor could wish to., what is written therefore is in fact mine, but only in so far as I put into the mouth of the poetically actual individuality whom I produced, his life-view expressed in audible lines.

I do not wish to delve into the issue other than briefly. It is my view that it is Kierkegaard’s intent to place the writer of the two books under discussion here in a position outside the Christian perspective.

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2 Ibid., "A First and Last Declaration," signed by S. Kierkegaard and unpaged (at his request), p. 551.
The author may thus be seen as a philosopher without a religious conviction. The reader is therefore free to accompany the author from a starting point devoid of theological import, aware that he is being offered a philosophical examination of both pagan and Christian perspectives toward the human condition. For this reason I will respect Kierkegaard's wishes regarding the pseudonyms and refer to Climacus as the author of the two works at hand.

Our study focuses upon the first chapter of Philosophical Fragments. Passages from other parts of Climacus' writing will be used to shed light on some of the more opaque ideas in that first chapter.

By way of a general introduction, perhaps I might note the title Philosophical Fragments and speculate upon the author's choice of it. The original title in the Danish is Philosophiske Smuler. Now, while "fragments" is an accurate translation, there is some literary spice lost in the English. At a time when the spirit of the Enlightenment still sought an explanation for, and an exhaustive description of, everything under the sun, Climacus mockingly reports his contribution as mere "Smuler." In the Danish the word suggests the idea of bits or scraps or crumbs such as those which fell from the rich man's table.¹

One might infer that Climacus is supporting the idea that an individual be encouraged to think deeply about his singular existence without being intimidated by the vast systems of philosophical and scientific thought that often tend to consume the seeming significance of the individual's personal reflections. Climacus is using his literary skills to express this leaning, one that was not very popular during the author's time.

The title page of the Fragments poses the question with which the author intends to deal:

¹ Hermann Winterberg, Syltiendals ryde Ordbøger, (Syltiendal, 1959).
Is an historical point of departure possible for an eternal consciousness; how can such a point of departure have any other than a merely historical interest; is it possible to base an eternal happiness upon historical knowledge?

It is Climacus' view that, due to the nature of the problem, a solution cannot be determined philosophically. He therefore reports in the Postscript's introduction (p.18) that the Fragments had made no pretense of solving it. The problem was merely posed and formulated. It can therefore be said that the Fragments wishes to explore the philosophical question of Christianity's relationship to an existing individual without raising the question of the truth of its claims since Christianity uniquely ties in with the problem.

It is well known that Christianity is the only historical phenomenon which in spite of the historical, may precisely by means of the historical, has intended itself to be for the single individual the point of departure for his eternal consciousness, has intended to interest him otherwise than merely historically, has intended to base his eternal happiness on his relationship to something historical. No system of philosophy, addressing itself only to thought, no mythology, addressing itself solely to imagination, no historical knowledge, addressing itself to the memory, has ever had this idea:...\footnote{Fragments, p.127-8.}

What emerges in the chapter, "A Project of Thought," takes the form of a discussion of the human condition in terms of the individual's relation to the Truth about his existence as a human being. Climacus determines this to be a central Socratic concern and chooses to deal with the question Socratically in the first part of the chapter entitled hypothesis: "A". "How far does the Truth admit of being learned?" is the wording used to open the discussion. The character of this part of the "Project" is dominated by what the Postscript calls the principle of immanence. The learning of Truth or virtue is to be understood as a kind of remembering. In order to ask the question, the learner must already have a latent possession of the answer. The reasoning behind this goes back to Plato's doctrine of Reminiscence, and Climacus offers a condensed
wording of the difficulty which Plato's doctrine saw through.

...one cannot seek for what he knows, and it seems equally impossible for him to seek for what he does not know. For what a man knows he cannot seek, since he knows it; and what he does not know he cannot seek, since he does not even know for what to seek.

In hypothesis "A" any teacher of Truth becomes non-essential to the learner's effort and success. The word "majestic" is used to best describe the relationship between teacher and learner. The moment at which the learner can be said to have attained the knowledge of Truth also takes a back seat. Since the Truth was always known to the learner, the learning should more accurately be called remembering.

The sort of remembering spoken of in the "Project's" hypothesis "A" and developed further in the Postscript is traced back to Socratic self-investigation. It seemed clear to Socrates that self-examination was the means toward an individual's understanding of his own place in existence. Consequently, from the pagan perspective, the individual's task in the pursuit of Truth in one of becoming inward or subjective. While Climacus does not champion the idea that the Truth comes from within, he does however seriously entertain the notion and regard it as one of two possible alternatives. Climacus chooses also to invest a great amount of effort in order to lead his reader to the threshold of the examined life, wherever that may lead. This is no simple task as Climacus himself knows. First the individual must be led away from the kind of confused thinking that mixes Socratic truths with the kind of truth-claims that come out of the community of thought. We shall see, later in this study, some examples of this sort of confusion. Then there must be a shift of attention in the mind of the individual. The attention must be turned back to determine the individual's basic attitude toward his existence. This then is how Climacus conceives

__1__Fragments, p.12.
of the Socratic concern coupled with the objective uncertainty of Socratic truths. Inwardness, self-examination, subjectivity, the idea of learning from the self are terms all of which belong to Climacus' formulation of the pagan pursuit of Truth.

Hypothesis "A" of the "Project", then, discusses the human condition from a pagan perspective. The construction of the hypothesis is based on the principle of immanence. It assumes that every man implicitly knows what it means to be a human and what his essential task as a human is. Further, it is Climacus' view that no other conclusion can be drawn by a man given to serious reflection unless some superhuman power has already laid down an alternative to this understanding of his condition.

The discussion of the Socratic perspective is embarrassingly brief in the "Project." It receives a much more condensed treatment in the Postscript with the author's claim there that the Truth is subjectivity. However, let what has been said thus far about hypothesis "A" rest until it receives further treatment in the following chapters of this thesis.

Climacus begins alternative "B" in the "Project" by establishing the hypothetical nature of his thought-project with the words, "Now if things are to be otherwise..." It is immediately indicated to the reader that the author intends his two alternative accounts of the human condition to be exhaustive.

(a) Alternative "B" assumes that the human learner does not have the requisite condition required to discover the Truth. It suggests that something very essential is lacking in him to keep him in darkness and Error. He is a stranger to the Truth. He is also unaware of his condition. He is in the state of Error, which means he holds a positive position opposed to the Truth. Consequently the doctrine of Reminiscence does not apply, since recollection would only thrust the learner deeper into Error. Similarly, the human teacher,
who in hypothesis "A" was non-essential but could be helpful, would here, at best, only assist in the rebirth of Error.

The condition of Error must be understood in this way because the moment at which the learner acquires the Truth must have decisive significance in our hypothesis in order for alternative "B" to stand outside the Socratic perspective. Further, the state of Error, call it a kind of bondage as Climacus does, must be a condition the individual human himself as guilty of having created for himself. The logic behind this conclusion is as follows:

This deprivation cannot have been due to an act of the God (which would be a contradiction), nor to an accident (for it would be a contradiction to assume that the lower could overcome the higher); it must therefore be due to himself.1

(b) The learner, in order to come free of the bondage of Error, will need outside help since every one of his efforts to free himself is useless. The only help possible will be superhuman help. The helper then is called the Teacher or the God. God who had created the learner with the condition for recognizing the Truth will now be the only One capable of restoring the requisite condition which the learner himself has forfeited. This first step of the restoration will come in the form of a reminder to the learner that he is in Error by reason of his own guilt. At that point the Teacher can give him the Truth. Climacus chooses to call this God-Teacher a Redeemer, a Saviour, a Judge. The moment at which the Teacher imparts His lesson to the learner (which will have decisive significance and thus keep us outside the Socratic standpoint) is called by Climacus the Fullness of Time.

(c) The man who has yielded the state of his existence to the Teacher becomes, by way of the lesson, a new and different man. Before, he was a man

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1Fragments, p.18.
also, but now his existence faces a new direction—toward the Truth. The moment of the turn-around occasions the grief and pain of severing oneself from a long-held mode of existence (even if it were Error). Climacus calls this pain Repentance. He calls the transition New Birth, and the change in the man Conversion.

I would now like to present glosses on some of the difficult words found in the "Project." It seems that the kind of reader Climacus sought was one who would take some time to reflect on the issues presented and expand the condensed notions in a way suited to his own disposition. This might explain the compacted nature of the "Project." It also demonstrates Climacus' attempt to conform, in action, to his idea of the maieutic relationship between teacher and learner. Climacus seems to be keenly aware of the fact that no one wording of the questions that penetrate the marrow of human existence will satisfy very many. Consequently, it is my job to cloak the skeleton of the philosophical reasoning found in the "Project," even though someone else would surely find a different way of unfolding the ideas. It is this effort (best done in silence and solitude) which takes the ideas out of an atmosphere of indifferent philosophical intellectualism and puts them into a new home where they can be used as tools working toward a clearer understanding of real life and day to day decision making.

Truth: This word with a capital, appearing in the first sentence of the "Project" and used throughout, serves as a key marker around an area of concern with which the author wishes to deal. It is important to note, firstly, that the author does not spell out the kind of truth in question. That detail is left to the reader to consider. It may therefore be said that the key feature of the kind of Truth referred to in the "Project" is that it pertains in a personal way
to the individual raising the question of Truth. Questions like the following ones would indicate the kind of issues that a Truth-seeking individual would involve himself with:

What is the worth of the one I was given to be?

Do I have a task that I should be carrying through?

Am I equipped with the talent and strength, and so on, to carry that task through if indeed there is one?

There is a further aspect to the individual's raising the question of Truth. The existing human subject is capable of researching within himself his opinion of his own worth and his attitude about the possibility of a specific task confronting him. A thorough reflection of his deeds and his regard for himself and others will bring this to light. He may, however, be led to question a secondary issue in the following manner:

Am I presently in the right place and doing what I should?

Is my present direction the right one for me?

Is my fundamental orientation here in existence trustworthy?

Consider then those two separate aspects contained in the "Project's use of the word Truth. First, it is the answer to the existential questions concerning an individual's personal worth and task. Secondly, it addresses the question of the individual's condition. Is he capable of recognizing or figuring out the Truth by himself, or is he existing outside of it?

