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Kierkegaard and the Feminine Self

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Kierkegaard's writings offer us a rich and often devastatingly insightful analysis of human selfhood; indeed, it could well be argued that the core of the Authorship is built around the question of how one becomes one's true and best self, considered in ethical and religious terms. There is, however, an ambiguity in much of Kierkegaard's writing regarding how women fit into this picture. On the one hand, he appears to be elaborating a distinctly egalitarian or even androgynist ideal, and on the other, he appears to be excluding women from the possibility of attaining full selfhood. Thus he argues in the same work that, essentially, there is no distinction between man and woman (SD, 49n.), and also that woman is constituted by a "lower synthesis" than that of man (SD, 67). What are we to make of this? Is this simply a rather banal expression of culturally-conditioned attitudes, inadequately overcome by a more considered reflection, or are we really seeing the indications of a much more deeply embedded, and even systematic, philosophical misogyny?

In the following, I shall explore Kierkegaard's views on the nature of the feminine self, and offer some answers to the question of just how women fit into Kierkegaard's analysis of human selfhood. In the process, I wish to consider the question of whether Kierkegaard does, in fact, present us with an androgynist ideal. This question arises for a number of reasons. First of all, given the ways in which he distinguishes "feminine" and "masculine" characteristics, this may be his one escape from the charge of misogyny, that is, if what he is really arguing for is the recognition of the necessity for each human being of putting together in her or himself a balance of very different, though equally essential, human characteristics or capacities. And,

on the face of it, his remarks concerning the essential similarity of man and woman would seem to lend support to such an interpretation.

From a more general point of view, whether a feminist philosophy of religion would necessarily be concerned to establish such an ideal is certainly open to a great deal more discussion. However, we might well be disposed to consider the appropriateness of androgyny as an ideal of selfhood if we also happened to favour two basic assumptions. First, that the differences between women and men which at the present seem to be so obvious are in some ultimate sense unessential or unimportant--in other words, that all human beings are, as such, and in all the ways which finally matter, fundamentally the same kind of creature. This sort of claim may well make more sense in a religious context (or, more specifically, certain kinds of Christian context) than in a secular one, since it is precisely the contrast of the human with the divine which is supposed to show the vanity of human distinctions. Secondly, one would have to be inclined to suppose that these distinctions are worth overcoming, particularly if doing so allows us to perfect our relationship to the divine.

These, suffice it to say, are large assumptions, which themselves raise a number of additional issues: for example, exactly what human characteristics or capacities are important in developing the God-relation? This becomes at once a more pressing and a more difficult question if one also accepts that most or all such characteristics and capacities are contingently acquired. I do not propose to explore all of these issues here. But it should be pointed out that the two assumptions just stated have a particular pertinence to the Christian context within which Kierkegaard pursues his discussion. Insofar as the relationship to the divine is the most important one which a human being can have, and is that which determines the boundaries of ideal selfhood, the contingently human has its significance primarily as that which is to be overcome in favour of this relationship. Consequently, Kierkegaard's

understanding of the self, and of what is required for a human being to become a true and fully developed self, depends upon a particular understanding of the divine, and of the nature of the relation in which human beings stand to the divine.

Having said all this, however, one of the things which I shall argue in the following is that, although Kierkegaard does seem to make the previous two assumptions, it is also the case that he makes a number of other assumptions concerning the respective natures of men and women which are in conflict with the former. Thus, I intend to show that, in fact, Kierkegaard does not present us with an androgynist ideal of selfhood, though he does provide us with some important foundations for such an ideal.

I

The human self, for Kierkegaard, is a synthesis of several pairs of complementary elements: finite and infinite, possibility and necessity, temporal and eternal. What this means for a human person in more practical terms is, in the first case, that one can exercise the infinity of one's will, feeling, and imagination in order to extend oneself beyond the finite limitations of one's actual physical being, while yet remaining anchored within them. That is, we can have knowledge and awareness of things which we have never ourselves experienced directly; thus, we can understand another person's situation, we can write and appreciate fiction and poetry, we can invent new devices, and so on. In the second case, one exists in the natural world, subject to the necessities of physical causes and influences, the whole complex of natural inevitabilities, but at the same time, not all of one's existence is determined by forces outside of one's own control--one has possibility beyond the statistically predictable. So, even if it should be the case that our life or death, poverty or prosperity, is in the hands of others, still we ourselves determine what meaning this has for us as the particular individuals which we ourselves are. Finally, each person has a temporal history, but for each of us, our

existence expresses more than merely an extended spatio-temporal location. Our definition, our peculiar identities, amount to more than the immediately traceable details of our historical, geographical, and sociological itineraries. This "more" is the eternal in us, and it can be represented in us by love, the good, ethical life, or the search for God. As individuals we are not simply units, making up a discrete quantity of a species--our significance includes but also transcends the biochemical transience of temporal existence.

These elements are said to be held in relation to each other by spirit, and this relating of one element to another can be either unconscious (where spirit is said to be "dreaming" (BA, 41-4, 48-9, 91)) or self-conscious (the self relates "itself to itself in the relation" (SD, 13)). This question of the consciousness of spirit is absolutely crucial, since in the former case, we do not really have a self in the proper sense of the word, and it is only in the latter case that one can even begin the task of becoming one's ideal self, the existential task which confronts every human being. It is also in the latter case that we have spirit manifesting itself as spirit--an expression which needs some explanation. "Spirit", of course, is not a *thing* (like some kind of ghost, if ghosts are things); it is a relation. Spirit is, essentially, freedom. When spirit expresses itself, the self has now become aware of itself as a free (as well as actual) being. That is, the self becomes conscious for the first time of its own relation to itself, of its parts to each other, and thus of both its actual existence (the way it is) and its possible existence (the way it might be): it is free, which it can only be if it is self-conscious. And freedom in the first instance is simply this awareness/consciousness of the relationship between actuality and possibility in oneself. In the second instance it is the attitude one takes to this consciousness. Only at this point can an individual become an ethical being. Thus spirit/freedom, self-consciousness, and ethical existence are inseparable.

The self-conscious person is able to self-consciously affect the relationship, or balance,

of the elements of the synthesis to one another. One can self-consciously lose oneself (one's everydayness) in imagination (infinity), and so on. But this sort of thing can also happen unconsciously. That is to say, consciously or not, one can get out of balance with oneself. Instead of an equilibrium of essential elements or capacities, the self leans to one side or the other of its constitutive synthesis: too much necessity, not enough possibility, etc. This, in Anti-Climacus' terminology, amounts to despair, and clearly the psychologically healthy self, the self which is constituted as it ought, is one which is in perfect equilibrium--a state which will also require self-consciousness to attain and maintain. All the forms of despair which Anti-Climacus enumerates involve the human individual's failure to keep in equilibrium their actual and ideal selves.[1] He makes a number of distinctions, but only one concerns us here, namely, that between "masculine" and "feminine" despair.

"Masculine" despair, as Anti-Climacus defines it, is despair in defiance, it is "in despair to will to be oneself" (SD, 67), whereas "feminine" despair is despair in weakness, or "in despair not to will to be oneself" (SD,49).[2] These designations of "masculine"/"feminine" hinge, in the first instance, on the characterizations of these kinds of despair as involving in the one case self-assertion or egocentricity, and in the other, weakness or (self-)flight. In the second instance, of course, they hinge upon the association of these characteristics with men and with women, respectively.

Anti-Climacus himself expresses some reservations about this association, and offers the observation that some women may, in exceptional cases, manifest masculine despair, and vice versa. He is describing ideal categories, and ideals are rarely encountered in the real world

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[1]Note that "ideal" can have two senses in talking about the self: what one *can* be (a possible self which one projects for oneself, which may or may not be optimal for the self one actually is) and what one *ought* to be (the self which is one's true self; a perfect balance of actual and possible selves).

