

Kierkegaard

Volume I of *Either/Or* (K) by Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) contains a difficult essay entitled ‘The Ancient Tragical Motif as Reflected in the Modern: An Essay in the Fragmentary Read before a Meeting of the Symparanekromenoi’. The last word is a neologism meaning something like ‘society of those who are living lives which are spiritually or mentally entombed and isolated’.¹ Since the essay is largely a commentary on Hegel’s distinction between ancient and modern tragedy, this chapter is in many ways a continuation of its predecessor.

‘Kierkegaard’² begins the essay by noting that the theatre-going public and ‘experts’ alike agree that ‘there is an essential difference between ancient tragedy and modern tragedy’ (K, p. 137). As the

¹ Editor’s note, K, p. 450. The term is presumably ironic since it is hard to see how the ‘mentally entombed and isolated’ could form a ‘society’. As Margaret Thatcher famously remarked, in a world of isolated individuals ‘[t]here is no such thing as society’.

² I put ‘Kierkegaard’ in quotation marks because the essay is attributed to the pseudonymous author ‘A’. Kierkegaard distinguishes three basic ways of life: the ‘aesthetic’ (hedonistic), the ‘ethical’ and the ‘religious’. His entire philosophy adds up to an extended argument that to avoid ‘despair’ the purely aesthetic life must advance to the ethical, which in turn must advance to the religious. Since ‘A’ is the protagonist of the purely aesthetic life, his views are no more to be identified with Kierkegaard’s own than the views of a character in a novel are to be identified with those of the novelist. Nonetheless, because much of the essay reads like an excursion into the philosophy of art that is independent of Kierkegaard’s overall argument, I shall continue to speak of him as its author, although where Kierkegaard’s views are crucially different from those of his fictional creation I shall take note of this fact.

discussion proceeds, it becomes evident that the foremost of these 'experts' is Hegel. Kierkegaard adds his voice to this general agreement and defends the thesis against several objections. Certainly, he says, people still appeal to Aristotle's *Poetics* as an authority for writing and judging tragedy, but Aristotle's account of tragedy is so general that two radically different species of drama can be accommodated within it. And to say that 'the tragic' must be invariant through the ages because the disposition to be brought to tears by dramatic artworks exists in all ages is like saying that 'the comic' must be the same at all times and places because the disposition to laughter exists at all times. The latter claim is manifestly silly because humour is notoriously variable among different ages, languages and cultures (K, p. 138).

MODERNITY AND SUBJECTIVITY

Kierkegaard thus agrees with Hegel that there is a radical difference between Greek and modern tragedy. The next question is: Does he draw the distinction in the same way as Hegel? In part he does. He quotes Aristotle's claim that in Greek tragedy plot is the 'main thing', that characters are portrayed for the sake of the plot rather than the plot existing to facilitate a display of character (see p. 26 above). In Greek tragedy, as in the Greek world it reflects, 'subjectivity' is not yet fully developed. Dialogue does not provide a 'sufficient explanation' of the hero's actions in terms of 'subjective reflection', which means that those actions possess a strongly 'epic' quality: we view them from the outside rather than understand them as expressions of an exhaustively described interiority (K, pp. 140–1). Modern tragedy, by contrast, seeks to provide a full explanation of action in terms of the hero's subjective states. The self-revelatory monologue (K, p. 161) is a key element. Kierkegaard himself provides no examples to support his observation, but most of Shakespeare's tragic soliloquies support his case. Most striking, perhaps, is the famous 'Now is the winter of our discontent' monologue, which, coming right at the beginning of *Richard III*, precedes all the action of the play. In it, Richard provides us with an almost Freudian self-'reflection' that leaves us in no doubt as to why, hunchback as he is, he is 'determined to prove a villain'.

Why the shift to subjectivity in modern tragedy? Kierkegaard's answer is that the modern tragic hero, like his Greek equivalent, mirrors the 'general consciousness' (K, p. 142) of his age. The modern hero is intensely 'introverted', self-scrutinizing, 'reflective', because the present age in general is an essentially reflective one. 'Reflective' here is closely related to 'scrutiny', 'criticism' and 'doubt'. What I think Kierkegaard has in mind is the spirit of modern science: the refusal to take anything at all for granted that is articulated most clearly in Descartes's resolve to doubt absolutely everything that could be doubted.³ The ethical consequences of this critical spirit of modernity Kierkegaard regards, I think, as disastrous. Whereas Greek society had been, as Hegel observes, an 'organism' held together by the unquestioned and unquestionable status of 'ethical substance', such 'existence is [now] more or less undermined by doubt' (K, p. 139), by the restless, Cartesian spirit that refuses to accord unchallengeable status to anything at all. The 'invisible spiritual bond' (K, p. 139), the shared communal values of state, religion and family that had held Greek society together, have dissolved, leading to a dysfunctional modern world of 'isolated individuals' in fractious competition with each other (K, p. 140).

