

The Aesthete as a Failed Religious Man: Notes on the Aesthetic Conception of Existence in *Either/Or*, Part I by Søren Kierkegaard

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The article takes as a starting point Sergio Givone's assertion that the aesthete is a religious man who has failed. Following this hypothesis, we see that, faced with the experience of boredom as the fundamental mood of the work, the aesthetic conception of existence leads to a practical method of discipline and detachment from the world similar to that of ascetic ideals. The Aesthete A is a failed religious man because he has lost the absolute and because, by transferring aesthetic categories to existence, what appears as the foundation of its method is a secularization of religious categories. The religiosity from which the aesthete distances himself is a monastic-aesthetic religion, that is to say, an aestheticizing religion. In this sense, the religion that appears on the horizon of *Either/Or* and the aesthetic position that is presented in the work are diverse expressions of the same phenomenon: the unhappy consciousness.

Keywords: Kierkegaard – boredom – aesthetic life – unhappy consciousness – religiosity

I. Boredom in the Aesthete A

I feel as a chessman must feel when the opponent says of it: That piece cannot be moved.
(SKS 2, 30 / Kierkegaard 1987a, 22)

In a remark on the aesthetic figure of Kierkegaard in his *History of Nothingness*, Sergio Givone has pointed out, lucidly, that the aesthete is a failed religious man (Givone 1995, 109).¹ Although Givone has not developed schematically, that is, from within Kierkegaard's work, such an idea, it nevertheless seems a good starting point for approaching the nature and implications of the aesthetic conception of existence in the thought of Søren Kierkegaard, its relation to the spirit of the nineteenth century and, naturally, to that of our own time. The aesthetic in Kierkegaard finds various levels and developments. One can see, in the field of the aesthetic, figures ranging from the tormented youth of *Repetition* or the "Quidam" of *Stages on Life's Way* in whom a kind of religiosity, a kind of monastic disposition, is to some extent evident, to figures such as Johannes the seducer, of whom, at least at first sight, one would not suspect a link with the religious. Givone's statement is all the more interesting because it is conceived from the point of view of Aesthete A, who is a figure, in the brief scheme proposed, closer to the seducer than to the Quidam. In other words, the aesthete as a failed religious man is the one who is described and shown in *Either/Or*, Part I. Therefore, it will be crucial to focus on different moments of this work to try to trace this hypothesis.

In the "Diapsalmata," a collection of aphorisms that opens *Either/Or*, Part I, the Aesthete A writes:

How dreadful boredom is—how dreadfully boring; I know no stronger expression, no truer one, for like is recognized only by like. Would that there were a loftier, stronger expression, for then there would still be one movement. I lie prostrate, inert; the only thing I see is emptiness, the only thing I live on is emptiness, the only thing I move in is emptiness. I do not even suffer pain. The vulture pecked continually at Prometheus's liver; the poison dripped down continually on Loki; it was at least an interruption, even though monotonous. Pain itself has lost its refreshment for me. If I were offered all the glories of the world or all the torments of the world, one would move me no more than the other; I would not turn over to the other side either to attain or to avoid. I am dying death. And what could divert me? Well, if I managed to see a faithfulness that withstood every ordeal [*Prøvelse*], an enthusiasm that endured everything, a faith that moved mountains; if I were to become aware of an idea that joined the finite and the infinite. But my soul's poisonous doubt consumes everything. My soul is like the Dead Sea, over

¹ This statement also appears in the chapter dedicated to Kierkegaard in his *History of Aesthetics*. For Givone, the aesthete withdraws into the void and thus self-destructs (Givone 2008).

which no bird is able to fly; when it has come midway, it sinks down, exhausted, to death and destruction (*SKS* 2, 46 / Kierkegaard 1987a, 37).