Moment and moment: In light of the kind of Truth that is at issue in the "Project", the way becomes clear for the author to establish the aforementioned dichotomy regarding any individual's relation to the Truth. A notion that comes out of the New Testament is used by Climacus in order to make clearer the distinctions between the respective alternatives. We recall St John's account of the meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus where Jesus states that a man must be "born again." This vital Christian notion takes its place on the side of
hypothesis "B" as the **Moment**. If the individual does in fact exist outside of the Truth, then the point in time at which he is ushered back into a relationship with the Truth takes on decisive significance.

From a Socratic perspective, conversely, there is no reason for one to suspect that he might ultimately be alienated from the Truth. Perhaps indeed he may find himself at times questioning whether or not he is doing the right thing, or whether his present attitude is a healthy one. Those instances however only serve to spark reconsideration, re-thinking, re-appraisal and so on. in short, **recolletion**. Consequently it becomes clear why Climacus characterizes "the temporal point of departure" as "nothing" from the Socratic view, since the Truth was knit together with the individual's very being from the beginning, and the instances of its cognitive recognition lack eternal significance.

**Teacher** and **Teacher**: Climacus takes a little time to note the place of fellow humans in the learner's pursuit of the Truth. Predictably, the relationship does not become of vital importance to the learner since the Truth pertains to the existing human subject in a **personal** way. A fellow human may serve to thrust the learner into a moment of unease, thus prompting a mood of reflection, or he may help to refine some of the learner's raw insights. That however would be the extent of his service as a teacher of the Truth at issue here. As has already been noted earlier, Climacus describes the 'teacher's' role as did Plato with the analogy of the **midwife**.

In hypothesis "B" however a higher power is needed to deliver the learner from the state of Error. His own efforts conducted in solitude or with the help of a questioning Socrates will only thrust him further in the wrong direction. The higher power is the God himself, the creator of the learner. He is the Teacher in hypothesis "B." His lesson is the gift of **New Birth**.

Other important italicized words in the "Project" become clear in the light
of the ones I have thus far discussed. Let this gloss then suffice for now.

* * * * * *

The "Project" then presents two mutually exclusive alternatives to the human condition. Either the individual is in a position to know the Truth and obtain it by himself through the process of reflection, or the individual is destitute of it and is in need of the help of the Power which first created him. The positions are paganism and Christianity respectively.

I propose in this paper that the two alternatives, presented in the "Project," in viewing the human condition are, as the author intends them to be, exclusive and exhaustive. I will attempt to defend my position by examining some thinkers who seem at first glance to mix these two alternatives or to offer additional ones.
CHAPTER II

NIETZSCHE'S CLASH WITH THE "PROJECT'S" ALTERNATIVES

It may amaze a reader of the "Project" that there should be two and only
two ways in which the human condition (man's relationship to the Truth) may
be understood. Philosophy, psychology and theology books are full of theories
regarding man and his situation. Imagine the number of unpublished thinkers
who have their own ideas. Do all these perspectives in the final analysis fit
into Climacus' two slots? It is our intent, as has been expressed in the previ-
ous chapter, to show that they in fact do. We may now begin the attempt to
posit the exhaustiveness of those alternatives by examining some bits of
Nietzsche's thought.

Nietzsche is a brilliant thinker and writer. It is no easy task, here
or ever, to attach the thought to an ultimate position, let alone to attempt
to do that rashly. With this in mind let us trace carefully some threads of
his thought that appear to relate to the issue we are concerned with, namely,
the individual's relationship to the Truth and the possibility of a third
position regarding that relationship. Even in so specific an area we will
find Nietzsche's thoughts elusive. When we think we have him understood and
labelled he may well be found to slip out of reach into another area of con-
cern. So much then for the sake of caution!

Let us begin by stating what the major moves in this chapter will be.
First, we will take note of Nietzsche's seeming leap outside of both positions
A and B, brought to light through (a) his antagonism toward Socrates on the
one hand and (b) his rejection of Christianity on the other. We will observe (c) that his attack on Socrates' stands conceptually apart from the "Project's" version of the Socratic position. We will show (d) that his rejection of Christianity does not allow him to eliminate decisively that alternative for others. Then we will examine a theory which Nietzsche offers concerning the evolution of the human species to determine where he stands on the issue at hand. Seen through the theory Nietzsche ends up either in Climacus' position A or represents himself as the Teacher in a sham B position. This compromise of the exclusiveness of positions A and B, however, vanishes when we analyze his theory.

(a) In the writings of Nietzsche various scattered descriptions of Socrates and the things he stood for demonstrate a bitter antagonism and an effort to establish the Socratic life-style and principles as pathological.

Not only are the acknowledged wildness and anarchy of Socrates' instincts indicative of decadence, but also the preponderance of the logical faculties and that malignity of the mis-shapen which was his special characteristic.¹

The argument, however, which leads Nietzsche to an anti-Socratic position takes shape in The Birth of Tragedy. Socrates emerges as a force which stands in the way of artistic creativeness and its foundation-human instinct. Nietzsche writes:

We are offered a key to the character of Socrates by the wonderful phenomenon which he calls his daemon. In exceptional circumstances, when his gigantic intellect begins to fail him, he receives a secure support in the utterances of a divine voice which manifests itself at such moments. This voice, whenever it comes, always dissuades. In this utterly abnormal nature instinctive wisdom only appears in order to hinder here and there the progress of conscious perception.

Whereas in all productive men it is instinct that is the creatively affirm- 
active force, and consciousness that acts critically and warningly; with 
Socrates it is instinct that becomes critic, and consciousness that becomes 
creator - a perfect monstrosity per defectum.

Somewhat later in that same work Nietzsche represents the Socratic 
position more pointedly as an illusory faith in human thought and logic. 

Well, to be sure, beside this detached perception there stands, with 
an air of great frankness, if not presumption, a profound illusion 
which first came to birth in the person of Socrates. This illusion 
consists in the imperturbable belief that, with the clue of logic, 
thinking can reach to the nethermost depth of being, and that thinking 
can not only perceive being but even modify it.

This critical discussion of Socrates is in actuality part of an exam-
ination of the classic Greek culture. Nietzsche attempts to define posi-
tions which characterize the dominant cultural tendency of a given people. 
These positions are designed to serve as qualitative distinctions between 
cultures. He contrasts the Socratic position with the artistic and the 
tragic.

It is an eternal phenomenon: the insatiate will can always, by means 
of an illusion spread over things, detain its creatures in life and 
compel them to live on. One is chained by the Socratic love of know-
ledge and the delusion of being able thereby to heal the eternal 
wound of existence; another is ensnared by the art's seductive veil 
of beauty fluttering before its eyes; still another by the metaphys-
ical comfort that beneath the flux of phenomena eternal life flows 
on indestructibly - to say nothing of the more ordinary and almost 
more powerful illusions which the will has always at hand. These 
three planes of illusion are on the whole designed only for the more 
nobly-formed natures, who in general feel profoundly the weight and 
burden of existence, and must be deluded by exquisite stimulants 
into forgetfulness of their sorrow. All that we call culture is 
made up of these stimulants; and, according to the proportion of the 
ingredients, we have either a dominantly Socratic or artistic or 
tragic culture; or, if historical exemplifications are wanted, there 
is either an Alexandrian or a Hellenic or a Buddhistic culture.

2 Ibid. p.1029.  3 Ibid. p.1040.
The Socratic position as Nietzsche constructs it meets with the
author's disapproval. This position, represented as a faith in the idea
that thought can penetrate existence, is assessed as pathological because of
the excessively developed logical element. However, as Kauffmann points
out, Nietzsche's discussion of Socrates is apt to be misinterpreted by the
reader if the Socratic position is isolated and examined in this manner.
More properly, Nietzsche's discussion should be understood as belonging to
a Hegelian sort of dialectic which is developed in The Birth of Tragedy.
The thesis which Nietzsche attempts to establish takes its first step in the
opening paragraph of that work with the claim:

...the continuous development of art is bound up with the Apollonian
and Dionysian duality; just as procreation depends on the duality of
the sexes, involving perpetual strife with only periodically interven-
ing reconciliations.

Socrates emerges in the next step of the dialectic as the antithesis of
the artistic moment. Kauffmann writes:

The Birth of Tragedy not only formulates the antinomy between knowledge
and life; it presages Nietzsche's solution...suggestion that the antag-
onism between Socratism and art may not be necessary. Actually, Nietzsche
starts out with the antithesis of the Dionysian and the Apollonian; and
their synthesis is found in tragic art. The antagonism is not one which
"may not be necessary." Rather Nietzsche concerned himself persistently
with what he accepted as necessary; and because Socrates seemed necessary
to him - he affirmed it. Like Hegel, Nietzsche sought to comprehend
phenomena in their necessary sequence; that is part of the significance
of his amor fati.

At this point we can notice the extent to which the "Project's" dis-
cussion of the Socratic position and Nietzsche's cited attack on Socrates fail
to deal with the same issue. We shall take this point up further in (c).

(b) Among the more popularized notions that have reached the layman

1 Ibid., p.951.

2 Walter Kauffmann, Nietzsche Philosopher Psychologist Antichrist,
from the Nietzschean literature is the phrase "God is Dead." Even though the expression is used by Hegel (*Phenomenology of Mind*) and Heine (*Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland*) before him, Nietzsche is popularly regarded as the creator of the notion. The expression took on pseudo-theological impact especially during the nineteen-fifties and sixties. In the expression we find a hint of Nietzsche's ultimate rejection of Christianity and consequently of position B in the "Project." There is however controversy among scholars as to what Nietzsche really meant by the expression. Some put him into an absolute atheist position, while others speak of him as agnostic in their attempts to label him for philosophical purposes. Perhaps part of the controversy hinges on whether one regards Nietzsche's death of God as a metaphysical speculation or as a diagnosis of contemporary civilization. One might be inclined to accept the latter view through a reading of Nietzsche's famous "Madman" parable in Section 125 of *The Joyful Wisdom*. Our present concern however does not call for a solution to this controversy but raises the issue only to indicate Nietzsche's rejection of the possibility of divine intervention in human life.

