

KIERKEGAARD AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIVIDUALITY

by

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(Under the Direction of Richard Dien Winfield)

ABSTRACT

To determine if something universal can be said of subjective experience, Kierkegaard shepherds us through at least three existential stages. First, he judges those psychologically arrested in the “aesthetic stage” of life as too distracted by pleasure to make a meaningful commitment, thus the aesthete is plagued by despair and is either pushed towards ethical selfhood or driven deeper back into finite ends. Second, Kierkegaard critiques the ethical domain as an objective matter that can create a moral subject via radical autonomy (an active synthesis of the temporal, the eternal, and spirited passion); however, universal norms are deficiently formal. The individual again despairs. This time over the imperfect ability to implement occasionally conflicting moral commands and the refusal of assistance from an outside intercessor. There is a progression towards meaningful individuality, in regards to coherent purposiveness, once one has become an ethical subject; however, the existential sickness of merely being ethical is a signal of a half measure. Kierkegaard, thirdly, argues that the domain of religion alone can provide significance to our individual subjectivity. This is because authentic religious commitment cultivates an inward deepening of passions, both pleasurable and unpleasurable, which roots out the pervasive sense of worthlessness and despair inherent in prior existence stages. Kierkegaard refers to the inward deepening process as “subjective truth”.

Kierkegaard will argue that there are in fact two fundamental types of religious commitment with different levels of subjective truth. The eminent subject truth level, is characterized as overcoming the penultimate level's negative pathos and is identified as exclusive to Christianity. Ultimately, Kierkegaard maintains, an unparalleled, passionate inward deepening occurs in a commitment to the rationally unintelligible Christian paradox (i.e. the God-man), ensuring that our individual subjective existences acknowledge sin-consciousness, atone, and become eternally validated beings-in-time that reflect the forgiveness extended to us in salvation. Conceptually clarifying significant individuality seems to be forever problematic given the resistance of subjective experience to a dissertation's argumentation standards; however, after such a study one takes more seriously the claim that individual lives attain the most meaning when in direct communion with the power that established them.

INDEX WORDS: Existentialism, Subjective truth, Individuality, Christianity, Paradox, Despair, Objectivity, Religious commitment, Ethical commitment, Kierkegaard, Philosophical theology

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For my Father,

Mark Johnson

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INTRODUCTION

Philosophers are typically defined by their unyielding pursuit of truth through reason. Truth is generally thought to be the same for everyone, as objective or intersubjectively valid. True knowledge is distinguished from the relativity of mere opinion; however, those things we believe to be rendered truths by reason only cover a portion of what there is. Every knower is in possession of an individual subjective view that philosophy tends to overlook in the search for the universal. Can anything intelligible and universal be said about subjective experience or is subjective experience something irreducibly individual and opaque to thought? If philosophy must overlook the individual reality of subjectivity, ought philosophy to be critiqued as hopelessly incomplete? Can philosophy be completed or supplanted with a new approach?

Numerous philosophers refer to the individual in passing, but it is Kierkegaard who first focused upon the significance of the subjective dimension of our lives and investigated how it could obtain meaning. How did Kierkegaard do this? Kierkegaard uses three tactics. First, Kierkegaard judges those psychologically arrested in the “aesthetic stage” of life as too distracted by both physical and intellectual pleasures to make a commitment that would provide meaning to their individual subjective lives. Second, Kierkegaard critiques the ethical domain as an objective matter that can create a moral subject via radical autonomy; however, the restriction to universal norms leaves the ethical stage deficiently formal, incapable of laying hold of the individuality of existence and the actual situation of conduct. The individual is left sorely existentially incomplete and despairs over the imperfect ability to implement occasionally conflicting moral commands. There is a progression towards meaningful individuality once one has become an ethical subject, though the ill psychological or existential

effects of merely being ethical, such as guilt and despair, according to Kierkegaard, are signals of a half measure. More is required of us. Kierkegaard, thirdly, argues that the domain of religion alone can provide significance to our individual subjectivity. This is because authentic religious commitment cultivates an inward deepening of passions, both pleasurable and unpleasurable, which roots out the pervasive sense of worthlessness and despair inherent in prior existence stages. Kierkegaard refers to the inward deepening process as “subjective truth”. Kierkegaard will argue that there are in fact two fundamental types of religious commitment with different levels of subjective truth. The level with the highest subjective truth is identified by Kierkegaard as exclusive to Christianity. Ultimately, Kierkegaard maintains, an unparalleled, passionate inward deepening occurs in a commitment to Christianity, ensuring that our individual subjective existences attain significance and meaning. Terminology such as “inward deepening” and “subjective truth” may strike us as philosophically vacuous or unnecessarily vague. Part of the mission of this entire work is to elucidate what Kierkegaard means by such utterances. We cannot fulfill the greater aim of the work without first doing so.

This dissertation primarily aims to critically evaluate Kierkegaard’s claim that individuality can achieve significance via a religious attitude and to investigate whether that attitude has its paramount realization in Christianity. Before examining what significance a religious attitude can provide to our individual subjective existences, we will examine Kierkegaard’s critique of the non-religious domains and why he believes they all fail to confer meaning upon our individual subjective lives. Our discussion will draw heavily upon eleven of Kierkegaard’s books; *The Philosophical Fragments*, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, *Fear and Trembling*, *Stages on Life’s Way*, *Either/Or (Parts I & II)*, *Training in Christianity*, *Works of Love*, *The Concept of Irony*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, and

The Sickness Unto Death.

Our examination of both the non-religious and religious subjective domains needs a preface. Why would we consider Kierkegaard's prescription for the self, without first exhaustively demonstrating why our traditional modes of objective knowing cannot proffer meaningful individuality (*even if we are not quite clear what the terms "meaningful individuality" constitute at the moment*)? First off, what might we and Kierkegaard consider to be objective means of knowing (*we use the terms "objectivity" and "objective truth" interchangeably with this expression "objective means of knowing"*)? It can be difficult to divide up the categories of objectivity, since their contents often bleed into one another, but in general the case can be made that Kierkegaard conceives of objective truth in at least five ways: 1) Empiricism/History, 2) Philosophy (secular), 3) Philosophy of Religion (without reference to a historical faith), 4) Christian philosophy, and 5) Ethics/The State/Politics. As we thoughtfully consider each category, we will have to ask ourselves if there is something about a particular form of objectivity's inability to confer meaning upon an individual's life. What are the limits to reason and speculation germane to each of the aforementioned varieties of objective truth? Answers to these questions will likely be derived from our ability to answer two subsidiary questions: a) is the given form of objective truth an illusion? And b) why cannot the given objectivity speak to the reality of the individual even if objective truth is to be had? It ought to be stated here that our aim in this examination is not to present a definitive demonstration of what can and cannot be objectively known. We take this time to lay out Kierkegaard's own critique of "objective knowing", so that we may understand his turn to and fascination with "subjective truth". Properly evaluating Kierkegaard's views on objective knowing is a separate project. Our aims are more modest. It is the hope that a presentation of

his thoughts on objective knowing will make the transition to “subjective truth” more intelligible and plausible.

Empiricists/Historians

We have grouped historical and empirical knowledge together, since they both essentially deal with how our ideas correspond with the material world in an observable and falsifiable manner. Some may quibble that this does not really distinguish these enterprises from speculation. True, history certainly does employ a bit more of a narrative in its construction and does not lend itself to verification in the same way pure science does; however, historical claims tend to not wander into the metaphysical, which proves to be the playground of many speculative philosophers.

Historical knowledge may deal more directly with human events, whereas the scientific tends to deal with personality-less matter, or ought to on Kierkegaard’s view. Kierkegaard controversially claimed scientific and historical truth to be an approximation, a very reliable and helpful approximation, but an approximation nonetheless. What were his reasons for claiming this? He had at least two: 1) the knowledge object is forever in flux and changing and 2) the knower himself is always changing. Therefore, if both subject and object are constantly changing, there can never be final knowledge, just an approximation. God, from his throne of eternal immutability, may have more than an approximation of truth, but this is not the case with temporal beings like ourselves.¹

This argument of Kierkegaard’s may perhaps proceed a little too quickly. What exactly is meant by the idea that the knowledge object and the knower are in constant flux and why does that necessarily prevent absolute certainty about the scientific or historical event under

consideration? Kierkegaard affirms the veracity of immediate perception; however, he claims that once we begin to reflect on the trail of causes that brought this particular object or event into being, we get away from immediately perceived fact and begin crafting conjecture and theory for why things culminated in the way they did. These narratives may be very effective at helping us scientifically or at helping us to build a paradigm through which to view human relations; however, due to the removal from immediate perception, uncertainty (even an iota of it) is snuck into our accounts, therefore turning scientific and historical explanations into approximations.

These approximations, given what we know about the history of scientific paradigm shifts and the diversity of paradigms through which history is viewed, can be overhauled in an instant should a new discovery come to the forefront or power relations alter in such a way as to disseminate an alternate historical account of the events previously held in common. So it appears the thing/event to be known is never fully known. Our theoretical understanding of it is constantly in flux either trying to catch up with new revelations or issuing theoretical prognostications and waiting for the results to be born out. Presumably this goes on ad infinitum.

¹ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*. (New York: Humanities Books, 1983), pp.117-118

Kierkegaard eloquently makes this point in the *Philosophical Fragments*:

In relation to the immediate, coming into existence is an illusiveness whereby that which is most firm is made dubious. For example, when the perceiver sees a star, the star becomes dubious for him the moment he seeks to become aware that it has come into existence. It is just as if reflection removed the star from his existence. It is clear, then, that the organ for the historical must be formed in likeness to this...²

So are these approximations, even the very good ones, objective knowledge? Approximations appear to be beliefs drawn from sense perceptions. These beliefs whether we acknowledge them consciously or not are often quite erroneous. If beliefs are erroneous, or at least never fully correct, can we claim that scientific and historical beliefs are objective knowledge?

Kierkegaard answers in the negative. What are empirical/historical beliefs then? Again, in the *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard pronounces beliefs to not be knowledge, but rather acts of freedom, where the will is expressed. A belief is little more than a resolution, by the will, to exclude doubt. Kierkegaard refers to this will to believe as *ordinary faith* (in contrast to the religious faith we will examine in later chapters). Given these distinctions, what further can be said about how Kierkegaard understands belief, objective knowledge, and doubt?

Kierkegaard thinks that belief and doubt are not knowledge or cognitive acts. They are opposing passions. Belief claims a sense for an object's/event's becoming, whereas doubt protests conclusions that supersede immediate sensation. Whether one believes or doubts is determined merely by will.³

² Kierkegaard, Soren, *The Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936), p.100

³ Kierkegaard Soren, *The Philosophical Fragments*, pp.83-84.

If we are satisfied with Kierkegaard's assessment of empiricism and history, what does this entail? We now have reason to be dubious of at least one type of objective truth. Does this then mean we are to abandon all empirical and historical scholarship? That would be too hasty a conclusion, for Kierkegaard recognizes their effectiveness at coming to terms with our world; however, we might want to heed his caution and question whether or not complete devotion to these scholarly pursuits is the ultimate aim in life. We need to be open to the question of whether or not these pursuits are essential or if there is another type of knowledge and a corresponding route available.⁴

Let us now address the two questions that initiated our examination of the varieties of objective truth. First, is empirical objective truth an illusion? Kierkegaard thought even if such objective truths existed, as demonstrated above, either man cannot grasp them or they are artificially constructed. So, on Kierkegaard's view, such objective truths are illusions and it is a matter of how to handle them. We are not to make them the sole focus of our existence. We are to treat them with some skepticism and take marginal confidence in their efficacy at explaining our world.⁵ This leads us to the other question. Why cannot empirical objectivity pertain to the reality of the individual regardless of whether or not objective truth is to be had?

On Kierkegaard's account, scientific and historical empiricism really do not give us what we seek. The totality of what exists in an objective sense cannot ultimately be known. Frameworks with pronounced explanatory power and practical import can be developed, but to stake meaning on those paradigms seems foolish. It is not empirical knowledge that bestows meaning on our life. A much more plausible option would be the attempt to fulfill an ethical commitment.

⁴ McLane, Earl, "Kierkegaard and Subjectivity", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 8, no. 4, (1977): 219.

⁵ The first question we have, if we take Kierkegaard's philosophy seriously, is how far can we take empiricism? Are there limits? The concern is not so much about science attempting to know every spec about the far flung corners of the universe, but rather what it can yield about the human mind and psyche? We prioritize these types of questions for it is quite enticing, once we have existentially exhumed the self, to then go back and translate all this philosophical insight into the messy biology of neurological states that may be subject to physical law. McLane notes in his article "Kierkegaard and Subjectivity" that Kierkegaard thought there was something supremely dangerous about the scientific attitude being applied to the realm of spirit. Kierkegaard's worry probably stems from a libertarian conception of man that can freely and passionately choose existence spheres. Take away man's freedom by reducing him to an automaton and the imperative to make these decisions is drastically muted.

It would inevitably prove too difficult to determine the type of neuroscience Kierkegaard would approve of and disapprove of. So perhaps the generative aspect to this question, are two more questions worth reflecting upon and imagining how they could potentially shape future Kierkegaardian research. First, are Kierkegaardian scholars so certain that brain science will ultimately do violence to Kierkegaard's phenomenology or ought it to be embraced as validating it? This would be a particularly interesting case study in applied philosophy; for it need not be the case that neuroscience undermines freedom. Secondly, what if it does undermine freedom by showing that choice is an illusion? Simply eschewing neuroscience is not honest scholarship. If results do in fact call into the question the freedom with which we make our commitments, what of it? Ought Kierkegaard to have a response prepared aside from warning us of its danger? It would appear that Kierkegaardians would have to engage the science or does the argument that empirical findings are nothing but approximations inoculate Kierkegaard's entire account? Lacking conclusive science on this issue, makes this a bit of tangent given our research goals. Perhaps it can be taken up in a separate work. It seemed worth mentioning before moving on to other concerns we may have.

Philosophy (secular)

Kierkegaard enumerates the phantoms of the objective realm as “sensate certainty, historical knowledge, speculative result”.⁶ We translate these categories into empirical/historical knowledge and speculative/systematic philosophy. Speculative/systematic philosophy can be further broken down into secular philosophy, philosophy of religion, Christian philosophy, and ethics.

Confronted by German idealism of the Hegelian variety at every turn, Kierkegaard either by sheer osmosis or by force had to reckon with systematic philosophers. Though very adept at understanding their philosophical moves, as exhibited in his satirical explanations of his own views, Kierkegaard believed systematic philosophies to be deeply misguided in their pursuit of a complete existential system. Objective thinkers believe they are developing a speculative system of knowledge by abstracting from the factual world. To speculate and develop supposed necessary truths, there must be this conversion of what is into the realm of infinite possibilities, or rather the fundamental essences of all things that are abstracted into a realm of speculative activity. Kierkegaard will call this transformation a conversion into pure-being. Here in the realm of pure being, all particularity has been divested, and thought pleasurably thinks itself.

Intoxicated by the prospect of pure being, objective thinkers are spirited away and need not encounter plain old life that is found to be so dreadfully boring. To become an objective individual that communes with these universal thoughts, everything temporal and factual about

⁶ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p.81.

the subject must be dismissed. The objective thinker needs to get outside himself in all its facticity, so that he can comprehend the complete system. So it appears we have adequately covered the escapism implicit in speculation; however, we have said little about if this is even possible and the ramifications of believing that it is.⁷

Kierkegaard had no problem conceding that logical systems could be established so long as they did not touch upon existence.⁸ But what was “existence” for Kierkegaard? It was not the mere ultimate reality of the universe. It is something else, which we will be profoundly preoccupied with. Even if total speculative systemization of all the things in the universe could be had, then something is still missing and this something is the reality or the “existence” of the individual (i.e. the subjective point of view). Kierkegaard was adamant that existential systems could not be established because individualized subjective existence could not be apprehended by philosophical thought and if a component of an existential system cannot be thought, then it is nonsense to speak of systems that are halfway finished.⁹

⁷ Broudy, Harry S., “Kierkegaard’s Levels of Existence”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 1, no. 3, (Mar., 1941), pp.298-299.

⁸ In contradistinction to the empiricist views just examined, there exists another way of thinking about objective truth. Coherence theorists, closely allied to classical idealism, do not posit that our ideas correspond with the world at large, rather objective truths, such as logic and mathematics, are conceptual and analytic, meaning they depend on relations between concepts. Essentially, that which is true is the fully rational. The test of reason determines what is reality. Neither logical nor mathematical systems make reference to the existential actuality of the concepts under consideration, so this makes it impossible to know the truth of these actual entities. So here we have objective truth, but truths that are nothing more than relations between concepts. Objective truths of these sorts are castles in the sky. We can’t really grasp what really isn’t there. So if there is objective truth on this level, when thought of as a mere coordination of relations, we have good reason to pause and think if we have in fact grasped objective truths and if there ought to be another focus to our life. For more on this matter, visit the sources that inspired this paragraph, specifically pp.117-119 of C. Stephen Evans’ “*Fragments*” and “*Post-Script*”: *The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus* and pp.110-111 of Kierkegaard’s own *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*.

⁹ Edwards, Rem B., “Is an Existential System Possible?”, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 17, no. 3, (1985): 203-204.

A halfway finished system, according to Kierkegaard, is not a system period. It is an incomplete possibility of reason. Further, philosophy cannot certify the reality of objects either, for, as Kierkegaard maintains, following Kant, concepts are universal without specifying the individual, so that they only determine “possibilities”, not actualities, for which intuition is required. We should point out here that when Kierkegaard references the impossibility of an existential system, he is ruling out the possibility of any metaphysical system fully capturing all of existence and not just the efforts of Hegel. This makes Kierkegaard’s criticism reverberate beyond the German Idealism within which he felt entangled.¹⁰

Let us try to understand why Kierkegaard believed an existential/metaphysical system could never be complete and therefore ought to be abandoned. When a philosopher attempts to build an existential system, he cannot lay hold of subjective existence itself; rather reflection meditates on the immediate experience. The immediate experience of subjective existence cannot be built into the system itself. It is resistant to thought and if thought, then “existence”, in the subjective sense of the word, is annulled. It should be noted that Kierkegaard believed only subjective beings to truly “exist”. It would be quite the non sequitur to conclude that anything “existed” from an objective point of view. This is a complicated distinction to establish. In short, existence for Kierkegaard is going to be a matter of a particular type of subjective striving. Atoms and a God removed from human history, as we will see, do not exist for Kierkegaard, not only because they cannot be proved, but also because there is no sense in which they must overcome their imperfect immediacy to accomplish a higher form of being.

¹⁰ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, p.109.

Ironically, on Kierkegaard's understanding there can be a God; He just does not "exist" like His subjects do.

For Kierkegaard, "Existence" does not truly begin until there is a blend of three components: the eternal ethico-religious ideals, temporality, and the passion to see said ideals actualized. We mention this perspective of Kierkegaard's in passing; however, it will be a cardinal model upon which we revisit and elaborate. Thought alone cannot grasp subjective existence for thought provides the ethical ideals that make existence possible. Thought is but one constituent of the activity that is existence. Existence is a mode of being that cannot be abstractly conceived, even though thought makes existence possible. Thought, as Kierkegaard's work and our own dissertation shows, can clarify some aspects of existence and deepening subjectivity; however, the individual's experience must complement everything that we theoretically conceive about the quest towards meaningful individuality. Perhaps an example will help us to understand why existence eludes thought. Think of a critic's review of a musical composition. Despite the elegance of language utilized to render a judgment on the work, the commentary is a pale facsimile of the original performance. Or if this analogy is uninteresting, think of how the written score both is and is not the music under consideration. The written, objective, abstract score leaves out all the experiential character of the performed, actualized piece. It cannot reveal how individual performances affect the music's qualitative nature or the emotional import of a piece as its performance is received. Just as the score or the critic's words cannot substitute for the music, neither can speculation fully apprehend existence. A metaphysical/existential system can never reach its conclusion in the finite human mind for both reality and ourselves are in a constant state of becoming, which cannot be concretized in

ideal thought.¹¹

To recapitulate, Kierkegaard sees objective systematic thought as a seduction into pure-being and away from one's individual reality, thus leaving very little to be said about the subjective experience of the individual. The individual essentially gives up the aforementioned self-creation process by eschewing ethical and religious commitments (*the very personal contracts which transform us into existent beings on Kierkegaard's view*) to dwell entirely in abstract thought. Many might protest that Kierkegaard's unique conception of "existence" is maddeningly at odds with our common sense understanding of what it means for a person to exist. Are we to think of individuals devoid of ethical or religious commitments as non-existent? How can Kierkegaard parse things in such a counterintuitive fashion? These individuals may be in possession of a raw subjective point of view, yet they have not progressed or arisen out of what might be considered a primordially human state. As we make certain commitments, different forms of significant existence become realities for us. Thus far we have limited our discussion to ethical existence, but we may exist in different religious forms as well. We will labor to make this distinction between raw being and ethical existence clearer in the next two chapters. Returning to our easily seduced speculative philosopher, the objective "knowledge" he seeks is, according to Kierkegaard, non-essential. None of this knowledge speaks to the speculators' actual position in existence. The drift of objectivity is away from personal commitments and towards a perspective where all is endlessly philosophically scrutinized with little practical import. God and the good are hypotheses ceaselessly on trial.

¹¹ Edwards, Rem B., "Is an Existential System Possible?", pp.202-203.

Kierkegaard's central claims in regards to metaphysical systems are the following: 1) Existence is an actuality, a mode of being, a blend of thought, particularity, and passionate willing. Thought, though it may elucidate the universal nature of this actuality, cannot grasp what is individual in existence 2) since existence cannot be fully appropriated by thought speculative systems are necessarily incomplete. 3) Fascination with the realm of pure conceivable being makes an individual's life matter less and less to himself and robs him of an actual world.

Philosophy of Religion (without reference to historical faith)

To understand how Kierkegaard repudiates and departs from systematic philosophies of religion, we have to familiarize ourselves with the distinction he makes between immanent and transcendental religious knowledge. Kierkegaard speaks of immanent religious knowledge, specifically of God, as being part of human consciousness. By contrast, transcendent religious knowledge is that knowledge of God made known to us via revelation. Kierkegaard is adamant that we cannot have natural immanent knowledge of God via speculative proof. Logical arguments may develop the God concept, but we only are led to the conclusion of such arguments if we accept the truth of their premises at the outset. As Kierkegaard argues we are not really proving God when we start out assuming premises which cannot be otherwise proved.

In ten brief pages in *The Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard raises five objections to the arguments for God's existence.¹²

¹² Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, p.150.

Objection 1: “Demonstrations are either impossible or foolish”.¹³ We call the unknown that collides with man’s reason the God. If the God does not exist it would be impossible to prove the God’s existence. It would be folly to try and prove that God exists if He does exist, for I would not attempt to prove God’s existence unless I was already assured of His existence. In effect, this means one would be proving something that is already known, which is foolish. Therefore, the idea that the existence of the Unknown/the God could be demonstrated does not suggest itself to reason.¹⁴

Objection 2: “Proofs for the Existence of God are Misnamed”.¹⁵ When we argue that “God is in possession of all perfections and existence is a perfection, therefore God must exist” we have made a deceptive move. The following dichotomy gets set up: Either the Supreme Being was non-existent in the premises and came to be in the conclusion or He was existent in the premises, meaning that He cannot come into existence in the conclusion. It is impossible for the necessary Supreme Being to be derived or come into existence in the conclusion. The Supreme Being cannot be dependent on an argument for existence. So the first disjunct has been ruled out. In the second disjunct, we do not prove God since he is already existent in the premises. God’s existence has already been assumed. The best we can do is logically develop the content of the God, such as determining His necessary existence. Therefore, one cannot prove existence; rather we can merely develop a conception’s content.¹⁶

¹³ Kelly, Charles J., “Essential Thinking in Kierkegaard’s Critique of Proofs for the Existence of God”, *The Journal of Religion* 59, No. 2, (Apr, 1979), p.138.