This passage is key to understanding the mood that runs through this first part of the work; it is the tedium that enshrouds everything. Here, Aesthete A characterizes the experience of boredom as paralysis and stagnation. Time stops and with it the possibility of becoming. That is to say, Aesthete A's complaint is rooted in the experience of paralysis and the absence of becoming. It is not about the banal experience of boredom as a simple not knowing what to do with one's time and therefore feeling that one is stagnating, but rather is about the experience of spiritual paralysis. Aesthete A longs for a goal so as to escape from this a state. He seeks that certainty of the absolute that would give a horizon to his existence. He glimpses the experience of faith as something no longer possible. From this perspective, he witnesses the spectacle of his spiritual stagnation as the experience of failure. He recognizes that there may be something infinite but he cannot follow it. In this experience of tedium we find, then, a broken will, which sees, or rather recognizes, the existence of the absolute, of the only thing that can give it an existential horizon, but does not have the strength to follow it.

This experience of the broken will, of recognizing the absolute but being unable to follow it, is similar to the experience of *acedia* described by the desert fathers, e.g., John Cassian, Evagrius Ponticus, and John Climacus. Kierkegaard himself stresses in a journal entry that what we moderns call spleen or tedium was what the desert fathers described as *acedia*, understood as spiritual carelessness, as the sloth of the heart in Cassian's term (see journal entry EE:117 in *SKS* 18, 44 / *KJN* 2, 39 – 40). This is why St. Thomas Aquinas pointed out that *acedia* is a dangerous spiritual vice that engenders other vices, such as curiosity and the distraction of the mind. It is the worst of the vices because it is grief over the divine good. That is, it involves recognizing the absolute but not wanting to walk the path that leads to it.² But the broken will not only implies disconsolation in the face of the absolute, grief, that is, a heavy spirit – *Tungsind* or the German term *Schwermut* – that leaves the will broke in its search for the absolute; it also implies what, in Kierkegaardian phenomenology, we could

² In this respect, and in relation to the experience of *acedia* in modernity, Baudelaire's poem, *The Bad Monk*, is very suggestive: in it the connection between *acedia* and tedium as Kierkegaard has described it in this note of his journal of 1839 can be seen very clearly (Baudelaire 1961, 27). For a reading of *acedia* in modern literature and specifically in Baudelaire (Kuhn 2017).

call an inauthentic relation to oneself. In this experience of stagnation, typical of boredom and well described by Aesthete A himself, the relationship with time is crucial. The human being is time, because it is in time that he can unfold his spirit, become. Time is freedom's stage, and freedom stagnates if the relationship with time is negative. The fact that time does not pass as Aesthete A experiences it means that the self is at a standstill. Remotely, Aesthete A is aware of this drama and therefore regrets having a broken will. In the aphorism quoted above the broken will manifests itself as doubt. Reflection was outlined as a poisonous doubt that prevents the beginning, certainty. It is not a methodical doubt proper to the Cartesian subject, that is to say, a doubt that waits to be overcome in order to find a certainty that will be the foundation stone of a strong construction, but a doubt that poisons everything, that does not allow edification.³ It is a doubt in which the evil genius cannot be overcome.

But this stagnation leads Aesthete A to a new stage that also appears in one of the "Diapsalmata," the infinite reflection:

I feel like a letter printed backward in the line, and yet as uncontrollable as a pasha with three horse tails, as solicitous for myself and my thoughts as a bank for its banknotes, indeed, as reflected into myself as any *pronomem reflexivum* [reflexive pronoun] (SKS 2, 30 / Kierkegaard 1987a, 22).

Here there appears the ambiguity of modern tedium. Aesthete A shows himself to be saddened by his discomfort in the world. He feels he is like a letter printed back to front in the line of existence. At this point he no longer yearns for something that binds the finite and the infinite together, no longer aspires to be corrected and amended. He affirms himself to be that error in the writing of life and on this he will build a particular sense of existence. And, therefore, as a consequence of the above, Aesthete A feels jealous of that which he is and of his thoughts. Given his distance from the concrete world, from the reality he cannot access because of his stagnation, he takes refuge in reflection. It is the process of infinite doubt that already knows that it will not reach any certainty. It is therefore a game of reflection with itself. Aesthete A discovers a sort of infinity in himself. And it is on this infinity of reflection that Aesthete A will build his method.⁴ Aesthete A transfers the categories of aesthetics to

³ In this sense, as Louis Mackey has pointed out, *Either/Or*, Part 1, would be a formative novel without formation (Mackey 1971, 274).