Kierkegaard makes two observations about this modern world: first, that it is, for reasons we have not yet discovered, an age of melancholy, is, indeed, 'profoundly in despair' (K, p. 139); and, second, that as an age it is not tragic but rather 'comic'. Though comedy and despair may seem to fit badly together, it turns out that all that Kierkegaard means by 'comic' is 'exaggerated individuality': as caricaturists and cartoonists achieve their satirical effects by exaggerating the 'accidental individuality' of their targets, so atomised modernity is a world that is 'comic' in its excess of individuality (K, p. 140). (A better word might be 'grotesque'.) So the 'society' of the 'mentally entombed and isolated' to which the essay is addressed is, in fact, modern society in general.

Why should modernity's, for short, 'atomisation through doubt' lead to the 'subjectivity' of modern tragedy? The answer is not entirely clear, but I think Kierkegaard's thought is this. In the world of shared ethical substance, the 'substantial determinants'⁴ of action are clear, limited and well understood. As Hegel observes, there is no more to

³ See Stewart (2003), p. 245. Kierkegaard was well acquainted with Cartesian doubt.

⁴ Kierkegaard (1987), p. 143.

Antigone's being than family loyalty, no more to Creon's being than loyalty to the state. Once the nature of the tragic conflict becomes clear, nothing more need be said by way of making their actions intelligible. To provide an analogy, once we know that Wayne Rooney plays for Manchester United, there is nothing more we need to know to understand just what he is doing on the pitch. In the world where individuals have become 'isolated' from ethical substance, however, nothing can be taken for granted. They have no 'team' they are playing for. And so their actions can be made intelligible only through exhaustive disclosure of their inner psychology.

THE GREEK TRAGIC HERO: FREEDOM, FATE, *HAMARTIA* AND THE TRAGIC EFFECT

The essence of the difference between Greek and modern life, then, is that unlike us the Greeks possessed the unquestionable bond of ethical substance. This has profound implications with respect to the application of the notion of freedom to the Greek world in general and to the tragic hero in particular:

In the ancient world ... even if the individual moved freely, he still rested in the substantial categories of state, family, and destiny. This substantial category is exactly the fatalistic element in Greek tragedy, and its exact peculiarity. The hero's destruction is not only a result of his own deeds but is also a suffering. (K, p. 141)

In line with his ongoing dialogue with Hegel (he refers specifically to the *Aesthetics* lectures; K, p. 145), Kierkegaard's focus is on *Antigone*.

His idea is this. Antigone is a free agent. But only within certain parameters: her freedom is circumscribed by the 'substantial category' – one of those fundamental 'powers' belonging to 'ethical substance' – of family. This looks simply to repeat Hegel's observation that Antigone's very 'being' and 'reality' are her commitment to the overriding importance of familial duty (p. 112 above), but in reality Kierkegaard wants to criticise Hegel, criticise his exclusion of 'fate' from Greek tragedy. Whereas for Hegel Antigone's commitment is an exercise of 'freedom of the will',⁵ Kierkegaard calls it a 'suffering' or

⁵ A I, p. 232; see also p. 116 above.

passio, something ‘inherited’ (K, p. 148); as we would say, it is something ‘hardwired’ or ‘programmed’. It follows, he concludes, that the action of burying her brother which provokes the tragic catastrophe has an ‘ambiguous’ status, that it is ‘intermediate’ between action and suffering, between the categories of ‘free’ and ‘fated’ (K, p. 142).