¹⁴ Kelly, Charles J., “Essential Thinking in Kierkegaard’s Critique of Proofs for the Existence of God”, p.138.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.139.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.139.

*Objection 3: “Existence is never subject to Demonstration”.*¹⁷ We reason from existence, not toward existence, regardless of whether we are in the realm of sense perception or within the realm of speculative thought. We do not prove that a stone exists; rather we prove that some existing thing is a stone. In courts of law, we do not prove that a criminal exists; rather we prove that the accused is in fact a criminal. Proving God’s existence is analogous to these examples. Therefore, God’s existence cannot be demonstrated.¹⁸

*Objection 4: “Demonstrations Rest on an Ideal Interpretation of the World”.*¹⁹ Napoleon, the individual, can be seen as the explanation of the French victory at Austerlitz. But there is no need to posit Napoleon as the individual from the event. It could just have easily been some other military genius. Thus, it appears that we cannot deduce the existence of something based upon effects. However; might the case be different with God? God’s acts are so uniquely His that we can identify God by His acts. Therefore, God is the only being whose essence includes existence. But this is problematic, for the deeds of God are not immediately known.²⁰ We have two options: a) we can interpret the world in theologically loaded ways (i.e. the world exhibits intelligent design) or b) we can merely intimate that the world exhibits some order, leaving it wide open to whether or not a God exists at all. If we go with a), we are not proving God. We have already assumed the existence of God and are developing the ideality of the Supreme Being. If we go with b), we cannot reason from effects to particular causes. Therefore, God’s existence cannot be proved via effects, either because doing so requires idealized interpretations that

¹⁷ Ibid., p.142.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.142.

¹⁹ Kelly, Charles J., “Essential Thinking in Kierkegaard’s Critique of Proofs for the Existence of God”, pp.146-147.

²⁰ Ibid., pp.146-147.

ultimately rest on the presumption of a Divine Being or the effects are so minimally described that it is impossible to deduce anything as particular as a God as a cause of them.²¹

Objection 5: “The Existence of God Emerges From the Demonstration by a Leap”.²² The proofs for the existence of God yield very little and go on ad infinitum. If we desire to Demonstrate God, we must abandon proofs. God’s existence emerges when we posit his transcendence. Therefore, God’s existence emerges not via a proof, but by a leap.²³

Ought we to abandon the proofs for God’s existence altogether? Would attempting to prove God’s existence really do the disservice that Kierkegaard believes it would? What work does our inability to objectively appropriate God do for Kierkegaard’s account? Not objectively knowing that God exists bounds reason, frees us from the obsession with speculative knowing, and allows, if we are inclined to do it, a subjective turn towards significant individuality as Kierkegaard has hinted at before. Knowing that we really do not have objective grounds for believing in God and to continue on in that speculative endeavor, causes us to vacillate between building that interior life and revisiting the proofs to make sure no one tears down our security. We keep an eye on them, lest they start to crumble and the entire dealing with God (both objective and subjective) comes crashing down. Kierkegaard advocates leaving the proofs behind altogether, whether we have settled them sufficiently or not, as the only way we remain in subjective truth steadfastly.

In order to counter Kierkegaard on this point, one would not only have to show, against

²¹ Whittaker, John H., “Kierkegaard on Names, Concepts, and Proofs for God’s Existence”, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 10, no. 2 (1979): 119-122, 125.

²² Kelly, Charles J., “Essential Thinking in Kierkegaard’s Critique of Proofs for the Existence of God”, pp.148-150.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp.148-150.

all of Kierkegaard's reasons, that proving God is possible and bestow upon us an airtight proof for God's existence, but also that this newly acquired objective knowledge of God would not be an impediment to the actualization of the self and the proper relationship with God. That is a tall order to say the least. If we elect to go such a route, we might want to keep Kierkegaard's admonitions in mind that life lost in objectivity robs us of the ability to exist essentially.

Melville, in *Moby Dick*, poetically articulates the same admonition:

Only one sweeter end can readily be recalled—the delicious death of an Ohio honey- hunter, who seeking honey in the crotch of a hollow tree, found such exceeding store of it, that leaning too far over, it sucked him in, so that he died embalmed. How many, think ye, have likewise fallen into Plato's honey head, and sweetly perished there?"²⁴

Christian Philosophy (narrow)

We distinguish specifically Christian forms of objectivity, namely Christian empiricism and philosophy, from philosophy of religion in general and secular metaphysics. Why are the well-intentioned historical and scientific pursuits aimed at authenticating everything perceived as relevant to Christian faith, ultimately damaging? We may be reminded of those who go on quests to establish the historical Jesus or verify events from the bible, such as the Abraham story. There is such zeal to establish the veracity of Christ's historical being and episodes in the hopes that it will confer greater certainty upon something incomprehensible, namely God, the eternal in time. There is an uniqueness to the Incarnation, in comparison to the doctrines of other religions. To be precise, the irreconcilable categories of finitude and infinitude will knot up empirical testimonies and, as we shall see, conceptualization. How could Kierkegaard find such empirical efforts disruptive? Kierkegaard is concerned that if one's faith hinges on irrefutable evidence

²⁴ Melville, Herman. *Moby Dick: Or, The White Whale*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956), p.271.

for the objects of faith, one will either be constantly distracted countering objections or one will never ascend to faith because the evidence required will never be reached. Kierkegaard is not of the mindset that God, Christ, or really any of it can be proven, either philosophically or scientifically. This is slightly problematic though, since we must have some modicum of evidence to distinguish the Incarnation of faith from mere fairy tales. It might be epistemologically immoral to be so casual with the things we believe.²⁵

We have discussed here not only how empirical efforts are precarious, but also alluded to the disruptive philosophical attempts to apprehend and systematize the faith object of Christ. If we thought Kierkegaard was down on the idea of speculation reaching God, we have not seen anything yet in regards to the prospects of rationally fathoming the “Absolute Paradox” (i.e. Christ). The God-man, says Kierkegaard, entirely defies conceptualization for the entity is comprised of utterly inharmonious properties. The infinitude of God cannot possibly be distilled into the being of a particular man. So in addition to all the problems already enumerated concerning secular and theistic system building, we have an impenetrable paradox at the center

²⁵ Evans, in his book *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, asserts a milder claim that a bare minimum of historical evidence for the divinity of Christ is needed; keeping in mind that ultimate proof is impossible. What elements or signs might be potential indicators of the divine? For Evans, that short list includes 1) No care or desire for possessions, 2) Seeking only the love of the disciple, and 3) Miracles. It would seem that the third of the three criteria is the lynchpin, for many humans have cared not for things and have loved others. So there needs to be some recorded history of the miraculous. What miracles Evans and Kierkegaard think are necessary could be quite perplexing. Kierkegaard rarely speaks of anything miraculous surrounding Christ, not even His resurrection. Presumably, Evans would at least require that threshold to be met.

of the Christian faith. The idea, for Kierkegaard, of creating a complete doctrine with certain non-negotiable Christian axioms is a foolish project. Further, using philosophy to try to understand Christ, how He fits into the Trinity, or how He insures the immortal status of past, present, and future souls might just be a way of intellectually passing time.

Explicitly objective Christian efforts to philosophically justify or empirically prove doctrine are ill-fated and like the fore-stated secular and generally theistic metaphysical systems, fail to speak to the reality of the individual by not offering a penetrating insight into that which is necessary for a meaningful life. Empirical and/or speculative understanding of Christ creates a conceptual possibility that we would, if possible, connect with on an objective level, but there is nothing about reaching such a “truth” that would prove transformative to the subjective character of the individual. Kierkegaard, as we will try to understand, believes the Christian truth to offer more than an intellectual delight.

Ethics/Politics/The State

The ethical is the last potentially deleterious form of objectivity we will consider. It should be clarified that Kierkegaard speaks of the ethical in a multiplicity of ways. There will be an illegitimate form of the ethical. There will be viable forms of the ethical and then finally a reformulation of the ethical after contact is made with Christ in a later existence stage. Here, we are concerned with the injurious ethical variety and how it is ultimately of little to no value to the individual, even though the lure of participating in something supposedly universal shimmers brightly.

Kierkegaard is frustrated that the ethical imperative of the time appears to be to become more objective, meaning the ethical is interpreted in terms of world historical outcomes and

not so much about the realization of a concrete self. This is bad on his purely ethical view for it distracts us from the essential, innermost freedom of the ethical and leaves us trying to vainly determine moral outcomes that we have little control over. Further, measuring our own ethical worth against the contributions that we make to world historical movements perpetuates the idea that individuals are to be swallowed up in sweeping historical movements rather than cultivate their own meaningful individuality. A related effect to this thinking is that individuals will view their lives as wasted if they cannot see their moral imprint upon the world. These are non- religious reasons for not thinking of the ethical in collectivist and world historical terms; however, Kierkegaard does not stop there. Kierkegaard has religious objections to the notion that the ethical is supposed to be thought of world-historically. We have not explicitly discussed the religious attitude that awaits us in future chapters; however, there appears to be nothing wrong with pulling back the curtain and stealing a glance of what is to come.²⁶

In short, thinking about the ethical in terms of outcomes leads to immoral narcissism, implying that God somehow needs our help. Further, a fixation with having world historical significance frequently coincides with a neglect of the God-relationship. If one is constantly caught up in the achievement of some earthly end or movement, the individual may be too distracted to enter into a direct relationship with God. Individuals caught up in world historical movements may frankly feel as if they have no need for the God-relationship. The

²⁶ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, pp.135, 137.

unfolding of history will take care of everything, even if that means expending large swaths of humanity to achieve said world historical ends. And even if God is included on the world historical view, God traipses through history; creating individuals he simply does not use (those not directly involved in the world-historical movement). God would never create beings that are of no use.

Aside from these objections to the illegitimate form of the ethical speaking to the reality of the individual, what reasons might Kierkegaard have for thinking the world historical ethical narrative is an illusion? Kierkegaard expresses deep concern that the world historical interpretation of the ethical excludes all evidence to the contrary of progress. How can it handle societies that do not appear to be advancing, let alone regressing? Without a way to really answer this question, Kierkegaard suspects the world-historical conception of the ethical to be not only injurious to the individual, but also fictitious.

In this introductory chapter, we enumerated the different types of objective truths, why they are limited in regards to promised knowledge, and how they overlook the perspective of the individual. Kierkegaard offers an alternative to all this objective knowledge, one that will zero in on the individual's subjective view and possibly even provide us with what we yearned for whilst completely wrapped up in various objective pursuits. Objective truth had to be delimited, so that we could take Kierkegaard's own project of meaningful individuality seriously.

Kierkegaard's project is predicated on the progression through subjective existence stages. It is his contention that we cannot fully invest in our existential project if we remain unconvinced that the objective matters and methods of philosophy and science are of no use to us as we discern what a meaningful life is. Kierkegaard had to exhaust the possibility of an objective answer to the deepest inquiry of mankind and more importantly the individual. Kierkegaard's

program is unraveled in existence stages. We will first attempt to understand what aesthetic subjective life is qualitatively like. Why do we begin our investigation of the aesthetic life after the repudiation of science and philosophy? This is largely because we are following Kierkegaard's own blueprint, but also because we are confronted with a sometimes vulgar popular culture idea that a pleasurable life equates with a good life, a life of happiness. Kierkegaard is going to have to demonstrate the hollowness of this notion and further he must show how "refined" manifestations of the same sentiment do not escape the same critique applied to the baser. We can now faithfully examine whether hedonistic pursuits in their multiplicity of forms can provide us with the meaningful individuality that objectivity could not. If one of the persistent problems with objectivity is that it made the individual life matter less, we may be tempted to think that an aesthetic point of view, completely beholden to personal and transitory desires, succeeds in speaking to the reality of the individual.

CHAPTER 1

THE AESTHETIC STAGE

"The elder spirits, if they knew that mirth was but the counterfeit of happiness, yet followed the false shadow wilfully, because at least her garments glittered brightest."
 -Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The May-Pole of Merry Mount*²⁷

Orienting Questions

As we contemplate the Kierkegaardian aesthetic stage, we need to reiterate the dissertation's overarching questions. We want to know if philosophy can say anything universal about subjective experience, which would in turn provide an account for how meaningful individuality is attained. Can activities of the aesthetic sphere (i.e. erotic love, imagination, art) provide meaning to individual lives, since there appears (at least superficially) to be passionate subjectivity in their achievement? It may be obvious to us that such endeavors do provide meaningful subjectivity given our personal pieties that some nebulous conception of love or art proffers a reason to live; however, Kierkegaard disagrees with this assessment or rather draws distinctions that if correct, ought to overhaul (with nuance) our general understanding of life's purpose.

²⁷ Hawthorne, Nathaniel *The Portable Hawthorne*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p.46.

The General Features of the Aesthetic Stage

Kierkegaard recognizes that the aesthetic does have an individual subjective character; however, the aesthete cannot cultivate meaning and significance in his life for he merely alights upon one pleasure after another. Life is but a series of oscillating pleasurable and unpleasurable experiences that he either consciously or unconsciously recognizes as a bleak state of affairs. Kierkegaard believes meaning has to come from something permanent and permanence happens when we make a commitment. Why might Kierkegaard think that meaning comes from something permanent? Are not our lives filled with meaningful moments, such as watching our children graduate college or time spent with someone for whom we have great affection? What if we could string all these meaningful moments together into a life? Would not Kierkegaard think that we had found meaning somehow? Despite the intense joy these moments may provide, Kierkegaard would likely object to a meaningful life being sustained by the collation of such moments and would argue even if life could be stacked with nothing but these sorts of experiences, that life would lack the qualitative character of the most meaningful life. We will concern ourselves with the qualitative character of a meaningful life as the dissertation develops. We cannot possibly see Kierkegaard's entire point of view on this matter yet, but what about the idea that there is something unsustainable about "meaningful" moments? Kierkegaard might claim that the moments strike us as particularly meaningful because by their very definition they are outliers. They are not the mundane and simply cannot happen every day. To found a life upon them, might lead to acute yearning and frustrated hope. Does this perhaps answer the question of why meaning needs to come from something permanent? Only if what is permanent dispels the pangs of longed for moments and provides access to meaning in a less extrinsically determined manner. How the permanence of certain commitments achieve this will be

Kierkegaard's focus. The aesthete does not trouble himself with commitments, but what is a commitment, as Kierkegaard, understands it anyway?²⁸ Explaining what a commitment is for Kierkegaard presupposes that there is just one kind of commitment; however, this is not the case. As we advance through existence stages, we accumulate or supplant (depending on how one examines the matter) commitments. Kierkegaard will speak of ethical, religiousness A, and B commitments. These commitments differ pretty dramatically from one another. Can anything be said about potential commonalities? We noted earlier that meaning, for Kierkegaard, comes from permanence and that commitments offer a type of permanence. Perhaps, if we consider this notion of "permanence" a bit more, we can further remark, as much as possible at this point, on the generalized nature of commitments. When Kierkegaard alleges that meaningful individuality has something to do with permanence it, what does he mean? We can likely decode what he does not intend. As we saw in our introductory chapter, meaningful individuality is not going to be induced by trying to permanently etch our mark onto the world, to be a man of historical outcomes. All that striving, if ever productive, is mere narcissism and the products of which ultimately perish. Kierkegaard is not the first to make such an observation. This line of thinking is at the heart of Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem "Ozymandias", which likely draws its inspiration from an older source; the denunciation of vanity in Ecclesiastes. So if the permanence of a commitment has little to do with a contribution to the world, what kind of permanence are we speaking of when it comes to commitments? There appear to be two types of permanence involved in the commitments germane to our discussion of Kierkegaard. First, with each type of commitment there is a resolute transformation of the subjective dimension of the individual.

²⁸ Broudy, Harry S., "Kierkegaard's Levels of Existence", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, pp.3-5, 8, 19-20.

This might be the closest thing to permanence an individual can temporally experience.

Secondly, what the individual is committed to, on Kierkegaard's view, has a permanent or eternal status. The three types of commitments we will discuss (ethical, Religiousness A, and Religiousness B) implicate the eternal reality of the object to which we commit. For Kierkegaard, the Good, God, and Christ endure even if the physical universe were to collapse on itself. If we like, we can refer to these two varieties of permanence as *subjective permanence* and *objective permanence* respectively. This is probably as far as we can go at the moment describing what Kierkegaard means by a "commitment". This will not be the last time we address this matter. Far from it!

Some may argue that aesthetes do in fact make commitments. An aesthete may make a commitment to pursue bodily sensuousness or to some sublimated higher form of pleasure involved in musical or intellectual creation. Take Kierkegaard himself for instance. His authorship reveals not only a deep infatuation with philosophical delights, but great pleasure in poetry, literature, and music that could really only be cultivated through committed scholarship and enjoyment. Enjoyment was unlikely the only thing driving Kierkegaard's work given his estimation of his unique genius and sense of divine purpose; but we can see how an aesthetic commitment persisted throughout his life's work. So it is not the lack of commitments altogether that makes an aesthete an aesthete, but the absence of particular kinds of commitments. We will have to ask ourselves as we proceed why hedonistic commitments are not going to foment meaningful individuality for Kierkegaard. Is it because the object(s) of the commitment is impermanent? Is it because the subject is impermanently resolved and therefore does not experience the qualitative character Kierkegaard associates with progressions towards meaningful individuality?

The Kierkegaardian aesthetic stage needs to be examined in detail. Let us address the earlier claim, “Kierkegaard recognizes that the aesthetic does have an individual subjective character; however, the aesthete cannot cultivate meaning and significance in his life for he merely alights upon one pleasure after another”. If the aesthete merely wanders from pleasure to pleasure, does that entail that he has completely given himself over to animalistic instincts?

Such an understanding of the aesthetic is erroneous. There may be an animal-like psychology motivating the aesthete as he elects how to pass today’s time; however, Kierkegaard does not see aesthetes as mere sows mirthfully wallowing in their own filth. In fact, some of history’s most inspiring figures may properly fit within Kierkegaard’s aesthetic categories. Kierkegaard painstakingly grades the stratification of aesthetes in both *Either/Or* and *Stages on Life’s way*.

What binds this stratification of aesthetes together? What commonalities do they have? The first trait we can pinpoint is that all aesthetes are running from something, specifically the dread of boredom. What is this dread that causes the routine of life to be seen as so disheartening, so much so that a fascination with the accidental aspects of things is perpetually renewed by aesthetes in lieu of entering into factual actuality (aka becoming a self) via certain commitments? Delighting ourselves with often easily obtained (and sometimes not so easily obtained) aesthetic pleasure is a temporary salve to the paralytic effects of dread that does not require an impassioned restructuring of a life.²⁹ To address this dread, we must examine two oft associated Kierkegaardian concepts: Anxiety and Despair. Kierkegaard explores them most intensively in *The Concept of Anxiety* and *The Sickness Unto Death*, respectively.

²⁹ Broudy, Harry S., “Kierkegaard’s Levels of Existence”, p.295.

To understand existential anxiety and despair, we first need to consider what it means for a human to exist at all for Kierkegaard. Existence for Kierkegaard is not mere essential being there or a raw subjective point of view. Animals are in possession of this being there, yet on Kierkegaard's perspective all that creeps and crawls cannot attain existence. Existence for Kierkegaard is an active synthesis of a triad of factors that compose a human being. We referenced this triad of elements in our introductory chapter and it will be a significant task of this chapter to understand if there is something non-arbitrary about Kierkegaard's positing. If one recalls, the triad of elements necessitated for existence are particularity/temporality eternal ethico-religious ideals, and a motive passion to see them actualized in one's very own life. One does not exist, for Kierkegaard, if you are merely a living human being.

Let us elaborate on these initial Kierkegaardian doctrines. Man in his given form is a synthesis of eternal and temporal, which means on Kierkegaard's anthropology that man is an ephemeral thing uniquely gifted with faculties to examine that which is permanent and unchanging (i.e. the good, God, and Christ); however, this does not entail that man "exists" in the Kierkegaardian sense. Man must reduplicate his existence. The word "reduplicate" is used for man must take this raw being or subjectivity that consists of particularity and ideality and will them into a marriage that generates a new being, specifically an ethical being at first if we follow Kierkegaard's existential sequences. There must be a motive power, a spirited passion for the unification of these disparate elements within, an interestedness within man to reflect on the ethical possibilities that he could enact and then commit to seeing them through. The ethical enters into our consideration and eventual decision for unification, when we no longer care to live according to aesthetic categories alone. We shall see that a life rooted completely in the aesthetic will lead to existential burdens and the ethical seems to be an antidote to all that weighs

upon us. So existence is a reduplication, where man enacts the ethical ideals he considers and reflects upon. The term “reduplication” is used here because the individual has transformed his raw subjective point of view to that of ethical existence. He has doubled who he is. The aesthetic will remain a part of any particular man, but it is now the ethical that disciplines those proclivities and brings him properly into existence. Since man is a finite being, he will most certainly fall short of enacting the ideal element within him. Finitude implies limitation and without complete knowledge or control over the aesthetic elements within, man cannot be expected to perfectly uphold the ethical, which sheds light on why man’s ethico-religious striving is linked to existence and since God does not strive, the divine does not “exist”. He merely is the unification of thought and being.³⁰ There is no chance that God can fail to obtain ideality, unlike man. When man is lost in thought, meditating upon all the possibilities, he is not technically existing in the strictest sense for Kierkegaard. It is an inalterable commitment for the good and accountability for our actions that creates an existent self as we have discussed above. The components of raw being via reduplication are able to be assembled into existence. Mere speculative thinking with no decisive element within it is not the same as existing. The inner striving for the good creates the self.³¹ To reiterate, one can strive without there already being an existing self if we think of what exists prior to the assembly of the components of self as a raw

³⁰ Kierkegaard is known for making the seemingly outrageous claim that God does not “exist” in the *Concluding Unscientific Post-Script to the Philosophical Fragments*. Evans expounds upon the idea in his text “*Fragments*” and “*Post-Script*”: *The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*. What we need to understand here is that Kierkegaard is using the term “existence” in a way that we are unfamiliar with. Kierkegaard believes there is no separation between God’s thought and being, otherwise God would imperfectly strive. Kierkegaard equates the imperfect striving of humans with existence. Since God is perfect and does not strive, on Kierkegaard’s terminology God may create and be eternal, but He does not exist. It should be understood that God retains superior independent being even though God does not exist. Only humans exist for their being and thinking are separate, held apart by existence.

³¹ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard’s “Fragments” and “Post-Script”: The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, pp.55, 57-58.

subjective point of view. This may very well typify the aesthetic point of view in general. Since there is raw un-constituted subjectivity, we can snatch for different pleasures of the aesthetic sphere, not unlike a beast devoid of the ideal component and an interestedness in committing to it (*By sheer constitution, animal lives will always be aesthetic lives*), or muster up the spiritedness to unify our eternal (the categories of the Good, God, and Christ) and temporal components (our finite being) and reduplicate existence in the form of an ethically existing self. One need not have an existing self, on Kierkegaard's terminology to pursue aesthetic ends.