⁴ This infinity of reflection is one of the great discoveries of the aesthetics of Romanticism, which understands Fichte's self, not as a principle of knowledge, but as the activity of the

existence. Everything that happens can only have an aesthetic interest. History itself is relegated to art. That is to say, only the characters of the history of art have an entity. That is why, for Aesthete A, a character from Shakespeare or a Greek tragedy is more real and authentic than any of his contemporaries. Naturally this has to do with a critique of the period and its lack of passion, but also with the idea that in romanticism there is a kind of aesthetic reduction (Bowie 2003, 63).⁵ This aesthetic reduction presents itself in Aesthete A in two ways. On the one hand, in the sense previously indicated, according to which real history is the history of art and, hence, all of Aesthete A's references are to figures of art. And, on the other hand, in the sense that the existential categories that will indicate the path of his existence are aesthetic categories. In other words, Aesthete A consciously distances himself from ethical categories such as work, marriage and friendship, since they are categories that lead to a life devoid of passion and a fall into vulgar boredom.⁶ He takes the categories that guide his existence from the aesthetics of romanticism.

The fundamental category is that of the interesting. This concept appears in Friedrich Schlegel, defined as the aesthetic force of an individual (Schlegel 1882, 109).⁷ From this aesthetic force there are derived key categories, such as irony, wit (*Witz*), fragmentariness and criticism as a reflection of the work on itself. The interpretative elasticity that the Romantics discover in the work is key to aesthetic existence since it implies living in a fragmentary way without aspiring to or expecting an absolute truth. Poetry, conceived by Friedrich Schlegel as progressive chaos, will also be taken as existence. In contrast to the idea of an existence with a beginning, development and end, in which opposites would be reconciled, as in the classical form of the formative novel,

self that thinks itself. For a development of this question see (Benjamin 1974, 29; Heine 1976, 25; Stewart 2003, 172). Hegel, too, understands romantic irony to be based on a trivialization of Fichte's philosophy (Hegel 1989, 93ff). Kierkegaard understands it in the same way in his thesis on irony (*SKS* 1, 311 / Kierkegaard 1989b, 275).

⁵ The aesthetic reduction means that art cannot be reduced to anything else. This means that there is no reading of phenomena outside the aesthetic. This is linked to the idea of a new mythology according to Bohrer's reading of Friedrich Schlegel's *Rede über die Mythologie* (Bohrer 1983, 59).

⁶ As Aesthete A makes it clear in "Rotation of Crops," there is the vulgar boredom of the person who is not conscious of leading a boring life, for example, someone who is immersed in his work, while the Aesthete A is conscious and thus seeks the means to entertain himself. That is to say, Aesthete A is aware of his boredom and finds in his method of amusement what we could call an elegant, aesthetic way of being bored.

⁷ On what is interesting in *Either/Or*, Part 1 (Harries 2010, 95 – 98).

with the Romantics, there appears the idea of a formative novel (*Bildungsroman*) which is as open as reality is chaotic. These ideas of the fragment and the open will be of key importance to Aesthete A, since, in the face of the fall of the absolute, it will be the fragment and the transient that appear on the horizon. In Aesthete A, a form of the death of God is expressed. What appears as an alternative is the power of the self that has discovered infinite reflection. Before the self, God becomes a phantom, as Jacobi predicted (Jacobi 2019, 144). The modern self becomes its self-foundation but also, as Jean Paul has put it, its exterminating angel (Jean Paul 1996, 274). This oscillation is what is fascinating for Aesthete A. This oscillation is that which goes from feeling uncomfortable in existence but jealous of the capacity for reflection. Doubt is fascinating, no longer as a horizon of foundations, but in and of itself.