[2]SD, 49. These distinctions are echoed in LT, 61.

(SD, 49n.). Nevertheless, he goes on to argue, there *are* characteristics definitive of woman and of man which are distinct and which justify these designations.

> However much more tender and sensitive woman may be than man, she has neither the egotistical concept of the self nor, in a decisive sense, intellectuality. But the feminine nature is devotedness, givingness, and it is unfeminine if it is not that....Devotedness is the one unique quality that woman has, and that is also why nature took it upon herself to be her guardian. (SD, 49n.)

Woman is characterized by the natural, i.e., instinct and the immediate, and by a need to fulfill herself, to become her true self, through devotedness--woman becomes herself by giving herself. Man, by contrast, is characterized by reflection, by spirit (SD, 67), and fulfills himself by taking hold of himself, i.e., self-assertion, putting himself apart from the immediate.

> In devotion she loses herself, and only then is she happy, only then is she herself; a woman who is happy without devotion, that is, without giving herself, no matter to what she gives it, is altogether unfeminine. A man also gives himself--and he is a poor kind of man who does not do so--but his self is not devotion (this is the expression for feminine substantive devotion), nor does he gain his self by devotion, as woman in another sense does; he has himself. He gives himself, but his self remains behind as a sober awareness of devotion, whereas woman, with genuine femininity, abandons herself, throws her self into that to which she devotes herself. (SD, 49n.)

As Sylvia Walsh's discussion of feminine and masculine despair points out (Walsh 1987), the two classes of despair correspond less to separate categories than to a continuum of despair, one which begins with the most rudimentary consciousness of despair, and ends with the most profound (and demonic) defiance of God. At each period in this continuum the self has a more intense awareness of self and its despairing condition. Greater intensity corresponds to greater self-discernment and self-individuation (or as Anti-Climacus would have it: "the more consciousness, the more self" (SD, 29)). Feminine despair is associated with the earlier portion of this continuum, where there is a relative lack of individuation; masculine despair is associated with an *excess* of this self-differentiation. This leads Walsh to the observation that, whereas "feminine" despair (the failure to will to be oneself) is a lack of

"masculine" self-assertion (i.e., in effect, willing oneself), "masculine" despair--defiance--"results from an individual's unwillingness to adopt a feminine mode of selfhood" (Walsh 1987, 128). The defiant individual asserts himself, or rather, the self he wishes to make himself into, against God, refusing to accept himself as the self which God made him to be. The cure is for him to learn to yield that self which he wills to be, to submit himself to God, and allow God to teach him what he is to will for himself. He needs to become more "feminine", less "masculine".[3]

As Walsh puts it, the "pathway to selfhood thus includes both masculine and feminine modes of relating, and the possibility of going astray on this path arises in corresponding forms of despair....Thus the feminine mode is inextricably involved in the process of becoming a self" (Walsh 1987, 128-9). Or, as we might also express it, the equilibrium which is necessary for the psychological health of the human self includes a balance of both feminine and masculine "modes of relating" to oneself and to one's environment. As it happens, Anti-Climacus describes the condition of not being in despair, i.e., faith, as follows: "in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it" (SD, 14, 49). This formula seems clearly to incorporate both the assertive self-choice which is associated with the "masculine", and the self-less confidence which characterizes the "feminine". Hence it would appear that the ideal of human selfhood which is being presented to us in ***The Sickness Unto Death*** is one of psychological androgyny, one which holds both feminine and masculine qualities to be equally valuable and equally necessary for a fully developed and healthy human individual, of either sex.

However, although this is in many ways an attractive conclusion, there are at least two

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[3]Cf. Judge William's comments to "A" concerning his wife's assessment of the latter's character: "She sees very well that you lack a certain degree of womanliness. You are too proud to be able to devote yourself." EE2, 326.

major reasons to suspect the validity of this conclusion. The first has to do with the weight of the characterizations of woman and the feminine throughout the Authorship; the second has to do with the two-tiered structure of the process of acquiring ideal selfhood, i.e., the fact that one has two relations to effect: that to oneself, and that to God. As I shall show, there is reason to suspect that if woman in reality bore any close resemblance to her characterization in the Authorship, she could never carry out the full task of selfhood--or at least, not nearly so well as man.

Anti-Climacus himself observes that femininity constitutes a "lower synthesis" (SD, 67). This is not explained in ***The Sickness Unto Death***, though we can surmise that he is perhaps referring to the relative lack of consciousness which is present in the kind of despair which is designated as "feminine". It should be noted that woman does not, on this analysis, lack spirit altogether. To be a synthesis at all requires spirit (see SD, 13-7), but it would appear that, for Kierkegaard, spirit in woman does not (or rarely) manifest itself *as spirit*: spirit in woman stays "dreaming". This also means that woman never (or rarely) becomes a truly self-conscious self, one which is fully aware of itself in reflection, and thus one which can participate in ethical society as a full and equal member. Woman is, in effect, nature's innocent (even when she strays). Consequently, as we have seen, "feminine" despair, like "masculine" despair, requires some degree of consciousness, but the consciousness involved could be quite minimal. The important point is that the degree of consciousness *increases* with "masculine" despair.

If we explore the rest of the Authorship, we will find a near constant set of associations between woman and the feminine, on the one hand, and absence of spirit and consciousness, especially self-consciousness, on the other. The pivotal association, however, is with *nature*.

In the early aesthetic works there is a good deal of talk about woman, much of it of perhaps questionable sincerity. Aside from the circumstances of Kierkegaard's personal life, the poetic character of the pseudonyms renders the status of their remarks hypothetical. After all, it could be argued: "of course Johannes the Seducer says *that* about women--he's a *seducer*!" Poetic licence aside, however, there is a high degree of substantive agreement among the pseudonyms and Kierkegaard himself regarding the nature of woman, although there is some disagreement on the subject of just what significance woman and her nature have for man.

We find in these works that the aesthetic, and "the aesthetic stage of existence", are associated as metaphysical categories with certain other such categories. The most important of these, and the one which has the most profound significance for the aesthetic mode of existence is Immediacy. Those who are immediate in their existence are governed by mood, feeling, beauty, sensuousness, passion, etc. They are, at one extreme, wholly determined by their environment--they *react* immediately. This is not to say that such persons are mindless automata, but they are incapable of determining their own actions independently of contingent circumstances. The idea of *mood* is invaluable here: if one's surroundings determine one's mood, and whether one acts in such and such a way is dependent on one's mood...then one is not significantly separate from one's environment or milieu. The motives for a person's actions then come fundamentally from outside that person, and are not *self*-determined. If it were not that they may also be highly cultured human beings, functioning smoothly in an environment of advanced civilization, it would be hard to distinguish such persons, metaphysically (and ethically), from non-human animals--they are, in a significant sense, *natural* creatures, at least insofar as they are in terms of identity not separable from nature; they act from nature, never contrary to it; they are expressions of nature. Thus, Don Giovanni, who is archetypal for such a personality, is described by the admiring aesthete "A" as

being at least as much a force of nature as an individual (EE1, 96).