To recap, in order for us to truly exist via reduplication and have an enduring self that transcends all transitory aesthetic moments that merely divert our attention away from dread, the existing self has properly integrated the following components gifted to each individual in the raw subjective point of view: 1) eternity (ideal categories of the good and God), 2) temporality (the necessary limit to human knowledge and perfection given finitude), and 3) spirited Passion (glue/motive interestedness to bring our ideals into actuality). It is not enough for us to make the passionate decision (*the decision is necessarily a passionate one for it is done as an allaying escape from existential dangers of aesthetic life*) once for eternal ethical ideals. Our commitments to the actualization of ethics and religion (which we will discuss elsewhere), must be constantly renewed. These commitments will require a kind of vigilant upkeep, yet it remains opaque at this moment if the renewal of the commitment is qualitatively identical to the first decision to be an ethically existing being or a type of religious person. Addressing this matter is best saved for the sections specifically addressing the types of commitments Kierkegaard has in mind.³²

³² Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, pp.58, 67, 69.

Via the comparison with the ethical self, we have a preliminary understanding of the raw subjectivity that we possess when aesthetically defined. Though we may have a sense of the psychological dynamics, which impinge upon the aesthetically defined raw subjective point of view, we might need to clarify if we are working with a subject here. The way that Kierkegaard speaks of existence not occurring until after one becomes an ethical being, might suggest to the reader that there is no unified consciousness or ego or coherent subject prior to being baptized in the universal. Of course, there is a subject here. For our purposes, we may want to call it a pre-self, a proto-self, or a non-existing subject. All seem to adequately denote Kierkegaard's conception of what we are prior to the ethical decision, disorganized beings bereft of the interestedness to identify with the good and therefore languish in aesthetic categories, seizing upon consolatory moments that prove to be episodic and unstable sources for meaning. It is now possible to explore in greater detail the existential states that drive and inhibit the aesthetically defined pre-self in its development towards ethical existence.

In *The Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard painstakingly explores how anxiety enters into our subjective point of view and penetrates every stage of being from the aesthetic on to atonement.³³ The discussion of anxiety is significant for it reveals the mechanism for what drives many of the aesthetic stage activities and what partially limits us from transcending into ethical existence.³⁴ The discussion of anxiety will introduce an array of new conceptual terminology, so now might be a good time to critically examine the bare structure of the non-existing pre-self and ethical existence. Is Kierkegaard's sketch of the aesthetic self and the birth

³³ Hamilton, Kenneth, "Man: Anxious or Guilty? A Second Look at Kierkegaard's: The Concept of Dread", *The Christian Scholar* 46, no. 4, (Winter, 1963), pp.295-296.

³⁴ I am indebted to Jon DeLuca for this particular phrasing of anxiety entering the individual's life. He suggested it spontaneously during a casual conversation about this dissertation chapter.

of moral agency tentatively plausible? First, let us turn our attention to the aesthetically defined self. Beyond the indignation of possibly being defined out of “existence”, would the aesthete take serious issue with Kierkegaard’s description of his state? If pressed, the aesthete would likely concede that ethical considerations do not reign supreme, that either occasionally or predominantly behavior is dictated by pleasurable outcomes rather than virtue. If the commitment permits of frequent exception, the individual likely serves two masters and cannot rightly be labeled a true adherent of the good. “Good” performances might be done out of moral naivety or to assuage future guilt, so their execution has an exceptional ingredient of the aesthetic in them. Should the aesthete admit to all this, perhaps he would be fine with not living up to status of an ethical person and might further claim that his life really does lack a unifying orientation and has been given over to animalism instead. What of the unassembled triumvirate of components that are waiting to be spiritedly synthesized and cease the aesthetic subject’s flailing around? Did Kierkegaard get this right? Does the ethical universally present itself? Does everyone have it within them to shape given finite being in accordance with the universal? Modern psychology tells us that there are humans born without the ability to decipher right from wrong. If true, what would such a finding mean for Kierkegaard’s model? It is hard to imagine how it imposes a threat anymore than an individual born extremely mentally handicapped. Perhaps, our understanding of the universal should be associated with this caveat: “The universal presents itself in like manner to all humans gifted with normal functioning cognitive faculties”. Some claim that they would like to be ethical and good people, but the will is just not within them for it. A moral torpor overtakes them, rescinding them to aesthetic categories time and time again. Whether this is the case will become clearer once we understand how anxiety and

despair afflict the aesthetic individual. Perhaps, the will for the good is there, but wilts in the presence of these existential afflictions. What about from the other side of things? Those of us who are committed to the ethical, do we feel like our “existence” really began once we got these elements of the self together and built a life for virtue? The idea seems a bit absurd for it implies that good people endured a radical identity break at some point (presumably adulthood) and yet many memories and traces still persist from our time as an aesthete. There is this tension between a supposed character transformation and the countervailing notion that deep down we have always remained the same person. This tension need not be a refutation of Kierkegaard’s theory of self development, after all the existence stages do not supplant prior modes of being as much as they discipline and rein them in. As we discuss religious commitments, we will see how they affect the decision for the ethical universal. There are those who may take issue with Kierkegaard’s conviction that there is a decisive moment for the good, an ethical version of the Damascus experience. Does this not comport with our personal experience? At least from this particular author’s perspective, something rings true about the transition into ethical life. There is a memory within of a longing to be unlike the hedonistic many and this was in part accomplished by a firm resolve to be a living norm of the good.

Kierkegaard believes the self is created by the positing of the triadic components present within every human being; however, within the realm of innocence, before existence has been reduplicated and a self exists, there is man in his raw form. One ought to dwell on Kierkegaard’s conception of innocence longer for it is as fruitful as it is fascinating. This raw form consists of the eternal and the temporal held together by spirit. In innocence, the psychical and physical dimensions to the human being are held together in a tentative harmony via spirit. The employment of the term “tentative” indicates the tense nature of spirit’s work. It sustains the

constituents of raw being however there is an animating impulse within spirit to disturb the innocent relation:

That anxiety makes its appearance is the pivot upon which everything turns. Man is a synthesis of the psychical and the physical; however, a synthesis is unthinkable if the two are not united in a third. This third is spirit. In innocence, man is not merely animal, for if he were at any moment of his life merely animal, he would never become man. So spirit is present, but as immediate, as dreaming. Inasmuch as it is now present, it is in a sense a hostile power, for it constantly disturbs the relation between soul and body, a relation that indeed has persistence and yet does not have endurance, inasmuch as it first received the latter by the spirit. On the other hand, spirit is a friendly power, since it is precisely that which constitutes the relation. What, then, is man's relation to this ambiguous power? How does spirit relate to itself and to its conditionality? It relates itself as anxiety³⁵

Kierkegaard poetically defines spirit as dreaming in this state of innocence.³⁶ What does it mean for spirit to dream? Kierkegaard informs us that it is in anxiety. Spirit is unaware of moral categories. It is ignorant and in this respect can be said to be dreaming. The type of anxiety impinging upon this innocent and ignorant subject is interconnected with the freedom and possibility to become something. It feels its nothingness.³⁷ Why and what is the nature of this anxiety?

The nature of this anxiety is characterized by freedom, freedom to posit itself in any conceivable way; however, this pre-moral subject is unaware of any moral categories from which

³⁵ Kierkegaard, Soren, *The Concept of Anxiety*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1980, pp.43-44.

³⁶ Ibid., pp.43-44, 155.

³⁷ Ibid., pp.43-44.

to choose and knows nothing of the pitfalls associated with any pursuance of finite ends. It is made anxious in its ignorance and inability to properly choose itself.³⁸ Does this mean the subject avoids moral accountability? Only when the anxiety is truly generated by ignorance is accountability inapplicable. We will see that anxiety will forever accompany the individual, especially after moral categories are discovered. The pre-moral self briefly experiences moral immunity. Why must it be the case that the pre-moral subject feels anxiety? Why cannot one continue on in this personal blissed out Eden? Blissful ignorance is not an option given the fundamental synthesis that human beings are. Spirit cannot help but seek to posit itself. It seems to be an essential feature of this component of existence:

If a human being were a beast or an angel, he could not be in anxiety. Because he is a synthesis, he can be in anxiety; and the more profoundly he is in anxiety, the greater is the man—yet not in the sense usually understood, in which anxiety is about something external, about something outside a person, but in the sense that he himself produces the anxiety...Anxiety is freedom's possibility, and only such anxiety is through faith absolutely educative, because it consumes all finite ends and discovers all their deceptiveness.³⁹

Kierkegaard compares this anxiety associated with innocence to a form of dizziness. In that early form of subjectivity, the individual, in her freedom, experiences a type of vertigo concerning all the possibilities available for her positing.⁴⁰ When a qualitative leap is made into the world of externals, there is hope that the subject may find herself; however, it is likely the

³⁸ Rumble, Vanessa, "THE ORACLE'S AMBIGUITY: Freedom and Original Sin in Kierkegaard's "The Concept of Anxiety"" *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 75, No. 4, (Winter, 1992), pp. 614-615.

³⁹ Kierkegaard, Soren, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p.155.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.61

case that a wrong route has been taken and the innocent subject has used its freedom incorrectly and not become a moral self, meaning the subject gets lost in aesthetic categories rather than becoming a living embodiment of the good. It has endured its own personal Fall and senses for the first time that it is guilty, to the extent that it knows it is still not a moral self, which for Kierkegaard means a self committed to the eternal ethical. A change has occurred here though. The innocent pre-moral subject has broken free of its complete ignorance. Through its individualized fall it is now aware of moral categories and guilty of not fully living for the good. Once the decision has been made to live for the Good, an existent moral self, with synthesized eternal and temporal elements, arrives. So ends the pre-moral subject's inhabitation of innocence.⁴¹

Once the qualitative leap has been made with primordial anxiety and freedom, the subject experiences anxiety over guilt.⁴² There is guilt because in that qualitative leap, the subject comes to have knowledge of morality and knows that it is in violation of it or certainly has not chosen to spiritedly will it.⁴³ It should be noted that Kierkegaard is operating under the presupposition that moral knowledge without subsequent right action transforms the innocent subject into someone guilt-ridden and at the very least minimally immoral. Why does guilt follow from knowledge? Ought guilt to follow from an infraction of morality? Kierkegaard must think that when the subject unearths moral categories there is the realization that a fundamental moral infraction has occurred, even if the individual has not committed some precise moral evil such as

⁴¹ Dunning, Stephen N. "Kierkegaard's Systematic Analysis of Anxiety." In *International Kierkegaard Commentary*. Edited by Robert L. Perkins. (Macon, GA.: Mercer University Press, 1985): 13-14.

⁴² Kierkegaard, Soren, *The Concept of Anxiety*, pp.108, 112.

⁴³ Hamilton, Kenneth, "Man: Anxious or Guilty? A Second Look at Kierkegaard's: The Concept of Dread", p.296.

stealing. What could this infraction be? The only readily available answer is that life was not structured around the good always and there is sorrow in this. We ought to pause for a moment and reflect on this expression “spiritedly will”. If spirit is the relation between the eternal and temporal within man what does it mean for spirit to will something? The answer to this question is predicated on the type of synthetic function spirit is engaged in. In innocence, spirit seems to passively hold together the human triad. In ethical life, spirit is doing more than triadic sustenance. Spirit is actively disciplining the immediacy in man via application of the Good.

This leads to an avalanche of questions that about which Kierkegaard himself is not entirely forthcoming. For instance, if we ask how we come to know that we are guilty from the moral perspective, Kierkegaard is largely silent. He intimates that our discovery of it cannot be explained. One might claim that we may come to understand that our self has life in the ethical after first exhausting all finite ends and seeing their emptiness, but does this happen at a certain developmental maturation point, say around sixteen years old? Kierkegaard cannot say.

Kierkegaard would never endorse the idea that human biological development dictates moral guilt nor can guilt be something discovered after aesthetic ends have proved empty. If guilt, omnipresent force as he conceives it, was predicated on individuals first exhausting aesthetic life then some, maybe the majority of, people may never confront what he takes to be universal.

There must be something automatically convicting in the encounter with the Good. All he really can claim here is that anxiety, once we are no longer innocent, shifts from a restlessness of dreaming spirit and becomes a neurotic sting that is felt if we fail to live ethically. This anxiety over our ethical guilt is not a mental illness for Kierkegaard since it is something shared amongst all humanity. Under this interpretation it would be a kind of mental illness to not be in

possession of anxiety. What typically happens when this type of anxiety is experienced?

Aesthetes, who are no longer ignorant of the good, do anything they can to pursue pleasure that returns them to that pristine Edenic state, where anxiety and its counterpart despair no longer rule.⁴⁴ The attempt to return to immediacy can take many forms, which we will parse very soon. The word “attempt” ought to be emphasized, for the aesthete may devise all sorts of clever schemes to approximate the joys of innocence, but that sort of bliss will never be ours again on Kierkegaard’s view.

Before progressing to our brief review of the interconnection between anxiety and despair, something should be said here of the daemonic, a term Kierkegaard is apt to use that may strike our modern minds as a relic of another era’s fascination with enchantment. When Kierkegaard speaks of the daemonic, he has in mind individuals who are aware of the good and the freedom that it could provide them from the guilt, anxiety, and despair, yet they choose to bury themselves in finite ends (aesthetic activities which are met with exhausting dread versus the endlessly enriching moral/religious modes of being). If applied liberally, all souls who have stepped outside of innocence and have yet to become ethical beings may be categorized as daemonic in some sense. Whether Kierkegaard truly meant for the term to designate so many people is up for debate, given the sobriety of the term and how all fall under its judgment at some point. How could the Good provide freedom from guilt, anxiety, and despair if it is one of the factors introducing such states to individuals? The answer is that the Good offers a way out from a type of anxiety, a type of associative guilt, and a type of despair. Becoming the Good cannot eradicate other species of guilt/anxiety/despair; otherwise Kierkegaard would not see the need to

⁴⁴ Rumble, Vanessa, “THE ORACLE’S AMBIGUITY: Freedom and Original Sin in Kierkegaard’s “The Concept of Anxiety””, p.615.

address religious categories. Why would anyone be so defiant and allow this cyclical internal war to continue ad infinitum is something we hope to have a better grip on by chapter's end.⁴⁵ As witnessed, anxiety is entangled with the concept of despair for Kierkegaard and like anxiety despair takes on a multitude of forms. There are three versions of despair that are germane to the aesthetic stage. Let us first address what Kierkegaard means by despair in general. Despair is the totality of mood states experienced by an individual in forms of being that are outside of the good and God (as we shall see later on). For instance, if we are to speak of despair in the aesthetic stage it would have to be a composite of guilt felt for not properly existing, the anxiety over that guilt, and the dashed expectations of the meaning aesthetic activities could provide. Now Kierkegaard says that the type of despair we experience in the aesthetic stage will vary depending on our consciousness of the despair. Our consciousness of the type of despair that plagues aesthetic life may push us towards ethical selfhood or to dive deeper back into finite ends that only fuel a greater internal war.⁴⁶

What are these three forms of despair that according to Kierkegaard an aesthete may experience and what can be said about their qualitative character? The three forms are unconscious despair and two forms of despair of weakness (*despair over the earthly* and *despair about the eternal*).

Kierkegaard describes those suffering from unconscious despair as dwelling almost exclusively in the sensate element, taking advantage of everything that is aesthetic with little thought to the actualization of the self by marrying the moral/eternal element with the limits of

⁴⁵ Dunning, Stephen N. "Kierkegaard's Systematic Analysis of Anxiety.", pp.27, 29.

⁴⁶ Kierkegaard, Soren, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition For Upbuilding And Awakening* (Kierkegaard's Writings, Vol 19). (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p.42.

embodied being. The reason the despair can be said to be unconscious is because all the illusions and passing fantasies of life are quite able to distract us from the darkness that lies beneath. Naturally, one may ask, “Where is the despair?” How can it be unconscious? Why wouldn’t one assume that despair is like a cold or the flu? We catch it, have it, and then are done with it. Why posit that the despair subterraneanly exists, especially when there can be such marked and prolonged periods of enjoyment? First off it does not seem inconceivable for enjoyment and despair to co-exist. Just because we may be experiencing joy in a given moment does not mean we cannot feel another way in general. Further, it can also be the case that we can feel two emotions simultaneously. Perhaps this is the case with unconscious despair. Pleasure or enjoyment may be the feeling that pre-dominates the forefront of the emotional view, yet it may also be coupled with an unidentifiable unease. This would be the unconscious despair. To quote Whitman’s “Song of Myself”, “Do I contradict myself? / Very well then.... I contradict myself; / I am large.... I contain multitudes.”⁴⁷ If this view has merit, it would seem that despair is the default posture of humans and enough enjoyment can be harvested from life to at least temporarily shunt despair to an unconscious level. One may be very lucky in an aesthetic sense and continually supply oneself with new pleasures; however, the enchantment cannot last forever according to Kierkegaard. Finite ends, by definition, cannot sustain us indefinitely regardless of what they are. Experience tells us that erotic love fades, eating past the point of satiation is sickening, indulging in intellectual speculation can lead to its own special form of melancholy, and creating a work of art, for as much joy may be intermixed in the project, also carries with it a tremendous amount of labor and tedium. We understand now why aesthetic activities exhaust us

⁴⁷ Whitman, Walt, *Leaves of Grass 1855 Edition*. (Ann Arbor: Lowe & B. Hould Publishers, 1855), p.81.

and require breaks and delving back into them if we so choose. At some point, whether it rises to the level of conscious recognition, this form of being has not delivered in regards to enduring happiness or meaning. What's troubling about this most pervasive form of despair is that our inability to consciously recognize it prevents the possibility of transcending it and getting rid of the despair. It is as if we possess a sickness and temporarily convince ourselves that we are somehow better or beyond it as we engage in finite ends, all the while the sickness persists.⁴⁸ One may ask, "If Despair is unconscious, what difference does it make if it is there or not?" Whether or not the idea of unconscious despair seems coherent does not primarily decide Kierkegaard's announcement of its discovery. Kierkegaard is merely describing, to the best of his abilities, what seems to be the case of the aesthetic mind. The skeptical inquirer might be indirectly reminding us that a fundamental presupposition of the Kierkegaardian project is that man, insofar as he lacks the God relationship, is in sin. The presence of sin, felt as despair, is going to work as a mechanism for Kierkegaard. Despair, as sin, is punishing and forces existential development into ethical and ultimately religious categories. If despair were not constantly unconsciously buried within man or consciously for that matter this would be problematic for Kierkegaard. It would mean at least two things 1) man could escape sin without the God-relationship and 2) further existential development would be arrested, since the animating despair is gone. Whether or not this intellectual burden unnecessarily prejudices Kierkegaard is a matter we have to leave behind for other scholars.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Perhaps this could be a starting point in existential psychotherapy for determining why there is such variety to the nervous personality disorders present in pampered Westerners.

⁴⁹ Kierkegaard, Soren, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition For Upbuilding And Awakening* (Kierkegaard's Writings, Vol 19), pp.44-46.

Now that we have covered unconscious despair, what does Kierkegaard say of conscious despair in general, so we can understand the nuanced subjectivity of aesthetic life? The person aware of his despair walks around with it. It weighs on him like a physical malady or illness. He may try to suppress it with diversions, just as the person unconsciously in despair would and is met with similar results, meaning the despair inevitably rears its head again and again.

Kierkegaard originally cleaves conscious despair into two categories (“despair of weakness” and “despair of defiance”) and then goes on to split the despair of weakness into two further types (“despair over the earthly” and “despair about the eternal”). We will not discuss the despair of defiance here for it is a form of despair best associated with the creation of the self in the ethical stage of existence.⁵⁰

What is the difference between the two forms of despair of weakness? The individual who despairs over the earthly, like the unconsciously despairing person, is trapped in immediacy and really only feels agony when external forces deprive him of the temporal. This agony is a component of despair over the earthly. We despair over the earthly, in most cases, when a material good is not attained or taken away. Those who despair over the earthly know on an intellectual level they can do without certain externalities; however, they have psychologically structured life so happiness is grossly predicated on the security of something from without. With the help of reflection, they can even anticipate the hollowness of their lives, even without objects being stripped from them. They may be able to even tell that there is something worthwhile about the establishment of the self from an eternal perspective; however, they have as of yet to make a complete break with immediacy.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Kierkegaard, Soren, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition For Upbuilding And Awakening* (Kierkegaard's Writings, Vol 19), pp.48-49.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp.49, 51-55.

One may ask, why attribute despair to any of this? To recap, the despair over the earthly occurs when 1) individuals are deprived of material goods and 2) when he or she is prompted to reflect on the emptiness of perhaps a materially secure or even glamorous life. So it looks like the despair over the earthly can be felt reflectively and/or traumatically in the wake of loss or frustration. Why unify these feelings of hollowness and grievance under the category of despair? There are several reasons for this. The prevailing feelings of hollowness and pronounced disappointment both occur as the result of an improper structuring of the self, a life that first seeks enjoyment/distraction from the dread of knowingly avoiding subjective moral and religious development. Secondly, one might point to the continuance of this sense of emptiness as an indicator of despair. We alone cannot rid ourselves of despair says Kierkegaard. Despair abides. The Despair about the Eternal is an intensification of the Despair of the Earthly. An individual experiencing this form of despair flagellates himself for being so weak and mourns the fact that he has parted ways with what is eternal and himself. Again, we call this despair for it arises from the self's fundamental disorganization and improper relation to the ideal element within. Berthhold-Bond reads Kierkegaard as giving us signs as to how to recognize this intensification of the despair of weakness.⁵² Unlike the passivity of Despair over the Earthly, there is action and resiliency in the Despair about the Eternal. The intensification of despair prompts change. One cannot maintain the status quo forever. An individual who succumbs to this type of despair seeks solitude to put distance between herself and corrosive temptation and out of the despair spiritedly wills to get the components of the self together. This isolation is key

⁵² Berthold-Bond, Daniel, "Lunar Musings? An Investigation of Hegel's and Kierkegaard's Portraits of Despair", *Religious Studies* 34, no. 1, (Mar., 1998): 46-48.

for an individual to affirm her radical autonomy.⁵³ Without the proper distance from the trappings of aesthetic life, she may prove too distracted to ethically choose herself and enter into existence proper as Kierkegaard understands it. Does this mean that one must first become an ascetic before entering ethical life? It depends what is meant by ascetic. If to be ascetic, means to annihilate the self in addition to shunning the material world, then Kierkegaard may caution against asceticism. He wants the subject to toil. To writhe in its decisions, to taste anguish, so it admits of limitations and reaches out. Simple solitude and reflection appear to be enough. No new age mindfulness programs needed.

Has the distinction between these fraternal twin concepts of anxiety and despair been drawn vividly enough? Kierkegaard appears to not believe in the genetic transmission of sin/despair, thus setting up these differences between anxiety and despair: 1) anxiety is present prior to sin in innocence as restlessness of spirit, 2) anxiety pushes the subject towards positing, which inevitably results in error/sin, therefore anxiety is a precondition of despair, and 3) despair appears to weigh the subject down, whereas there appears to be a frenetic aspect to anxiety. Working in concert, the different forms of anxiety and despair instigate existential revolution. Kierkegaardian aesthetes, according to Broudy, avoid anxiety and despair, if they choose to not isolate, in one of two ways. Should they have the means, every desire and fancy is pursued. Should they be limited financially, physically, or in some other fashion they can deepen the intensity of the experience. For instance, as I write these words, I'm witnessing a bulldozer uproot a 200 year old oak stump. This ordinary event probably means little to the workers engaged in the tree's removal, yet the elasticity of my imagination provokes within me a

⁵³ Kierkegaard, Soren, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition For Upbuilding And Awakening* (Kierkegaard's Writings, Vol 19), pp.49, 60-62.

metaphor that likens the happening to philosophical ingenuity. Though I may be limited to this desk and chair, I can distract myself with my imaginative powers to find the mundane riveting.⁵⁴ Wisdo points out that the flight from despair and anxiety, whether it is into the realm of sensual pleasures or something higher-minded, such as the realm of imagination, further demonstrates that the life of an aesthete is merely a collection of experiences. The aesthete does not appear interested in the endless implementation of an ideal, such as the ethical that would provide an arc to the entirety of his life. In case we need reminding, the ethical rescues us from the externally determined amusements of life and re-orientes us so that our abiding focus is to manifest the good within. The aesthete is ultimately beholden to circumstances, whether they bestow fortune or frustration. An aesthete, despite what intellectual gifts they may possess, is sternly judged by Kierkegaard as having no unifying life purpose.⁵⁵

Since Kierkegaard sees aesthetes as caught up in immediacy, living entirely for the moment, aesthetes make no commitments that cultivate a self and find themselves in what Prather calls “existential bankruptcy” once the moment is extinguished.⁵⁶ We have covered extensively the types of anxiety and despair that arise in this state. Let us now take stock of the general features of aesthetes. All of this is done so that we may clearly answer the specific questions we have about the aesthetic stage. Aesthetes: 1) cannot stand the dread (anxiety + despair) of aesthetic life and understandably seek some pleasurable experiences to ward off the dread, 2) produce, with their flight from dread, little more than a collection of experiences that fail to provide a unified trajectory to their individual lives, and 3) ultimately find themselves in

⁵⁴ Broudy, Harry S., “Kierkegaard’s Levels of Existence”, p.295.