The last of the aphorisms of the “Diapsalmata” is key to understanding the transfer of the aesthetic categories of romanticism to existence. There, Aesthete A asks the gods for laughter to always be on his side. Laughter here is wit (*Witz*), a category contained within the constellation of irony. With laughter on his side, Aesthete A is in a position to play with reality without falling into the dangers of seriousness, that is, boredom. We have already said that Aesthete A is a bored person conscious of his boredom. As he says explicitly in “Rotation of Crops,” tedium is at the root of evil, and is, therefore, what must be confronted (*SKS 2*, 280 / Kierkegaard 1987a, 291). The degree of consciousness is key in Aesthete A. And what is seen throughout in *Either/Or*, Part I is that Aesthete A is becoming increasingly aware of his state. He goes through various figures. As happens in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where consciousness gains clarity with respect to itself as it becomes conscious of its figures, so too in Kierkegaard’s phenomenology there is a progressive becoming conscious, that is, each figure of consciousness corrects the previous one and unfolds new possibilities in the face of the same phenomena.⁸

In relation to Aesthete A’s progressively developing awareness of his state, the essay, “The Unhappiest One,” is crucial. There the Aesthete A recognizes himself as an unhappy consciousness. “The Unhappiest One” is what we could call an anti-upbuilding discourse that parodies the building discourse and can be read as a counterpart of “Ultimatum,” the building discourse with which *Either/Or* concludes. The Aesthete A takes Hegel’s definition and expounds it, no longer from the perspective of the conceptual

⁸ This can be seen from the theory of the stages or spheres of existence, in the “passage” from one sphere to another, but within each moment there also are different figures.

development offered by Hegel himself, but from an existential position. From an existential point of view, it is possible – and this is what occurs in *Either/Or* of Kierkegaard's works and perhaps in all of them – that the unhappy consciousness is not overcome. What the Aesthete A expresses in the face of the *Συμπαράνεκρωμένοι* is the certainty of dwelling in wretchedness and accepting oneself as wretched consciousness.⁹ While everyone wants to escape from unhappiness, to overcome it, his confreres, those nocturnal birds that live against the grain, affirm it and build their existence on it. The unhappiness defined by Hegel and assumed by Aesthete A consists in the fact that consciousness has its foundation outside of itself (Hegel 1970, 131; *SKS* 2, 216 / Kierkegaard 1987a, 222). It is the religious consciousness that has found a master outside the world. It has found the infinite but outside itself. This coincidence of the unhappy consciousness identified with the religious consciousness is extremely revealing with respect to the secret of the aesthetic life. In effect, the aesthete is a religious person without God. That is to say, he has found the absolute, but no longer outside himself, but rather within himself. Like the religious conscience, his unhappiness has to do with the impossibility of accessing reality. It is a reality that he also despises. For the religious conscience, reality is despicable because God is in the beyond.¹⁰ The world becomes a tortuous place of transit that is threatening for those who seek salvation. The Aesthete A despises the world because it is also the temptation, not of the perdition of the soul, but of falling into boredom. In other words, the aesthete is a monk who wants to escape from the world but without a monastery to which he can go because God is dead. The only possible

⁹ When speaking of the unhappy consciousness, one can speak of the degree of consciousness of Aesthete A in relation to his own state. At times, this is self-deception but at others it is conscious detachment from the categories of ethics. At the moment of self-consciousness, the question of melancholy appears as that which impedes his self-awareness. In a revealing passage from his *Journal*, Kierkegaard writes: "For many years my depression has prevented me from saying 'Du' to myself in the profoundest sense. Between my 'Du' and my depression lay a whole world of imagination" (*SKS* 20, 97, NB 141; Kierkegaard 1978, 369).