In a way the most valuable insights of a thinker come out of his personal confessions. One such confession informs the reader of Nietzsche's discontent with religious explanations.

I am too inquisitive, too sceptical, too arrogant, to let myself be satisfied with an obvious and crass solution of things. God is such an obvious and crass solution; a solution which is sheer indecency to us thinkers - at bottom He is really nothing but a coarse commandment against us: ye shall not think...

Part of Nietzsche's great ability as a writer rests perhaps in the fact that he can captivate his reader with the high level of emotion contained in

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1 *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, p.833-4
his expressions. Rarely does he rest content to voice his opinion in the
cold language of objectivity, yet there is a suggestion that what he says
has objective truth. Here is another expression of his rejection of Chris-
tianity:

The destiny of Christianity lies in the necessity that its faith had
to become as diseased, as base and vulgar, as the needs it was meant
to satisfy were diseased, base and vulgar. In the church, finally,
diseased barbarism itself gains power - the church, this embodiment
of mortal hostility against all integrity, against all elevation of
the soul, against all discipline of the spirit, against all frank
and gracious humanity.

Nietzsche goes on:

If we have even the smallest claim to integrity, we must know today
that a theologian, a priest, a pope, not merely is wrong in every
sentence he speaks, but lies - that he is no longer at liberty to lie
from "innocence" or "ignorance." The priest too knows as well as
anybody else that there is no longer any "God," any "sinner," any
"Redeemer," - that "free will" and "Moral world order" are lies;
seriousness, the profound overcoging of the spirit, no longer permits
anybody not to know about this.

Nietzsche also has some things to say about the concept of "faith" in
various factions of the Christian Church. The "Project," while maintaining
that it has borrowed position B from the New Testament, does not however use
the word "faith." Nevertheless, position B describes a relationship between
Teacher and learner, and that relationship is called "faith" in the Postscript.
There the faith relationship is represented as non-intellectual.

A believer is one who is infinitely interested in another's reality.
This is a decisive criterion for faith, and the interest in question
is not just a little curiosity, but an absolute dependency upon faith's
object. The object of faith is the reality of another, and the rela-
tionship is one of infinite interest. The object of faith is not a
doctrine, for then the relationship would be intellectual, and it would

1Nietzsche, The Antichrist, sect. 37.
2Ibid., p.38.
be of importance not to botch it, but to realize the maximum intellectual relationship. The object of faith is not a teacher with a doctrine; for when a teacher has a doctrine, the doctrine is eo ipso more important than the teacher, and the relationship is again intellectual, and it again becomes important not to botch it, but to realize the maximum intellectual relationship. The object of faith is the reality of the teacher, that the teacher really exists.

Now we will find Nietzsche's understanding and use of the word "faith" comparable, but he denies, firstly, that faith is central to the true understanding of Christianity.

It is false to the point of nonsense to find the mark of the Christian in a "faith," for instance, in the faith in redemption through Christ: only Christian practice, a life such as he lived who died on the cross, is Christian.\(^1\)

Nietzsche goes on to deny that such faith as Climacus supposes in position B is psychologically possible. Each man, according to Nietzsche, does in fact act from instinct alone and the One believed in by the faithful person is only a facade for a basically instinctual mode of behaviour.

In fact, there have been no Christians at all. The "Christian," that which for the last two thousand years has been called a Christian, is merely a psychological self-misunderstanding. If one looks more closely, it was, in spite of all "faith," only the instincts that ruled in him — and what instincts!

"Faith" was at all times, for example, in Luther, only a cloak, a pretext, a screen behind which the instincts played their game — a shrewd blindness about the dominance of certain instincts. "Faith" — I have already called it the characteristic Christian shrewdness — one always spoke of faith, but one always acted from instinct alone.

Perhaps Nietzsche's clearest separation of faith and truth is witnessed in a letter to his sister. Contained in this short quotation is an inference which Nietzsche later pins down in The Genealogy of Morals. He concludes that "faith" is most probably — illusion (Part III, sect. 24). (It is a view similar to the one developed by Freud in The Future of an Illusion!) This

\(^1\) Postscript, p.290.
\(^2\) Antichrist, Sect. 39.
\(^3\) Ibid., Sect. 39.
demonstrates Nietzsche's inclination to discuss "faith" as a psychological curiosity rather than a possible alternative to the immanence of Truth within the learner. Here is a quotation from his letter:

\[ \text{...if you wish to strive for peace of soul and pleasure, then believe; if you wish to be a devotee of truth, then inquire.} \]

We have now examined some passages of Nietzsche's that discuss the topics: Socrates, God, faith, and Christianity. As regards Nietzsche's stand on Socrates, my discussion in (a) was essentially an aside to the main thread of the thesis since Nietzsche's Socrates is irrelevant to the "Project's" concern. I included it to re-enforce the fact that the "Project" brings Socrates into discussion only in a narrow and an historical manner. I will say more on this in (c). The discussion of Nietzsche and Christianity relates more directly to the main thread. Nietzsche's rejection of Christianity is a clean rejection of alternative B of the "Project." In (d) I will discuss the convincingness of his rejection.

(c) As we have seen in (a), with the help of Kaufmann's insights, Nietzsche's fundamental attack against Socratism is ultimately a contrast of characteristic cultures - the Socratic, the artistic and the tragic. Seen in this way hypothesis A of the "Project" is not attacked, since Nietzsche is not addressing himself to the question of man's relation to the Truth. We may however become puzzled by the seeming clash created by Nietzsche's rejection of the "belief that thinking can reach the nethermost depth of being" on the one hand and position A of the "Project" which symbolizes Socrates as the most reasonable of thinkers in pursuit of the Truth. It is however the case that Nietzsche, while critically addressing thinking,

\[ \text{1 Nietzsche, p.309.} \]
the clue of logic, the force of consciousness, and so on, is again only con-
trasting characteristic cultural forces. In this case he is pitting intel-
lect against instinct. Hypothesis A of the "Project," on the other hand, is
representing Socrates as the symbol of human effort expended in the pursuit
of the Truth.

(d) We have noted several passages in which Nietzsche expresses his
rejection of Christianity. Some of those passages offer reasons for a per-
sonal rejection of the possibility of Christian faith while others exhibit
a tendency on the author's part to make that decision for other people, for
example, by branding faith as an illusion. Behind this tendency, I believe,
is the declaration that the condition of being destitute of the Truth is incon-
ceivable. How could one be in the state of Error? This was also the position
of Socrates who formulated the doctrine of Recollection in an effort to explain
his own ignorance of essential knowledge. Ignorance for him was to be under-
stood as a consequence of forgetting — never of Error. But position B opened
itself to the learner, as an alternative to A, after Socrates' time. Thus
it can be said that the state of Error need not have been inconceivable to
Nietzsche. His rejection of that alternative is personal, but what about
his wholesale denial of that possibility? While this question does not deal
with the main movement of the thesis, I feel that the tendency to try to
close the possibility of faith for others is a kind of confusion in which
Nietzsche is not alone. Allow me then several pages to demonstrate that
Nietzsche's wholesale rejection of "faith" does not hold water. If I am
successful, hypothesis B, despite Nietzsche's protestations, will remain a
possible alternative to A. (The outcome here will apply also to our dis-
cussion of Sartre in the following chapter, as he is a professional atheist).
"There is an invitation in the New Testament addressed to me, an existing individual interested in the Truth about my existence. It offers the promise of an eternal happiness but asks that I enter a faith relationship with my Creator and take up a creaturely existence. While it would appear that I am free to accept or to decline, it is not quite as simple as that. The choice between God's will and my own is in itself profoundly difficult, but now, to confuse things further, I am told by Nietzsche that such faith is in fact a "cloak, a pretext, a screen, a blindness behind which the instincts play their game." In other words, he is telling me that if I should enter into such a faith relationship I would still remain the instinctive human that I am, but would then exist in ignorance of the nature of my true being. At this point my decision is not so much in acceptance or rejection of God's invitation, but rather a choice between the invitation and Nietzsche's words of caution to me. On the one hand I am pulled toward the promise of an eternal happiness so that my restless thoughts concerning the questionable state of my existence may be quieted. On the other hand I would hate to become blind to my true self. Neither side can guarantee me the truth of its position.

"Now the invitation from God comes to me personally. I am alone in receiving this invitation (or the illusion of this invitation) since the possibilities which surround it concern me directly. Furthermore, I do not really know where an acceptance would lead me. (I have looked at the lives of others who did accept when the invitation came their way, but how does this help me to know my particular fate if I should accept?) Nietzsche however insists that the outcome is the same for all—it is in all cases an invitation into blindness! This appears to mean that Nietzsche knows something about all particular cases.
"I must wonder now if Nietzsche's claim holds water as it appeared to when it shocked me away from my religious decision. While he may know many things of which I am ignorant and possess an intellect far greater than mine, how does he have the gift to know personally one he has never met or to inspect the authenticity of an invitation which comes only to me in a particular way? Only a God has that gift. I must consequently reject the idea that Nietzsche can advise me on my religious decision. I find myself back once again considering whether or not to accept that invitation to me."

We have now examined and met the initial threat that Nietzsche directs against the "Project." We have seen that his critique of Socratism is not related to the manner in which the figure of Socrates is presented in the "Project." We have also determined that Nietzsche's rejection of Christianity is only a personal rejection. He cannot close the possibility of religious faith for another. So far, then, Nietzsche's apparent clash with positions A and B is not real and the alternatives remain open to the learner.

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We have not as yet established what Nietzsche's position is, if in fact he has a definite position that is truly independent of Climacus' A and B. Let us turn now to another area of Nietzsche's writings, apart from his discussion of Socratism and Christianity. We will look at his genetic theory of self-consciousness and this will be the test as to whether he can credibly claim a position outside A and B.