⁵⁵ Wisdo, David, “Kierkegaard on the Limits of Christian Epistemology”, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 29, no. 2, (Apr., 1991,) p.103.


⁵⁶ Prather, Kieran, “Kierkegaard’s Symbolic Use of “Don Giovanni”, *Jo. of Aesthetic Ed* 12, no. 3, (Jul., 1978), p.54.

the midst of the despair and anxiety that originally motivated all aesthetic activities.

Aesthetic Stage Types

By sifting through *Philosophical Fragments*, *Stages on Life's Way*, *Either/Or*, *Works of Love*, and *Concluding Unscientific Post-Script to the Philosophical Fragments*, a fairly extensive, yet by no means uncontroversial chart of aesthetic types was assembled. In this section, it is our intention to explore these types quickly and thoroughly so we can conclude why no type in the aesthetic stage can account for meaningful subjectivity as Kierkegaard claims. Our chart below ranks the types of aesthetes by how much abstraction and imagination each requires.

Table 1: Diagnosing the types of Kierkegaardian aesthetes

Degree of Abstraction or Imagination Required	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> vii.) Pleasure in the sadness of despair (AG/DEL) vi.) Intellectuals/Speculative Philosophers (AG/DEL) v.) Artists, Poets, and Those that Love their Work (AG/DE/DEL) iv.) Recollection of the First love (AG/DE/DEL) iii.) Manipulation of the seduced from The Seducer's Diary (AG/DE/DEL) ii.) Erotic Love/Immediate erotic (AG/UD/DE/*DEL) i.) Going through the motions of existence (AG/UD/DE/*DEL)
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Characterized by: Anxiety over Guilt (AG)

Unconscious Despair (UD) Despair over the Earthly (DE) Despair over the Eternal (DEL)

*Possible, yet somewhat rare

It may be tempting to think of aesthetes as romantic rebels; however, there can be a much more banal manifestation of the aesthete. The philistine is an aesthete who lives the life of civic virtue, taking the path of least resistance, simply because he cannot envision an alternative to the day in and day out routine that is his life. The philistine has allowed external forces to shape his life, rather than actively choose himself and his passions. So yes, superficially the anti-intellectual everyday men will not resemble a Don Juan or an Intellectual elite, but they are all

driven by the common force of eking out security and safety by allowing extrinsic societal expectations (attaining a spouse, a good wage, a boat etc.) to be the motive force of their life.⁵⁷

What types of anxiety and despair might we find amongst the philistines? Since we are speaking of those externally defined by society, we are likely considering individuals far past the initial anxiety that pre-dates the personal fall into error. Philistines are not children, but no longer innocent adults. If there is anxiety to be had (and there is according to Kierkegaard), it is the anxiety over the error, anxiety over our guilt. Anxiety over guilt does not entail despair, but is coupled with it. What kind of despair might the philistine possess?

What about unconscious despair and the two forms of despair of weakness? It seems entirely plausible that a philistine could experience unconscious despair and the despair over the earthly. The inundation of material and cyclical activities can be quite effective at preventing or only allowing a little reflection on the pointlessness of societal activity. Such diminished reflective reserves, keeps despair unconscious or minimally conscious until existential bankruptcy is felt. Though not an impossibility, it would seem unlikely for someone experiencing despair over the eternal to be your garden variety philistine. Those that despair eternally seem to seek distance from philistine life for they fully grasp the vacuousness of it. There is nothing necessary about such isolation that thrusts such individuals towards ethical existence, so it is possible that they descend back into their routine; however it would seem more likely that one finds some fleeting satisfaction in some “higher” form of the aesthetic to break up the monotony of life.

⁵⁷ Wisdo, David, “Kierkegaard on the Limits of Christian Epistemology”, p.104.

So is Kierkegaard's account of the philistine aesthetic life defensible? Kierkegaard isn't describing a life path that should sound alien to us. What could be contentious about the account? Perhaps, two things 1) was Kierkegaard right in regards to the types of despair found here? And 2) need one be an aesthete to live a philistine life? Are not there good philistines? The second of the pair is perhaps easier to answer. Not all philistines caught up in the metabolic processes of ordinary life are unreflective or minimally conscious. Some of the individuals have transcended aesthetic categories and have internally revolutionized themselves towards the Good. To the observer, their lives seem identical, but the observer has no conception of the existential subject's change. What was once a job to pass the time has become a moral vocation by transitioning into ethical existence. Therefore, not all philistines are aesthetes. Returning to the first question, did Kierkegaard identify all the types of despair an aesthete of this sort could experience? Perhaps this is a problematic question. Kierkegaard himself, to this author's knowledge, did not say this type of aesthete experiences only one or two forms of despair and no more. We have synthesized multiple texts of Kierkegaard's to generate hypothetical despair applications. If an error has been committed in the adjudication of despair types, this author and Kierkegaard should split the blame. So what error could there be? What about those philistines, who feel the intensity of the despair about the eternal, seek solitude, yet give once again to societal pressures rather than existentially evolve? We have perhaps taken it for granted that all will embrace ethical actuality if the despair is painful enough. This is not the case. Think of the exploits of Don Draper, his sudden bouts of soul searching, only to later return to the world of coca cola and laundry detergent jingles without much subjective development. It appears despair over the eternal is here.

i. Erotic Love/Immediate Erotic

The character of Don Juan from Mozart's "Don Giovanni" is widely thought of as symbolizing the Kierkegaardian aesthetic stage, despite there being numerous other aesthetic types. Don Juan, unhampered by ethics, lives entirely for the moment in his relentless pursuit of seducing every woman he encounters. Don Juan is merely a collection of seduction experiences. Without a serious commitment to the ethical, Don Juan is an undeveloped person and close to the brutish, whose entire sense of well being is determined by the ability to attain favorable external circumstances in the form of copulation partners.⁵⁸

Someone truly living this licentious lifestyle will most likely be unable to cultivate friendships, let alone marriage.⁵⁹ To really develop either, choices have to be made and whims sacrificed. What kind of choices might these be? The commitment to a friend or a spouse, Kierkegaard would see as an ethical commitment. A promise that is typically unaltered regardless of external circumstance.⁶⁰ Maybe we ought to pause and say something more specific about the nature of the commitments in friendship and marriage. Kierkegaard is more precise on this matter later on in the authorship when considering what a Christian ethics would look like. When Kierkegaard speaks of ethics divorced from religion or those which are vaguely religious ethics, he is not long-winded when it comes to a secularly ethical friendship or marriage. His tone is legalistic and dissolvable upon dissatisfaction of ethical-legal terms. The more religious the ethics, the more such ethics must have the impress of eternity, according to the pseudonym Judge Wilhelm. If we keep it simple and our ethics philosophical rather than

⁵⁸ Prather, Kieran, "Kierkegaard's Symbolic Use of "Don Giovanni"", pp.51, 54, 56-57.

⁵⁹ Broudy, Harry S., "Kierkegaard's Levels of Existence", p.296.

⁶⁰ Kierkegaard, contrary to popular belief, is not a pure Kantian ethicist and allows latitude in these decisions.

bestowing a religious dimension upon them, friendship and marriage are contractual. The aesthete, especially not our Casanova subject, is really unable to make such a commitment. This is just too demanding for someone caught up in carnal escapades and if he was able to make said commitments it is unlikely that he would continue on living solely for sexual conquest. The ethical would likely lead him to a new vocation. “A”, the writer of *Either/Or* part 1, does not live the life of Don Juan but he believes the sensual nature of Mozart’s opera can bring him as close as possible to Don Juan’s subjectivity.⁶¹

Does the individual dedicated to romantic love experience meaningful subjectivity or is he just another aesthete, though passionately inspired, unable to get the fundamental components of self together? Have the lovers made a commitment to one another and is such a commitment indicative of ethical existence for Kierkegaard? If the lovers make their nuptials official somehow, Kierkegaard might be inclined to grant that they have in fact made the sort of commitment characteristic of ethical and not aesthetic beings. If unmarried, Kierkegaard is likely to think that the two individuals simply become so enamored with one another that they have intoxicated themselves with spontaneous and erotic love for one another. There seems to be something impulsive and closer to the aesthete Don Juan here, than initially conceived. In this type of erotic love, where only two individuals are bonded together through sensuality, can we say that either has developed meaningful individuality? The answer appears to be no on Kierkegaard’s terms. The commitment made to the beloved is one with a caveat. It exclaims that my investment in this person extends so long as the times are generally good and there is derivable pleasure from it, unlike the commitment of the married couple (ideally) that is made for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health. A commitment with such a caveat, for

⁶¹ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard’s “Fragments” and “Post-Script”: The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, p.35.

Kierkegaard, is not really a commitment and not indicative of a progression to the ethical; rather passionate dedication is mere effusive ecstatic feeling. The idea that the love affair is aesthetic is reinforced should the love affair come to an end and leave one or both of the individuals in the depths of despair. Despair, defined as the melancholy experienced in the apartness from the good and God will show that they built the foundation of their life upon something transitory, something of the temporal world.⁶² To be sure there is anxiety built into this despair as well. We have seen how despair and anxiety accompany one another. It is not anxiety alone given the enervating effects.

To be specific, what types of anxiety and despair may our seducer and lovers experience within the aesthetic? The anxiety over guilt (for it is always with us once the Edenic exit has occurred), unconscious despair, and despair over the earthly all appear to be in play again, not that it is impossible for the one who despairs eternally to be either kind of lover. Despair over the eternal is perhaps less likely given the element of isolation in it. It would seem that aesthetic lives that require more solitude, such as artistic and speculative lives, are in greater possession of the despair over the eternal. It ought not to surprise us if we discover star-crossed lovers or Casanovas, who are also inclined towards the artistic and cerebral. The isolation can be a temporary reprieve back into the amusement park of delights.

The account of erotic love is an insightful one, showing us just how much sensuousness and immediacy is involved in something people define as the ultimate aim of life. Once properly understood chasing “love” or sexual partners seems wildly foolish. This is not to say that erotic

⁶² Kierkegaard, Soren, *Works of Love: Some Christian Reflections in the Form of Discourse*. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962), pp.25, 54, 68-69.

love cannot give way to something higher in ethico-religious categories. We will elaborate upon Kierkegaard's ideas concerning love and friendship towards the dissertation's end, when we look at how a second ethics comes into play in the ultimate existence stage of meaningful individuality.

ii. Manipulation of the seduced from *The Seducer's Diary*

Kierkegaard conceives of another aesthete who closely resembles Don Juan. In *The Seducer's Diary* from *Either/Or pt. 1*, we learn of Johannes the Seducer, who to chase away the doldrums of anxiety and despair, sets out to ensnare one and only one admirer. His prey, Cordelia, is not pursued out of sexual gratification; rather Johannes gets some sort of twisted delight in learning about all her hopes and fears, so that he can manipulate her into falling in love with him. Johannes is not after something carnal. He merely finds pleasure in orchestrating an elaborate seduction. It requires great planning and cunning. He revels in his cleverness and schemes.⁶³

This aesthete type was ranked higher than our typical lover or seducer due to the greater forethought required to execute his duplicitous machination. This individual is likely aware of his own misery and how to bring the misery about in others still living for some variety of immediacy. To be unconsciously despairing and enact such a plan that is predicated on knowing what makes humans despair appears unlikely. Such a description requires too much reflection on the banalities of ordinary life. This person seems somewhat removed from sensuousness,

⁶³ Utterback, Sylvia Walsh, "Don Juan and the Representation of Spiritual Sensuousness", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 47, No. 4, (Dec., 1979), pp.634-635.

either because he knows the prospect of happiness and meaning in the temporal is close to nil and he is just too weak to individually draw closer to the ethical and institute an attitudinal revolution or he has experienced the isolation characteristic of despair about the eternal and is yet too weak to will the good and plunges back into this finite game. Of course, anxiety over guilt would accompany either form of despair associated with this type of aesthete. This individual may seem like a psychopath to us and a credible contender for a compelling Hollywood screenplay; however, the idea of enjoying the hunt more than the prey might be more commonplace than we care to admit.

iii. Recollection of the First love

In this bizarre section of *Either/Or*, “A” gives a review of a play entitled *The First Love* by Scribe. This review is bizarre for it simultaneously reveals details of A’s own first love and how he had a brief encounter with her at the play’s performance. She tells him that she never loved A and had since become engaged to someone else, leaving him with only his memories of their time together to fantasize about. As for the play, A finds it more and more endearing each time he sees it and reflects upon it. The major point here throughout this ponderous review of the play seems to be the following. Recollection can transport us away from the despair implicit in aesthetic life. Meditating upon art or lost love takes the pain away briefly. Getting lost in a contemplative fantasy about what we may have idealized from our past distracts us, even if it is but for a moment, from the ubiquitous presence of anxiety and despair. Our powers of imaginative recollection present us with a world better than the one in which we find ourselves. If only the phantasmagorical experience could never end, then we may never progress out of this aesthetic life or others that require the vivid implementation of imagination or cogitation. The

first love aesthete is “higher” than our previous discussed lives because there are signs that the individual now has some distance from the purely sensual and temporal. He knows that he can do without that which is external to him and has begun to enter into the mental reclusiveness that characterizes those brushing up against the despair over the eternal. He may even be well aware of the error he made during his first love of idolizing the object of his affection and mistakenly deifying her. This individual seems to be a bit of a transitional figure in regards to the despair present within his life. Recollection of this sort may be experienced by those in the throes of both types of weakness despair endemic to the aesthetic stage. If we must draw distinctions about it, it would seem the one that experiences the recollection without being all that upset is more likely to despair eternally. Such an individual has some command over his emotions and the anguish that attachment can bring.⁶⁴ The eternally despairing individual feels dread more intensely about how life has thus far been lived. Such individuals might not be as caught up in the particularity of loss. An obsession over the loss of a particular lover and fantasizing about it might be indicative of one still clinging to externality for happiness and meaning.

iv. Artists, Poets, and Those that Love their Work

Now we are starting to pierce the realm of aesthetes who do not exactly resemble the wantons and philistines of the bottom tiers. Artists, Poets, and those that love their art, are quite familiar with the anxiety and the despair that is so frequently intermingled with life at this stage. They do not resolve to comprehend this suffering; rather they choose superficially high-minded means to escape it.⁶⁵ Employing their imagination and their receptivity to artistic ideas, they can

⁶⁴ Daniel A. Storm, "Kierkegaard, D. Anthony Storm's Commentary on," D. Anthony's Storm Commentary on Kierkegaard, 2011, accessed November 13, 2012, <http://sorenkierkegaard.org/>.

⁶⁵ Broudy, Harry S., "Kierkegaard's Levels of Existence", p.297.

create an altered reality temporarily alleviating their despair.⁶⁶ Kierkegaard is content to place artistic types here because their imaginative reflecting drives them towards possibility and away from commitment, actuality, and permanence.⁶⁷

What about all this? Surely we don't think poets and artists live in a meaningless dream world. They slave away at their craft and almost all will report that what they've committed themselves to is deeply meaningful. On some level it makes sense that the individual, who fills his or her life with music and poetry, hopping from one high-minded pleasure to the next, is some sort of evolved aesthete. This is not necessarily problematic. It is those that suffer for their art who on the surface do not seem to be aesthetes, for they seem to have an uncompromising commitment to an ideal and from what we know of Kierkegaard thus far it is commitments that define us existentially and elevate us out of one stage and into the next. Other things such as life events, trauma, rebellion etc. may define us as well but perhaps insofar as they prevent or incentivize existential commitment. Is there something lesser about the commitment that artists make? Is the artist's commitment an inhibitor, forever binding them to the aesthetic? What are we to make of them?

Perhaps this quote from the *Concluding Unscientific Post-Script* will help us.

*"If an individual throws himself away in order to grasp something great, he is esthetically inspired; if he gives up everything in order to save himself, he is ethically inspired."*⁶⁸

What Kierkegaard appears to be saying here is that someone who devotes his or her life to art essentially becomes a disposable vessel through which the art comes to be. If it is imperative for one to cultivate meaningful individuality then this is not the way to go. Another path is offered

⁶⁶ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, p.36.

⁶⁷ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, p.443.

⁶⁸ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, pp.390-391.

which we are exploring during the course of this dissertation. There appears to be some sense to what Kierkegaard is saying about the esthetically inspired individual. Those who suffer from this mania, appear to create unceasingly. As soon as one thing is accomplished, there is no rest. One must neurotically create for reasons he likely cannot even explain. If he is not creating, he becomes moody and berates himself for his indolence. This is likely because an artist begins to feel the weight of anxiety and despair upon him when he is not rapturously engaged in the artistic process. He is bored of life and wants to jump back into the act of creation. Now saying all this does not in the slightest discredit creative pursuits. It seems that if art is going to be a cure-all for certain existential maladies, then it has to be transfigured or redeemed in a higher existence sphere, such as the ethical or even the religious. Once one has brought his life in accord with such fixed points, the artistic process can be seen as having a cohesive arc that consists in working out certain eternal ideas in the world. The work of the artist will seem to fit a larger plan and mean more to the creator than a pastime that seemed to suit him well. How all this is done, we cannot say right now for we have barely scraped the surface of what these other existence spheres are. For the time being, we may have a tentative answer as to why artists fail to cultivate meaningful individuality; however, this does not mean one has to give up art to develop significant individuality. Just as marriage does not require us to give up erotic love, neither does transcending into another existence sphere demand that we give up art. How art fits into the entire Kierkegaardian project we will have to explore as we progress through the chapters. If we desire a clue now, perhaps examining Kierkegaard's own authorship is revealing as to how fragmentary artistic creations develop coherence when subsumed beneath larger ethical or religious goals and how that might be a more rewarding way of making art than whatever arbitrarily comes to mind during existential blights. If one implements the Good through his or

her art then it would be hard seeing how Kierkegaard would object but what makes for an artistic manifestation of the Good we do not quite know. Not being obvious, not being direct would seem to be qualities. It is hard to say more than this at the moment.

To be thorough, what sort of despair might we see manifest in these aesthetes? Given the well known trope of the tortured artist, it is unlikely our subjects unconsciously despair. Artists driven by the potential to experience fame and become a fascinating celebrity might be best conceived as despairing over the earthly, whereas those that create as a coping mechanism after distancing themselves from the world of finite ends, appear more in touch with the despair about the eternal.

v. Intellectuals/Speculative Philosophers

What follows will undoubtedly be controversial and this need not be a bad thing, for it might be the case that our modest investigation has properly understood Kierkegaard on a point others have overlooked. It is also entirely conceivable that we have gone off the rails in our understanding of what comprises the aesthetic. It is our tentative conclusion that a portion of what is known as objectivity or the objective realm within Kierkegaard's writings could be correctly conceived as being a level within the aesthetic sphere. To be clear, the whole of objectivity is not contained within the aesthetic. We will see in future chapters that there is an objective component to each inward involution of the self. For instance, when we speak of ethical existence, reference will be made to an objective ethical that everyone ought to have access to as the result of being human. Similarly, when we speak of the religious stages there will be reference to an objective entity to which we must relate subjectively. Why might we

think there is something aesthetic to objectivity? For starters, Kierkegaard himself never delimits an existence sphere as objective. It is generally believed that there are at least three stages of existence (see *Stages on Life's Way* and *Either/Or*), the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. These three stages are then broken down into finer sub-stages, yet we have not encountered within the literature a separate or sub-sphere for objectivity. One could very well ask why we ought to think of the objective realm as a level within the aesthetic, when there is objectivity in the ethical and religious sphere. There is an objective reference point, something independent of the individual, in the ethical and religious stages. That is not the type of objectivity in the aesthetic realm. The type of objectivity identified to be a level within the aesthetic is intellectual activity that fashions itself to be independent of the individual given that all humans are capable of participating in reason and arriving at consensus rational truths through that participation. To address the rationale for placing the intellectual level within the aesthetic, we need to review the three commonalities found between the non-contentious levels of the aesthetic and ask if the objective meets this criteria as well. To review, we claimed;

Aesthetes: (1) cannot stand the dread (anxiety + despair) of aesthetic life and understandably seek some pleasurable experiences to ward off the dread, (2) produce, with their flight from dread, little more than a collection of experiences that fail to provide a unified trajectory to their individual lives, and 3) ultimately find themselves in the midst of the despair and anxiety that originally motivated all aesthetic adventures. So how does the objective, conceived as intellectual activity, measure up?

(1) the flight from anxiety and despair

Others apart sat on a hill retired
In thoughts more elevate and reasoned high
Of providence, foreknowledge, will and fate,
Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute,

And found no end in wand'ring mazes lost.
 Of good and evil much they argued then,
 Of happiness and final misery,
 Passion and apathy, and glory and shame:
 Vain wisdom all and false philosophy!
 Yet with a pleasing sorcery could charm
 Pain for a while, or anguish, and excite
 Fallacious hope or arm th'obdured breast
 With stubborn patience as with triple steel.
 (Milton, *Paradise Lost* 2.557-569)⁶⁹

Just as some of the fallen angels in Milton's *Paradise Lost* philosophized to pleausrably pass the time, the inhabitants of the speculative/objective level also revel in the pure joy of contemplating ideas, be they divine, political, or artistic. We may even see certain individuals devote their entire lives to such pursuits, not unlike the inspired artists and poets we referenced earlier.⁷⁰ And for that reason we may very well be entitled to refer to those lost in speculation as esthetically inspired.⁷¹ Their own lives become like vessels for some presumably higher and universal truth. Kierkegaard thinks there is something truly comical about individuals who live in such a way.⁷² In an intellectual's calm deliberation over the truths that supposedly define all existence, passion appears to be drained away. Such individuals appear to become paradoxically less human in the pursuit of the truth they believe will make their lives meaningful. Emotions and passionately willed decisions are suppressed or delayed. How can we let such matters interfere in

⁶⁹ Milton, John, *Paradise Lost*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), p.48.

⁷⁰ Broudy, Harry S., "Kierkegaard's Levels of Existence", p.298.

⁷¹ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, p.391.