These notions of ‘ambiguity’ and ‘intermediacy’ seem to me to blur the claim Kierkegaard wants to make. Schopenhauer famously claims that while it is obviously the case that, much of the time, we can do what we want, we are not genuinely free unless we also choose what it is we want. And this, as will shortly become clear, is also Kierkegaard’s conception, which means that in reality he wishes to deny any kind of freedom to Antigone. Certainly she can perform genuinely free actions in areas of choice that present no challenge to the supremacy of family over all other values, but in the ‘definite moment’ (K, p. 142) on which the tragedy turns she is, he really wants to claim, ‘programmed’ and therefore unfree in defying Creon. Kierkegaard muddies the waters because he thinks that we need to work out some sense in which Antigone’s commitment to family is free or else we could not love her for her ‘sisterly affection’ (K, p. 154). But this is fairly clearly a mistake. We love sunsets but do not have to pretend that the sky is in any sense a free agent in order to do so.

Kierkegaard claims that as Antigone’s action is ‘ambiguous’ between freedom and fate, so is her *hamartia* or, as he calls it, ‘guilt’ (*skyld*). Because she is innately programmed to (in Hegel’s language) a ‘one-sided’ elevation of family loyalties above all others, she is innocent of any culpability for her contribution to the tragic catastrophe. Yet in line with the ambiguous status of her action, her innocence, too, is an ‘ambiguous innocence’ (K, p. 142). Here, I think, the notion of ‘ambiguity’ is on stronger ground. Although Antigone cannot be *blamed* for her one-sidedness, she has nonetheless, in Kierkegaard’s view, a less than excellent character. Through no fault of her own, as one might put it, she has a tragic fault or flaw. Although she has no ‘guilt’, she does have a ‘fault’. Again my sunset analogy makes the point clear. Some sunsets we do not, in fact, love. The crimsons are too garish, too ‘technicolor’. So they are flawed, have a fault, but are in no sense blameworthy on account of it.

That Kierkegaard does not really want to attribute any kind of freedom to Antigone’s defining act is made clear by the following striking

remark. While the ‘ethical’ stance which attributes absolute freedom and responsibility to the agent is, he says, ‘harsh’,

the tragic has in it an infinite gentleness; it is really in the aesthetic sense with regard to human life what the divine love and mercy are: it is even milder, and hence I may say that it is like a mother’s love, soothing to the troubled. (K, p. 143)

This is Kierkegaard’s account of the tragic effect. What draws us to genuine tragedy is its gentle ‘soothing’ of the troubled spirit. To understand his idea, it is helpful, I think, to return to the Nietzsche of his positivist period.

In *Human, All-too-Human*, as we saw (p. 91), Nietzsche turns his back on the youthful romanticism of *The Birth of Tragedy* and decides to adopt the scientific outlook. Science, and science alone, is the repository of truth. Intrinsic to the scientific outlook is the principle of universal causation *and consequently* the denial of ‘free will’. The second follows from the first, he holds, because it seems to him obvious that an action cannot be both causally determined by events that happened before one’s birth and also free. Rather than finding this denial of freedom depressing, however, he finds it liberating. For ‘free will’ was always a myth invented by priests in order to make us feel responsible, and therefore ‘guilty’, and therefore in need of their intercession in order to obtain redemption. But with the turn to science, one sees that there is no free will, and so no moral responsibility, and so no guilt, and so no need for priests. And so one finds oneself ‘in paradise’.⁶ Discarding the myth of free will, we recover our lost ‘innocence’.⁷

This, surely, is the soothing gentleness Kierkegaard is talking about. To have the sense that one’s life-defining actions are in the hands of fate – or God – is to be freed from the ‘harshness’ of ethical judgment, from the weight of responsibility and guilt, so that one discovers, so to speak, the incredible lightness of being. This is why Kierkegaard says that not only *can* one be both happy and tragic but that actually one *must* have a sense of tragic fatality in order to be happy (K, p. 143).⁸

⁶ HH I 124.

⁷ HH I 107.

⁸ Or, rather, this is what A says. The issue of the ‘harshness’ of ethical judgment is the crucial point at which A’s views and Kierkegaard’s own views diverge. Whereas A believes (as does Nietzsche) that such harshness has a destructive, depressing effect,

I think this same sense lies behind his difficult idea that the feeling belonging to the tragic outlook is ‘sorrow’ rather than ‘pain’ (K, p. 145–6). In empathising with, inhabiting, Antigone’s predicament one may feel sorrow that her destiny is a tragic one but not pain. For, given that she has no personal responsibility for her ‘guilt’, the ‘bitterest pain’, that of ‘remorse’, is not experienced. It is, says Kierkegaard, like ‘dark and cloudy weather’. There is nothing one can do about it – it is simply a *fatum* – and so one shrugs one’s shoulders, forgets about it and gets on with life or, as the case may be, death (K, p. 154). Notice the implication here that the tragic effect is a bitter-sweet emotion: one feels the pleasure of the lightness of being but at the same time tragic sorrow. One can imagine an Israeli or Palestinian soldier having the same feeling. Since he is born, fated, into the tragic conflict he feels no responsibility, no guilt or remorse, for prosecuting his side of the conflict. But at the same time he may feel deep sorrow that the times in which he lives are so ‘out of joint’.