In The Joyful Wisdom, Nietzsche develops a theory concerning the evolution of mankind and in doing so attempts to explore the peculiar character of beings of our kind. The passage entitled "The Genius of the Species" is surprisingly brief for so grand a project. The theory, however, emerges with the distinctive mark of the aggressive Nietzschean style. The passage deals
with the problem of how it came about that a human is able to become conscious of himself. It is the strength and subtlety of this ability, according to Nietzsche, that distinguishes man from beast. Now Nietzsche sees this capability, call it a kind of mirroring of our actions, thoughts and feelings back to ourselves, as being genetically related to man's ability to communicate with others of his kind. The theory/speculates upon the origin of man's unique talent for communication. It developed, Nietzsche suggests, out of a need which the "most endangered animal" (early man) learned could be met by others of his kind:

He needed his fellows, he was obligated to express his distress, he had to know how to make himself understood.¹

In order to know how to make himself understood, he had to know what he lacked, how he felt, what he thought. Consequently, communication and self-consciousness evolved hand in hand as a bridge between humans.

The attempt to fit Nietzsche into the first of the two alternatives in the "Project" will now run us into trouble. Seen through Nietzsche's theory, position A begins to look wrong. Position A makes the claim that the truth is something which the individual can figure out for himself. It is the Truth about himself personally; it lies within him and is ultimately to be understood through what Socrates called "recollection." But Nietzsche, in addressing the problem of human consciousness, argues that the human capability of communication functions outwardly—man to man. Up through the evolution of the species there was never any need for the creature to dialogue inwardly, while outward communication was the evolved tool which made human survival possible.

Indeed, we have not any organ at all for knowing, or for "truth": we know (or believe, or fancy) just as much as may be of use in the interest of the human herd, the species...\footnote{The Joyful Wisdom, Sect. 354}

Consequently, one prong of Nietzsche's theory attacks the possibility of a genuine self-knowledge.

...each of us, in spite of the best intention of understanding himself as individually as possible, and of "knowing himself", will always just call into consciousness the non-individual in him, namely, his averageness...\footnote{Ibid., Sect. 354}

We can begin to come to terms with this first prong of attack by noting that Nietzsche is right when the idea of self-knowledge is only carried to a certain point. What comes in this case is a list of the kinds of traits one would note in himself that another might be interested in learning about, for example, a prospective employer, a voter, a date, and so on. Consciousness, self-knowledge, in such a case would belong to the individual's social or herd nature, as Nietzsche is inclined to call it. There is really no incomparably personal counterpart of information that one may derive from himself when he looks at those kinds of traits in himself.

As concerns our enquiry, however, the idea of a self-knowledge takes on a specifically different character. We are speaking of an individual's effort to come to know what he, an existing individual, really thinks about his own human existence. The learner would proceed by paying attention to his treatment of himself and others. He would look at his actions, his thoughts, his expressions, and thereupon become conscious of that attitude within him which leads him to his personal life style. For example, an individual may discover, through reflection, that his unconcern for the welfare of others indicates the opinion that a human existence is, to him,
a matter of ultimate indifference.

There is another prong of attack created by Nietzsche's theory (witnessed also in his critique of Socratism) which addresses an individual's asking of those basic human questions about personal existence. I am speaking of those kinds of questions which were aired in the first chapter of this study. As Nietzsche's theory moves from observation to conclusions we find him saying the following:

'It was only as a social animal that man acquired self-consciousness—which he is still in the process of doing, more and more.'

Nietzsche in effect issues the judgment that an individual's efforts to move toward a personal form of self-consciousness are out of line with a certain standard of health that he himself appeals to. It is an effort that Nietzsche characterizes as diseased in his discussion of the person of Socrates.

Let us review what Nietzsche's standard of health looks like. "We humans can know just as much as is in our collective interest. Our essential nature is one of gregariousness. Our ability to acquire self-knowledge is proportionate to our ability to exhibit our impressions externally. The strength and subtlety of our developed communication skills indicate the degree of humanness we as individuals have obtained." Now we ask, did Nietzsche get that standard out of his own head or did he get it from the Teacher? With that question (and the obvious answer—his own head) Nietzsche is found to fit neatly into position A of the "Project" of dichotomy. And so we can dispense with this second prong of attack.

There is however one final issue with which we must deal, one that

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1 Joyful Wisdom, Sect. 354.
tends to compromise the exclusiveness of Climas' two alternatives. We recall our model learner, Socrates, having problems in arriving at certainty about what human nature was, yet being quite clear and steady in his mind when he spoke of his personal mission to approach the citizens of Athens singly and question them on the matter of human virtue. The particular standard of health that Nietzsche has prescribed for himself, however, suggests a somewhat different approach. In Socrates' case we witness the effort to inform others about the function and limit of their conscious powers. For example, Nietzsche draws a limit to the capabilities of human consciousness as though he has seen that spectrum from the "outside."

Owing to the nature of animal consciousness, the world of which we can become conscious is only a surface and sign-world, a world that is made common and meaner; whatever becomes conscious becomes by the same token shallow, thin, relatively stupid, general, sign, herd signal; all becoming conscious involves a great thorough corruption, falsification, reduction to superficialities, and generalization... ¹

Similarly, he claims knowledge of that something which governs and directs human thought itself.

Our thoughts themselves are continually governed by the character of consciousness--by the "genius of the species" that commands it--and translated back into the perspective of the herd. Fundamentally, all our actions are altogether incomparably personal, unique, and infinitely individual; there is no doubt of that. But as soon as we translate them into consciousness they no longer seem to be.²

In light now of this information which Nietzsche holds out, the "Project's" positions seem to lose a part of that exclusive quality. His theory about the function of human consciousness, while fitting the description of an opinion the learner in A might possess, now vaults Nietzsche into a superhuman sphere where he himself appears as the Teacher in B. It looks as though A then can be turned into a sort of sham version.

¹Ibid., Sect. 354. ²Ibid.
of alternative B.

In reality, it is the manner in which the theory is put forth that causes us this final problem. At bottom it is only another theory about the origin of particular human skills and how they might possibly have evolved, but we are led by the aggressiveness of the Nietzschean style right up to a point where the considerations rise above the atmosphere of opinion by seemingly pertaining equally to every member of the species. Perhaps the theory and the conclusion we have cited is in fact the truth. But on the other hand it is far from being necessarily true. It is full of assumptions which we have a right to question.

1. Nietzsche claims to have had a close look at early human creatures and their condition.

2. He supposes an essential and necessary link between modern man and early forbears.

3. He assumes that a limit to modern human capability can be discussed in terms of that link, for example, "We know just as much as may be of use in the interest of the human herd."

4. And if he would have us believe that the theory sheds light on what we as humans should employ our energies toward, then he is assuming that the problem which early ancestral creatures faced are related to problems that confront modern man.

The theory, therefore, is not a gospel declaration of the state of human existence. It is hardly the sort of news that would be essential to the fulfillment and happiness of every individual — something very important that he read and work through, question and confirm, etc. Certainly it is possible that some individual here and there might go that very route, but in that case the theory would be relating to him only accidentally, probably because of a special interest he happened

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1 Ibid., Sect. 354.
to have. It would not relate to him essentially. So Nietzsche, in spite of the claim that he is speaking truth about the species, is in fact offering accidental knowledge which might be valuable to a learner, but on the other hand might not.

Nietzsche is a very complicated thinker. The path toward an understanding of his real position is marked with detours and sharp turns. He is capable of both enlightening and confusing his reader. That much we have noticed in our efforts to show that his thoughts conform to position A of the "Project." It is valuable however to submit the "Project" to such a challenging test. We become aware that it has its philosophical depths and that a too simple understanding will not stand the challenge offered by a complex thinker like Nietzsche.

We began by noting Nietzsche's criticism of Socratism and his rejection of Christianity. It was however discovered that the "Project's" concerns do not relate to Nietzsche's critique of those two positions. We determined moreover that Nietzsche's passionate rejection of Christianity is ultimately a personal one - that there is a flaw in his reasoning if he attempts to close the possibility of religious faith for another. So alternatives A and B remain open to the learner. Then, seen through Nietzsche's theory about the function of consciousness, position A begins to look weak as Nietzsche's theory brings into question the possibility of genuine self-knowledge. It turns out however that Nietzsche and Climacus were carrying the ideas of self-knowledge in different directions. The other prong of Nietzsche's attack which came to light argued that the basic human question about personal existence should not be asked by an individual. Nietzsche's subsequent appeal to a specific standard of health put him (despite his protestations) into position A of the "Project," since
his standard was something that he had figured out through his own thinking. Our final consideration which dealt with the question of whether or not Nietzsche's theory held out essential knowledge for the learner threatened to compromise the exclusiveness of positions A and B. Nietzsche, while conforming in essence to the learner in A was found to put on a mask of the Teacher in B. The mask was removed when we recalled that his theory is just another theory, not necessarily true, full of assumptions which would, at best, relate to a learner only accidentally. So at this point in our investigation, the alternatives in the "Project" remain exhaustive and exclusive.
CHAPTER III

EXISTENTIALISM: THE MOMENT OF SELF-CREATION

Let us consider now J. P. Sartre's analysis of the human condition. Sartre, a contemporary, is one of the most influential thinkers and literary figures since the war. The school of thought associated with his name calls itself Existentialism. This school is split between Christian and atheistic perspectives. Both sides acknowledge their indebtedness to Kierkegaard, who is considered by many as the greatest as well as the first of the existentialists. Sartre is a representative of atheistic existentialism. This philosophical position attempts to determine, with the greatest possible consistency, a doctrine of human existence and an understanding of the human condition reasoned from the premise of an uncompromising atheism. The thesis offers a new description of human nature and ultimately attempts to explore the category of the "ethical" in human existence. Sartre's brand of atheism, as we shall see, will have to be examined differently from Nietzsche's, in as far as applies to the project at hand, which seeks to determine whether or not Sartre's description of the human condition escapes the two categories presented in the "Project of Thought."

The history of the God question goes back to Greek philosophy. Since then, proofs for the existence of God have come and gone. While the majority of philosophers have been influenced by some sort of Christian perspective, the atheistic camp has not been lacking in representatives through the ages. Still others have refused to take sides. Climacus, in the third chapter
of the *Fragments*, proposes a thesis whereby we think of God merely as a
name we assign to a particular Unknown. It becomes evident in that chapter
that the author intends both theism and atheism to appear as metaphysical
positions born of confused thinking. Sartre, either unfamiliar with Climacus'
thesis or in disagreement with it, proposes that God is the name we assign
to the hypothetical power which stands behind man's creation. He understands
the word "God" then as meaning Creator or supernal artisan. Sartre does not
offer a proof of God's non-existence, but begins his reasoning from the
assumption that such a being does not exist.