⁷² Swenson, David F., "The Anti-Intellectualism of Kierkegaard", *The Philosophical Review* 25, No. 4, (Jul., 1916): 586.

our quasi-omniscience? Kierkegaard will often compare such seekers of rational truth to crude imaginings of mechanical, droid-like beings.⁷³ He deems such scholars to be married to distraction, which sets up a discussion of exactly how such individuals take flight from boredom. Intellectual activity is extrinsically pleasurable for it entertains us, preoccupying us so we can shift our attention off the ever present anxiety and despair life has to offer. Intrinsically, there is much to be said about the pleasures of intellectual life. It does seem to hold out the hope that rational sense can be made of an otherwise mad world, simultaneously one cannot deny the elevating effects of pride, when we feel speculative comprehension and even intellectual contribution are near. Intoxicated by the prospect of pure being, objective thinkers are spirited away and need not encounter plain old life that is found to be so dreadfully boring.⁷⁴

(2) No unified self

Since living objectively means doing away with as many factual encounters as possible, choice is minimized and one can dwell amongst possibilities. To be precise, how exactly does objective intellectual activity limit choice? The choice Kierkegaard is concerned with has to do with an individual bringing certain ethical ideals into reality or deciding to live in a particular type of relationship with God. If a spiritedly willed decision cannot be made for the ethical because an intellectual is waiting for all the justificatory evidence (i.e. thought experiments for the perfect moral theory) to come in so as to decide for her how to live, then a low priority is

⁷³ “but one dares not look at a madman of the latter type [the objectively mad] at all, from fear of discovering that he has eyes of glass and hair made from carpet-rags; that he is, in short, an artificial product. If you meet someone who suffers from such a derangement of feeling, the derangement consists in his not having any, you listen to what he says in a cold and awful dread, scarcely knowing whether it is a human being, or a cunningly contrived walking stick in which a talking machine has been concealed...to find oneself engaged in rational and philosophical conversation with a walking stick is almost enough to make a man lose his mind.” Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, p.175.

⁷⁴ Broudy, Harry S., “Kierkegaard’s Levels of Existence”, pp.298-299.

made on decisive ethical choice. If a similar approach is taken in the pursuit of God knowledge, then the decision could be delayed even longer. Without choice and decision, on Kierkegaard's view, we do not make the commitments for assembling a proper self and building a meaningful life. Kierkegaard has established the parameters for how existence is truly inaugurated (*see the earlier discussion of how spirit holds the components of self together and then births a self when these elements can be effectively married*).

What gives Kierkegaard the right to prioritize what is gained in the development of the self as essential or more important in comparison with the speculative knowledge that an intellectual seeks objectively? First, Kierkegaard is strident in his belief that objectivity returns a fraction of the answers we hope it will provide (and this is being generous on Kierkegaard's terms) and does us a disservice for it delays the existential choice that could prove helpful in our conquest of despair and anxiety. At least with preoccupying oneself with the state of one's self and how to advance it, one is talking about how to live a better life here and now, a life with a structured subject that is free to receive the meaning associated with the overcoming of pernicious and persistent maladies. Why else might Kierkegaard deem objective knowledge less essential than the type of knowledge we may experience in existential revolutions, such as the internalization of the Good and a less objective, yet more personal relationship with God? Kierkegaard is preoccupied with man, not only from a historical and temporal point of view, but also an eternal one. Whatever blessings objective thought may bestow upon mortal man, moreover individual men, it cannot resolve for them the question of their eternal destination. Kierkegaard believes his existential project, if reflected upon and followed carefully, can actually have a say on an individual's eternal destination. Kierkegaard's guidance on the subjective route is at a minimum a map for how individual lives attain significance. Kierkegaard's admonition teach us how to overcome despair,

as sin, the triumph over sin (if possible) will result in a removal from this fallen realm and sustenance in a more perfect one. The nature of the afterlife for Kierkegaard or his concept of hell (if he even has one) will not be debated at length since we are consumed with Kierkegaard's playbook for how to live a meaningful life, not an after-life. These are the primary reasons why Kierkegaard prioritizes a route other than the objective. One need not choose one route or the other or exclude objective intellectual thought. The goal for Kierkegaard, in part, is to reign in the ambitions of objective thought so individuals are not misguided. Kierkegaard is not interested in undermining the efforts of objective thought altogether. He merely wants it to work properly in concert with a new approach to the fundamental problems plaguing human life.

(3) Leads to despair

When caught entirely within the realm of reflection, despair will inevitably emerge in the form of doubt. Why does this happen? Kierkegaard answers, as seen in our introductory chapter, that though certain arguments or metaphysical systems may tempt us, ultimately matters of the good and God cannot be demonstrated. The doubt emerges for we know just how tenuous the evidence and the explanations are. We may busy ourselves, perhaps through our entire lives, bolstering the positions for and against, but we remain haunted by the thought we are merely sustaining a house of cards. Doubt might be temporarily resolvable by more reflection; however, once in the midst of doubt man despairs deeply and is not easily roused to joy. Doubt entails despair for we call into question whether or not anything good and true can rescue us from the vanities of aesthetic life. When the objective prospects look dim, we question if our intellectual

pursuits are no better than “lower” aesthetic distractions. The life of the mind suddenly looks so meaningless. What of this? Must one despair deeply if beset by intellectual doubt? Can one not happily doubt? The history of morose philosophers ought to be enough to put this critique to bed. It does not seem to be the case that singular episodes of doubting, such as “Does reality exist?” or something of that nature, lead to despair, but rather the question of whether or not the entire philosophical enterprise offers something worthwhile. Particular instances of doubting can be quite rewarding for they establish a contemplative mood, but hopelessness in the very methods of philosophy would lead to an especially difficult form of nihilism. Hope in God or an upright epistemically justified ethical attitude might fix his sorry lot; however, he cannot reach ethical or religious categories via some rational bridge. He must abandon his fixation with the rational, the objective, and make a qualitative and “perhaps” blind leap in both cases. Kierkegaard belabors this point with the disorienting discussion of conflicting moral codes in *Fear and Trembling*⁷⁵ and the flash of luminous acumen on display in the *Philosophical Fragments* where Kierkegaard forcefully argues against the possibility of establishing God with reason alone.⁷⁶ The despair characteristic of objective/aesthetic life and doubt reveal to the man of intellection the absolute barrenness of the aesthetic life. He is left feeling hollow.⁷⁷ Prather believes Faust came to symbolize this type of despair for Kierkegaard.⁷⁸ Really the only way out of this despair is to rethink our approach to objective truth, and pursue a new route, one of increased subjectivity and ultimately subjective knowing. If Kierkegaard has properly described the myriad of forms despair can take in aesthetic life alone, perhaps we ought to entertain his claims of a new way. What if we are unconvinced non-objective truths are awaiting us that would lead to a “truer” existence? Even if Kierkegaard

⁷⁵ We will examine the discussion in the next chapter.

⁷⁶ Revisit our introduction for an overview of this matter.

⁷⁷ Broudy, Harry S., “Kierkegaard’s Levels of Existence”, p.311.

⁷⁸ Prather, Kieran, “Kierkegaard’s Symbolic Use of “Don Giovanni””, *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, p.55.

has said something intelligible about the anxiety and despair of aesthetic life, what grounds might we have for thinking something non-objective might be “true” (*can we even conceive what it would mean for something to be true in this sense?*) and a proper antidote to the described angst of life? If we are to be so myopic and only deem those matters which can pass universal demonstration or empirical confirmation, then we might have to dismiss things that we consider to be very much true, such as the love we have for our parents or the aesthetic value of Faulkner. If we are willing to countenance these matters as true in a non-objective way, then perhaps we ought not to write off Kierkegaard’s approach without giving it a fair hearing. For now, it appears we have provided sufficient reasons for thinking that a portion of the objective realm, specifically intellectual objective activity, is really a constituent of the aesthetic stage, a very high-minded and in some sense laudatory level.⁷⁹ We will, to the greatest extent possible at this point, show how we create subjective truth or meaningful individuality for ourselves in this chapter’s conclusion. We have one more aesthetic type to review before we can explicitly do this.

Given everything we have said about the objective level, there may be some unconvinced that it properly belongs in the aesthetic sphere, for it seems like it is truly possible to transcend into some objective realm if one really dedicates one’s life to abstraction, making intellectual activity more than just a distraction from the cultivation of a self. It is not possible according to Kierkegaard, for purported objective truths of such a realm are really illusions, perhaps very helpful illusions, from our perspective.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Swenson, David F., “The Anti-Intellectualism of Kierkegaard”, *The Philosophical Review*, p.574.

⁸⁰ So does this mean there is no existential system at all? It certainly means that there isn’t one available to humans, so the promise of it in an objective realm is false. Kierkegaard does; however, believe an existential system can exist for God, since for God reality/existence is final and systematized (Swenson, David F., “The Anti-Intellectualism of Kierkegaard”, *The Philosophical Review*, p.574). What reasons might we have for thinking God has access to an existential system, given Kierkegaard’s claim (see table 1 again) that God does not exist

(Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, p. 332). How can something that does not exist, systematize all existing things?

Kierkegaard writes; “Well, it is he who himself is outside of existence and yet in existence, who in his eternity is forever concluded and yet includes existence within himself—it is God”. (Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, pp.112, 118). So somehow God is uniquely positioned to understand an existential system given his externality to existence and how existence is included within him. Ironically, digging into this matter might be a distraction from our pursuit of unearthing meaningful individuality. Interested parties should consult the corresponding footnote, where the notion is philosophically explored in Curtis L. Thompson’s paper “From Presupposing Pantheism’s Personality: Seeking Parallels between Kierkegaard’s and Martensen’s Theological Anthropologies”.

What does it mean for existence to be included within God? Furthermore, even if existence is included within God, how does that enable Him in any way to construct an existential system? Is God an existential philosopher? It would seem to make this part of the claim coherent Kierkegaard would need to not only advocate some kind of pantheist thesis where the entire universe is at the very least a part of God, which can be broken down into further constituent parts. Some of which (humans) exist by the creation of a self in the manner indicated in table 1. Even if we were to grant this though, this would not be enough for God to subjectively comprehend an existential system, *unless* God had privileged access to our selves, could penetrate their experiences, and really dwell within those experiences. And since there is no division between what God experiences, thinks, and acts upon (see table one), we might be entitled to say that the corrupting force of reflection does not present God with a stumbling block to the conceptualization of an existential system. Now all of this fantastical speculation prompted by Kierkegaard’s own musings on the Divine Being leads to a curious conclusion. It would appear that Kierkegaard, a Christian, is somehow committed to a pantheist thesis of God. Perhaps, he did not intend for us to take this particular passage so seriously and would reprimand us for getting too far into the weeds concerning Divine Being, something he declares over and over to be unknowable via intellect. One cannot help but think he is speaking out of both sides of his mouth on this matter; offering us an account of Divine Being, while prohibiting us from getting too caught up in it. So there are really two controversies a) Is Kierkegaard committed to pantheism? And b) is there any meaningful line of demarcation in Kierkegaard which reads “think this much about the divine and then no more”?

Curtis L. Thompson takes up the first question of this pair in his article “From Presupposing Pantheism’s Personality: Seeking Parallels between Kierkegaard’s and Martensen’s Theological Anthropologies”. Thompson first clarifies what he understands pantheism to be and it is not the simple notion that God is the sum of all things, rather it is the worldview that there is a divine substance that unites the world and dwells within all things. Thompson illustrates from several of Kierkegaard’s journals that Kierkegaard held conflicting views on pantheism, which are relevant to our discussion. Kierkegaard saw pantheism as a nascent religious posture necessary for the serious engagement of God; however, it is to be presupposed and surmounted in further religious thought. Thompson believed Kierkegaard took a position somewhere between pantheism and supernatural theism. Thompson calls it “pantheism” and defines it in a bipolar manner. God is thought to be immanent, meaning all things rest in God, while simultaneously God stands in a transcendent and free relation to the universe. God is both immanent and transcendent. Why would Kierkegaard think of God in a transcendent manner? Why progress beyond pantheism? As we shall see, this will involve Kierkegaard’s acceptance that God at the height of His omnipotence, provides relative freedom (of conscience) to human beings. Providing freedom to human beings will ultimately imprison God (by his own omnipotence) to transcend nature and take on bodily form. Human beings, on Kierkegaard’s account, can only progress so far in regards to freedom and meaningful individuality without the Incarnation. It is the ability to properly commune with God as a person that will prove essential. So this is how we get the somewhat schizophrenic view of pantheism, where God is the foundation of all things, humans are relatively free, and God transcends nature to reconcile man with Him. This is all fine and good, but does it at all shine a light on how God may be able to penetrate our hearts and familiarize Himself with existence, so as to make an existential system possible for Him? Perhaps, the answer relies on the understanding that there is a unity between the Divine lover and the human lover during reconciliation. The Incarnation itself along with bonds forged with humanity, may deliver an existential system to God.

If this is in fact how God gains an internal look into existence, then there seems to be something deeply problematic about this understanding of pantheism. It would appear that not only is God dependent upon human individuals for existential knowledge, but that until the introduction of the Incarnation into history God was completely unaware of an aspect of the universe, specifically existence. Has God’s omniscience been challenged now that we have perhaps saved Kierkegaard from the charge of pantheism? This question we will need to save for later, when we

really examine the nature of the relationship between the individual and Divine, to see if there is knowledge truly communicated to God. Kierkegaard may have been saved from the charge of pantheism, but are we any closer to understanding how much inquiry is allowed into the Divine nature on the Kierkegaardian paradigm and if perhaps Kierkegaard contradicts himself by speculating on it? Despite a prohibition on metaphysics, there are aspects of Kierkegaard's work that lend themselves to speculative understanding. Perhaps, this question must be revisited as well towards the conclusion of our work.

What types of anxiety and despair might appear amongst the intellectual set? Anxiety over guilt is a near given, when we consider how much maturation serious intellectual pursuits require. Anxiety from guilt comes from knowledge over our failure to exist ethically. Which kinds of weakness despair, if any, apply to the intellectual? Could those caught up in objectivity despair over the earthly? Here, one might despair over the earthly; however, these arduous enterprises do not appear that irresistible and fallen into unthinkingly. Serious reflection upon ordinary life and dissatisfaction with it appear to be requisite before joining the intellectual rank and file. This level of reflection likely far surpasses those merely despairing over the earthly. Does it not seem more probable for the objective intellectual to despair about the eternal? Intense isolation and introspection are required of such people, distancing them from the temporal world and giving them some mastery over its processes. Those caught up in the pursuit of objective truth are well acquainted with the despair implicit in prioritizing the temporal order; however they do not acknowledge as immediately the despair endemic to their own endeavors. Such endeavors, Kierkegaard would argue, are futile consolations for the lack of a developed self in relation to the eternal Good and God. The zealous pursuit of objectivity, as Kierkegaard sees, is a misappropriation of the passion according to which the subject has to become an eternal self within ethical and religious categories.

vi. Pleasure in the sadness of despair

Despair, as a life-view, is the last aesthetic level. The individual who has reached this level within the aesthetic stage via advanced reflection and penetrating insight understands, in ways that the others do not, the limitations of every aesthetic activity. In *Either/Or II*, Kierkegaard describes it vividly as the moment when one hovers above the plurality of

conditions and moods we futilely employ to find some point of interest in life. We can choose despair rather than the descent back into the world of distractions and by choosing despair we begin to set in motion what will eventually help us overcome it.⁸¹ By choosing despair, man protests the descent back into the world and isolates himself. Whether he knows it or not, he is preparing himself for the transition into meaningful subjectivity.⁸²

Where might the pleasure in this bleak perspective be found? If one searches one's conscience and revisits these moments in recollection, prideful superiority might be the source from which one derives any modicum of happiness. Comparison tells us that we are somehow more insightful and therefore better (even though depressed) than the aesthetic horde. Might there be another source of pleasure in our despair? Kierkegaard believed there to be some evidence of enjoyment in the ironic detachment from the entirety of human social life, not just because it gave some individuals a sense of superiority over others, but also because it allowed one to delight in his freedom to remake himself over and over again as any character he may find in life. If one understands the emptiness of every aesthetic perspective, he is free to try them on like masks or create new identities.⁸³

⁸¹ Broudy, Harry S., "Kierkegaard's Levels of Existence", pp.294-312.

⁸² Kierkegaard, Soren, *Either/Or, Part II (Kierkegaard's Writings, Vol. 4)*, pp.194, 198-199, 221.

⁸³ Frazier attempts to reveal more about the boundary sphere of irony and ironic detachment in his article, "Kierkegaard on the Problems of Pure Irony". He draws primarily from Kierkegaard's own doctoral dissertation, *The Concept of Irony*. Frazier believes Kierkegaard's thesis can be boiled down to essentially the two following propositions: 1) pure irony is incoherent and unrealizable and 2) the pursuit of pure irony results in bondage to mood states. Kierkegaard believed Socrates to truly embody irony (in contrast to the romantic form of irony often demonstrated by aesthetes) and by that he seems to mean a radical and critical disengagement from society. We can elaborate upon this disengagement with four further qualifications

Kierkegaard finds something redeemable in the fixation upon one's own despair. We may consider this realm within aesthetic life to be our lowest low; however, Kierkegaard is optimistic that this is when we are closest to choosing a new way, specifically to have our existence in something that provides an inward turn towards meaningful individuality. The weight of the despair here might finally provide the catalyst for a new point of view, but then again it may lead to self-negation. So, what may feel like an interminable and incommutable sentence, if viewed from another perspective, could be precisely what we need in order to progress towards meaningful individuality. Kierkegaard does not provide the answers for why we choose one route over the other for that must remain beyond all explanatory power. Both aesthetic and ethical views have delights and pangs unique to themselves. Kierkegaard does not hazard to urge us one way or the other, not only because a rational computation for the decision cannot be offered up, but also because such urging might compromise our autonomy. He merely eloquently states the impetus behind such potential change:

- 1) irony is a detached posture against "actuality"
- 2) ironists view their given actuality to be in vain
- 3) ironist attain a variety of negative freedom by recognizing the vanity of everything
- 4) due to actuality losing its validity, the ironists become alienated

According to Frazier's understanding of Kierkegaard, ironists view the social order as meaningless and become alienated from those that take seriously their social roles. How is this difference accounted for? Why does the ironist not conform? It is the desire for what Kierkegaard calls negative freedom, a desire that sets off liberation from his social roles. As persons become less defined by their social roles, the more alienated they become. It all appears worth it to the ironist, for he is now free to create novel and more interesting relationships.

Kierkegaard foresaw a number of problems with this posture. For starters, the ironists' stance is a bit paradoxical. In order for the ironists to maintain their unserious view, they must be seriously committed to the un-seriousness of everything. The upkeep of pure irony demands vigilance, something completely at odds with the ironic stance in the first place. Thus, it appears the ironic stance is unsustainable internally. Kierkegaard sees things de-evolving in the following manner. When ironists pursue negative freedom and alienate themselves, they enter into presumably superficial relationships without long-term commitments. The same goes for the projects they pursue. Therefore, ironists' identities do not possess depth or continuity. Since ironists have no way to change the situation, given their disengagement from actuality, they slip back into boredom and soon thereafter are enslaved to their panoply of mood states. In the forthcoming chapters, we will look at the various inflection points available to ironists and aesthetes that can rescue them from the boredom and despair of their indecision.

What, then, is depression? It is hysteria of the spirit. There comes a moment in a person's life when immediacy is ripe, so to speak, and when the spirit requires a higher form, when it wants to lay hold of itself as spirit. As immediate spirit, a person is bound up with all the earthly life, and now spirit wants to gather itself together out of this dispersion, so to speak, and to transfigure itself in itself; the personality wants to become conscious in its eternal validity. If this does not happen, if the movement is halted, if it is repressed, then depression sets in. One can try a great many things to consign it to oblivion; one can work, can snatch at more innocent remedies than a Nero, but the depression continues...But depression is sin, is actually a sing instar omnium (that stands for all), for it is the sin of not willing deeply and inwardly, and this is a mother of all sins.⁸⁴

Closing Questions

We can now begin to clothe the oft referenced concept of subjective truth with an answer to the following question. What is the difference between merely possessing subjectivity and developing subjective truth, which confers significance upon our individuality? This is an incredibly difficult question to answer with finality so early on in our investigation, yet that ought not to prevent us from an initial attempt. To begin a tentative answer we have to summon up the conclusions we have made regarding the aesthetic and our discussion of objectivity. From our discussion thus far, we should have a pretty solid grasp of the following three categories even if we have not spelled them out precisely: raw subjectivity, objectivity, and objective truth. Knowing what these terms mean will provide a foil for subjectivity and subjective truth. For now let's deal solely with raw subjectivity. Raw subjectivity is not a term Kierkegaard, or as far as we know anyone else employs, yet it serves a very important role for understanding the Kierkegaardian project. Raw subjectivity is that panoply of mood states that every human has merely as being a member of the species. These mood states are the ones outlined in our discussion of the aesthetic, specifically the oscillation between various forms of pleasure and impinging forms of anxiety and despair. Depending on our level of intellectual and cultural sophistication these mood states will distract us from taking the first steps towards cultivating meaningful subjectivity. We saw that in the aesthetic, we can postpone making commitments and decisions the more we get wrapped up in the trappings of each aesthetic level, be they the ephemeral desires of bodily wants or the intoxication offered up by the objective level's speculation. Kierkegaard thinks we have not properly begun to exist for as long as we are married to these distractions. So if we do not yet "exist", then according to Kierkegaard we lack

⁸⁴ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Either/Or, Part II* (*Kierkegaard's Writings, Vol. 4*), p.189.

a passion, and the temporal), and experience despair. In these disjointed and self-less mood-states of raw subjectivity, there is a subjective point of view; however, it lacks any constitution. There may be a consciousness, an awareness, or even an identity, but it is not a “self” in the strict sense for Kierkegaard. How can Kierkegaard really contend that those who have not configured their lives in accordance with the ethical lack a self? We have perhaps touched on this issue earlier, but reconsidering it only strengthens the interpretation of the account on the whole. Why would Kierkegaard not explicitly identify the self with memory or mere consciousness as so many philosophers and plain folks are apt to do? Why make it so predicated on a specific type of ethical and then religious commitment? In Kierkegaard’s paradigm, the self appears to be something that cannot be immediately endowed such as a faculty or a raw point of view. It is not a passive matter but rather something actively created and sustained so we perhaps see how identifying an existing self with moral/religious categories is less arbitrary than originally thought. One does not strive to make consciousness or memory. We understand the difference between an active ethical/religious self and passively affected subjectivity, but why identify this self with something active? Why not one of the passive faculties instead? Do we really want to entertain the idea that individuals are bereft of selves before ethical existence? Our common experience might legitimate the self as an actively dynamic entity. If we were to get caught up in an ecstatic frenzy during a Rachmaninoff performance we may say we lost control of our self even though conscious memory of the experiences persists. Similarly, if we take certain drugs or alcohol, we may feel as if our selves were vacated and yet some memory or consciousness could occur during that time. These may be some reasons to consider Kierkegaard’s unique idea of the self as an active dynamism. What about the notion that somehow we are not selves before certain commitments? What seems to be the real case is that we make many false starts or stutter

that is constituted of correct relations between the components of the self and then in turn that self's covenants to ethical and religious ideas. It is premature to discuss these relations and commitments at length or in a manner greater than the one provided already. The rest of the dissertation will clarify these remarks. Kierkegaard thinks if we are to make progress towards subjective truth or living that true life, we need to first properly construct an enduring self that functions much like a receptacle for the elements of meaningful individually as the relationships to religious ideas deepen.

It is time to update the file on the terminology "meaningful individuality". This concept will grow exponentially as we discuss the ethical and religious self. Thus far, we see that Kierkegaard thinks that a certain amount of self-craft must be done in order to create an enduring subject that is not at the mercy of aesthetic life and therefore volatilized. Meaningful individuality is not going to be a passive acceptance of "meaningful" moments by a disorganized subject, but rather a dynamic and continuous relation that constitutes the self and precipitates a qualitatively improved inner life that is more or less unshaken by the ways of the world. As we progress out of aesthetic life, certain forms of despair and anxiety will be left behind, contributing to this elevated sense of self. Our dealings with unconscious despair and despair over the earthly will likely be limited. The Edenic anxiety will be a faint memory. We will have to see if we still despair over the eternal in ethical life and what becomes of anxiety over guilt. One can gather that a certain type of freedom is going to be an element in meaningful individuality. As we progress to moral categories there will be a freedom from some existential maladies and leverage over those activities which once so possessed us. Meaningful individuality will have a knowledge component as well. What this subjective knowledge is we cannot fully say at the moment. It will likely have something to do with how the self evaluates its

transcendence and residence within noted existence stages, but also the objects to which we relate (i.e. the Good and God) post-aesthetic life. Saying more about meaningful individuality might unnecessarily convolute our objectives. We will assuredly revisit this concept at the end of every chapter since it is our primary interest.