¹⁰ This duality of unhappy consciousness can be seen in B's critique of the Aesthete A and the mystic: "It is as if they discovered an entirely different world, as if their nature were in itself double. Anyone who refuses to struggle with actualities acquires phantoms to struggle against" (*SKS* 3, 304 – 305 / Kierkegaard 1987b, 323). Also in *Stages of Life Way* appears this criticism of the mystic: "The religious abstraction desires to belong to God alone. For this love [*Kærlighed*] it is willing to refuse, renounce, sacrifice everything" (*SKS* 6, 162 / Kierkegaard 1989, 173).

monastery is that of irony. It is that of the aestheticization of existence. And the bases of his spiritual exercises are set out in detail in "Rotation of Crops."

II. The Method of the Aesthete A: Religious Principles?

*The first duty in life is to be as artificial as possible.
What the second duty is no one has as yet discovered.*
(Wilde 1903, 5)

In "Rotation of Crops," the Aesthete A – taking into account the development of his consciousness – has identified boredom as the root of evil. It is the enemy to be defeated. Tedium is elevated to the level of myth. The world itself has arisen from God's boredom (SKS 2, 276 / Kierkegaard 1987a, 286). Humanity has opposed insufficient principles to boredom and therefore has not succeeded in eradicating it. In reality, it has not been eradicated. But there are methods that only succeed in expanding it. In this essay, the Aesthete A is more fully aware of the ethical categories he wants to avoid. Friendship, marriage and profession are the targets of his attacks. They all entail continuity and thus lead to an empty repetition that, in his view, inevitably leads to boredom. Aesthete A states that entertainment is the true opposite of boredom. In order to have fun, the intensive rather than the extensive is fundamental. That is, a disposition of the self to master reality rather than a dependence on reality for enjoyment. In a particular reworking of the logical principles of Aristotelian and even Stoic ethics, Aesthete A argues that it is the self that dominates reality and that one cannot be at the mercy of chance and leave one's happiness to the whims of fortune. Naturally Aesthete A does not speak of happiness in terms of a life achieved by the constancy of virtuous behavior turned into habit, but he uses these rationalist principles in his method of aesthetic living. In other words, there is a practical rationality that Aesthete A puts at the service of amusement as an ideal of existence. This practical rationality involves seeing the world as an occasion for enjoyment. Reality is reality, but it depends on us how we see it, how we play with it, since, according to Aesthete A, "the eye with which one sees actuality must be changed continually" (SKS 2, 288 / Kierkegaard 1987a, 300). It is this variation that is lost if one enters into a way

of life full of monotony, as demanded by the ideals of the modern age.¹¹ This is the practical rationality that leads to the moderation of enjoyment. Thus the principle of limitation and arbitrariness is crucial. Here again the concept of the interesting is crucial. Whoever possesses the interesting has the power to foresee and calculate the effect of his acts. But above all, to know oneself, since living aesthetically “it is primarily a matter of being able to use moods; if a person can do that, an inexhaustible variation of combinations can be achieved” (SKS 2, 286 – 287 / Kierkegaard 1987a, 298). The interesting is the power of limitation since he who does not limit himself is limited by the external. But what is also interesting is what we could call a will to artifice. In this will to artifice there is a process in which the relationship with oneself is one of experimentation. Here it is worth remembering Lessing’s idea that he who lives aesthetically ends up treating himself as a thing (Lessing 1979, 513). This treating oneself as a thing logically implies treating the world and others in the same way. What appears on Aesthete A’s horizon is the reification of others at the hands of the power of a self-fascinated with its power.

Self-limitation is arbitrariness. It is taking control of reality. The self becomes superior and reality is only an opportunity for enjoyment. Already in the “Diapsalmata” Aesthete A speaks of descending into reality and trapping prey to take to his castle. His castle is sorrow, that is to say, melancholy, which, as a fundamental mood, keeps him apart from concrete reality.¹² The aesthete’s melancholy is a gateway and a cloister at the same time.¹³ The power of

¹¹ Undoubtedly, in Aesthete A there is a criticism of society and the customs of the era as a kind of alienation and loss of the human essence. The ideals of the era become dehumanizing. The repetition of the customs and the emphasis on productivity and the constitution of the family, marriage as the only valid instance of love, would be the main sources of modern alienation. We also find an important antecedent to this criticism of the era in Friedrich Schlegel (Schlegel 2007, 81).