The first and most important step from this assumption asserts that
men then is in fact not a creature. He simply suddenly exists in the world,
with no Creator behind his particular beginning, no divine conception of
human nature before his particular conception, the individual man exists
without a nature or essence. Sartre explains his definition of "existentialism":

What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean
that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the
world—and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist
sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing.
He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes
of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God
to have a conception of it. Man simply is.¹

This insight gives Sartre something to go on with in his discussion of man.

Somewhat later we find him defining man in a roundabout way:

...he is therefore nothing else but the sum of his actions, nothing
but what his life is...²

and

...man is no other than a series of undertakings, that he is the sum,
the organization, the set of relations that constitute these under-
takings.³

¹J. P. Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, (Methuen and Co., Ltd,

²Ibid., p.41. ³Ibid., p.42.
To furnish a clearer understanding of the idea here presented, I might suggest that this notion belongs to a metaphysic which Sartre has borrowed from Hegel. Sartre writes:

But in reality and for the existentialist, there is no love apart from the deeds of love; no potentiality of love—other than that which is manifested in loving; there is no genius other than that which is expressed in works of art.\(^1\)

I am reminded of a passage in Hegel's preface to the *Phenomenology of Mind*. He speaks of an "empty depth" in what had come to be regarded as a criticism of the romantics.

*The strength of the spirit is only as great as its expression; its depth is only as deep as it dares to spread and lose itself in its explication...*

A corollary to this flow of insight is found in Sartre's famous words, "Man is condemned to be free."\(^2\) Since God the Creator does not exist, man is therefore not provided with any values or commands that could obligate him or legitimate his behaviour. According to Sartre's notion of freedom, then, man is free to define himself magnanimously or the converse.

Sartre's freedom, however, alters in appearance when we examine the next stage of the philosophical development. In establishing a condition


\(^2\) While the use of the word "free" might appear peculiar in this context it is reminiscent of the Augustinian concept of the first freedom of will man received. Augustine distinguishes between two kinds of freedom of will possessed by man before and after Christian redemption.

"For the first freedom of will which man received when he was created upright consisted in an ability not to sin, but also in an ability to sin; whereas this last freedom of will shall be superior, inasmuch as it shall not be able to sin..."  
*St Augustine, The City of God, tr. M. Dods, (The Modern Library, 1950)*  
p.865.
as free, one is essentially restricting that very condition. And so in Sartre's understanding, the price of freedom is responsibility. The free man (all men are in the same condition) has a twofold responsibility - he is responsible, according to Sartre, for the creation of his own essence and, since what he individually will create a certain image of man in general, he is responsible for the whole of mankind.

Sartre uses three terms which help to explain the existentialist's understanding of the "human condition." The first term, anguish, is understood as the tension that accompanies the depth of the individual man's responsibility to legislate (in his everyday actions and decisions) the way for all of mankind. This tension is heightened when the individual realizes that there is no chance of ever finding a proof that his legislating, as a consequence of his personal conception of man, is in fact the correct course for man to take. The second term discussed by Sartre is abandonment. This word describes the individual's feeling when he discovers that he is without a God that he is here on earth with no possibility of finding the eternal values that were once held to exist in an intelligible cosmos governed by divine design - God does not exist. Despair, the last of the three expressions, serves as a further description of mankind now without a belief in God. All our actions and willings are profoundly limited to a reliance upon earthly strength. All possibilities are limited to one's will. There is no hope of obtaining superhuman help for any of our wants or needs.

Here then is Sartre's picture of the human reality: man, a being

1 If you point your finger at a man and tell him that he is free, the mere presence of that finger of authority will render your statement paradoxical.
necessarily free but responsible, is condemned to suffer the pangs of anguish, abandonment and despair, as a consequence of the nature of his existence. This is what Sartre calls the "universal human condition." (Existentialism, p.46). But what has happened to his original insistence that there is no "human essence or design"? Oh, yes, here it is! He deals with my question directly:

...although it is impossible to find in each and every man a universal essence that can be called human nature, there is nevertheless a human universality of condition. It is not by chance that the thinkers of today are so much more ready to speak of the condition that of the nature of man. By his condition they understand with more or less clarity, all the limitations which a priori define man's fundamental situation in the universe.

At this point, having seen the basic thrust of Sartre's thought, a reader may want to ask certain questions. There seems to be something important about Sartre's distinction between human essence and the human condition, at least in terms of his philosophical perspective. Yes, there is no essence, but there is a condition. The fact that there is no essence is derived, as we have seen, from the premise that God does not exist. If, however, the human condition could not be discussed Sartre would have nothing further to say. Consequently, he draws a line between the two. The quotation just cited establishes the distinction with some degree of clarity, but let us ponder, just for a moment, what that might mean if we look at it from a different angle. "Well, I am an existing human being. I have no idea what the power that established me in existence is like. I also have no idea what that power had in mind specifically for me to do in this existence. But there are others of my kind here that I can communicate with. We share a great many things in common and all seem to be in the same position

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1 Existentialism, p. 45-6.
when it comes down to having answers to those hard questions." From this perspective, Sartre's distinction between essence and condition seems to correspond to the distinction between Socratic ignorance and Socratic knowings. Sartre's reader, however, may want to ask whether or not Sartre loses sight of that distinction at various times in his lengthy discussion about the human condition. Does that discussion remain within the limits of legitimate earthly knowings? I will say more about this at the conclusion of this chapter.

If then the human situation, the human reality is in fact just as Sartre understands it, there exists the possibility of constructing a position concerning an individual's relationship to the Truth which will appear to compromise the claim that positions A and B of the "Project" are exhaustive. This becomes obvious when we see just how the Sartrean position seems to reject both A and B.

Alternative B vanishes immediately from Sartre's perspective. This alternative assumes the existence of a Creator who stands behind the learner's existence and takes on the role of Teacher when the learner comes to him and asks that the essential condition for his understanding of the Truth be restored. This Creator and Teacher, i.e., the God, does not exist, according to Sartre. Although Sartre gives no proof for the non-existence of the God, one can detect a relationship between Sartre's personal unbelief and his discussion of anguish and abandonment. Which comes first, the unbelief or the feeling of anguish and abandonment? The logic of the doctrine implies that the non-existence of God is somehow established first and the two emotional categories are the manifestation of that situation - a reality common to all men. Or is it perhaps the case that Sartre's atheism is a consequence of an anxiety which belongs to him personally? In any case, he
denies dogmatically the possibility of divine intervention in human existence. Consequently, alternative B is closed to Sartre and Sartre's learner.

Alternative A of the "Project", as has already been seen, expresses the view that the learner is in possession of the Truth from the beginning. The word "recollection" consequently characterizes the learner's task. The learner, born as a human, has merely to become through recollection what he already is. But Sartre's position avoids this alternative. The learner, from Sartre's perspective, begins with nothing except bare existence. Recollection therefore cannot help him in his ethical task since there is no original human design or "conception" or essence to be recalled. The learner is characterized as existing void of anything essential, latent or realized, up until the moment he becomes human through the act of moral choosing. Here we note how Sartre's position differs from the Socratic one. While they both agree that the tension of decision making and objective uncertainty belongs to the ethical sphere of life, Sartre has complicated the Socratic position with a decisively significant moment for the learner. Sartre's moment, flagged throughout his doctrine, is in the final analysis anything but "accidental, an occasion, a vanishing moment (Philosophical Fragments, p.13). So it would appear then that Sartre has opened a new alternative for the learner. The learner, devoid of essence from the beginning, creates in time the truth about his particular being through his actions. This position leads to the conclusion that each human learner is his own God and Teacher.

Let us now examine Sartre's answers to the following questions. They will test the existentialist doctrine by summoning answers to specific issues about the learner and his condition.

1. How does the individual learner go about creating his own essence?

2. Where does the essential knowledge about his task as a human come from?
3. How does he recognize himself as having accomplished his human task?

1. Since, according to Sartre, there is no human design laid down by Divine conception, the truth about the Learner's essence is non-existent until he conceives himself. Self-conception, in Sartre's doctrine, is identified with moral choosing. Freedom is determined by the foundation of all human value, consequently all avenues are open to the Learner who is seeking the Truth, or rather, creating the Truth about himself. Sartre offers an analogy:

...let us say that the moral choice is comparable to the construction of a work of art. \(^1\)

(Sartre's analogy is perhaps a good one since it ushers in for the second time a secular sense of the word "create"). This picture which the learner paints of himself with the brush-strokes of his moral commitments is to become the Truth about his existence as a human being. Sartre carries the analogy one step further:

Does one ever ask what is the picture that he ought to paint? As everyone knows, there is no-pre-defined picture to the composition of a picture, and the picture that ought to be made is precisely that which he will have made. As everyone knows, there are no aesthetic values a priori, but there are values which will appear in due course in the coherence of the picture, in the relation between the will to create and the finished work. No one can tell what the painting of tomorrow will be like; one cannot judge a painting until it is done.\(^2\)

In this way Sartre chooses to characterize the learner creating the truth about his particular being. The learner's ethical creation is completed when his existence is completed, just as when the finished canvas is unveiled.

2. In order to base his teaching "upon the truth," the Cartesian cogito serves as the "moment of self-attainment." It is the only principle, in

\(^1\)Existentialism, p.48. \(^2\)Ibid., p.49.
Sartre's view, which does not suppress the truth about man and his consciousness. This logical base is the absolute truth for the learner, i.e., the truth by which all the possibilities that are open to the learner in his life of moral choosing can be put into perspective.

In order to define the probable one must possess the true. Before there can be any truth whatever, then, there must be an absolute truth, and there is such a truth which is simple, easily attained and within the reach of everybody; it consists in one's immediate sense of one's self.