Immediacy is contrasted with Reflection. Don Giovanni does not reflect on his nature, on his actions, on the question of whether he ought to act in one way rather than another--he simply acts. However, although all aesthetes seek the immediacy of experience which such creatures as Don Giovanni enjoy, it is not the case that all aesthetes lack reflection in this way. Indeed, it requires reflection to deliberately seek out immediate experiences, though, since one is reflective and not purely immediate, those experiences will (perhaps) never have quite the same intensity of *immediate* experience as they would if one was not so reflective. "A", of ***Either/Or I***, is just such a reflective aesthete, as is Johannes the Seducer, Constantin Constantius, and Victor Eremita. So, although immediacy and reflection are, as such, mutually exclusive, the aesthetic can, and usually does, include both (at least for the aesthete). Reflection permits the aesthetically-inclined individual to appreciate the object of his admiration in a particular way, but also to arrange or affect that which he enjoys, in order to enjoy it even more. Thus his enjoyment is also heightened in a certain respect. This is something which the individual who lacks reflectiveness is never able to do.

Reflection is also essential for ethical existence, although reflection in and of itself can never make one an ethical being.[4] This is because the ethical requires a decision, which is essentially an act of passion, although one which runs counter to all that the aesthete stands for. And this is because in order for a person to be able to carry out an act of decision, that person must already have attained sufficient reflectiveness to be able to separate their own existence from their environment/milieu, to be able to understand themselves as a distinct self, that is capable of acting and choosing independently of all the factors and influences around them. This is something which even the reflective aesthete is reluctant to do to the

[4]See AE, Vol. I, esp. Part Two, Section II, Chapter I ("Becoming Subjective"); also Part One, Chapter I, §1.

requisite degree, and hence the aesthetic individual never acts in a decisive way. Or as it might also be expressed: the aesthetic individual never fully becomes *spirit*. The "decision to decide" which is at the very basis of the ethical is the act of "positing oneself as spirit", i.e., as a free and responsible being, a self aware of itself as a self. Thus, to the same degree that reflectiveness and immediacy are opposed, so also are the ethical and immediacy.

Now, woman is described by the aesthetic personalities in terms which place her definitively within the realm of the immediate, the natural, that which is to be enjoyed on an aesthetic level. Perhaps the most striking example of this is an extended passage in "The Seducer's Diary", where Johannes explains that both femininity in general and all of nature are being-for-other, in the sense that by itself neither has meaning, until apprehended by something which can put an interpretation upon it, put it into relation to itself.

> So she is being-for-other. Here in turn, from a different angle, we must not let ourselves be disturbed by experience, which teaches us that very seldom do we meet a woman who is truly being-for-other, since the great majority usually are not entities at all, either for themselves or for others. She shares this qualification with all nature, with all femininity in general. All nature is only for-other in this way, not in the teleological sense, in such a way that one specific segment of nature is for another specific segment, but the whole of nature is for- other--is for spirit. It is the same again with the particular. Plant life, for example, in all naïveté unfolds its hidden charms and is only for-other. Likewise, an enigma, a charade, a secret, a vowel, etc. are merely being-for-other. This explains why God, when he created Eve, had a deep sleep fall upon Adam, for woman is man's dream. The story teaches us in another way that woman is being-for-other. That is, it says that Jehovah took one of man's ribs. If he had, for example, taken from man's brain, woman would certainly have continued to be being-for-other, but the purpose was not that she should be a figment of the brain but something quite different. She became flesh and blood, but precisely thereby she falls within the category of nature, which essentially is being-for-other. Not until she is touched by erotic love does she awaken; before that time she is a dream. But in this dream existence two stages can be distinguished: in the first, love dreams about her; in the second, she dreams about love. (EE1, 430)

By itself such being has no direction; it is purposeless (dreaming) until directed by spirit--which comes from outside. And hence woman, as he says, is characterized by virginity, which is in itself an abstraction, which has meaning only in relation to something else (EE1, 430-1).

The association of woman with nature is especially underscored by Johannes' repeated likening of her existence to that of plants. Thus, "Woman's being (the word `existence' already says too much, for she does not subsist out of herself) is correctly designated as gracefulness, an expression that is reminiscent of vegetative life; she is like a flower, as the poets are fond of saying, and even the intellectual is present in her in a vegetative way" (EE1, 431). However, what is really significant about this association are the conclusions which he draws from it. In particular, because woman "belongs altogether to the category of nature", she is "free only aesthetically" (EE1, 431). By this he would appear to mean that she is free to follow her moods as she pleases. True ethical freedom, by contrast, involves being able to decide independently of one's moods, feelings, and environment. Insofar as one does not control the environment which determines ones moods (and this external control is precisely the aim of the seducer), one is only minimally free--one does as one pleases, but one is not free to determine for oneself what that is which pleases. "Aesthetic freedom", then, is a kind of false consciousness, which in this case is also a deliberately deceitful construction.

But, for aesthetes such as Johannes, it is one which is entirely justified by the end which is to be achieved--an aesthetic ideal of beauty, which, being an ideal (and hence reflective) construction, lifts woman out of the realm of the purely natural, the vegetative. This gives her a significance which she would not otherwise have. Indeed, woman *should not* have any reflective qualities of her own; the aesthetic demands that she come to the situation unformed, a *tabula rasa*, in effect. A girl should not be interesting in her own right, as this implies reflection, and hence individuality and spirit--which are distinctly masculine qualities.[5] Reflection and the interesting involve an engagement of the intellect, which is inappropriate in girls since they are to be enjoyed aesthetically. The interesting is something which is produced

[5]"An interesting girl may very well be successful in pleasing, but just as she herself has surrendered her womanliness, so also the men whom she pleases are usually just as unmasculine". (EE1, 339)

in her by the male's reflectiveness acting upon her. A female reflectiveness (brought about by associating with other girls) unsettles this relationship, and makes her unsuitable for the role of male company (EE1, 339-40).[6]

Intellect [*Aand*] is, in some sense, opposed to beauty. Thus the Seducer opines that a man cannot conquer a woman with masculine beauty, but only with intellect, which, since it is nothing to her, and negates her entire womanly existence, generates anxiety, which in turn generates the interesting (EE1, 362).

Woman's distance from reflection, and closeness to anxiety is elaborated on by Vigilius Haufniensis in ***The Concept of Anxiety***.[7] The degree of sensuousness in a person, it seems, is proportional to that of anxiety, and vice versa. Woman is more anxious than man because she is more sensuous, and she is more sensuous because she is, amongst other things, derived. Both man and woman are created beings, and each subsequent individual in the continuing history of the human race is derived from those who arrived before, but Adam was first and Eve derived from Adam; hence woman is "more" derived than man (BA, 63-4). The relationship of generation, then, imparts a "more" to the subsequent individual, which is a "more" of sensuousness, and of anxiety, as well as a quantitative accumulation of the history of human sinning in the context of which the individual must endeavour to avoid personal sin.

Vigilius thinks that the fact that woman is more sensuous than man is evident in her physical structure (BA, 64)--an observation which he chooses not to explain further. However, he also argues that "viewed ethically, woman culminates in procreation" (BA, 66), which

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[6]See also SV, 166, where William remarks that "a feminine soul does not have and should not have reflection the way a man does". It follows from this that she does not have an ethical understanding, either.

[7]See especially pp. 63-7.

indicates that she is more sensuous. According to Vigilius, at the moments of conception and of childbirth, the woman is at one extreme of the synthesis, and consequently spirit (which holds the two "ends" of the synthesis together, and which therefore has nothing to do at this time) is pushed to the side, or "suspended". Both events are extremes of sensuousness, thus, for Vigilius, extremes of anxiety (BA,72). Why these events should provide the culmination of woman's ethical task, however, is unclear. Unless, that is, we also assume that woman is constitutionally unsuited (by her sensuousness) to the tasks of spirit.

That woman is more sensuous than man is also exemplified by the particular nature of woman's beauty. "When beauty must reign, a synthesis results, from which spirit is excluded" (BA, 65). Thus, Vigilius argues, inspired by the Greeks, a woman is most beautiful when represented as sleeping, as this is a state in which spirit is absent, whereas for a man, who is characterized by spirit, this would be the most unattractive mode of representation.