What may be controversial in what we've described thus far is that somehow, heeding Kierkegaard's advice on the route to take will yield meaning, as if we have some conception of what meaning is to begin with. On this point, we will need to practice intellectual patience. Kierkegaard slowly entices the reader to move down this path by indirectly showing where we think meaning resides and how we are ultimately wrong about those conclusions. Seeing the limitations of each sphere in regards to a type of knowledge and meaning, we are presented with a decision to make that is all our own. It is a decision for us because Kierkegaard cannot convince us with the certainty we may have come to expect from scientific or philosophical proofs (which we may be questioning now given Kierkegaard's polemics against speculative pursuits). Also, the uncertainty of Kierkegaard's project is actually part of its virtue in his eyes. Leaving room for doubt also leaves room for us to freely choose it and with free choice, Kierkegaard believes, those yet to be defined elements of meaningful individuality are precipitated out. Should we have no choice in the matter, signifying it is beyond a shadow of a doubt what the Good is or the form God takes, our lives again are emptied out of all passion. Why cannot we have passion for what reason tells us? Kierkegaard would claim that reason, pure reason, tells us very little; therefore preventing passionate devotion to any supposed truths of reason. Even if the beliefs we have about the world could be defined for us, such certified beliefs arouse as much care and significance to us as whatever may fill our field of vision at any moment. This is to say not very much. Do we have passion for a truth of reason such as $2+2=4$

or the law of noncontradiction? It is unlikely for they communicate nothing to our individualized existence. What if someone believes they have found a moral law or God via reason and the relationship remains an objective one? Kierkegaard would conceivably claim that such passion is misplaced and contains doubt and despair in it, specifically, the despair about the eternal. So passion of a bastardized sort could be present for dictates of reason. Just as passion for the shell of a person redirects spirit away from that which is eternal, halting the development of the inner life characteristic of meaningful individuality. Should we freely commit ourselves to Kierkegaard's alternative course, we can have a further insight into what Kierkegaard means by increased subjectivity and ultimately subjective truth.⁸⁶ To freely commit ourselves to a new point of view is more than an arbitrary intellectual ascent. We must work out the program Kierkegaard sketches in our own lives and then see if there is congruence between Kierkegaard's words, our deeds, and our internal lives. This will allow us to truly judge if Kierkegaard got something correct in his philosophical and religious thinking and if we are indeed living a subjectively true life or at least approximating it. How do we certify the congruence? Can we trust our self-observation or is this our only option? Aside from careful introspection and reflection upon Kierkegaard's texts, how else can we legitimate our soul searching? We can certainly ask questions of those that are at a different or even the perceived same existence stage as us. Whether or not such findings could be generalized into quasi-scientific "data" tables might be conceptually flawed or highly contingent on the nature of questions asked. Given the lack of verification methods, we must rely on self-observation.

The first movement into the realm of ethical subjectivity and meaningful individuality occurs when one recognizes his eternal validity in moral command and right action. Is this

⁸⁶ McLane, Earl, "Kierkegaard and Subjectivity", p.219.

possible if one has come to doubt reason and despair over its limits? This is possible and may even necessitate doubting reason and despairing over its limits. As we may have anticipated already given Kierkegaard's skepticism over rationalistic proofs of God and the playing up of despair and anxiety, choosing to be good will not solely, if at all, be a rationalistic enterprise. Kierkegaard is inclined to use terminology like "eternal validity" for dramatic effect, but do we understand why the validity is eternal? What makes the ethical eternal is its transcendence through all historical epochs and changing contexts as the orienting point of ethical soul craft. Choosing to embody the ethical aligns us with something universal and supposedly forever, which prompts another question, specifically, "How does Kierkegaard conceive of the ethical?" A superficial survey of those commenting on Kierkegaard would leave one to think that Kierkegaard is merely a Kantian in regards to ethics, making the ethical Kant's dictate of reason; however, as we will come to expect, Kierkegaard is not that easily classified. We will dwell on this extensively in the next chapter; however, we can preemptively point to the emphasis Kierkegaard places on duty as a fundamental feature of the ethical in *Fear & Trembling* as the reason so many assume his ethics to be Kantian. How is one to think of the ethical? How does one discover the ethical? What makes one choose the ethical? How can the ethical be realized in everyday existence? How does choosing the ethical contribute meaning to one's life that the movements of the aesthetic stage did not? What are the limitations of the ethical? Why cannot the project of significant individuality stop there?⁸⁷ These are the questions we aim to answer in the next chapter.

⁸⁷ McLane, Earl, "Kierkegaard and Subjectivity", p.222.

CHAPTER 2

THE ETHICAL

“And a man shall be as an hiding place
from the wind, and a covert from the
tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place,
as the shadow of a great rock in a weary
land”⁸⁸ Isa.32:2

Introduction

Where are we to turn now, after our thoroughgoing critique of the aesthetic life and the levels within it (ranging from the carnal to the intellectual)? We opted to cleave ethics and ethical thinking from the previous modes of objective thought. Thus, ethics is left standing as the last non-religious domain with an objective dimension that could provide essential meaning to our individual subjective lives. So what was the rationale for discussing the ethical stage separately from other such objective pursuits as empiricism and systematic philosophy?

(1) Given the commonly accepted definition of a good life equaling a virtuous life, ethics seemed to hold more promise for significant individuality than icy scientism or endless speculation. It is often parroted throughout society that service and kindness to others is the key to the meaning of life; however little rationale is given for this generally agreed upon platitude. We are not urged in the same way to study mathematics or philosophy. (2) The dissemination of Kantian thinking amongst western intellectuals appeared to bolster the assumption expressed in (1), for Kant sees ethical embodiment as key for individuation

⁸⁸ Isa. 32:2

and evolution out of animality. (3) That the ethical is not really a purely objective level; rather it appears to be a type of hybrid with a subjective dimension as well, which catalyzes our initial step down the path of subjective truth. Kierkegaard appears to endorse an independent ethical universal which can be objectively contemplated; however, once fully embraced it foments a qualitative subjective change within the individual, the likes of which we do not see in aesthetes. The subjective dimension to the ethical is not a mere mood state, such as the steely detachment associated with objective investigation, but an enduring transformation that purposively assembles the fractured components of self and rescues us from the anxiety and despair implicit in the aesthetic stage.

These are tersely expressed justifications for treating the ethical differently from others within the intellectual level of the aesthetic. Much explication is needed to understand these initial justificatory instincts. Simultaneously we will see that not only were our instincts correct but there exist many more considerations for cordoning off the ethical realm from the previously discussed intellectual level within the aesthetic.

In this chapter, in addition to demonstrating how the ethical sphere provides meaning to our lives unlike the hitherto discussed aesthetic sphere, we will attempt to expound upon many of the questions peppered throughout the last chapter and distilled in that last chapter's conclusion. We will begin with a seemingly obvious and yet complicated question. Is there a Kierkegaardian ethical project? It is widely held, given how Kierkegaard speaks of ethics in *Fear and Trembling* that Kierkegaard himself adopted the entirety of the Kantian ethical project. This appears to be a relatively shallow understanding of Kierkegaardian ruminations upon the ethical. In some texts, Kierkegaard emphasizes the soul-craft dimension of the ethical, where we must acquire virtues to experience greater well-being, which resounds clearly with students of

Aristotle. In other works, the ethical is little more than something intuited through common sense or communicated by the societal entanglements within which we find ourselves. Such ambiguity sets up a multiplicity of questions, which we intend to answer and clarify in the following chapter. Our attempts to answer them all relate back to our ultimate aim of understanding how Kierkegaard believes significant individuality is achieved. In addition to numerous secondary sources, we will draw from Kierkegaard's own *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, *Fear and Trembling*, *Either/Or pt.2*, and *The Sickness Unto Death*.

What is the role of ethical objectivity and can the ethical provide significance?

Before we can begin to speak of the role of ethical objectivity, it needs to be established that Kierkegaard believed the ethical to be something beyond the merely subjective. Everyone simply improvising what the ethical is would not do. Man somehow discovers the ethical, and if he enacts it correctly then he produces a significant self. We have somewhat crudely described how an individual proto-self goes about enacting the ethical (see our discussion from the previous chapter). In our discussion of the details of the enactment we hope to build upon the previous conception. Man does not create and project value onto the universe. Via objective discernment, man unearths the ethical and can truly become an ethical self if he so chooses.

What reasons did Kierkegaard have for thinking that the ethical had some independent existence? There seem to be at least two reasons. First, should the ethical not have objectivity, then there would be no ethical dilemmas to confront. Second, the only way for an individual to emerge from the relativizing ends of the aesthetic life, is to create a fixed and absolute self (this

is a point we will elaborate upon at length). For now, it should be said that no arbitrary choice will produce an absolute self, something that stands out against the backdrop of the aesthetic. An absolute self, as we shall see, is an ethical self. The self becomes a living norm of the good. In order for the self to become absolute and not lost in relativity, there must be an absolute to choose to embody. The absolute that creates the ethical self when chosen is the ethical and it is not an arbitrary projection.⁸⁹

So we can see here that objectivity and subjectivity work in concert in the ethical stage of existence. There has to be an independent moral norm for the individual to freely choose so she can become an absolute self or subject in a sea of relative ends and experiences. Without independent moral truth to relate to, our meaningful identity is erased and what Kierkegaard believes to be essential subjective truth or essential individuality is lost. What we will need to do now is examine a little more closely how the absolute self is made.⁹⁰ We will elaborate upon the concept of ethical subjective development hinted at in the last chapter and itemized below.

Table 2: Aesthetic Life vs. Ethical Existence

Aesthetic Life/Raw Subjectivity (Proto-Self)	Ethical Existence/Ethical Subjective Truth
Externally determined (unfree)	Self-directed (freedom over aesthetic/autonomous)
Disorganized	Purposeful
Unconscious Despair-->DE-->DEL	Dignified/Despair of Defiance
Edenic Anxiety-->Anxiety over Guilt	Repentant over failure to properly exist

⁸⁹ Mooney, Edward F., *Knights of Faith and Infinite Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling*, pp.74-75.

⁹⁰ Dupré, Louis K., *A Dubious Heritage: Studies in the Philosophy of Religion after Kant*. (Oregon: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2004), pp.31-32.

By being reflectively objective or philosophically discerning when it comes to ethical possibilities and choosing to actualize some of them, human life becomes a self-directed existence. It is no longer extrinsically determined and swept up in the ceaseless flux of aesthetic experiences.. A stand is taken and an ethical self is created out of the raw components of a human being (intellect, spirited passion, and temporal givenness). A non-negotiable and unforced commitment to the ethical has brought into existence a self that is unconstrained by the whims of relative ends. It is proper to call this self free even though it submits to a given ethical ideal, for this self has risen above the ceaseless stream of happenings and events. It is something permanent that jumps out in front of all the earthly noise. So this is one of the first moves towards dwelling in subjective truth. We will say more about the qualitative differences involved in this step down the path of subjective truth. For right now, we have established a subject via this harmonious combination of reflective objectivity, motive passion, and our temporal nature.⁹¹

The ethical person recognizes universal values and actualizes them in his life. First, the ethicist realizes that he truly chooses himself, recognizing that he has the ability to actualize eternal values and therefore has eternal significance. The next step is to realize those eternal values in life. It should be rather clear by now that the creation of an ethical self, via the actualization of ethical values, is not a one-time event. As long as we find ourselves rooted in immediacy, which we always will as non-heavenly beings, these steps must be continually renewed. Cultivating the self is less like a conversion experience and more like the practice or habituation involved in becoming excellent at a sport or craft. We cannot lapse. We cannot

⁹¹ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Either/Or, Part II (Kierkegaard's Writings, Vol. 4)*, pp.215-216.

take days off. We cannot coast on the opinions and advice of others or else the possibility of the self's disintegration is very real.⁹²

Kierkegaard's ethical view is reassuring, given the emphasis on the self's creation and meaningful individuation. On this account, no life, regardless of how little fame and attention it garners, is insignificant, so long as the task of ethical existence is taken up. It does not matter what contributions you make to the ethical community writ large or small. All that matters is that you succeed in existing and start down the route to meaningful individuality.⁹³ Becoming an ethical self is a bold and radical move, yet that does not mean we must take on monkish virtues and renounce the entire world. How we relate to the world would certainly change for it is certainly silly to chase relative ends once we become eternally ethically constituted.⁹⁴ This in part shows that the aesthetic is not excluded from the ethical. One can have the pleasures of the aesthetic coupled with the stability of the ethical.

Two more quick things should be said here in regards to the movement of becoming a self in the ethical sphere. Taking on responsibility for our life and integrating or concretizing the tripartite components of the proto-self, precipitates a feeling of repentance from that former life.⁹⁵ Repentance is likely the first less than positive dimension of ethical life discussed thus far; however, even though there is sorrow in repentance there is also hope of a new life lived for an absolute, which reforms character. It should be of no surprise that ethical life does have

⁹² Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, pp.41-44, 67-69.

⁹³ Mooney, Edward F., *Knights of Faith and Infinite Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling*, p.69.

⁹⁴ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, pp.85, 87.

⁹⁵ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Either/Or, Part II (Kierkegaard's Writings, Vol. 4)*, pp.177, 247.

some true darkness in it; hence, why we must resurrect our discussion of despair from the previous chapter.

A close reading of *The Sickness Unto Death* yields the qualitative type of despair experienced while participating in the universality of the ethical. Of the types of conscious despair already enumerated, what Kierkegaard calls the *Despair of Defiance* or *Demonic Despair* is our culprit (at least at first blush). Despair of defiance is categorized as such because the sufferer of it is well aware of a further progression of self beyond the confines of the ethical and in direct relation with the Absolute (i.e. God). The despair persists because there is a certain infatuation the self has with itself. There is a certain pride the self possesses as a result of getting itself together; even though it can disintegrate at any moment. Despair of defiance creeps in when we get over our self-infatuation and become conscious of our very real moral failings.

There seems to be some preliminary understanding within demonic despair that to directly reach out to eternity, to God would require a leveling of self where the self ought somehow to be broken such that it experiences humility and equality with other men; however, this is an anathema to the self that conceives of itself as ethically and rationally superior to the great hordes of humanity. Those in the despair of defiance would rather endure the misery that is their fate than directly reach out to God. Kierkegaard notes that it is not uncommon for individuals enduring this form of despair to lash out at God as a symptom of their own sickness.⁹⁶

Does despair of defiance capture the entire qualitative nature of the despair felt in the

⁹⁶ Kierkegaard, Soren, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition For Upbuilding And Awakening* (Kierkegaard's Writings, Vol 19), pp.67-70, 72.

ethical stage? Our preliminary findings indicate that the full definition of the despair of defiance ought to include not only the self-important posturing before the absolute, but the dissatisfaction one has with any moral decision one makes (given that it will most certainly imply a moral evil on some level) and the ethical inadequacy felt in the attempt to live up to the ideally pictured ethical self. These seem to be the three essential components of the despair of defiance experienced in the ethical stage.

We can now highlight some of the hallmarks of subjective truth or meaningful individuality at the ethical stage of existence and contrast them against the oscillating interiority of the aesthetic stage's proto-self, which is characterized both by dizzying Edenic and guilt anxiety, pleasure (sensitive up to the intellectual), and despair. It is Kierkegaard's contention that the ethical subjective truth distilled by an individual's decision for the good is synonymous with a richer and fuller life that outshines aesthetic fancies. We need to clarify what this fuller life of ethical subjective truth is.⁹⁷

We have touched upon a number of qualities germane to ethical subjectivity. It provides significance to our individuality by offering cohesiveness to our personality. Passion for the ethical liberates us from the unending experiences of the aesthetic that so often conditioned us like brute animals.⁹⁸ Our sense of freedom and integrated personality also bestows feelings of dignity, purpose, and respect for the act of self-creation we are responsible for. There is also a sense of eternal validity, given our earnest efforts to bring our temporal lives into accord with high minded ethical ideals. It is not all roses though (as we have seen),

⁹⁷ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, pp.39-49, 69, 71.

⁹⁸ Broudy, Harry S., "Kierkegaard's Levels of Existence", p.301.

for suffering is intermixed with our largely positive experience of the subjective truth ethical passion. We experience suffering when we repent and revise our self after consulting ethical ideals. It is not easy to eschew all the misdirecting corruption contaminating and distracting us prior to the assumption of the ethical. There will inevitably be a sense of mourning and grief for those things that we must leave behind, though we know our decision to instantiate the ethical bestows a richness and significance upon our lives that all the pleasures of the aesthetic could not match.

One might ask that, "If ethical existence is so much more meaningfully subjective, why would anyone ever exit for a supposed higher existence sphere?" If we remain arrested at the ethical stage, the despair of defiance will weigh on us until we are ready for the next subjective revolution or leap. We must endure the despair of defiance or seek out a potential escape.⁹⁹

Valuing the ethical requires us to locate what it is via reflective objectivity and then deciding to match our lives with this universal standard. Philosophers and professional ethicists run the risk of living entirely in abstraction, endlessly debating what the ethical is, forever contemplating how it fits into larger metaphysical systems, and never really ceasing to weigh different moral alternatives. Though abstraction is important for determining our set of values, if we do it too much, we fail to act in accord with them. Reflective ethical objectivity that goes on *ad infinitum* prevents us from making the decisions that will provide a genuine ethical existence. Reflective objectivity ideally discerns the ethical so we can develop varying gradations of conduct; however, it can also derail the entire enterprise.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, pp.435-436, 443.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.302, 304, 308.

Can Kierkegaard's varied views of the ethical be integrated?

We need to learn what Kierkegaard communicates about the features of the ethical. This is no small task, as Mooney has pointed out, for it seems that the ethical takes on a multiplicity of forms throughout the Kierkegaardian corpus. Simply claiming that Kierkegaard merely adopts Kantian formal law and moral religion will not do. There is a depth and diversity to Kierkegaard's ethical writings that are decidedly un-Kantian. Let us explore some of the major themes concerning Kierkegaard's understanding of the ethical.¹⁰¹

In *Fear and Trembling*, the ethical as universal is affirmed while Kierkegaard simultaneously discusses how tragic heroes undergo trials of tragedy. In a "trial of tragedy", a tragic hero is typically presented with two or more ethical duties that are in direct conflict with one another.¹⁰² Agamemnon is a perfect example, says Kierkegaard, of the tragic hero. Agamemnon must choose between the competing duties of sacrificing his daughter in order to ensure military success or protecting her as all fathers are compelled to do when considering the well-being of their offspring. How is Agamemnon to choose which ethical duty to follow? He determines which is the higher expression of the ethical, and loyalty to the state trumps his familial role, therefore he sacrifices his daughter. This is not easy for the tragic hero, hence the name "trial of tragedy"; however, he is pitied and is ultimately understood for everyone, supposedly, has a clear grasp of the universal and what must be necessarily done. Captain Vere is also a tragic hero. Captain Vere feels compelled to put Billy Budd to death after the accidental killing of a superior officer. He has both a duty to protect the innocent, but also to maintain the

¹⁰¹ Mooney, Edward, "Kierkegaardian Ethics: Explorations of a Strange Yet Familiar Terrain", *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*, T. 64, Fasc. 2/4, Horizontes Existenciários da Filosofia/ Søren Kierkegaard and Philosophy Today (Apr. - Dec., 2008), p.860.

¹⁰² Kierkegaard, Søren, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp.59, 78.

discipline of the ship.¹⁰³ This depiction of the ethical emphasizes the ethical's concrete complexity and how it frequently leads to agonizing impasses. Bringing our attention to this matter is essential, for it cautions against excessive pride in our intellectual abilities, emphasizes the turmoil in ethical existence, and the potentially multifarious nature of the ethical.

i. The Ethical has Aristotelian and Kantian markings

Kierkegaard's ethic might faintly resemble Aristotle's promise of better living (i.e. happiness) through virtue; however, the ethical seems to have the formal character of Kant's ethic, when Kierkegaard poetically speaks of it in terms of eternal and inescapable duty elevating us out of the meaninglessness of animality. It is some kind of synthesis.¹⁰⁴ We get the Kantian deontological reading from *Fear and Trembling* and the multitude of discussions concerning how all must edit themselves in accordance with that which is universal. Such discussions intimate a widely known moral law identified by the moral community that is actively instantiated.¹⁰⁵ Kierkegaard does not conceive of this moral law to be utilitarian in nature, given his grave misgivings over unknowable moral outcomes and world-historical movements that swallow up the individual. The ethical is to be conceived as if it applies to the individual alone.¹⁰⁶

More can be said about Aristotle's influence on the Kierkegaardian conception of the ethical. We have spent a great deal of time discussing how the actualization of the ethical in

¹⁰³ Mooney, Edward F., *Knights of Faith and Infinite Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling*, pp.138-140.

¹⁰⁴ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, pp.85, 87.

¹⁰⁵ Mooney, Edward F., *Knights of Faith and Infinite Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling*, p.69.

¹⁰⁶ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, p.143.

human life produces a self with a qualitatively superior form of subjectivity from what the aesthete experiences in pleasure-seeking adventures. This is not dissimilar from the Aristotelian view, where habitually performing virtuous activity provided a moral arc to one's life and an overall sense of eudaimonia. Unlike Aristotelian ethics, Kierkegaard seems to intimate that there is in fact a particular duty that can be apprehended (i.e. Kant's universal moral law), whereas the right thing on Aristotle's view is frequently contextual.¹⁰⁷

ii. How the ethical might be connected to God

A relationship with God need not be a requirement for enriched ethical subjectivity and the corresponding life transforming arc, given that the ethical is something to be objectively conceived, rather than received via revelation. Kierkegaard does think that many, if earnest about ethical responsibility, will feel drawn to God as the ontological source of moral command. This is not a necessary movement, making it difficult to say precisely why some come to see ethical command as divinely inspired. Perhaps reference to the eternality of the law or its being held on high encourages an interpretive shade of divinity and a corresponding celestial lawgiver. Being ethical may carry a certain burden we desperately reach out to God to allay. The individual embraces God only in objective freedom since no logical argument forces our ascent to some "higher" reality and, as it can be obviously demonstrated by the scores of upright Atheists, resist any urge to establish God as the watchful eye over her moral self. Kierkegaard may introduce the notion of God as ethical lawgiver not to establish Kantian moral religion, but to reinforce the idea that when one contemplates and decides upon the

¹⁰⁷ Lillegard, Norman, "Passion and Reason: Aristotelian Strategies in Kierkegaard's Ethics", *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 30, no. 2, (Summer, 2002): 260, 271.

ethical, one cannot let the whims of social morality determine what is right.¹⁰⁸ What is right is what we determine to be our duty apart from community. Our ethical consciousness, even if God does not exist, ought to be valid in such a way that it is so pure of societal contamination God himself would be pleased.¹⁰⁹

iii. Duties from social roles

At other times, Kierkegaard speaks in what Frazier identifies as a Hegelian ethical dialect, meaning that our duty/duties are not so much intellectually derived as they would be from a Kantian perspective, but rather they are something communicated to us by the roles within which we find ourselves entangled as members of a community oriented toward flourishing. There are specific duties that a son who is also a father and a factory worker has that others in a different social role do not have.¹¹⁰ This contradicts the purity of a non-contextual eternal moral law; however, one sees how Frazier adopts this interpretation, for our above cited tragic heroes are assuredly listening to and obeying certain societal mores.

iv. Duty seems to involve an entire commitment without many specifics

In *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard appears to grow frustrated by calls to specify precisely what duty is or what are the exact natures of our duties. Such clamoring for ethical answers, to Kierkegaard's lights, hints that perhaps the ethical has not truly been engaged. Moral fretting might be symptomatic of individuals who have not eternally decided to take on the

¹⁰⁸ Mooney, Edward, "Kierkegaardian Ethics: Explorations of a Strange Yet Familiar Terrain", p.866.