¹² Melancholy is the fundamental mood in *Either/Or*. As Climacus has said, melancholy is omnipresent (SKS 7, 229 / Kierkegaard 1992, 253).

¹³ On the relationship between melancholy and the religious, McCarthy emphasizes the different terms used by Kierkegaard for melancholy. McCarthy proposes an aesthetic, religious or aesthetic-religious approach. For McCarthy, aesthetic writing expresses a non-resolution of melancholy. In this respect, McCarthy himself adds that the aesthetic life is suffering and despair “precisely because he refuses the childbirth of the eternal in the personality” (McCarthy 1978, 81). And so Aesthete A knows he is stuck because he “*will not will*” (McCarthy 1978, 119). In this sense *Tungsind* is understood as the natural development in spiritual evolution and, paradoxically, romantic (aesthetic) melancholy becomes an

limitation and arbitrariness show the potency of the interesting. But it also shows that Aesthete A is disciplined. The discipline that appears here is key to understanding in what sense he is a religious man gone bad. He is so because he has the method, but he has lost the certainty of the existence of something absolute. But the kind of religiosity to which Aesthete A aspired is nevertheless an aesthetic religion, that is, a religion based on the feeling of the absolute, but without an ethical component, as will appear in later works of Kierkegaard.¹⁴ In that sense, it is a facet of the same question that appears in the background; Aesthete A is a figure of the unhappy conscience as well as the kind of religiosity to which he aspired and in which he himself believes he fails. In reality he achieves a form of religious life in a different way. This divergent mode is the aesthetization of existence. In this sense, we can no longer speak of an aesthetic religion but of a religious aesthetics, that is, an existence consecrated with monastic rigor to the aesthetic. Aesthete A is an unsuccessful religious person, not only because he experiences the death of God, that is, the loss of absolute values, but also because he secularizes religious categories. The aesthetic categories that are transferred to existence will be lived religiously.

obstacle to authentically religious, constitutive melancholy. According to McCarthy, the complete restoration of the self occurs when the need for God is recognized and desired: only then does true repetition come to pass in the sense that everything is made new: what one had acquires its true value by becoming connected with a foundation higher than the self, or more precisely, by becoming related to the authentic self. For this reason, McCarthy concludes that “the essence of melancholy is the longing for a restoration of one’s God-relationship. In melancholy, the desire and the need for a religious dimension and religious grounding of the Self is experienced in two phases, first in the unconscious longing and suffering of *Melancholi* and then in the reflective and discerning longing of *Tungsind*” (McCarthy 1977, 164). In a broader analysis of the aesthetic, which goes beyond *Either/Or*, a close relationship between melancholy and the religious can be seen, as for example in the Quidam of *Stages on Life’s Way*. On the ambiguity of the terms used by Kierkegaard and the ambiguous treatment of the phenomenon, see Michael Theunissen’s analysis (1996, 44 – 47). On the other hand, for Ferguson, melancholy anticipates the religious since it relates the human being to the dark foundations of existence (1994, 254).

¹⁴ According to Colette, Aesthete A lacks the seriousness to take on a real metamorphosis and therefore remains at the stage of laughing and playing (Colette 1994, 73). In the same sense, for Pattison, Aesthete A senses the religious, but his conscience does not yet access the key notion for understanding and determining the passage to the religious: sin (Pattison 1983, 313).