What we have here, then, is a fairly consistent identification of woman with the physical or natural (including instinct), and of man with spirit or reflection (consciousness).[8] Despite the occasional association of woman with the infinite, she is most often put in relation to the finite. This is especially evident in Judge William, who describes her as having been created to deal with, indeed to save man from having to deal with, minutiae (EE2, 68). He describes her as being in harmony with time (EE2, 306-7), as having an innate ability to explain the finite (EE2, 310), as Nature's mistress, connecting her with the earth, as he does man to

[8]An apparently inconsistent association is also sometimes made between woman and the eternal. The key to the explanation for this is to be found here in the complementary association made between man and spirit: spirit permits decisiveness, activity, and these in turn permit the possibility of history (BA, 66). Insofar as woman lacks spirit, she also lacks the differentiation inherent in having a history; woman is an infinitude of possibilities--being nothing definite, she can be anything. Thus she has a kind of back-door connection with the eternal, which some of the more hostile aesthetes of the early pseudonymous works (Victor Eremita, Constantin Constantius, the Fashion Designer) might instead express as the fantastic. But this is perhaps the reason why woman is also described (often by the same personalities) as having an idealizing effect on man (see SV, 56-63). And it is consistent with her association with imagination (see G, 182; EE1, 392), as well as contributing to her association with love--which might be either sensuous or eternal, or both at once.

heaven (EE2, 310-3).[9] Vigilius' emphasis on woman's procreative role is echoed by William in his praise of mother love: a woman's development is not complete until she is a mother (SV, 131-5).[10] Also, William too identifies woman with the aesthetic and, consequently, thinks that her natural immediacy (including the tendency to romanticism) gives her an edge in getting to faith--for her it is an easy transition from the first to the second immediacy, without reflection (SV, 166-7). Of course, this therefore also suggests that woman does not attain the degree of reflection which man does, which he otherwise holds to be a necessary intermediate stage for man to get to the ethical.

What all of these authors agree on is woman's comparative lack of consciousness. William, for example, puts a (perhaps unwholesome) stress on woman's childlike qualities (EE2, 310), and argues that she does not and should not have reflection the way a man does (SV, 166). As previously noted, Johannes argues that, for the sake of the aesthetic ideal, a girl should be isolated from other girls, lest she develop an unseemly (masculine) reflectivity (EE1, 339-40). He also argues that it is precisely woman's innocence, her lack of self-consciousness, which is alluring--"This is how woman tempts" (SV, 78). Moreover, she wants to be seduced; she is better off for being seduced.[11] Finally, she does not die as a man does--she dissolves, as a dream, since that is what she is (SV, 77-80). Constantin regards woman as fundamentally irrational (SV, 52-6), and Victor Eremita as completely unaware that her entire existence is a negative one (SV, 56-65). And, as we have recently seen, Vigilius argues that a woman's proper beauty is best represented by one who is asleep, i.e., unconscious.

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[9]Note that Johannes, also, describes a young girl as "nature's *venerabile*" (EE1, 391).

[10]Though it should be pointed out that, for William, the male is just as bound by life to marriage as is woman (SV, 145), though not nearly so much is made of fatherhood.

[11]In EE1 it is claimed that the women whom Don Giovanni seduces are raised to a higher level of consciousness--in a sense, they are improved (EE1, 98, 100, 108-9).

This lack of consciousness has, of course, important consequences. The first of these is that a woman cannot become an ethical individual, as this requires reflection, and especially a reflection which effects in the individual a fully adequate concept of self. But if woman does not possess the basic requirements for becoming an ethical individual, it is also true that she does not become a self in any profound sense, since the requirements are the same: self-consciousness. Hence William's comments concerning woman's easy transition to the religious show the degree to which this pseudonymous personality misconceives the religious as well as the ethical: throughout the second volume of ***Either/Or*** he argues the compatibility of aesthetic immediacy with ethical existence (specifically, the civil institution of marriage), through a religious movement (thanksgiving to God). There are many things wrong with William's views in the Kierkegaardian context alone, but the error here involves the notion that one can, first of all, retain an essentially unaltered immediacy while performing a self-conscious resolution (which defines the ethical), and secondly, relate oneself to God without having a self to relate.

Woman's relativity is occasionally referred to directly, but more often it is implied. Notice, for example, in "The Seducer's Diary", that Cordelia's reactions to Johannes are inevitably a reflection of his relation to her--she resonates, reacts *to him*, never independently. In Judge William's attack on the emancipation of women in ***Either/Or***, he remarks that in trying to find her perfection through the definition of man, woman only becomes "a prey to his whims, whereas as woman she can be everything to him" (EE2, 310-3). But, of course, in being everything to him, she still has her definition in relation to him.

This brings us to the question of whether there is really any significant difference between William's views and those of the other pseudonyms. It is true that William prefers to praise women, and objects strongly to the critical aesthetic attitude to woman. William's

celebration of woman involves seeing her "imperfections" as perfections, that is, he argues that her natural condition is one which is to be appreciated for what it is, not altered as Johannes would do, for the sake of some artificial aesthetic ideal. As nature, finite, she is the necessary completion of man, who is, by himself, "an unstable spirit"--hence the importance of marriage to provide equilibrium (see EE2, 66-7).

But, although William may reject Johannes' instrumental alteration of women for the sake of aesthetic enjoyment, he too regards them as instrumental in providing both aesthetic enjoyment and ethical opportunity. In effect, they are still objects--the difference is whether the man needs to alter them first to make them into more enjoyable or more worthy objects. Woman is conceived, by the aesthetes and by William, as first and foremost a "helpmeet" to man's existence--she enhances his life in one way or another, but thus she is always seen as an instrument, an addendum, whether aesthetically, or as the occasion for an ethical decision on *his* part. Like disease or wealth, woman is a factor in the environment within which man develops. Woman has no decisive significance save in relation to man, whether this relation is positive or negative: just like the rest of the natural world.

III

In the acknowledged works, we see two apparently contradictory trends in the attitudes expressed towards woman and the feminine. One of these continues in much the same vein as the aesthetic works, gradually increasing in the level of its hostility, until in the "attack" literature and the late Journal entries we have evidence of a particularly pronounced misogyny. The other, however, puts forward woman as the pattern for all Christian life. Once again, these two trends are not so far apart as they might seem. As before, the nature of woman is not seriously in dispute; only whether that nature is a good thing, and in particular, whether it is compatible with the demands of Christianity.

At this point, we are concerned not only with the first relation which the fully realized self must accomplish, i.e., that to itself, but with the second: the relation to God. When the self becomes conscious of itself, one of the things it discovers is that it is a created being which must also relate itself to its creator, namely God (SD, 13-4). In this God-relationship, according to Anti-Climacus, "the distinction of man-woman vanishes", and "it holds for men as well as for women that devotion is the self and that in the giving of oneself the self is gained" (SD, 49n.). Thus, as previously remarked, it appears from this that full selfhood, not only is open to man and woman equally, but actually requires feminine qualities of both--at least at the level of the God-relation. I shall return presently to the very interesting question of why these two relations should appear to have differing requirements, but for the moment, let us concentrate on this second set.