¹⁰⁹ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, pp.140, 149.

¹¹⁰ Frazier, Brad, "Kierkegaard on the Problems of Pure Irony", *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 32, no. 3, (Winter, 2004):.42.

ethical in their temporal life. All of this points to the notion that once one has aligned oneself with the ethical an entirely new perspective is ushered in that seems to inform one's entire being, allowing one to enact duty in totally new situations without too much moral consternation. The decision to become ethical almost appears to bestow a moral sense upon one that allows one to discern what one's duty is at any moment. Kierkegaard eloquently articulates this view as follows:

The more deeply a man has structured his life ethically, the less he will feel compelled to talk about duty every moment, to worry every moment whether he is performing it, every moment to seek the advice of others about what his duty is. When the ethical is viewed properly, it makes the individual infinitely secure within himself; when it is viewed improperly, it makes the individual utterly insecure, and I cannot imagine an unhappier or more tormented life than when a person has his duty outside himself yet continually wants to carry it out¹¹¹

So it appears that ethical decision can and ought to be accompanied by a newly instilled ability to determine one's duty.¹¹²

Tempting as it may be, we cannot assemble these components of the ethical without first understanding the Kierkegaardian mechanics of moral decision.. What he reveals about being reflectively objective or abstracting from existence, should shed light on the nature of ethical cognition and which ethical theory fits best with this sort of cognition.

¹¹¹ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Either/Or, Part II (Kierkegaard's Writings, Vol. 4)*, p.255.

¹¹² Kierkegaard, Soren, *Either/Or, Part II (Kierkegaard's Writings, Vol. 4)*, p.266.

Can one have objective cognition of the ethical's form?

Gouwens has done significant work on the role imagination plays in ethical decision making for Kierkegaard. We cannot be ethical without utilizing our imagination. Gouwens contends that Kierkegaard understands the imaginative component of objective thinking to apprehend an ideal version of our ethical selves. It depicts what we ought to be as ethical beings. We carry this within us and allow for *kinesis* (the process of making this possible self actual in the given world) to do its task. The imagination fashions a moral fantasy of our selves, creating an ethical disposition within us. This is to be distinguished from the notion of the imagination being used episodically to conjure up good deeds. It is a cognitive faculty that deliberates with great seriousness about the type of person we want to become. It is possible to become too enraptured with ethical imagining. At some point, we must decide or else we will go on endlessly weighing the different ethical options before us. The decision has to be made, so it can be enacted and we can be said to truly exist. But all of this may cause some worry.¹¹³

The concern is that if we ought not to dawdle in our ethical imagination, coming to a conclusion about how we ought to be, then there seems to be something arbitrary about the ethical image of ourselves that we choose. The requirement to “exist” seems to be determining our ethos, rather than the rationality of the ethos itself. We could be equally justified in choosing a Kantian framework over a more Aristotelian one. How is this conceivable if Kierkegaard really does think that the ethical has an objective reality? The ethical is very real; however, our finite minds can only grasp aspects of it. Why is the ethical

¹¹³ Gouwens, David J., “Kierkegaard on the Ethical Imagination”, *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 10, no. 2, (Fall, 1982): 209-210, 212, 216.

so resistant to total systemization? We may be inferior creatures unworthy of total knowledge of the ethical or maybe eternal ideas simply do not fit in our messy reality. If there is a God, maybe He wanted it this way so that we do not arrest our search for meaningful individuality in ethical life, but go beyond into religious domains. If we attempt to use our ethical imagination to integrate all the ethical theories or wait for all the evidence to come in, we will never make a decision about ourselves that culminates in existence and passionate subjectivity.¹¹⁴ We sit on our hands and become dispassionate observers. We have to make a choice and no matter how we choose, we will be committing some evil.¹¹⁵ Should we opt for principle, we may cause suffering in regards to consequences. Should we opt for a consequentialist view, we could conceivably demean the humanity of innocents. We have to choose and whatever conception of the good we choose, we also entail some evil with it as well. Assuming responsibility for bringing the good into the world, opens us up to criticism from within and without that we could have done more if we were just a bit more ethically ingenious or foreknowing. Why does Kierkegaard think that ethical choice is coupled with misgivings if the ethical has an objective reality? It appears that Kierkegaard speaks of the ethical in a multi-faceted way, to drive home the point that there cannot be a science of ethics given our limited abilities and imagination. All hope is not lost, for it has to be this way. If ethics could be something algorithmically determined or something on which we could defer to an expert, then we would never struggle to make the ethical decision that breeds the qualitatively superior form of subjectivity (or subjective truth) associated with this stage of

¹¹⁴ McLane, Earl, "Kierkegaard and Subjectivity", p.221.

¹¹⁵ Friedman, R. Z., "Kierkegaard: First Existentialist or Last Kantian?", *Religious Studies* 18, no. 2, (Jun. 1982): p.161.

conditions, Kierkegaard seems to believe, would do nothing for the growth of a burgeoning subject. Holmer points out that Kierkegaard is not so much interested in us objectively knowing ethical truth, but rather becoming it (*whatever our imagination conceives the ethical to be*).¹¹⁶

We demonstrated why Kierkegaard prevaricated on the nature of the ethical, purposely frustrating our attempts at developing a grand unified theory of ethics. He certainly did not believe all the ethical theories could be seen as dimensions of the Kantian project, nor did he want them to be viewed as such. He wants us to understand the limitations of knowing the ethical. Could ethics be practiced in such a way that the greater good is brought about, while imbuing meaning to an individual's existence? We would suspect that Kierkegaard would have serious objections to that notion from a religious perspective (*it implies God somehow needs our help*) and from his contention that thinking about mass effects ultimately swallows up the individual, the very thing Kierkegaard is trying to salvage. Saying all of this, in the dilemmas that involve conflicting duties, Kierkegaard typically chooses characters that opt for the command that somehow affects a greater number of people (i.e. Captain Vere and Agamemnon). Religious objections aside, it looks as if a utilitarian ethical theory is entitled to a share of the universal and if the individual makes his decision for it, why ought it to not have the similar qualitative subjective change (i.e. self-determining freedom intermixed with a new synthesis of dread) that choosing another ethical theory would have? The worry here is that if the utilitarian option is opted for, one will allow one's ethical decision to be taken over by world-historical leaders or an unreflective calculus. If the moral decision is externally

¹¹⁶ Holmer, Paul L., "Kierkegaard and Ethical Theory", *Ethics* 63, No. 3, Part 1 (Apr., 1953): 162-166.

defined sparing the individual any deliberative agony, then the subjectively transformative ethical leap does not really occur. It would seem that the utilitarian option can be opted for if it is simultaneously understood that it is not a superior ethical dogma over the competing theories of truth and that choosing it involves a great deal of risk. If the individual experiences this anguish (i.e. the anxiety of knowing that choosing leaves some moral good still to achieve), when imagining the sort of individual they want to be and not outsource the decision, then a qualified form of utilitarian choice appears permissible.

Insofar as Kierkegaard permits, we have answered the question concerning whether or not the ethical can be objectively grasped and the nature of its form. It cannot be objectively apprehended and its form cannot be received by the human mind, for the ethical, on Kierkegaard's view, is pluripotent and ill-suited for perfect grafting upon finite minds in a finite world. In regards to the question about needing superior cognition to grasp the ethical, it appears that all individuals, in light of being human and ethical, will necessarily possess an ethical imagination that allows them to entertain moral possibilities that cannot 100% objectively obtain. Subsequently this extends ironic detachment to a greater partition of aesthetes.¹¹⁷ Surely some imaginations will be dimmer than others, but just having an ethical

¹¹⁷ We addressed the forerunner boundary zone of the ethical, known as irony. There we cited Frazier's claims that the ironic is a non-necessary existence sphere that only ethically cultured aesthetes inhabit before making the leap into ethical existence. Our primary concerns in that section included the following: 1) what does it mean to have intellectual understanding of the ethical? And 2) why do only some aesthetes possess such an understanding? Frazier advanced the idea that intellectual understanding of the ethical could be reduced to the knowledge of duties held in our given social roles. Given our research of the ethical, we can now say with confidence that this is an oversimplification of what it meant to grasp the ethical. The ethical can be conceived of in many ways, beyond social role duties. So if there is a multitude of ways of grasping the ethical, there can be just as many types of ironists. Ironists, across the board, use their rational and imaginative abilities to craft a particularized ideal self, yet rebel against bringing this ethical self into actuality. Now, given our study of the ethical, we might have to call into question the conditionality of the ironic stage. It seems that all individuals, though some will possess intellectual gifts more advanced than others, must be able to intellectually and imaginatively grasp the ethical. If this is a precondition for being an ethical person, then it would seem to follow that all (not just a cultured elite) can have an intellectual understanding of the ethical and pass through the ironic stage, even if it is a momentary trespass. One may find this to be an erroneous move. Why

ought the ironic stage have its conditional status stripped? Could we not just as easily claim that the ethical stage is conditional and that not all humans enter it given their diminished intellectual and imaginative lights? This is certainly true in a sense, for Kierkegaard would claim there is nothing necessary about inhabiting any existence sphere. They have to be freely chosen and presumably there are scores of individuals who never awaken from their aesthetic slumber. How do we resolve this tension? It would seem that we have to, with the exception of the aesthetic stage, posit the conditional character of every existence stage. Simultaneously, it is probably incorrect to set the bar higher for entrance into the ironic stage than the entrance into the ethical stage writ large.

imagination is enough and no special talent or genius gives one an ethical knowledge advantage over others, for the ethical cannot be known objectively. In fact, elevated imagination might actually be a hindrance (*given how tempting it is to become lost in possibilities*) to actualizing the imagined ethical self in temporal life.

Why does Kierkegaard employ “ethico-religious” terminology in regards to the ethical?

It is no easy task to separate Kierkegaard’s feelings about the ethical from religious sentiments he holds concerning this existence sphere. To pretend Kierkegaard sees no religious dimension to the ethical would be to misrepresent his work. Many Kierkegaardians are inclined to speak of distinct ethical and ethico-religious existence spheres for clarification purposes. The ethico-religious sphere is not inhabited by the much anticipated knight of resignation.. Ethico-religion is a forerunner to resignation. The ethico-religious stage occupies a space between the ethical and the first variety of religious attitude. Kierkegaard thought natural factors (1. moral guilt over lack of ethical perfection, 2. positing God to ensure moral rigor, and 3. despair of defiance) push individuals towards a form of moral religiosity; however, this is not a necessary trajectory for all ethical individuals. So how did Kierkegaard speak of this religious dimension to the ethical? As with just about everything, he did so in a variety of ways that superficially seem not to interlock. Our challenge now is to see how the pieces fit.

God appears to get inserted into the discussion of the ethical via two routes. The first route usually involves conceiving of God as the ontological foundation of our moral duties, whereby the moral commands of reason are apotheosized via God’s edict and enforcement. Evans believes this viewpoint is most accurately represented via the pseudonym of Climacus

in the *Concluding Unscientific Post-Script to the Philosophical Fragments* and the *Philosophical Fragments*. Essentially, Evans thinks that Kierkegaard via Climacus maintains that we discover God in our moral duties. Given the fact that human ethical achievement will undoubtedly fail in light of a complex temporal order, we need to posit a God to not only extend our life beyond this life (so we can continue to perfect our moral performance), but also to keep us morally obligated. Without reference to a celestial lawgiver, ethical labor appears to be slavish. The chance to perfect our moral duties gives us a shot at an eternal happiness where we are satisfied and contented with our ethical performance. This sounds like a direct lift from Kant's own moral religion, which would not cohere with our findings concerning the elusive mystery of the ethical that Kierkegaard wished to sow.¹¹⁸ How can we account for the varying readings of the ethical when Kierkegaard appears to give a ringing endorsement of Kantian moral religion? 1) Perhaps Kierkegaard put moral religion in the mouth of Climacus to inject confusion and drive home the perspectival aspect of morality or (2) maybe Kierkegaard's views on the ethical evolved or were erratic or a synthesis of 1 and 2. Kierkegaard's ethical views could have evolved multiple times and yet he could have retained the view that ethical cognition is limited. All of these scenarios are possible.

It would appear prudent to treat Evans' understanding of the religious dimension of the ethical with some caution or at least maybe heed Kierkegaard's own advice that the ethical-religious stage cannot be where our journey ends. In *Problema II: Is There An Absolute Duty to God?*, Kierkegaard (as Johannes de Silentio) writes that if the ethical is the universal, then the ethical is deified and the real God is made a mere impresario. This makes every duty a duty to a

¹¹⁸ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, pp.62-63, 67, 144-147.

divine set of rules; concurrently it is the case that I do not have a direct duty to or a relationship with the maestro behind the universal. Helping one's neighbor involves me and my neighbor, but not necessarily God. If the ethical contains all dictates for human action, the need for God becomes less and less clear, until He vanishes. From the perspective of the ethical, if man has a God-relationship and begins to cultivate inwardness, the individual is shrinking away from external demonstration and finds himself in spiritual trial. In short, Kierkegaard seems to be making the point that if inward extra-moral religiousness takes hold, when we commit ourselves to the ethical, then ethical religion is ultimately unsustainable.¹¹⁹

We undoubtedly have many questions about how God connects to the ethical still. What does it mean to discover God via the ethical? Do we "discover" him based upon a moral hope, a Kantian argument, or a psychological dynamic? We are left with not a lot in regards to specifics. Perhaps, when we discuss the second way in which Kierkegaard speaks of how God enters the ethical conversation, we can have a conceivable mechanism for how God may be seen as the foundation of moral claims.

The hitherto addressed despair of defiance seems to be the driving force of the discovery of God via the ethical. However we decide to implement the ethical there will be a sense of dread since choosing one way will indirectly mean committing something we sense as fundamentally evil. For instance, should we opt to behave in accordance with

¹¹⁹ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, p.68.

Kantian principles we may lament the happiness we could have bestowed upon many or vice versa. Despair is implicit in the act of choosing to be ethical. Also, despair appears to emanate from the difficulty we have actualizing the ideal self in reality. As humans, we fail to be fully ethical as we conceive it given our frailty, limited resources, and limited foresight. This intensification of despair teaches us that we cannot implement the ethical on our own and that we are in need of divine assistance. What we are calling despair here, Collins believes Kierkegaard referred to as an “overdose of repentance”.¹²⁰ So it looks like that discovering God in the ethical, is not really an unearthing of God, but rather an understanding that our earnest ethical efforts will indubitably fail and we need something to console ourselves with our inherent ethical ineptitude. This would explain why not all ethical individuals ascend to a belief in God. They endure the despair rather than find a way out of it. Why wouldn’t they take the Kantian moral religion escape route?

There must be good intellectual reasons (*which are fairly obvious*) that a movement to a divine moral helper is not exactly intellectually justifiable. So if God cannot be discovered, but rather is posited, we appear to have good reason to identify another leap of faith beyond the ethical leap of faith. To progress into the ethico-religious sphere requires a leap of faith as well, so we have an ethical leap and an ethico-religious leap.¹²¹

This would be a good time to fully address an issue perhaps given short shrift thus far. When reference is made to ethical-religious ideals, we can now see why Kierkegaard and

¹²⁰ Collins, James, “Faith and Reflection”, *The Journal of Religion* 37, no. , (Jan., 1957): 14.

¹²¹ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard’s “Fragments” and “Post-Script”: The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, pp.43-45.

others use such terminology, for the ethical can take on a religious hue as described above.

What do we mean, however, by ethical-religious knowledge that is “essential” and experienced in the subjective movements towards ethical action and religious belief? Objective truth is, by contrast, “inessential”, whether it is scientific, historical, ethical, mathematical, or logical. It is inessential for it is incomplete and lures us away from ethical subjectivity, keeping us beholden to enervating despair and unfree in regards to external determination. Objective truth or knowledge is inessential for it is an approximation of whatever it apprehends and does not answer existential problems for the individual. Conversely, one would have to believe that if ethical and ethico- religious subjectivity are forms of essential knowledge, they must a) not be approximations and b) speak to the reality of the individual’s existential dilemmas. We have seen how ethical and ethico-religious subjectivity resolve some of the existential problems impressed upon the individual, but what of the first requirement? How are ethical/ethico-religious subjectivity not approximations? Does ethical subjectivity of either variety arrive fully at the reality of the individual or to a greater degree than objectivity arrives at its objects? If ethical subjectivity arrived at the reality of the individual, then we could finish our inquiry at chapter’s end and there is no way to tell if an ethical subjective approximation is closer to its reality than an objective approximation is. Perhaps it is unfair to deem ethical subjectivity an approximation, since it is a mere stage of subjectivity that has a culmination, according to Kierkegaard, in the relation to the Christian truth. If we take this grander view, subjectivity has a terminus and objectivity does not and is therefore endless. By cultivating stages of subjectivity, we arrive incrementally closer to that terminus truth of the Incarnation and because the terminus can be reached via subjectivity Kierkegaard appears copasetic with the truth value of non-Christian subjectivity being parasitic upon the ultimate truth of Christ, enough to claim

that one is living in truth, even if one has only entered ethical existence and not transcended into the highest religious domain. This will mean that ethical subjectivity is “less true” than ethico-religious subjectivity, which is less true than resignation subjectivity and so on.¹²²

Before we conclude this section, something has to be said of this term “eternal validity” that Kierkegaard is apt to use whenever discussing the ethical. What does it mean to be eternally validated for Kierkegaard? From the *Concluding Unscientific Post-Script* and *Either-Or*, we might be able to improve upon the definition attempted in the previous chapter. If the individual starts to see the ethical as an extension of the divine, then the subject feels as if he has been drawn closer to God, or what he fashions to be God, meaning he has finely edited his existence, repented of evils, and brought himself in harmony with the commands and character of God.¹²³ We can have a sense of this, as the judge tells us in *Either/Or*, if the depression and hysteria of the aesthetic stage lifts when we relate to God via the universal.¹²⁴ Not only are forms of despair (Unconscious despair and both species of weakness despair) eliminated by drawing closer to God, but we also find ourselves at home in the world. We no longer pine to be born in another era, where we could be better understood and appreciated. If we are eternally validated, then all that matters is making the ethical ideal manifest in our existence now and the future. We have received a task from the ethical and God to accomplish. Kierkegaard uses the judge in *Either/Or* to articulate what can be a very powerful subjective feeling of purpose involved in ethical actuality ; however, we also know that Kierkegaard is not content to let the story end here. In *Fear and Trembling* and elsewhere, the limitations

¹²² Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, pp.123, 125.

¹²³ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, pp.149, 163.

¹²⁴ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Either/Or, Part II (Kierkegaard's Writings, Vol. 4)*, pp.167, 189-190, 206, 208-209.

of ethical choice are made clear. Despair creeps in in a different way and we have to be prepared for future movements of the self.

Why is the ethical not the final existence stage for Kierkegaard?

Earlier we discussed how one might enter the ethico-religious stage as the result of pangs of ethical inadequacy. We also mentioned that Kierkegaard appeared reluctant to fully embrace the idea of Kantian moral religiousness. The objection stems from the concern that if the ethical is viewed as a self-contained sphere through which all humanity can finely regulate itself (i.e. *eternally validated*), then God as the foundation of the ethical disappears.¹²⁵

The ethical functions as an unnecessary intermediary between God and man from a further religious purview. Kierkegaard seems to not accept the idea that adopting a Kantian moral religiousness will cure us of the guilt, agony, and despair of not living up to the imagination's projected ethical self. The self finds itself lying outside the realm of the universal ethical and these upsetting emotions of repentance mark the end of the ethical stage and prepare a transition to the next. The self seeks an alternative that will restore itself to the pristine freedom that seemed promised with the ethical. Kierkegaard believes the only way this will happen is if the individual is somehow separated from the universal in the movements that precede faith and faith itself.¹²⁶ What does it mean to separate from the universal? What does the universal ethical supposedly do? It organizes our wild raw subjectivity and transforms us into responsible agents. Impressions of our immediately determined individuality persist; however, there can be a homogenizing effect of the ethical molding good

¹²⁵ Kierkegaard, Søren, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, p.68.

¹²⁶ Dupré, Louis K., *A Dubious Heritage: Studies in the Philosophy of Religion after Kant*, pp.39-40.

people. Separating from the universal must require further individuation and individuation that is significant, not the type of individuation that involves piercing our ear, getting trendy tattoos or the taking up of smoking a pipe. The individuation that occurs must be an internal intensification of ourselves in the cultivation of subjective truth.

What needs to be kept in mind here is how essential the ethical stage is for what is to come. The ethical stage disciplines us and rips us out of the oscillating pleasures and hollowness of immediacy. The ethical brings us into universal truth and establishes our freedom from external forces. Without this step, without the despair that eventually creeps in, we would not feel outside the domain of the ethical and perhaps even suspended from it and prepared for an existence sphere that bestows even greater felicity, freedom, and meaning. Kierkegaard appears to be of the mind that one cannot bypass the existence stages, for instance one cannot be mired in the aesthetic, proceed directly to faith, and skip the disciplining nature of the ethical. This is Friedman's read on the matter, so more investigation will be required to see if this in fact the case. It does not seem beyond the realm of comprehension that one could be rescued from the despair of the aesthetic stage via faith.¹²⁷

Critiques and Conclusion

Can Kierkegaard's claims to the objectivity/ontological independence of the ethical be taken seriously if the ethical resists total conceptualization? Instinctually, it makes sense that the undefined nature of the ethical is something we will never be completely comfortable with and Kierkegaard would want it that way. The uncertainty is essential for our subjective development

¹²⁷ Friedman, R. Z., "Kierkegaard: First Existentialist or Last Kantian?", p.169.

What we are really investigating here is the gradation of uncertainty we must live within ethical existence and/or if an answer to this question can be distilled at all.

Let us first examine the reasons Kierkegaard believed the ethical to have an independent existence: 1) Should the ethical not have ontological objectivity, then there would be no ethical dilemmas to confront. 2) The only way for an individual to emerge from the relativizing ends of the aesthetic life, is to create a fixed and absolute self. No arbitrary choice will produce an absolute self, something that stands out against the backdrop of the aesthetic. An absolute self is an ethical self. The self becomes a living norm of the good. In order for the self to become absolute and not lost in relativity, there must be an absolute to choose to embody. The absolute that creates the ethical self when chosen is the ethical and it is not an arbitrary projection.

In regards to reason 1, is it in fact the case that there are no ethical dilemmas should the ethical not have some independent existence? If ethical truth is relative and not universal, would we still have ethical dilemmas? Does a relativist experience moral dilemmas? A relativist ought not to have moral dilemmas, yet he may find himself choosing in a way that contradicts an earlier position, trapping him in the anguish of hypocrisy. Moral dilemmas appear inescapable; however, it is unclear if the presence of ethical dilemmas is enough to establish the ontological objectivity of the ethical. It could be claimed that my troubled relativist is not really a committed relativist at all, for if he was then he would have no qualms whichever way he decided to behave. It could be claimed that a genuine relativist does not encounter dilemmas in regards to ethical choice. Even if this is the case, does the fact that non-relativists experience moral dilemmas, testify to the objective and universal reality of the ethical? All this really tells us is that certain individuals believe the ethical to have such an existence and experience dilemmas as the result of such a belief. Is it merely a law of reason

that all rational agents ought to have access to, including God, in an unequal way or does the ethical exist out there in some non-mental reality, like a Platonic form, waiting for us to ascend to it? One cannot imagine Kierkegaard would even find this questionable answerable. If humans can't fully conceive of the ethical, how could we determine the nature of its independence? If the ethical were purely a rational law, that if grasped would be inter-subjectively valid, would ethical dilemmas establish the existence of that inter-subjectively valid law of morality? It may initiate ethical meditations upon such a law and how to establish it, but it remains opaque how dilemmas alone could prove its "existence".