This essential knowledge which Sartre calls "one's immediate sense of one's self", and later "self-discovery", is the learner's ticket to the kind of existence he should be leading. This self-discovery by the learner is the knowledge of his condition or situation as a human. Sartre, as we have already seen, points out that this condition is one of freedom and responsibility. The task unfolds itself to the learner at the point of his self-discovery; it is ethical in nature by virtue of the human condition.

3. The ethical task laid upon the learner by virtue of his condition as a human and apprehended by the learner through the inwardness Sartre finds in the Cartesian cogito, will have to be actualized into deed. Sartre insists that others of his kind are the judges of the learner's success as regards the carrying out of his ethical task. It is through the mediation of another that the learner can, in truth, recognize the actualization of his task.

Thus the man who discovers himself directly in the cogito also discovers all the others, and discovers them as the condition of his own existence. He recognizes that he cannot be anything (in the sense in which one says one is spiritual, or that one is wicked or jealous) unless others recognize him as such. I cannot obtain any truth whatsoever about myself, except through the mediation of another. The other is indispensable to my existence, and equally so to any knowledge I can have of myself.2

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1Ibid., p.44.  
2Ibid., p.45.
Sartre's description of the learner and the essential knowledge which the learner must and can seek in himself is now more or less clear. Since there is no pre-determined essence or human nature, the learner must create it as one creates a work of art. It takes imagination and effort. The essential knowledge for an existence in conformity with the human condition or situation is, at bottom, self-knowledge. This self-knowledge dictates that the learner take up an ethical mode of existence. The learner's success as a human, that is, his success in the sphere of moral choosing and ethical action, is judged by the external act—judged by others. He recognizes himself as having carried his ethical task through when others have given him the nod. This is the moment when he has created, for himself, the truth about his existence as a human being.

* * * * * *

Let us now consider Sartre's doctrine from Climacus' perspective.

1. The human essence which the learner creates, the set of values which he has embraced in his life, by which he will have defined his existence as a human being, becomes in Sartre's reasoning an objective answer, collectively noted by those who have observed the learner's active life. The truth about the life of Sartre's learner is to be gathered from the collection of his moral choices and ethical deeds during the course of his life. The learner created this truth and will be responsible for it in the history books. Indeed this will be the truth about his existence (from at least one perspective). But how is the learner, an existing individual, related to the truth which only becomes understood at best when his existence ceases? The question of Truth as we have wanted to discuss it in this study is conceived as being raised by the existing individual—the learner, in order that he may exist in it.
Consequently, the truth about the learner's existence, i.e., the notion of truth with which Sartre is dealing, is not related to the manner in which the existing learner is raising the question of Truth. Originally we asked about the learner and the creation of his essence. At this point it could be said that Sartre is using the word essence in a private way—essence determined in retrospect. This probably accounts for the fact that we have been misled in our original comparison of position A's notion of "recollection" and Sartre's notion of self-creation. 

2. Sartre is very sketchy about what he calls the "absolute truth of self-discovery." "It consists," he says, "in one's immediate sense of one's self." I take this statement to represent the knowledge that a learner has regarding his condition as a human being. Climacus takes more time to understand this notion. In his way of thinking, self-knowledge, essential knowledge, is a product of inwardness and subjective reflection. What emerges in Climacus' description is not a notion of the universal human condition, as Sartre puts it, but rather the personal attitude the learner has toward his existence. The learner reviews what he really thinks it is worth to be that which he was given to be. In Climacus' view this is as close as the learner can come to a knowledge of his place in this existence. Further, the fact that the learner has, at bottom, an opinion of his worth and his ethical task implies that he would want his existence to accord with that opinion. The word ethical contains the notion of shaping one's existence or lifestyle to a principle or opinion. Climacus writes:

Ethics concentrates upon the individual, and ethically it is the task of every individual to become an entire man; just as it is the ethical presupposition that every man is born in such a condition that he can become one. 

1Postscript, p.309.
3. The judgment of moral choice is a tricky matter. Sartre, as we see in the quotation cited on p. 38, is inclined to regard the opinion of others as important in the sphere of the ethical. But as we have also seen, Sartre is concerned with the truth about the learner's existence when the existence is completed. A dead man is in no way ethical or unethical. We might ask then whether or not that which calls itself ethical belongs strictly to the individual's existence during his existence. Climacus would answer yes:

The ethical requirement is imposed upon each individual, and when it judges, it judges each individual by himself; only a tyrant or an impotent man is content to decimate. The ethical lays hold of each individual and demands that he refrain from all contemplation, especially of humanity and the world; for the ethical, as being the eternal, cannot be observed by an outsider.¹

When the question of Truth is raised by the existing individual learner the opinion of others can be of no help to him unless of course they help him understand more fully his own opinion about what it is worth to be that which he is. (Perhaps this could be called a Socratic kind of mediation.) From this perspective, the actions which consequently emerge from his personal opinion cannot be judged by an observer in any absolute way.

The real action is not the external act, but an internal decision in which the individual puts an end to the mere possibility and identifies himself with the content of his thought in order to exist in it. ²

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We have lapsed into some Postscript idioms, but that, I believe, has not been wasted energy. Let us now simplify our criticisms of the Existentialist doctrine and then show exactly where Sartre's thought fails to establish itself as independent of the "Project's" positions A and B. We find Sartre doing a lot of thinking for the learner and moving rather quickly past some areas of concern that the "Project" would understand as unknowable. He

¹Ibid., p. 284.
²Ibid., p. 302.
seems to know that the individual's task is to do projects that define his essence. This knowing takes on the shape of the Truth from Sartre's perspective. The "Project" stays back a step and merely pictures the learner as asking, "Have I a task?" What would Socrates say if told that his task is to manufacture an essence for himself? He would undoubtedly ask in return, "How do you know that?" So Sartre and the "Project" are not using "Truth" in the same sense. Secondly, we can distinguish Socratic self-knowledge from the abstract self-knowledge of the cogito. Socratic self-knowledge relates to that which is personal, not "universal." Furthermore, the error element in the "Project" has a role here. Sartre is again found to be assuming an answer to that which is unknown when he declares that self-knowledge can divulge the Truth.

Seen through these criticisms, the Existentialist doctrine looks like a bit of speculation regarding those serious questions which the learner might ask of himself. We can establish now that Sartre has a foot in position A because of his supposition that he, a mere man, can get at whatever truth there is about human existence.

Before there can be any truth whatever, then, there must be an absolute truth, and there is such a truth which is simple, easily attained and within the reach of everyone; it consists of one's immediate sense of one's self.

The doctrine however presented our thesis with a complication when Sartre was found to put his foot in alternative B as well. He presented his opinions on

\[\text{1} \text{The learner in his moral choices only succeeds in showing, and rather obscurely in many instances, what he thinks he ought to be like.}\]

\[\text{2} \text{Existentialism, p.44.}\]
the essential matters as though they were the Truth, and, assuming the role of the Teacher, he took his place in the catbird’s seat. There he made several pronouncements:

There is no power which stands behind our creation.

We all have a task—to manufacture an essence for ourselves.

Self-knowledge can divulge the Truth.

We will all be eternally responsible for our existence.

As regards the "Project's" dichotomy once again, we find that Sartre's seeming escape from position A into position B is, at bottom, a tendency to present as knowledge what a human is in no position to know. This however only indicates that Sartre is either more than human or taking an indiscriminate turn in thought. Similarly, he seems to escape from position B by his atheism, but this is also one of the things that man cannot know for sure.

And finally, what about Sartre's seeming escape from position A by asserting that the learner is not in possession of anything essential from the beginning (if we do assume some similarity between what Climacus calls Truth and what Sartre calls human essence)? Well, if Sartre subsequently is capable of figuring out for himself the "universal human condition" and the "absolute truth in his immediate sense of himself"—the two things necessary for the "moment of self-attainment," then we find this escape from A not very convincing.

Does Sartre then offer a clear position that is neither A nor B?

The conclusions that we have arrived at show that Sartre does not establish such a position. Our basic question is whether we are logically forced to open a new category (C) for Sartre. If he merely vacillates between A and B, the necessity for a (C) seems questionable.
CHAPTER IV

LOGICAL POSITIVISM: THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEANING AND NONSENSE

I will now attempt to deal with the ideas of a thinker whose approach to philosophy differs from those discussed in the two previous chapters. A. J. Ayer, a contemporary, belonged in his early years to the school of philosophy known as Logical Positivism, which argues that the philosopher is not in a position to furnish speculative truths. In his book Language, Truth and Logic, Ayer attempts to establish what the purpose and method of philosophical enquiry should be. His course is marked first by the rejection of metaphysical statements that claim meaningful insight into a transcendent reality. Further along he offers a critique of ethics and theology. He concludes by attempting to resolve some specific long-lasting philosophical disputes.

Our thesis is concerned with Climacus' "Project," and seeks to establish that positions A and B are exhaustive. Thus far we have examined two thinkers who at first seem to occupy a third position, yet their final positions have been found to fall within, or else oscillate between, the "Project's" alternatives. Ayer exerts a different strain on the "Project" since he does not seek out possibilities beyond A and B but seems simply to turn his back on the entire sphere of concern. That is, a philosopher who pronounces great segments of metaphysical, ethical and religious "truths" as cognitively meaningless would appear prime facie to occupy a position different from both A and B, and to be therefore a living refutation of Climacus' claim that
A and B are exhaustive.

I would like, in this chapter, to summarize Ayer's position and the basic insights applicable to the task at hand. I will not attempt to support or refute his position since this would constitute a lengthy discussion by itself as well as lead us outside our immediate concern. I will assume that his critical insights have validity in so far as they pertain to a certain class of statements and hypotheses. As a consequence, we will be led to ask questions like these of the "Project of Thought:"

If all talk about ethico-religious truth and the like is cognitively meaningless, what about the "Project's" discussion of the Truth?

Is the "Project's" basic concern a metaphysical one?

Does the "Project," at bottom, belong to a type of ethical or theological enquiry?

Ayer begins by putting all factual propositions into two categories; meaningful ones and nonsensical ones.