Two separate discourses on the same subject, "The Woman That Was a Sinner", put forward her example as the appropriate pattern for Christian worship--for the God-relation which is required to complete the task of true selfhood. It is important to realize that there is nothing in the description of woman in these two discourses which is either at odds with, or even very new to, anything which we have seen so far. Her association with love is repeated and deeply accentuated. The quality which woman has, and man has too little of, is passion, the ability to act without getting sidetracked by questions, further considerations, and technical details. Woman has a capacity to be single-minded in a way that man's capacity for reflection makes difficult for him. As Kierkegaard remarks, "*one* is woman's element. One wish, not many wishes--no, only one wish, but that with the whole soul put into it..." (EOT, 262).[12] The woman can concentrate all of her attention on her relationship to her sin, and

[12]That this attitude is supposed to be essentially feminine is further supported by the sort of comment which we find in LT (142-3), the basic sentiment of which is frequently repeated: "Yes, just as a Mother, who carries her beloved child asleep at her breast along a difficult road, is not troubled about what may happen to her, but only fears that the child may be disturbed and upset, so he [who truly wills the Good], too, does not fear the troubles of the world on his own account".

thence to God. Thus concentrated, this becomes the only thing of concern to her--gaining forgiveness for her sins. In this way she becomes a pattern for man, since it is every human being who must relate to God in this way.

The other significant obstacle which man faces in his God-relation is his self-assertion--his defiant selfhood. Man has to learn to be more like "the woman who was a sinner", and submit his self and his own ideas about what his self should be, to God. The woman annihilates herself, which allows her to receive herself again from God--she loves God more than she loves herself, and in loving God she forgets herself (YTS, 379-80, 382). She admits that of herself she can do nothing at all in terms of getting this relation right--she must let God do it (EOT, 266-9). If she were to imagine that there was something she could do of herself, she would in fact be asserting herself against God, as if she didn't really need him: she would be in defiance of God. Thus, the cure for the "masculine" despair of defiance is for the man to become as "the woman who was a sinner", to acquire those qualities which woman has by nature: devotedness, submission, self-abnegation, and so on.

Woman's love in this instance is praised, as it exemplifies a religious ideal. But this is not always the case. Woman's love also exemplifies the earthly, and all that is dangerous and deluded about purely human conceptions of what is ideal for human beings. The love which is most often associated with woman is erotic love.[13]

Kierkegaard has a number of objections to erotic love, many of which apply equally to friendship. Erotic love (as well as friendship) is partial; it separates out some small set of persons from the rest, and loves only them, to the exclusion of all others--hence it is the

[13]Mother love also appears frequently, but it is mentioned to illustrate one of two things: either feminine single-mindedness, or as a non-gender-specific parental analogy for God's love for man.

antithesis to love of one's neighbour (KG, 65-70), which is the specifically Christian love. Erotic love is "desire for this life" (KG, 288); it lacks the eternal quality of religious faithfulness; it "has the sadness of temporality and thus is inspiring to the poet" (KG,289). In other words, it is aesthetic, and insofar as woman's love is identified with the erotic, it is also identified with aesthetic existence--which lacks spirit and is therefore incapable of effecting a true religious relation. That Kierkegaard does make this identification is shown by the way he puts together the feminine and the distinctly human conception of what it means to love. Thus,

> In relation to what the natural man, who loves himself selfishly or loves himself in a womanly way, regards as love [*Kjerlighed*], friendship, and the like, Christianity resembles a hatred of what it is to be a human being, the greatest curse and torment upon what it is to be human. Indeed, even the more profound person can have many weaker moments when to him it is as if Christianity were misanthropy, because in the weaker moments he wants to coddle himself, whimper, have an easy life in the world, live in rather quiet enjoyment. This is the effeminacy in a human being, and therefore it is also quite certain and true that Christianity has an uneasiness about marriage and also desires to have among its many married servants an unmarried person, someone who is single, because Christianity is well aware that with woman and erotic love [*Elskov*] etc. also come all the weaker, softer elements in a person, and that insofar as the husband himself does not hit upon them, the wife ordinarily represents them with an unconstraint that is extremely dangerous for the husband, especially for the one who is to serve Christianity in the stricter sense. (IC, 117)

Here the feminine, and the feminine conception of love, are clearly associated with an attachment to the things of this world, to the easy way out, compromise, and complacency. What also comes out in this passage is the dangerousness of a woman's love for a man who wishes to relate himself properly to God. This notion appears in a relatively mild form in ***Works of Love***, where Kierkegaard offers the following admonition:

> Not only shall the person who unconditionally has a call from God not belong to a woman, in order not to be obstructed by wanting to please her, but also the person who in love belongs to a woman shall first and foremost absolutely belong to God, shall not first seek to please his wife, but shall strive first that his love may please God. (KG, 117-8)

Further along, he asks: "How many a man has been corrupted, divinely understood, by a girl's love, simply because, defrauded out of his God-relationship, he became far too faithful to her

while she in turn was inexhaustible in her praise of his love?" (KG, 131). And in the ***Instant***, we find an extended attack on the institution of marriage (Ø, 7: 219-22).[14]

Woman's love, then, is presented in two quite different ways: it can be the pattern for man's religious existence, and it can be a hindrance to that very existence, interfering with a man's ability to adopt the pattern in his own life. How can these two very different visions be reconciled? In a sense, they don't need to be. When woman's love is praised, and exalted as a pattern, what is praised is simply one aspect of it--the single-mindedness, the utter devotion to the task of love. But for Kierkegaard, what woman (ordinarily) sees as the task of love is misconceived. Woman can only love in her characteristically immediate and possessive way; she can't follow the man into the dialectical realm of true Christian existence, so she ends up holding him back (See JP IV 5007 (XI^2 A 192)). Kierkegaard's praise for woman's love, then, is *selective*; his use of it as a pattern is comparable to his use of "the birds of the air": we should be like the birds of the air in the sense that we should trust in providence--not in the sense that we should build nests of twigs and eat worms.

However, ***Works of Love*** in particular also develops the notion that in the relationship to God, man and woman are essentially equal. But, once again, what we see in this argument is that insofar as what woman (or man) seeks is equality in *earthly* or *purely human* terms, she departs from what is decisively Christian. The contrast is between the purely human and the Christian. Thus those who seek to establish earthly equality completely miss the truly Christian relationship of equality before God, where each, both man and woman, is answerable to God for their relationship.

What abominations has the world not seen in the relationship between man and woman--that

[14]See also JP IV 4998, 5000, 5003, 5005 (XI^1 A 141, XI^1 A 226, XI^1 A 281, XI^1 A 426).

> she, almost like an animal, was a despised creature compared to the male, a creature of another species! What battles there have been to establish women on equal terms with men in the secular world! But Christianity makes only the transformation of infinity and does it, therefore, in all stillness. Outwardly in a way the old remains--for the man shall be the woman's master and she shall be submissive to him, but in inwardness everything is transformed, transformed with the aid of this little question to the woman, whether she has deliberated with her conscience about having this man--for a master, for otherwise she does not get him. Yet the question of conscience about a matter of conscience makes her in inwardness before God absolutely equal with the man....Foolish men have foolishly busied themselves in the name of Christianity to make it obvious in the world that women have equal rights with men--Christianity has never demanded or desired this. It has done everything for woman if she Christianly will be satisfied with what is Christian. If she will not, for her loss she gains only a mediocre compensation in the little fragmentary externals she can win by worldly threats. (KG, 139-40)

God is the essential middle term in any human relationship (KG, 112-8). God "essentially becomes the only loved object, so that it is not the husband who is the wife's beloved, but it is God...The purely human conception of love can never go further than mutuality...Christianity teaches that such a love has not yet found its proper object: God. The love-relationship is a tripartite relationship of the lover, the beloved, love--but love is God" (KG, 124). First one relates oneself to God, in one's conscience, and only then to the other--who is then first and foremost the neighbour, which each *human being* is *essentially* (KG, 141-2). Thus it is God who teaches each of us how we should love wife or husband, and not the husband the wife or the wife the husband (KG, 117-8). In this way, it seems that each human individual is on the same footing with respect to God, at least, if not to each other in a secular sense (given that man remains woman's "master"). This would be the case if it were true that woman actually does relate to God on her own recognizance, as it were, and not only *through the man*.[15]

But then, what are we to make of the more spiteful and vitriolic attacks on women, and the indirect condemnations of the feminine character ("effeminacy"), which we find in the writings of Kierkegaard's final period (i.e., the Journals of 1854-5, and the ***Instant***). In the

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15."..it is probably true that in most cases the woman actually relates to God only through the man". (SD, 49n.)