KIERKEGAARD VERSUS HEGEL ON GREEK TRAGEDY

One of Hegel’s central claims, as we saw, is that the idea that fate as ‘blind’, ‘purely irrational and unintelligible destiny’ is integral to ‘the classical worldview’ is a myth. Insofar as fate appears at all it moves in a ‘moral sphere’ that essentially involves the hero’s *hamartia* (p. 145). This seems to be what Kierkegaard wishes to criticise. Greek tragedy, indeed all tragedy, he wants to argue, essentially involves the operation of a fate that is capricious, ethically ‘blind’. That this is the essential character of tragedy, he claims, is why there are no tragedies in the Old Testament: however terrible the god of Judaism, the afflictions he sends are always ‘righteous punishment’. ‘Judaism’, he concludes, is ‘too ethically developed’ to provide ‘tragic material’ (K, p. 148). The reason blind fate appears in Greek tragedy is, as we

Kierkegaard himself holds that a sense of the yawning gap between ourselves as we are and as we ought to be is essential to providing us with a life-defining goal, with meaning and inspiration. Hence we must advance from the aesthetic to the ethical life. But since the gap is a *yawning* one, we cannot hope to cross it without God’s help, and so, without God, we are condemned to ‘despair’. Thus to live with meaning but without despair we must take the further step from the merely ethical to the ‘religious’ life. Q.E.D. Or maybe not.

have seen, that the hero's character is pre-programmed, capricious, unchosen.

This, however, seems to me to confuse fate with necessity. For those who defend the essential role of fate in Greek tragedy, the central paradigm is *Oedipus Tyrannus*. For the 'fateists', the essential point about *Oedipus* is that fate is the *antagonist* of the hero's will, that although Oedipus struggles against the prophecy of parricide and incest, he ends up fulfilling it anyway. As Schelling emphasises (p. 77 above), for 'fate' to be the victor over the hero, the crucial event must be *contrary* to his will. To borrow Hamlet's words, fate must 'shape our ends' *in spite of* our valiant attempts to 'rough hew' them. In the case of Antigone, however, 'fate', or rather necessity, and the hero's will are *in harmony* with each other. If Kierkegaard is right, Antigone is *necessitated* to perform the decisive act, could have done none other. But since she also wills it, since necessity operates *through* her will, there is no struggle with a hostile adversary and so no operation of 'fate'.

Is not, however, necessity enough to upset Hegel's account of Antigone? He does state, after all, that her action is an exercise of 'freedom of the will'. As we saw, however, all he means by this is that the action is not the result of the hero's being overcome by something contrary to her character but is, rather, 'an essential content of rationality', that is, is 'well considered and wholly deliberate'.⁹ All he means is that Antigone acts in and from character rather than being overcome by something out of and contrary to character.¹⁰ Hegel can thus accept Kierkegaard's surely correct point about the necessitated nature of character without disturbing any of the points he wishes to make about Greek tragedy. He can even, I think, accept Kierkegaard's point about 'sorrow' rather than the 'pain' of remorse belonging to our response to Greek tragedy.

⁹ A I, p. 232.

¹⁰ It is perfectly reasonable to speak of 'freedom' in this context. As against the Schopenhauer-Kierkegaard conception of freedom as essentially incompatible with causation, it seems reasonable to distinguish a notion of freedom that depends on the *manner* in which one's actions are caused. According to this notion, if an action is caused by a settled disposition of character, rather than, say, a desire brainwashed into one by Chinese Communists (*vide* the 1959 movie *The Manchurian Candidate*) or by Aphrodite in a bad mood (p. 84), then it counts as 'free'.