We may begin by criticizing the metaphysical thesis that philosophy affords us knowledge of a reality transcending the world of science and common sense.¹

The author recalls Kant as one who also dismisses transcendent metaphysics but did so on different grounds. Kant, the author submits, accused metaphysicians of ignoring the boundaries beyond which human reason cannot safely venture. He held that the human understanding is so constituted that it runs against contradictions when it attempts to deal with things-in-themselves, or in other words, deal with a transcendent reality. The positivist

on the other hand, holds that the impossibility of a transcendent metaphysic in a "matter of logic", a phrase that helps us to understand the positivist's perspective. The metaphysician is accused of disobeying the rules which govern the significant use of the language. In other words, it is not the presence of contradictions that renders metaphysics meaningless to the positivist, but rather the very sentences which embody metaphysical claims. The rule which these sentences disobey is seen in Ayer's definition of the metaphysical sentence.

We may accordingly define a metaphysical sentence as a sentence which purports to express a genuine proposition, but does, in fact, express neither a tautology nor an empirical hypothesis. And as tautologies and empirical hypotheses form the entire class of significant propositions, we are justified in concluding that all metaphysical assertions are nonsensical.  

The criterion of verifiability is the test whereby anyone can distinguish meaningful statements from nonsensical ones without having to consult Ayer's definitions of the words 'tautology' and 'empirical hypothesis'.

We say that a sentence is factually significant to any given person, if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express—that is, if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false.  

Ayer might then be described as assuming a position as overseer of human language-practice. His thesis aims to eliminate instances of meaningless talk by pointing to some bodies of enquiry that ultimately lead only to nonsensical language use. Further, Ayer attempts to build the criterion of verifiability into philosophical procedures to serve as a safeguard against wasted effort. As we turn now to an examination of Ayer's critique of ethical

\[1\text{Language, Truth and Logic, p. 35.} \quad 2\text{Ibid., p. 102-3.}\]
and theological statements we will recall Climacus' learner as one in pursuit
of ethico-religious knowledge or "essential" knowledge.

As regards ethical statements Ayer makes a calm prediction at the be-
ginning of the chapter—his thoughts grounded in the verifiability principle:

We shall set ourselves to show that in so far as statements of value
are significant, they are ordinary 'scientific' statements; and that
in so far as they are not scientific, but are simply expressions of
emotion which can be neither true nor false.¹

Now, since ethical statements are not, as such, "scientific," they cannot be
cognitively meaningful until they are translated.

We are enquiring whether statements of ethical value can be translated
into statements of empirical fact.²

Ayer dismisses arguments which contend that a translation of that sort is poss-
able. The validity of the ethical judgement, he argues, cannot be determined
empirically since ethical philosophy deals with, in his words, "descriptive
ethical symbols" not with "normative ethical symbols."³ For example, the
expression "X is wrong" can have meaning as an ordinary sociological propos-
ition if X is a repugnant action within a particular society. In that case
its truth or falsity can be empirically determined. On the other hand, if
the symbol "wrong" purports to describe an action as "unethical"—running
contrary to good human conduct in general, it can not, in this case, express
an empirical proposition at all. In light of the criterion of verifiability,
then, statements that express such ethical claims are necessarily void of
factual or literal significance. They have no objective validity. Their
function is purely "emotive."⁴ Since ethical statements are mere expressions
of emotion, one is forced to the inevitable conclusion that it does not make

¹Language, Truth and Logic, p.102-3. ²Ibid., p.104. ³Ibid., p.105
⁴Ibid., p.108.
sense to speak of a "true system of morals." Consequently, the study of
the moral habits and moral feelings of a given individual or a given group
of people can be the only legitimate enquiry in connection with ethical
issues, statements, propositions and claims.

This enquiry falls wholly within the scope of the existing social
sciences. 2

Ayer devotes the second half of Chapter Six to a critical examination
of theology and the possibility of religious knowledge. He reminds us of his
treatment of metaphysics. It appears that the term "God" is a metaphysical
concept by the simple fact that when one talks about God one talks about a
transcendent being. Consequently, all utterances about God's existence or
God's nature are nonsensical. Now, with respect to the question of the possi-
bility of religious knowledge, Ayer once again employs his criterion of veri-
fiability. In speaking of the "mystic" who claims cognition of religious
truths, Ayer says:

The fact that he cannot reveal what he "knows," or even himself
device an empirical test to validate his "knowledge," shows that his state of mystical intuition is not a genuine cognitive state. 3

The mystic's statements thus receive the same criticism as those of the
ethicist. They do not express anything factual or meaningful about the ex-
ternal reality of this world. They offer nothing more than indirect informa-
tion about the mental and emotional condition of the given mystic or ethicist.

Let us return now to the main thread of the thesis. Seen through the
positivist doctrine, the particular concern which the "Project" describes
the learner as being involved in becomes one of nonsensical rumination. Ayer's

1Language, Truth and Logic, p.112. 2Ibid., p.112. 3Ibid., p.119
thesis, it would seem, makes the following pronouncements on the learner's activity:

The learner, in raising the question of Truth, is attempting to come to grips with a transcendent reality. All talk about that is cognitively meaningless.

When the learner seeks to establish what he ought to be like, the statements that disclose his leanings on the issue will necessarily be devoid of factual or literal significance since the conclusions are not verifiable.

Any thoughts or utterances about a God or a divine Teacher are nonsensical since "there cannot be any transcendent truths of religion."¹

Now if these pronouncements are in fact reasonable, then we must assume that the "Project's" effort to deal with the individual's relation to the Truth dichotomously is a mere froth of empty words. The exhaustive and exclusive claim of positions A and B will therefore dissolve.

We can begin our task of shielding the learner's enquiry and considerations from the positivist doctrine by recalling the premise of Ayer's argument—that testability is a necessary condition for meaningfulness.² His thoughts, in demanding that condition, seem to be in order when we consider, for example, the realm of nature studies. Science begins with the positing of a physical cause which seeks to account for a puzzling fact. Until that 'empirical hypothesis' is tested the so-called 'cause' can claim to be little more than someone's hunch. The demand for testability functions in the realm of physical explanations as a practical method of concluding fact from hunch.

¹Language, Truth and Logic, pp. 117-118.

²I will omit, for obvious reasons, inclusion of the second half of Ayer's thesis, that being his admission of the analytic statements of mathematics and formal logic into the class of meaningful propositions.
And so to give Ayer's position credence, from this perspective, we need only cite the example of someone saying that it was a ghost that caused Smith's death. This would be a nonsensical hypothesis since the ghost could never be reached for questioning by the suicide squad (or by the coroner for that matter).

Ayer's doctrine however begins to cause confusion when unlimited range is assigned to his criterion of verifiability. It would appear that Ayer is asking his reader to treat any proposition as though it were an 'empirical hypothesis.' But language is composed of a great variety of contexts dependent on who is putting the sentence together and for what purpose. Let us consider, for a moment, sentences like these:

(a) God created every living creature.
(b) You have an immortal soul.
(c) This man should not receive the death penalty despite society's cry for it.
(d) We ought to remember the poor in our thanksgiving.

These statements belong to the contexts of natural theology, Scripture and ethics. Seen through Ayer's stipulation regarding meaningful language usage they would be classified as nonsensical since they cannot be brought under the light of verification. Ayer's suggestions are however both correct and yet erroneous--dependent upon the respective contexts in which the statements rightfully occur. Sentence (a) has been described as an hypothesis by those who think it to be an explanation for the presence of the world (and all that is in it). Ayer's demand for testability in that case is reasonable. In another context where the writer of that sentence is only professing the personal view that he regards himself as a creature, Ayer's stipulation will miss the writer's employment of language. Similarly, sentence (b) could easily be classified as a bit of nonsense if someone were
inclined to try testing it out. But who has the authority to pronounce that statement meaningless for someone who privately entertains it as a possibility in an area where our experience offers us no knowledge? The statement in such a context only raises the possibility that our individual existences have an eternal significance. Sentences (c) and (d) belong to the sphere of ethics. Ayer rashly concludes that these kinds of statements have no (scientific) meaning, with the exception of their analysis by someone trained in the existing social sciences. Again, within the domain of science he is right. But the conclusion that such declaratives concerning matters of the deepest importance are nonsensical in all contexts appears to be grossly erroneous.

Now what about the learner's employment of language in his attempt to come to grips with the Truth? The significance of his existence in any eternal reckoning cannot be determined from an earthly perspective. This Ayer knows! The learner will not be able to test any conclusion he might fancy. Does this constitute meaninglessness? If it purports to be a scientific undertaking we will be forced to answer in the affirmative, in agreement with Ayer. But the "Project's" learner is not engaged in an objective enquiry. Conversely, his questioning is set in a climate of passionate inwardness, and his findings, which will always remain objective uncertainties, will reside in a corner of his consciousness where the notion of testability never enters. He is not a metaphysicist in pursuit of a transcendent reality—he is an individual concerned with the question of the worth of his existence. The question is asked privately and is answered in privacy.

When the learner tries to decide what he ought to be like his concern is ethical in nature. Again, it is important to note the difference in the
nature of the questioning between the learner and, as it were, the ethicist. The kind of person we usually think of when we hear the title "ethicist;" and the sort of thinker Ayer has in mind, is one who discusses human virtue and exhorts others toward that. The ethical statements which he makes run him into problems with Ayer because his statements are not testable. Those statements cannot be demonstrated to be either true or false. We would say that there is no earthly means of establishing the ultimate value of his insights. If it is purported to be a piece of systematic and objective truth it cannot help but limp.

The ethical sphere, as the "Project" alludes to it, occupies that part of the individual that makes some special kinds of decisions—ones that he doesn't have the time or the facility to test, because they concern his day to day treatment of himself and others. Ought he to take a role in that sort of activity? Isn't it reasonable for him to insist on that? Should he perhaps be more patient with his children? This is a sample of ethical issues raised and answered inside the learner's own consciousness. Their context differs significantly from that of the declaratives which the ethicist is inclined to use. Consequently, as concerns the learner's ethical reflections, the criterion of verifiability has no application.