Instant he carries on his assault on the "effeminacy" of contemporary Christendom, particularly the Danish Lutheran Church and its ministers. Under the heading of "effeminacy" he includes such traits as untruth, coquetry, duplicity, and equivocation (see esp. Ø 5: 176). In the attack, it is clear that these are characteristics which he attributes to women. Hence the crime which these men commit against Christianity is that of feminizing it when they should be deepening the spiritual basis of Christian belief.

In the Journals the criticism of official Christianity continues hand in hand with a rejection of feminine qualities and concerns. First among these is marriage, which is condemned as one of the trivialities which fill one's life (along with one's job, children, and position) and which Christianity demands that one be willing to break with. The decadence of contemporary Protestantism is demonstrated by the fact that now "everything revolves around woman", and so around chatter, trivialities, and sexual relations (JP IV 4998 (XI^1 A 141)). Indeed, the "whole business of man and woman is a very intricate plot or a practical joke intended to destroy man *qua* spirit....And it follows as a matter of course that once man enters this company he is essentially lost for everything higher" (JP IV 5000 (XI^1 A 226)). In other words, marriage is a devious trap in which woman "corrupts" man, by "finitizing and mediocritizing" him (JP IV 5003 (XI^1 A 281)). "Man was structured for eternity; woman leads him into a side remark" (JP IV 5005 (XI^1 A 426)). Marriage introduces man to an egotism which he would not otherwise know (JP IV 5000 (XI^1 A 226)), and to an existence of lies, pretending that marriage is the true happiness:

> Constantly lying like this is extremely degrading to the man. It is different for a woman; she is once and for all a born virtuoso in lying, is really never happy without a little lying, just as it is *a priori* certain that wherever a woman is there is a little lying. In a sense she is innocent in this; she cannot help it. It is not possible to get angry about it: on the contrary, we find it very attractive. She is in the power of a natural disposition which uses her with extreme cunning to weaken the man. (JP IV 4998 (XI^1 A 141))

Thus, at the start and at the end of Kierkegaard's writings, woman appears as a barely conscious locus of natural forces.

Now, as Julia Watkin rightly points out (Watkin 1991, 89), this later Kierkegaardian polemic is *not* specifically an attack on woman *per se* (perhaps none of Kierkegaard's remarks on the subject form part of such a deliberate attack), but it is in fact directed at those (the Judge Williams of the Church, as it were) who would, in his view, turn Christianity into a complacent comfy-bourgeois compromise with the world. As such, his comments are consistent with the whole of his religious project, and do not represent any radical shift in attitude. Nor, as we can now see, do they represent any very significant shift in attitude to women. What is rejected first and foremost, is a preoccupation with the earthly, with purely human distinctions, and whatever distracts one's attention from one's spiritual relationship to God and the truths of Christianity. Strictly speaking, woman is not the problem; spiritual vacuity is. However, having said this, it cannot be overlooked that woman is nevertheless deemed by Kierkegaard to be an appropriate stick with which to beat his opponents. Whether she is his target or not, the association *is* made, by Kierkegaard, between spiritual degradation and woman.

And yet, we also have Kierkegaard's (and Anti-Climacus') claims to the effect that before God, man and woman are essentially similar. As remarked earlier, the two relations involved in human selfhood appear to have differing requirements. It is time now to examine more closely the relationship between these two relations.

IV

Why is it that, in the God-relation, man and woman are essentially unimportant distinctions, whereas no such claim is made for the first relation of ordinary self-

consciousness? One fairly obvious answer is that in the first relation, an individual learns about the self which he or she actually is, here and now, as well as coming to a realization of what is possible for him or her. One of the things which we inevitably are (so such an explanation might run) is male or female, and which of these we happen to be does make a certain amount of difference not only for what each of us is now, but for what we might become, in short, for the way in which we relate to ourselves. On the ordinary, secular, level, sex matters.

However, in relation to God, such differences are meaningless. These distinctions, like those between rich and poor, powerful and weak, shrink into insignificance in comparison with the gulf which separates God from the merely human. The Word of God cuts through these distinctions to lay a command upon each human being, to which they must respond, each in the ways open to them.

Now, while it is true that sex matters at the secular level, what is not clear is how deeply it matters. That is, is the difference surmountable, at either the secular or the religious level? Sylvia Walsh (Walsh 1987, 129-34) seems to suggest that Kierkegaard's analysis of the self and of masculine and feminine despair could allow us to interpret the situation something like this: the fact that the first relation of selfhood neither requires nor expects equality of men and women, while the second presupposes it, merely reflects the difference between the essential nature of human beings as metaphysical and moral equals and the actuality of their existence as historically constrained and culturally conditioned beings. Thus, men and women being what they are, or have been made, culturally and sociologically, it is a contingent fact that each is prone to develop in one way rather than another, thus justifying the designations "masculine"/"feminine" for each type of behaviour. Men and women relate differently to themselves, succeed better or worse at the project of becoming selves, because history and society have joined forces to make them that way, not because God fashioned them from

different moulds. In the relationship to God these differences are fundamentally irrelevant and without meaning: here all humans are essentially similar, because here what is at issue is what humans are *essentially*, underneath all of the contingent conditioning. In fact, the ideal human self is one which overcomes the traditional stereotypes, which moves away from the excessive "masculinity" of defiant despair, and the "feminine" egolessness and identification with the other definitive of the despair of weakness, towards the equilibrium of an androgynist combination of modes of relating.

On an account such as this, all that condemnation of "effeminacy" in the attack literature, and the ridicule of woman in the early aesthetic works, is really a rejection of the *stereotype*, of the deficient creature which society has made, not of woman herself.[16] The difference, then, is surmountable at the religious level, and possibly also at the secular, though this would require a society rather different than any which Kierkegaard experienced or perhaps even envisaged. It has to be admitted that this question of whether Kierkegaard was talking about women in general, or whether he was only criticizing the women *of his time* as contingently unrealized selves, is a crucial one. It makes all the difference for whether he was a common misogynist or some sort of ironical feminist. But a number of obstacles stand in the way of the latter interpretation. First of all, Kierkegaard's expression gives every indication of being absolutist: woman is essentially as he describes her. Individual histories may vary in their details, not the category "woman" (or "man"). There is a dearth of positive evidence to support the notion that Kierkegaard entertained the view that woman either could or should be significantly different than she is, under some alternative socio-cultural regime. (At least, that is, in terms of her basic *nature*; it is plain that Kierkegaard demands as much a change in *behaviour* from women as he does from men.) Indeed, there is plenty of evidence to show that he thought the attempt to alter the prevailing structures to border on the perverse (see EE2,

[16]Birgit Bertung (1989), gives a particularly persuasive and subtle version of this sort of explanation.