MODERN TRAGEDY

The modern tragic hero, Kierkegaard suggests, is an image of the modern soul. With the disintegration of the 'substantial categories' of ethical substance, the 'fatalistic element' of Greek tragedy disappears. The modern tragic hero, like modern human beings in general,

is fully reflective, and this reflection has not only reflected him out of every immediate relation to state, race and destiny, but has often even reflected him out of his own preceding life. (K, p. 141)

Since there are no unquestionable 'givens', since nothing is immune to critical 'reflection', everything is open to question. Since modern consciousness is 'undermined by doubt', the unquestionable grounding of his life in one of the categories of ethical substance is impossible for the modern hero. He must rather be a 'Pelagian' figure (K, p. 142), as it were, a moral *tabula rasa* untainted by any kind of 'original sin'. A hero reflecting the 'general consciousness' of modernity has to be 'left to himself' (*ibid.*), untrammelled by pre-established ethical parameters, the 'creator' of his own destiny (K, p. 143).

If for the modern hero there are no unquestionable ethical axioms, the question is, how does he act at all? As Jean-Paul Sartre will later emphasise, since there is no pre-given ground, the final basis for action has to be, for Kierkegaard, a 'leap', an act of ungrounded commitment.¹¹ This makes the individual 'responsible for everything' (K, p. 144). For someone who has 'gone to the dogs', therefore, there are no extenuating circumstances: according to Kierkegaard, the sensibility of the present age is such that an appeal to an unhappy childhood would fall on entirely deaf ears (K, pp. 142–3). There are, as Sartre will put it, 'no excuses'.¹²

How does this sensibility affect the nature of modern tragedy? Kierkegaard endorses Aristotle's requirement that the tragic hero possess some element of *hamartia*, 'guilt'. And he also endorses the requirement that this guilt have morally 'intermediate' status. If there is no guilt, he writes, 'tragic interest is nullified'. But if the guilt is

¹¹ For Kierkegaard himself, as distinct from A, God is the ground of ethical axioms. But since he does not pretend that God can be *known* to exist, for him, too, ethics are grounded, ultimately, in a 'leap'.

¹² Sartre (1956), p. 555.

'absolute', there can likewise be no tragedy since there is nothing tragic about the downfall of the wicked: 'sin', as Kierkegaard puts it (repeating Hegel's remarks on the devil [p. 114 above]), 'is not an aesthetic element' (K, p. 142). That, however, constitutes precisely the problem of writing tragedy in the present age. The only kind of guilt we have access to is the 'harsh', 'ethical' category of absolute responsibility. There is no way of mitigating the tragic hero's responsibility. Hence, if he 'goes to the dogs', he is not 'tragic' but rather 'bad' (K, p. 143).

And so, it seems, the tragic, together with its comfort, is absent from the modern outlook, which is the reason for the underlying 'melancholy', indeed 'despair', of our age (K, p. 143). When things go wrong through our agency we have nowhere to turn, for we live in an age that is 'self-complaisant enough to disdain the tears of tragedy but also self-complaisant enough to dispense with divine mercy' (ibid.).¹³ We can appeal neither to fate nor to God's forgiveness to exculpate ourselves from the 'harshness' of ethical guilt and judgment.

REWRITING *ANTIGONE*

There can, then, be no tragedy written from within the 'general consciousness' of the modern age. But that does not mean that there can be no modern tragedy. For it turns out that modern consciousness, with its idea of the 'absolute' individual with 'absolute' responsibility for his actions, is based on an 'illusion', the illusion that the human being is the 'absolute creator of its own destiny'. In truth, 'every individual, however original he may be, is still the child of God, of his age, of his nation, of his family and friends' (K, p. 143). Although modernity is blind to the 'categories' of ethical substance, they are not destroyed, merely hidden. That they are still in being, waiting to be rediscovered, seems to be the basis of the essay's final project of rewriting *Antigone* in such a way that 'the characteristic of ancient tragedy is embodied within the modern' (K, p. 138). The project is to synthesise the classical and the modern, fate and reflection, so that

¹³ Kierkegaard himself, of course, while agreeing with A that to escape 'despair' we need *either* to be capable of the 'tears of tragedy' *or* to believe in 'divine mercy', holds that the second is the only truly viable solution to the problem (see note 8 to this chapter).

the result 'will have substantiality enough for [tragic] sorrow to show itself', but 'reflective enough to mark the pain' characteristic of reflective consciousness (K, p. 151).

The rewriting begins by shifting the focus from Antigone's relationship with her brother to her relationship with her father, Oedipus.¹⁴ In Kierkegaard's drama, Antigone knows her father's guilty secret but, amidst all the celebrations of his honour, keeps silent, knowing that it will ruin everything. In the end, knowing she cannot marry her betrothed without being absolutely truthful (presumably for the quite mundane reason that, from the point of view of procreation, he would need to know she herself is the product of incest), she sacrifices her love for him, and for herself, in order to preserve her father's honour.