The aesthete lives ascetically.¹⁵ In this way he seeks to live distanced from the dangers of the world. As with the medieval monk – another figure of the unhappy conscience – the aesthete feels that the meaning of his life is threatened by the world. To save the purity of his interiority,¹⁶ of his self, he then absolutizes the casual, the fragmentary. In order not to fall into the dangerous seriousness of the world, into human madness, he plays and laughs. Like the dandy and the flâneur, his brothers of the century, Aesthete A understands that the only absolute that can be saved is that of the casual, the passing and random, the fragmentary.¹⁷

In one of the “Diapsalmata,” Aesthete A makes a statement in which he again glimpses the principles of a religious life that for him is lost: “On the whole, I lack the patience to live. I cannot see the grass grow, and if I cannot do that, I do not care to look at it at all” (SKS 2, 33 / Kierkegaard 1987, 25). The impatience to see the grass grow appears on the horizon of the type of religiosity that is presented in the “Ultimatum,” the discourse that composes the third part of *Either/Or*. In the “Ultimatum,” the pastor who writes it states that before God we are always in error. The human being is finite and imperfect, he is neither the foundation of the world and nor is he in himself the world. The self-understood as subject has taken upon itself the enormous

¹⁵ Aesthete A is not a poet of the religious (McCarthy 2008, 73). This would lead him to openly acknowledge that he is a failed religious man, as Climacus and Johannes de Silentio, for example, do admit.

¹⁶ The Aesthete A, like the beautiful soul described by Hegel, shelters from reality within himself (Hegel 1970, 366). As Adorno points out, he shelters himself on a romantic island from the historical flood (Adorno 1966, 81). Lukács has gone further and argues that this aestheticizing religion is applicable to Kierkegaard’s thought as a whole since, according to Lukács, “his religion is nothing more than an asylum for stranded decadent aesthetes” (1962, 254).

¹⁷ These figures, which involve a high degree of nihilism (Givone 1995, 99ff.), are expressions of the modern *spleen*, as Kierkegaard himself said. They represent the modern experience of *acedia*. Charles Baudelaire categorically states that dandyism is a form of religion (1998, 233 – 234). For Agamben, following Baudelaire, the artist sacrifices himself as a religious man does (Agamben 1977, 59). We can also find a paradigm of what is an aesthetic life based on the principles of dandyism in Oscar Wilde’s famous novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The affirmation of the transient, of the minimal, skepticism with respect to all kinds of absolute values, can be seen deployed throughout the literature of the nineteenth and twentieth century in works such as those of Walser, Musil, Melville, and even of Franz Kafka and Beckett. These are all works in which the figure of the anti-hero appears, that is, the hero who does not represent the incarnation of any kind of absolute and who embodies in himself the fall of the ideals that sustained the Western tradition.

weight of the world and the latter has ended up crushing it with misfortune. To let go of the weight of the world is to recognize that there is an infinite power above us and to rejoice in its existence.

To rejoice that before God we are always in error is the motto of the speech written by the pastor of Jutland. Faced with the certainty of our imperfection before God we have two options: either to despair and live this certainty with bitterness, or to accept our imperfection with joy. On the one hand, we have the rebelliousness of the self that seeks to oppose this state of affairs, and on the other, we have the patience, resignation and trust that make up faith. We know well that Aesthete A, as a good modern person, chooses the first option and seeks to oppose the power of the self to the order, or rather, to the disorder of the world. Aesthete A prefers to live in unhappiness with the certainty of being unhappy. However, the religious position to which Aesthete A would aspire, that is, the one that appears on the horizon of *Either/Or*, is in reality the other face of the unhappy consciousness. It is a religiosity based on the resignation and passivity of the self in the face of an order foreign to itself. That is to say, aestheticization and resignation are the two faces of the same phenomenon: the unhappy consciousness. Indeed, while the religious position outlined in the "Ultimatum" finds an order outside itself before which the self remains passive because it is imperfect, in aestheticization we find an active self that renounces the world and is therefore split. It depends on what it despises and finds imperfect but which it does not have the strength, the force, to change, and which it can therefore only play with. These two expressions of consciousness are opposed to the world and in that opposition they go astray. Resignation and irony are, then, the two paths that open up as the reverse and the obverse of the unhappy conscience.

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