311-3; LA, 77-96; KG, Two, VII), though it must also be said that the main thrust of his criticism of such efforts is that they tend to miss the point existentially (in effect, making us bean-counters of rights, instead of existentially responsible human beings). Clearly, he thought the difference surmountable at the religious level, but it takes a highly imaginative reading of Kierkegaard to find this happening at an earlier stage. Moreover, Vigilius' references to the biblical account of the creation of Eve in support of his statements about the nature of woman, as in ***The Concept of Anxiety***, would seem to offer some (admittedly indirect) support for the contention that Kierkegaard's views on the subject of women are essentialist, not accidentalist.

More importantly, however, it is questionable whether such an account can get around a more serious problem with Kierkegaard's analysis of the self. And that concerns the matter of whether woman, equal with man in the God-relation, can in fact carry out this relation on her own behalf. In other words, whether the sexual difference is truly surmountable at the religious level. This is a problem precisely because there are *two* relations involved, and this is the *second* one.

Recall Anti-Climacus' remark that femininity is a "lower synthesis". This is because, although on the one hand, "essentially" man and woman are the same, in that both are constituted by a synthesis of complementary factors held together by spirit, on the other (as Vigilius explains), woman's synthesis is naturally heavily tilted to one side, to the "more" of sensuousness and the comparative absence of conscious spirit. Woman's existence is determined by nature and instinct to a far greater degree than is man's. Of course, this "more" would not by itself have to mean that woman is a less worthy self. On the contrary, the "more" translates into a tougher struggle for woman to become a self, but precisely for that reason, if she succeeds, she becomes a more perfect self (see BA, 64, 72; Bertung 1989)--though the

difficulty involved might mean that fewer women succeed than men.[17]

However, insofar as the "lower" quality in the feminine synthesis is explained by her *biology*, it is difficult to see how the general failure of women to become selves could be put down to purely historical circumstances and cultural expectations. For Kierkegaard, this could hardly have seemed sociologically contingent. Furthermore, insofar as this "more" of sensuousness and instinct also entails a lack of *consciousness*, woman is not, generally speaking, self-defining. She is relative, while man is absolute.[18] Woman's existence is defined by her relation to another (usually man), but the same is not true for man--he is defined by his relation to his self (which he has independently) (see SD, 49n.). Woman may well provide the occasion for his effecting this relation, but she is not the essential factor in it (as the man is for her).

This, then, leaves us with an apparently irresolvable difference between man and woman in terms of their possibilities for selfhood: how they become selves, and even whether they become selves. This is because, if when Kierkegaard or Anti-Climacus says that woman becomes herself (devotedness) by instinct, he means that this self which she becomes is her true self, in the sense of the self which she ought to be, then woman becomes the self she ought to be *by instinct*. If self-consciousness is otherwise held to be crucial for selfhood (which does seem to be the case),[19] and if woman becomes what she ought to be without it, then (although *some* women may become themselves self-consciously) the self which woman ought to become is a significantly different kind of self than that which man ought to become. And

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[17]Note that when Anti-Climacus says that woman relates to God through the man, he does say "in most cases". (SD, 49n.)

[18]Cf. SV, 48, where Constantin says, "It is the man's function to be absolute, to act absolutely, to express the absolute; the woman consists in the relational."

[19]"...the self is the relation to oneself". (SD, 17).

this difference is more than simply one of sex: woman is not as fully-developed a self as man. If, indeed, she is properly speaking a self at all, she is, in one important respect at least, a lesser self.

As for man, being self-conscious, he has to learn to give himself in devotion to God--he has to *learn* to do self-consciously what she does by instinct. Could all this simply mean that man and woman have each their different, but equally valid, "modes of relating" to God? Not if self-consciousness is itself a superior "mode of relating" to oneself and the world than instinct. If so, then man's devotion to God is superior to woman's, even though devotion is what characterizes woman's nature, and is what man must learn from her--man fulfills woman's task better than she can herself.[20] In this case, woman cannot have a relation to God which is comparable to man's, either because she does not have a self to relate or because she just can't do it as well.[21]

Now, if man and woman do not relate the same way to God, then it is difficult to see what sense there is in saying that in the God-relation, the distinction vanishes. Clearly, if the foregoing is true, man and woman are not equal before God. Or they are only equal in the purely formal way that a peasant and an aristocrat are equal before the law--both are subject to the rule of law, but, substantively, they face quite different sets of laws. In this context, we can see that the claim which Kierkegaard makes in the Journals to the effect that Christianity is a man's religion[22] is not particularly at odds with the implications of the rest of his writings.

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[20]See Walsh (1987), 126-7. If woman's devotion is instinctively based, rather than self-conscious, one supposes that she might be more likely to make mistakes with respect to her object--much the way beavers do who, driven by instinct to build dams over running water, have apparently been known to build dam-like constructions over loudspeakers carrying the sounds of running water.

[21]See also Garside (1971).

[22]"...Christianity as it is found in the New Testament has such prodigious aims that, strictly speaking, it cannot be a religion for women, at most secondhand...The essentially Christian task requires a man, it takes a man's toughness and strength simply to be able to bear the pressure of the task....So it is with everything essentially

Finally, I wish to make a few observations about the androgynist ideal which Kierkegaard seems at times to be putting forward. Given that the God-relation can be expected to transform one's ordinary human relations, one could expect that a religious ideal which was fundamentally androgynist might well motivate a restructuring of such relations. Such a relationship between the religious and the ethical is certainly evident in ***Works of Love***. Thus, if Kierkegaard had held a truly androgynist ideal we might expect to see evidence of such a restructuring. However, the most we could say of the ideal presented in ***Works of Love*** (and this might be too much--for the reasons just presented) is that it is egalitarian, not that it is androgynist. As I have already argued, when Kierkegaard praises the feminine character, he does so *selectively*. The feminine quality (i.e., devotedness) which man needs to cultivate for the sake of his individuated soul is only one aspect of her existence. He is not otherwise asked to make himself "feminine"--this, in fact, he is warned against. It is also worth noting that whereas there is much stress put upon his developing devotedness and submission of his self to God, there is comparatively little emphasis on woman developing the masculine qualities of self-individuation and self-assertion. Rather, she is simply advised to find the object of her devotion in God rather than man. Moreover, we should expect a properly androgynist ideal to operate, not only at the religious, but also at the secular level, that is, "masculine" and "feminine" qualities ought to be shared by persons of both sexes in their relations not only with God, but with each other. Yet, there is no indication that a man is supposed to display devotedness (or any other supposedly feminine quality) towards woman, or other men, much less that woman is to show masculine qualities with respect to either men or women.

Many of us (though by no means all) would also reject the kind of close and exclusive associations which Kierkegaard makes between woman and nature on the one hand, and man

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Christian. Only man has from the hand of Governance the toughness to be able to endure the dialectical." (JP IV 5007; XI^2 A 192).

and reflection on the other. Kierkegaard is just plain wrong about the essential nature of woman (and man, for that matter), supposing for the moment that talk about the essential nature of either sex makes any sense.[23] If Kierkegaard is wrong about what women and men are really like, then he is certainly also wrong about a number of consequences of these assumptions, not the least of which is that woman is a lesser self. This suggests another reason why the more "positive" assessments of woman which we find in the Authorship (as in Judge William, YTS/EOT, etc.) are not much of an advance over the negative ones: devotedness may well be a good thing (though we cannot say so without qualification), but it is questionable praise to say of any person that they are essentially this. Woman is not *one* thing; neither is man. We are complex beings, with many "essential" qualifications. To say that a person, male or female, is just this one thing, whether it is otherwise considered good or bad, is to diminish, not to celebrate, that person.