What makes Kierkegaard's Antigone a modern figure is easy to understand. Whereas Sophocles' Antigone knows all about the family's tragic sorrow and about her own absolute commitment to the family's honour, yet shrugs her shoulders and gets on with life, Kierkegaard's Antigone anxiously broods over the secret she can share with no one, is isolated and introverted by the pain of 'hereditary guilt'. Whereas, prior to the decisive confrontation, the Greek Antigone has lived the life of a 'carefree maid', the modern Antigone's life is 'essentially over', she is already 'dead', before the play starts (K, pp. 153–7). (One notices, here, large elements of Hamlet grafted onto Antigone.)

More difficult to discover is what Kierkegaard takes to be the classical element in his supposed synthesis. The answer, I think, lies in the description of his Antigone as a 'bride' wedded to 'an idea' (K, p. 156), the idea of family honour. The basis of this 'marriage' is love: Antigone 'loves her father with all her soul, and this love transports her out of herself and into her father's guilt' (K, p. 159). What I think Kierkegaard is appealing to here is, once again, the fact that a passion is a suffering, a *passio* (K, p. 148). Antigone does not choose to have a love for her father that is so intense as to give her a 'supernatural' bearing (K, p. 156). Like all great passions it is something she is 'overcome' by. Kierkegaard's suggestion is, then, that Greek fate can be rendered intelligible to modern consciousness by being translated into a powerful emotion that lies at the foundation of character.

¹⁴ This is pointed out by Christine Battersby ([1998], p. 152).

Antigone is 'fated' and 'classical' because her character is caused, not chosen, yet psychological and 'modern' because, bereft of moral absolutes, she agonizes about that very character.

Whether this means that Kierkegaard believes, after all, that tragedy is possible in the modern age remains a moot point. Although he provides the synopsis of a modern *Antigone*, he says that he will 'refrain from every prophecy about this being what the age demands' (K, p. 138). Of its success, in other words, he is sceptical, presumably because he doubts that modern consciousness will accept the 'fated' nature of character.

CRITICISM

In his account, Kierkegaard attributes two beliefs to 'modern consciousness':

- (1) Since there are no moral absolutes, one's ultimate moral commitments can be based only on acts of ungrounded choice, acts of choice that are unsupported by justifying reasons.
- (2) Each person is the 'creator' of his own destiny, is, that is, the ultimate ground of his actions, their uncaused cause.

He further represents 'modern consciousness' as taking (2) to *follow from* (1). But if this is what modern consciousness thinks then it is wrong. Our ultimate moral commitments, our moral character, may be 'ungrounded' in the sense of being ungrounded in prior *reasons*, yet simultaneously 'grounded' in the sense of being the product of prior *causes*, the product of nature and nurture. Kierkegaard's account of the possibility of modern tragedy effectively consists in pointing this out. His Antigone agonises about the moral priority she attaches to family honour over her moral character. She does so because she is conscious that she can give no justifying reasons for her stance, for being of that character. Yet at the same time she is *not* the creator of her character: like everyone else she is the 'child' of 'her age, nation, family and friends'. Hence she is both 'fated', in that her character is determined by events beyond her control, and yet psychologically 'reflective' because she is tormented by moral doubt.

Kierkegaard is absolutely right: that one's fundamental moral principles, one's moral character, is ungrounded (unsupported by

prior reasons) and hence a source of moral agony is fully compatible with that character's being completely grounded in (caused by) prior events. What is dubious, however, is his attribution of this confusion between the two senses of 'ground' to 'modern consciousness'. To be sure 'existentialism', as articulated by Sartre, might be said to constitute at least a segment of 'modern consciousness', the segment Kierkegaard is concerned to analyse. But although Sartre indeed holds *both* that we are free in a sense that is incompatible with causal determination *and* that our ultimate moral commitments cannot be grounded in reasons and are thus a source of moral 'anguish',¹⁵ he is always clear that the lack of causal determination of our actions and the lack of rational grounding of our moral commitments are claims that are *logically independent* of each other. Kierkegaard's discussion thus has the appearance of working through his own confusion rather than a confusion that can plausibly be attributed to anything that could be called 'modern consciousness'.

¹⁵ Sartre (1956), pp. 38, 480.