The last point we must discuss concerns hypothesis B of the "Project. It would appear an insurmountable task to convince Ayer of its meaningfulness in the light of all the theology contained in it along with the manner in which it is inclined to describe the transcendent. We will note, however, that the verifiability principle does apply at this level, since there are observations brought to light by the learner's dialogue with himself, relevant to the determination of the truth or falsehood of the charge of Error.
The charge that he is in Error might do little more at first than remind the learner of Sunday mornings in his youth when, quite frankly, he understood virtually nothing of the teacher’s “God-talk.” But now, being far more concerned with, as it were, the Truth, the charge might take on meaning. The learner, one who has inspected his thoughts carefully, and arrived at a knowledge of what he really thinks of his own existence, has been touched recently, ever so lightly, with a doubt about carrying through the task he has prepared for. He has had an occasional hint of a feeling of low worth. “Ah—they are insignificant moments that even the most courageous undergo,” he decides. But this decision is not really final for he remembers the New Testament story, and is struck with the idea that things may be far more serious than he wants to admit.

“Perhaps the periodic feelings of low worth and these temporary uncertainties are no mere manifestations of so-called human frailty. They indicate a consciousness completely infected by wrong conclusions and bitter feelings about this earthly existence of yours. In time, this infection will strip you of more and more self-confidence and apparent fruition until the pain of being yourself becomes unbearable. And there is nothing on earth, no words from a wise counsellor, no new psychological techniques, no restructuring of your life-style, that can help you.”

The charge of Error will come at the learner in a vocabulary and style that fancies his personal situation and way of speaking, for in order that the learner respond to the charge he must significantly internalize its message. The charge is indeed serious but even while it is being received, the learner is aware that the one, according to the story, who has issued the charge of Error is also the one who claims the power to free the learner of the condition of Error and promises the same merely for the asking.
Taken seriously, the idea that he does not know what he is really supposed to be like will burden the learner with guilt when he asks himself why he, a creature whose nature it is to know, is ignorant of such essential knowledge. As the guilt pang hits home the immediate inclination will be one of escape from the charge and the guilt, back to position A where he was free of both discomforts. But the consciousness of his own guilt remains with him even in flight, for upon his return to A he blames himself for his use of time in deliberation. He is ethically responsible for the time spent that should have been devoted to the 'task' he has set for himself.

He finds himself back considering more seriously now the charge of Error, for the last experience has prompted at least a part of him to think that something is wrong with his old way of conceiving his existence. He sees more clearly now that there is a completely different way of viewing human existence than he could ever have imagined. All the while the other side of him seeks to rescue the whole from this absurd alternative. It longs for the old Socratic confidence. But the damage has already been done, and the learner is now at war with himself, one foot in A and the other in B, intuiting that time will fault the ground between the two.

A decision seems to be in order, but then again, how can the learner possibly return to A relaxed and innocent? The learner is a changed man from his old self, now tied up with a new set of unknowings and uncertainties. Sometimes he is overcome with resentment and bitterness toward the one who charged him with Error and started all this in the first place. At other times he is inclined to submit in faith to that one and make a fresh beginning.

The door leading to the consciousness of Error is now open. Should
the learner enter, hypothesis would, for that individual, be verified.

To summarize, Ayer pronounces a great segment of metaphysics, ethical and religious truths as cognitively meaningless. It appeared, before our examination of his doctrine, that anyone holding such an opinion should be found to occupy a position outside that contained in Climacus' dichotomy. We began by looking at his doctrine and found it to be in order. Upon considering the dynamics of human language, however, we were led to the conclusion that Ayer's stipulation regarding meaningful language usage can lead to confusion when unlimited range is assigned to the verifiability principle. It became reasonable to suggest, when speaking of the realm of ethical-religious concerns, that the meaningfulness or insignificance of a statement is largely dependent upon who is putting the sentence together and for what purpose. In short, the verifiability criterion was found to miss the learner's employment of language in his personal ethical deliberations. On the other hand, the verifiability principle would be useful to the learner in his encounter with hypothesis B of the "Project" if we appeal to what Ayer calls "the weaker sense of verification." To demonstrate this we offered a sample case of a learner considering the charge of Error.

Logical Positivism is a philosophical exercise which seeks clarity on issues basically unrelated to the concern raised by the "Project." Therefore we cannot be expected to place representative Ayer in either of the "Project's" positions, and can thus conclude this investigation of his doctrine.

1The weaker sense of verification" is phrased on p. 38 of Language, Truth and Logic in the following manner: "Would any observations be relevant to the determination of its (a statement) truth or falseness?"
CHAPTER V
EPITOME

It was our prescribed intention from the beginning of this study to demonstrate the exhaustiveness and exclusiveness of positions A and B of the "Project of Thought." Our approach was inductive as we examined in turn three thinkers whose selected works promised to challenge the claim of our thesis. These challenges served to illuminate the "Project's" philosophical depths but failed in the end to break Climacus' dichotomy.

The kind of truth at issue in the "Project" came to be called "essential knowledge" as it was understood to belong to the ethico-religious sphere of an individual's life. Some examples were spelled out in the introduction to this study.

Both "Project" and present study have dealt with the question of the individual's relation to this essential knowledge. Now that that position has been answered and the answer defended I will submit my opinion regarding Climacus' purpose in raising the question. He is indirectly guiding his reader to see clearly the key feature of "essential truth." The Truth pertains in a personal way to an existing human subject.

Climacus, it seems to me, was keenly aware of a tendency among some thinkers to confuse two spheres of concern that ought to be kept distinct. The class of propositions relating to Socratic concern comprises one sphere. Again, it pertains to the individual and his debt to himself as an existing man. The other sphere of truth-claims, systematic in nature, are of the objective type that one or a few men can discover and pass on to others.
Climacus sought to revisit, along with his reader, the border between objective and Socratic concerns.

This study has offered some examples of the tendency to confuse these distinct spheres of concern. All three thinkers which we employed to challenge the "Project" exhibited a degree of awkwardness when their thought was found to approach the line between the spheres.

In the case of Nietzsche's considerations it would perhaps be fair to say that overexuberance to a large part was responsible for his ignoring the boundary line. We have already seen how his theory on the evolution of the human consciousness promised a cure for Socratic ignorance. That theory, we observed, related only accidentally to the particular existing man. Let us look briefly at another example of Nietzschean exuberance leading him to assume a systematic answer to the Socratic question of the individual's place in eternity. Here is a poetical rendering of his doctrine of the eternal recurrence—one that he himself called "the most scientific of all possible hypotheses":

Now, if some day or night, a demon were to sneak after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life, as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh...must return to you—all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over and over—and you with it, a dust grain of dust!" Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: "You are a god, and never did I hear anything more godlike!" If this thought were to gain possession

1Friedrich Nietzsche, Will to Power., Sect. 55.
of you, it would change you as you are, or perhaps crush you. The question in each and everything "do you want this once more and innumerable times more?" would weigh upon your actions as the greatest stress. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation...?  

The doctrine offers a delicate bit of deduction from the scientific assumption that the universe possesses a finite amount of energy, occupies a finite space and has an infinite amount of time. That may or may not be in order. Science has the time to deal dialectically with that problem. Conversely, it is the individual alone who can entertain the ethical dimension of the doctrine which purports to offer him insight as to what he personally should expect in eternity and act accordingly now. But this doctrine can only relate to the individual's Socratic reflections as another of many possibilities. As such it does not bear the stamp of essential truth.

As a possibility, however, within the Socratic sphere, it might be noted that the scientific dimension of the doctrine seems to get in the way of its ethical challenge to the individual. We know that science does not have a consciousness apart from the human voice that articulates its truth-claims. And existence offers no man any certain understanding of the eternal.

Sartre arose in this study as another example of one failing to comprehend the profundity of the unknown within the ethico-religious sphere. Is there a deity behind our conception? Is there divine purpose? Who on earth can know in an objective way? Yet Sartre denies flatly any such possibilities. Seen through the "Project" and this study Sartre's assumption becomes an example of indiscriminate thought. Led by his passionate

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1 Friedrich Nietzsche, The Joyful Wisdom, sect. 341.
rejection of anything religious he creates a doctrine for all of mankind
premised by his personal position.

Ayer, conversely, emerged in our study as one chronically aware of
a kind of boundary line between the spheres of cognitive concern. But the
awareness is carried to an extreme by the logical positivist when his reason
leads him to equate the "objectively uncertain" with nonsense. His reader
can stand a good chance of sharing the confusion that results when humans
are categorically denied the option of entertaining unverifiable personal
considerations. It is reasonable to draw the line on Ayer when we see
that he pretends to know that personal and ethical considerations are
nonsense.

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To summarize, the kind of knowledge we have come to call essential
knowledge or Truth (or wisdom in everyday usage) pertains to an existing
individual in a personal way. It is the type of truth that one man cannot
pass on to another. Climacus, a philosopher, undertakes the project of
determining the individual's relation to the Truth and emerges with a
dichotomy--either he discovers it by and from himself or he is in the
state of Error.

But when the key feature of essential truth is kept in clear sight
position A of the "Project" is merely an articulation of the obvious.
Position B is a rewording of the New Testament's charge of Error on the
existing subject, underlining the fact that the religious experience is
a personal one. Consequently, the exhaustiveness and mutual exclusiveness
of those alternatives become self-evident.

When a thinker purports to have some direct information on particulars
within the Socratic sphere of concern and passes it on to others he puts
himself in a position where he will appear to escape the "Project's" dichotomy. Nietzsche's genetic theory on the function of human consciousness, Sartre's wholesale atheism, and Ayer's ultimate pronouncement that personal ethical and religious considerations are nonsensical are but a few examples of unwarranted escapes from dichotomy. To establish a third position a thinker must pretend to be sure about something that an existing subject is in no position to know. It is Climacus' view that a disservice is being done to the reader when he is deflected through such pretenses from his personal Socratic development.

On the positive side, the "Project" offers the encouragement of humility to both teacher and learner. Woody Guthrie, an American song-writer, said that he wanted to be known as the man who told people something they already knew. It is that kind of modesty that would characterize the model teacher. And when we as learners embark on a pilgrimage in the land of ethical and religious concern we can expect to face a pathless terrain governed by objective uncertainty. Even miracles lie within the range of the possible.
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