This, in turn, suggests a possible response to the problem before us. An extraordinarily large part of Kierkegaard's writings is concerned with putting together the complementary aspects of human existence. The aesthetes try to realize the (aesthetic) ideal in actual persons, while William argues at length about how the immediacy of the aesthetic can be incorporated with the abstract demands of the ethical: that the universal can be made concrete in one's own existence. In ***For Self-Examination***, Kierkegaard argues that we must be not only hearers of the Word, but doers of it: the unity of word and deed becomes an important theme in the later acknowledged works. Indeed, Kierkegaard has a reputation for stressing the importance of inwardness and the isolation of the individual from all around him. Yet, he also argues the importance of turning faith into *practice*: love to one's neighbour is not just having warm feelings. Hence, the "attack" on "hidden inwardness" in ***Practice in Christianity*** (IC, No. III, V). In ***Two Ages***, as well, we find the notion of a "genuine association", which puts together the

[23]Which I assume it does not--but this is an argument for another place.

individuality of its members with their union in an ideal (LA, 62-3). And, of course, we have the dichotomies of time and the eternal, necessity and possibility, the finite and the infinite, which appear not only in ***The Sickness Unto Death***, but throughout (especially) the pseudonymous works. A true self is a complete self, one which gets all these elements in balance in its own existence. Why, then, should these not include the masculine and the feminine?

First of all, it should be noted that, in any case, the equilibrium which is sought is not one in which both elements participate in *exactly* the same way. For example, in the case of passion and reflection, Kierkegaard argues, in effect, that passion is a vital motive force without which the human individual is lost in the sterility and aimlessness of reflection; but passion must be filtered through reflection first, in order for it to be able to serve as the proper antidote to excessive reflectiveness.[24] First, we have passion, as an immediate, primal, impulse; then, reflection superimposed upon passion; finally, reflection motivated and intensified by passion--but a passion which has itself been altered by its encounter with reflection. The passion which forms one half of this pair is *not* the same passion which is initially overcome by reflection; it could not be, insofar as any immediacy which is brought into relation with consciousness is necessarily changed by that relation into something other than it was. Meanwhile, reflection itself does not appear to be altered, though clearly the human self which has effected this equilibrium within itself must be profoundly transformed.

Much as Kierkegaard values passion in relation to reflection, it seems clear that he regards reflection as being in some sense a *higher* achievement. Passion has to be transformed by reflection in order to be able to participate in a relationship of equilibrium. This suggests that underlying Kierkegaard's psychology of equilibrium is a metaphysics of hierarchy, in

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[24]"...considerable reflectiveness is the condition for a higher meaningfulness than that of immediate passion, is the condition for it..." (LA, 96).
"...the prerequisite for acting more intensively is the thorough kneading of reflection" (LA, 111).

particular, one which devalues the natural and the instinctual in favour of consciousness, reflection, *et al*. Thus, to the extent that woman is defined by the natural, and for this reason is assumed to be relatively incapable of the higher achievements of consciousness, it is inevitable that woman should fail to become a fully developed self. It is woman's association with the natural, *combined with* the devaluation of nature which makes her a second-class self.

This, then, is the crucial point for those who wish to find the basis of an androgynist ideal of selfhood in Kierkegaard. For any such ideal, *all* the terms involved in the constitution of the self must stand on equal ground. Consequently, any attempt to reappropriate Kierkegaard for this purpose must also include a re-interpretation or re-definition of the more fundamental relationships of the terms involved. "Masculine" and "feminine" cannot indicate the complementary components of an equilibrium if these terms are understood to mean what Kierkegaard understands them to mean, not only because this is descriptively inaccurate, but because the characteristics and capacities so designated are assumed from the outset to have a relationship to each other which renders a true equilibrium impossible.

This, of course, leaves aside the question of whether it even makes any sense to talk about "masculine" and "feminine", in anything other than a provisional sense, in the context of androgynism. If the latter is a valid ideal, then no characteristics or capacities are properly "masculine" or "feminine", only human, and talk about an equilibrium in which the "masculine" and the "feminine" are ideally balanced in a single human individual is at best a necessary, though perhaps pernicious, fiction; the complementary pair "masculine"/"feminine" *ultimately* has no place in a fully human self. But, again, this is because all the fundamental constituents of the self must weigh equally in the balance, and not be subject to depreciation on the basis of some spurious association.

So, the question remains: does Kierkegaard offer an androgynist ideal of selfhood? Clearly, no. Could, however, Kierkegaard's account of the self provide the basis of such an account? The answer to this, I think, is yes--with a lot of reservations. What Kierkegaard's example points out to us is what we might loosely term the ecology of metaphysical assumptions. The problem here, after all, may be less in Kierkegaard's attitudes to women than in his attitude to the natural; not so much misogyny, or androcentrism, as (perhaps) anthropocentrism. However this may be, if we want to rehabilitate or reappropriate Kierkegaard's views on the self in such a way as to include all of us as potential selves, it is the hierarchical assumption which must be done away with. If this is abandoned, then, it seems, the misogyny no longer has any philosophical basis. The big question is whether this can be done without doing violence to the rest of Kierkegaard's theoretical structure--and the answer to this is unclear. This does still leave us with questionable characterizations of men's and women's "natures", but simple failures of description are much more easily remedied than fundamental distortions of the metaphysical framework.

However, if we look at the situation positively, what we find is that Kierkegaard does give us an otherwise highly useful analytic structure for understanding the process of acquiring selfhood, particularly where selfhood is itself understood as a combining together and a balancing of the different (sometimes opposed, sometimes complementary) aspects of our existence, and especially where this existence is assumed to involve a relation to God. Moreover, despite the reservations noted, Kierkegaard's analysis of the many and varied ways in which we fail to become ourselves is second to none in the brilliance of its insight into the human psyche. Quite simply, there is too much of value here to allow us to just dismiss Kierkegaard as an irretrievable misogynist. On the contrary, given that Kierkegaard's own analysis starts out with terms which are in fact common to all human beings, and which extend to the full compass of human existence, we have here much of the necessary conceptual

apparatus to begin to build a new account of the self which is fully human, and which thus may well also be androgynist in some sense.

But should we still call such an account Kierkegaardian? Our problem here is much the same as the one which is faced by non-believers, or non-Christian believers, in confronting Kierkegaard. Although some would like to argue that, for Kierkegaard, what counted most was simply faith, and that what exactly happens to be the object of one's faith, whether the Christian God-in-time or a wooden idol, is irrelevant,[25] this seems to be an ultimately untenable reading of Kierkegaard's views. For Kierkegaard, the only and final remedy for the human existential condition is submission in devotion to the God of the New Testament; all other solutions fail to adequately orient the individual in self-consciousness and in the God-relation. Just as we must accept the fact that Kierkegaard himself was a political conservative, and a misogynist, we must also accept that he was, so to speak, a religious imperialist: you don't get Kierkegaard without the Christianity. Yet it also seems deeply false to conclude on that basis that he has nothing to say to those who remain steadfast non-believers.

The issue is the authorship of the process of reappropriation. If we derive from Kierkegaard an account of the self which completely neglects a specifically Christian point of view, or which eliminates the hierarchical relationship between instinct and reflection, then it would be both fair and accurate to say that such an account is *not* Kierkegaardian in the sense that it is not *Kierkegaard's*, but is in fact contrary to *Kierkegaard's* own express position. Happily, however, philosophy is not a static discipline, and *inspired* by Kierkegaard, *fuelled* by his observations and conceptual techniques, we can recommence the project of defining the human self. But, we must also recognize that in doing so, we are speaking with *our own* voices,

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[25] As in Johannes Climacus' discussion in the ***Postscript*** concerning the *what* and the *how* of religious belief (AE, 201-3). Yet it is in the same work that it becomes clear that only the paradoxical truth of Christianity can restore the individual to existential harmony.

and not Kierkegaard's.

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