The second reason given for why there has to be ethical universality/objectivity has to do with how our lives cannot be liberated from immediacy by any old arbitrary choice. For the self to become absolute/ethical, it must choose to embody an absolute and that absolute is the ethical. How are we to square this with Kierkegaard's caveats that there is no science of ethics and however we decide is going to only really capture a dimension of ethical right action? It would seem that all we need to do to absolutize the self is to believe that the ethical has an independent existence and though we strive to grasp it in all its majesty, our ethical choice will be necessarily incomplete. We seem fully capable of liberating ourselves from immediacy as long as we are firm in our ethical choice, be it independently establishable or not. The self would appear not to suffer at all if it turned out there was no objective ethical at all. All the subjective truth acquired in such a determination of the will would still fall out and our lives would be qualitatively richer and more meaningful. So it appears that we can have the deepening subjectivity without even really knowing if ethical truth has an independent existence. All we need is a belief that it does. Belief does not establish the objectivity of the ethical.

Kierkegaard's reasons for the objectivity of the ethical do not entail the ethical's objective "existence". Also, we cannot know for certain if we are merely rationalizing our moral instincts. As, Kierkegaard is apt to say in many places, matters such as ethics or the good cannot be speculatively proved. They are often posited. Presumably the good cannot be rationally proved along similar lines as to why God cannot be logically proved. Every attempt to prove the good follows only if certain premises are assumed. All hope is not lost though in the Kierkegaardian project, for none of this may matter. As hard as this is to confess, it may be of no significance whether there is a rationally accessible universal moral norm. What appears paramount is to choose the good in the absence of a contradictory proof. There are subjective reasons for positing the existence of a moral norm despite our inability to perceive it clearly and distinctly.

Kierkegaard can dodge the charge of being a relativist if he affirms that the different moral norms individuals actualize in their lives are not projections, but rather limited understandings of a greater ethical truth. This however would appear to open Kierkegaard up to the critique that individuals may apprehend the ethical in ways we would not be comfortable with and take away our ability to condemn such understandings of the ethical. For instance, an anti-abortionist may believe his understanding of the ethical not only permits, but commands him to take matters into his own hands, leading to terrorist activities. The undefined nature of the ethical may provide us with a great deal of flexibility in how we go about living and willing the good in our lives (*a feature many ethical theories do not have*); however, is it too insubstantial?

Must Kierkegaard draw some limits to what can be conceivably thought of as reasonable moral activity? There appear to be at least four moves available to Kierkegaard. Early in our discussion, we noted Kierkegaard's fascination with tragic heroes that yielded to higher

expressions of the ethical. Kierkegaard might be able to affirm the ultimately unknowable nature of the ethical, while at the same time ranking certain moral norms and decisions in proximity to that unknowable ultimate norm. If such a ranking procedure were possible, then (un)ethical options could be cordoned off; however, it's completely unclear how Kierkegaard would establish such a prioritization. Kierkegaard might be able to evade the criticism by claiming that he is not an ethicist. That his account does not rise and fall with such matters and to be obsessed with such details is to miss the larger point of his project. This answer might be acceptable to a certain degree; however, Kierkegaard would have to admit the limitation. Perhaps, it would be acceptable for him to claim that no individual who has properly apprehended the ethical to the best of her abilities would actualize employ widely condemned means of achieving her "ethical" goals. After all, if one is truly living in accordance with the universal one would be pitied and sympathized with for acting the way one did. Human beings with a similar grasp on the ethical could sympathize with one's plight and conceivable solutions. Finally, Kierkegaard can comfort us with the claim that his discussion of the ethical is currently incomplete and can only be seen in its fullness once we have been guided throughout all the existence spheres. We learn something more about the nature of the ethical via a direct relationship with God in faith.

If we found Kierkegaard's reasons to be lacking in regards to establishing the objectivity of the ethical, might we have other reasons for the ethical's objective independence? Above we asked if ethical individuals share qualities, regardless of their take on the ethical, that might in some way testify to the universality and objectivity of the ethical. Presumably all ethical individuals can be understood by their community, even if there is not consensus on their ethical choice. Ethical individuals also appear to do right for no other reason except that it is the right thing to do. They do not do it out of coercion or glory. They

are principled and their principles elevate them out of the dizzying experiences of aesthetic life. Their lives involve some sacrifice for their commitment to the good and they endure despair for doing right involves conflict, a failure to perfectly realize their ethical self, and an infatuation with themselves that convinces them that no outside help is needed. In assembling this list, we may have helped Kierkegaard develop a litmus test for discriminating against purported ethical acts (i.e. the anti-abortion extremist) and a defense against the charge that the Kierkegaardian understanding of the ethical endorses or permits a range of largely understood unethical behavior. This looks to be a promising method for weeding out ethically inspired sociopaths; however, it must remain a tentative defense until we have grasped Kierkegaard's further thoughts on the ethical and its specific relation to the revealed faith of Christianity. For now, we are preoccupied with whether or not these shared qualities amongst ethical individuals testify to the ethical's objective status. Our answer to this question is predicated upon how we conceive of the ethical's independence. If the ethical exists independently of human minds, then we won't find this to be compelling evidence for its existence; however, if the ethical is conceived as that which is inter-subjectively valid, why ought not this cluster of properties affirm its existence? If we acknowledge the reality of pain, given the universality of its effects on individuals, ought we not to be just as charitable when it comes to considering the reality of the ethical? An effective argument against this line of thinking might involve undermining the purported universality of ethical subjective experience. Is there something glaringly wrong about how Kierkegaard describes ethical existence? Is his description grossly at odds with our intuitions concerning what being a moral person feels like? At this juncture, this does not seem to be the case.

It is worth pointing out how there might be something socially cohesive concerning

Kierkegaard's ethical account (*Something he likely did not intend nor would take credit for*). If people of good will can sincerely come to conflicting outcomes on an ethical issue, ought we to realize that those who oppose us need not be our ideological enemy? Are they not, as limited beings, doing their best to grasp the ethical and actualize it? If we take this generous view, we should be able to recognize the truth in our opponent's view and integrate it with our own to reach consensus ethical solutions. Of course, there will be some irresolvable ethical conflicts and every integrated solution will remain incomplete given the limited human ethical imagination; however, such charity towards one another would go a long way towards dismantling ideological imprisonment and tamping down radicalism of all stripes. This would be a desirable outcome for Kierkegaard, not so much from what it could achieve in regards to the human political realm, but rather from liberating people from stultifying ideology that requires little reflection. We will all have to struggle more earnestly to arrive at ethical decisions that cannot be resolved for us by professional ethicists/political scientists/opinion makers. All of this contributes to our growing subjectivity.

We return to the first question in this section. How big a problem is it for Kierkegaard that the ethical cannot be defined? Our analysis has rendered the following tentative conclusions: 1) A preliminary test for those truly manifesting the ethical is conceivable if founded upon shared traits, insulating Kierkegaard from the charge that his ethical views prohibit moral condemnation of those claiming to be ethically inspired, yet acting in widely understood deplorable ways. 2) Though, Kierkegaard's own reasons for the existence of the objective ethical are suspect, the shared traits indicate something of the ethical's objective reality. 3) The undefined nature of the ethical serves as a terrific salve for extremism and promote social cohesiveness. 4) The undefined nature of the ethical appears essential for our

own struggle to determine right action and precipitate meaningful subjectivity during the ethical stage of existence. The downside to the undefined ethical has been mitigated and the upshot has been reiterated and reaffirmed: Kierkegaard may still have a case for an objective ethical that functions as an elevating absolute bestowing all the wonders and new pangs of cohesive selfhood/ethical subjective truth.

Is ethical uncertainty really needed for our subjective development? Throughout this chapter, we've considered the idea that our subjective development in the ethical stage is tied to the uncertainty we have concerning the ethical. Is it in fact the case that we cannot achieve meaningful subjectivity at this stage without ethical certainty? What if a science of the ethical were possible? What if there were a formula that if consulted would tell us unfailingly what to do any situation? Would our subjectivity suffer? Perhaps, a point should be clarified. There are already ethical formulas out there for us to choose from, which will tell us what to do. What is ambiguous and uncertain, from Kierkegaard's purview, is the case for each of these formulas being the ultimate moral law. The multiplicity of ethical theories serves Kierkegaard's general maxim that the good cannot be proved, but is posited. So let us suppose that not only a trustworthy moral theory existed, but it was philosophically justified (whatever that may mean). Would our moral self and ethical subjective truth be at risk?

Ethical subjectivity is recognized by Kierkegaard to have the following qualities; 1) self-determined/freedom from aesthetic wants 2) cohesive, 3) purposeful, 4) dignified, 5) eternally validated, 6) intermixed with suffering/repentance of the aesthetic, 7) reflectively objective/imaginative, and 8) in despair of defiance. Having the ethical plotted out for us could certainly still bestow a purpose on our life and give us a sense of dignity for we are trying to bring into being something that is valid for all time. There would certainly be suffering in the

sacrifice of our aesthetic aims and one could retain reflective objectivity so long as we are given discretion as to how to implement the ethical into our life. Also, despair of defiance could still be possible. The ennobling pride of our given ethical task may leave little room left over for a direct relationship with God. At first glance, the first two qualities may be most at risk should an ethical law be discovered and proved. Interestingly enough, one may be very well in the right to categorize these two qualities as the most important qualities of ethical subjective experience.

Ethical freedom at the very least has to do with liberating us from the slavish pursuit of pleasure, by replacing externally determined wants with conscious intentions to live for the good above all else. A morally autonomous agent is created when one makes a committed decision to the ethical. One moves from the being an unprincipled animal to an ethical agent that can withstand the tides of sensate pleasure if need be. Does freedom mean more than this for Kierkegaard? On his view, there is also the free choice to actualize the ethical to the best of one's abilities. Should the ethical be defined for us and proven, we would lose this freedom of interpretation. Is this a significant alteration? What do we lose with it?

If the ethical is scripted for us, it seems according to Kierkegaard that there would be a diminishment of the responsibility for our own lives. We surrender something of our accountability when we let the ethical be decided for us. We lose our individuality. We are merely following orders from on high. It appears when we free ourselves from moral labor, we lose the freedom to be ourselves. We descend back into a type of animality, where generation after generation, they merely follow the script, never establishing their individuality. Here it is emerging that our moral freedom is deeply intertwined with meaningful individuality, not the raw individuality of being an individual per say, but the

individuality of a life that cannot be created by or lived by anyone else.

The freedom an undefined ethical gives us is twofold. First, it frees us from our appetites, but then it gives a further freedom to individuate ourselves with accountability that no ethical script could provide a moral agent. An undefined ethical makes our unrepeatable lives our own and rigorously forms the personalized moral faculty of conscience that is capable of discerning when and how to apply different aspects of the ethical. It makes us unique and individuated in a substantive way in the grand scheme of history and ultimately (if we are inclined to believe) in the eyes of God. A defined and proven ethical theory would do harm to our freedom in this way.

What about the cohesion that passion for the ethical provides? Would it be undone in some way if the good could be proven and defined for us? Again, having this all thought out for us seems to do an injustice to the cohesive passion of ethical subjectivity. Duties and commands may set boundaries for our lives, but rather than us living to find a way to bring the good into our lives, the clearly defined duties of the ethical would seem to live our lives for us. We would become emotionally hollowed out if there were a wholly external determination of ethical duty. It is hard to believe in such a world that an all consuming passion for the ethical could envelop us and provide a cohesive arc to the entirety of our lives. Performing the ethical would become another rote mechanism built into our days, no different than brewing the morning coffee or checking the mail. It seems rather clear now how a defined and proven ethical would undermine an enriched and meaningful individuality in regards to the qualities of freedom and passionate cohesion.

Is it clear to us how God enters the ethical stage and why Kantian religiousness sets the stage for future existential movements? Are we convinced that Kantian religiousness cannot

address the despair experienced in the ethico-religious stage? Earlier we discussed how, Kierkegaard shares Kant's view that feelings of ethical inadequacy naturally suggest the idea that God extends our lives so we can achieve ethical perfection. If this movement into the ethico-religious stage were really as helpful at treating our despair as some believe it to be, then the story should end there. Turning to a particular revealed faith or a direct relationship with God ought to be viewed as superfluous to Kierkegaard and ourselves; however, this idea of Kantian moral religiousness does not get the job done, yet it is not entirely clear why it does not.

Kierkegaard cautioned us against embracing the idea of moral religiousness for it has the effect of reducing God to a vanishing point as the ontological foundation of the ethical. The movement into the ethico-religious sphere is a temporary fix. It temporarily provides a salve against the feelings of ethical inadequacy, yet those feelings creep back in. Why is this the case if we are confident that it will all be taken care of at a future date?

According to Kierkegaard, we must cease to believe that an infinite life of ethical perfection is in fact the case. Why do we stop believing it? Intellectually positing such a relationship with God and the afterlife and continued moral work is not enough. Moral work and intellectual argumentation, though admirable in and of themselves, close us off to a definitive understanding of God or at the very least distract us. The secret to keeping the despair away and "knowing" God must involve a different and more direct route.

Kierkegaard located the despair of defiance or daemonic despair as gripping those in the ethical stage. If positing God as the ontological foundation of the ethical temporarily relieves daemonic despair, but then despair creeps back in, are we dealing with a new form of despair (daemonic despair 2?) or is this the same despair experienced in the ethical stage? Originally the

following qualities were ascribed to the despair of defiance/Daemonic despair: 1) dread of ethical commitment to only one understanding of ethical action, 2) feelings of inadequacy experienced in the failure to fully actualize the ideal ethical self, and 3) an infatuation with the self's ethical constitution that prevents seeking help from God.

In the ethico-religious stage, God is called upon to relieve the despair of the ethical stage; however, the indirect manner in which the self relates to God is unsustainable and the self finds itself in despair again. In this type of despair, there seems to be further dissatisfaction with how the indirect relationship with God has worked out, making for a qualitatively new form of despair. It should be noted accordingly as Despair of Defiance 2/Demonic Despair 2 as indicated above.

Is there something problematic about the ethical self being dependent upon the ethical for its freedom? How can one have true freedom if that freedom is predicated on something outside of the self? It is unclear if Kierkegaard's account at this point is complete in regards to freedom.

There might only be something problematic about the self gaining freedom through the independent ethical, if the individual himself can bring himself out of the chain of necessity without reference to an absolute standard and into the realm of freedom. Is it possible for an individual to posit his own ideal and lift himself out of the aesthetic stage or will there be something intrinsically arbitrary about whatever ideal he posits, thus deluding him into thinking he is free when in fact he is more imprisoned than ever? What if an individual posits that his life will be defined by monetary success? What if the pursuit of the beautiful in all its forms is the defining ideal? How about knowledge or self-gain by any means necessary? What about the pursuit of self-annihilation through meditation? It is unclear if all the enumerated

ideals are arbitrary or arbitrary in the same way; however, an arbitrary ideal will be unable to coordinate the fractured elements of self and lift us out of the confusion of aesthetic life. The pursuit of material goods may emphasize the temporal element excessively, whereas the quest for knowledge intoxicates and distracts us from bringing ethical ideas into reality.

Further, the imagined ideals of monetary success, beauty, and amoral self-gain could all be seen as shackling for they require events to go their way. A hospitable business climate in the first, the existence of artists and beautiful nature in the second, and willing dopes in the third. What if my life is defined by the pursuit of truth and knowledge? If truth and knowledge are understood to be rendered by reason and observation, it is assumed that the objects of knowledge have some sort of objective existence as well. This would be analogous to the founding of one's freedom upon the independent existence of the ethical, except that

¹²⁸ This could be disputed and perhaps tangential to the real question of whether or not the pursuit of objective truth is less free than the subjective truth gained via an encounter with the ethical. In what sense is the possessed scholar less free than an ethical individual (*not that these are mutually exclusive in the slightest*)? Has the individual committed to objective truth been disabled in some way on Kierkegaard's view? In a neglect of the ethical, have they compromised an essential part of their humanity? Has the withdrawal from the ethical perhaps made them immune to right action? Have they become limited in their ability to freely express the good in their life?

Scholarship is not closed off to the ethical individual; however, one might argue that a dogmatic consumption with objective truth can turn an individual into a hyper-intelligent being that is somewhat deficient in regards to human warmth. Would such a deficiency make a person less free? Kierkegaard is apt to draw comparisons between those obsessed with objective truth and animated machines and scarecrows. Do such individuals resemble automatons or robots? Is there a profound resemblance that would account for a difference in freedom or is it hyperbole? It's hard to tell if we are making progress on this question. Perhaps, it should be thought of differently. The individual wholly committed to objective knowledge/truth might be less free for they have taken a route that will not lead them to ultimate freedom, whereas the ethical individual could still experience greater gradations of freedom in existence stages to come.

the ethical engages the fractured elements of the self, whereas observation and speculation diminish that engagement, turning us into aesthetically unfree icy deliberators.¹²⁸ The intellectual may not have begun the ethical project; therefore he has not been liberated from the three forms of despair that precede ethical existence. If the ethical project has been set in motion, intellectual work could prevent him from gaining further freedom from the guilt, anxiety, and despair of ethical life or a life of resignation.

What if we are deadlocked in our ethical reflection between alternatives? Will we risk our ethical subjectivity in abstaining from decision? Must we force a decision? This seems like a very real scenario where decision is ultimately paralyzing. Either way we decide looks terrible. Of course, if we do nothing, then a decision will be made for us and we have allowed the moment to actualize the ethical pass us by. What if we abstained in order to preserve our moral purity? What if that is our ethical choice, when other ethical choices seem too terrible to actualize? So long as our decision is not based on fear or shrinking away from tough decisions, this effort to preserve moral purity may be a legitimate way to actualize the ethical if it is a legitimate option.

CHAPTER 3

RELIGIOUSNESS A

Now that we have presented Kierkegaard's reasons for why we ought to take religious commitment seriously, we can explore precisely how Kierkegaard thinks that religious commitment provides subjective truth that eclipses inwardly deepened ethical existence. Kierkegaard delineates two types of religious attitudes or commitments, which he calls Religiousness A (resignation) and Religiousness B (faith). They offer qualitative progressions of subjective truth. In this chapter and the next, we will examine these varieties of religious commitment with respect to their differences, how they add significance to our lives, whether Kierkegaard describes them adequately, what their relation is to one another, and if they exhaust the options of religious commitment. The relationship between the forms and their exhaustiveness will be raised here, but fully addressed at the end of the next chapter, after both forms have been explicated. Answers to these concerns and questions will determine if Kierkegaard is justified in his turn to religion and especially to Christianity.

This chapter will be devoted almost entirely to the consideration of Religiousness A since Kierkegaard portrays it as the religious attitude that prepares us for Religiousness B (*the form associated with Christianity*). Our investigation begins with the exploration of five essential questions in order for us to understand the nature of Religiousness A, the

corresponding grade of subjective truth, and the individual's placement within the continuum of existential stages.¹²⁹

Who is the Knight of Infinite Resignation?

There seems to be a prevailing view within the secondary literature that the knight of infinite resignation can be rather easily reduced to a handy definition, swapped out with other terms, and measure who is and who is not properly worthy of the title. This is problematic. Why? Different scholars seem to have a slightly different take on what it means to be a knight of infinite resignation and therefore do not agree on the exchangeable terminology or the paragons of resignation. Is the immanent pagan a knight of infinite resignation? Is religiousness A synonymous with resignation? What is Socrates for Kierkegaard? Where does the cultural Christian fit in? To illustrate the confusion on these points, one need only look at Kierkegaard's own words and those of Mooney, a leading Kierkegaard scholar.¹³⁰ In the *Concluding Unscientific Post-Script*, Kierkegaard refers to Socrates as an "analogue of faith", something one step prior to that of the passionate Christian; whereas Mooney stops short of considering shares the same status. This launched a thorough investigation into precisely which individuals exemplify Infinite Resignation, Religiousness A, and Immanence. We then asked if it was proper to consider we cleared up

¹²⁹ We begin with what will seem to some to be a rather elementary query. It is widely understood that the knight of infinite resignation and the Religious A individual are one and the same for Kierkegaard, yet the same degree of certitude is not exhibited across the scholarly board when it is asked if the concept of immanence

¹³⁰ Mooney, Edward F., *Knights of Faith and Infinite Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling*, p.104.

all three designations to be coequal and what the totality of their characteristics is. Once these conceptual ambiguities, we noted some strong similarities between Religiousness A and the previously discussed ethico- religious stage, which inevitably prompted a comparison of the two stages in order to determine definitively if both were existence stages in their own right. After we met that inquiry with satisfaction we meticulously scrutinized what it meant to possess subjective truth and significant individuality in the stage of Religiousness A. The triumvirate of questions below guided us through what could easily be defined as the most crucial part of the chapter, if not the dissertation.

- 1) How does the religious commitment of A provide inward deepening and significance?
- 2) Why do suffering and guilt define our lives as significant?
- 3) How does Kierkegaard associate the above feelings with subjective truth?

Next we asked what the limitations of Religiousness A are and inquired into the contingent existence of the boundary zone of Humor, so as to understand the conditions that prepare the way for Religiousness B.

Most of our commentary in this chapter was saved until the *Concluding Questions and Ruminations* section. There we first deal with an assortment of questions and critiques compiled as we attempted to understand the major themes of the chapter. We then thoroughly addressed whether or not Kierkegaard adequately described the Religiousness A posture. We closed with some conceptual concerns about the role of argumentation in Kierkegaard's project and the timing of a full blown evaluation of the religious turn and significant individuality. Socrates a Knight of Infinite Resignation and deems it more appropriate to think of the Athenian gadfly as an intellectual tragic hero confined to the ethical sphere.¹³¹

What we need to do in this section is to examine all the appropriate figures and terminology associated with Kierkegaard's concept of the Knight of Infinite Resignation. The hope here is that we a) produce a robust account of the Knight of Infinite Resignation and b) get Kierkegaard scholars on the same page about this issue. Frequently, the terms of Immanence, Religiousness A, and the Knight of Infinite Resignation are all taken to be equivalent. On the surface, one might not protest about the interchangeability of Religiousness A and the Knight of Infinite Resignation, but what is this immanence of which Kierkegaard speaks so much? How does it relate to resignation, if at all? Does it highlight a dimension of resignation that is not covered in the explicit discussions of resignation and religiousness A? What do the supposed concrete examples of immanence and religiousness A tell us about the Knight of Infinite Resignation in general? We will begin with an exploration of immanence and how Kierkegaard believed Socrates to be the figurehead of it. Then we will unfurl the movements involved in Religiousness A/Infinite Resignation and see how, the lad from *Fear and Trembling*, epitomizes this existence stage. At the end of the section, we will attempt to integrate all these conceptual candidates and exemplars into a cohesive understanding of what it means to be a knight of infinite resignation.

¹³¹ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, p.205.

Immanence

In the simplest terms, Kierkegaard speaks of immanence as knowledge, specifically religious knowledge of God that is part of human consciousness. Contrast this with transcendence, which is the knowledge of God made known to us via revelation. Kierkegaard, as we have seen elsewhere, is adamant that we cannot have natural knowledge of God (immanence) via speculative proof. Logical arguments may develop the God concept and may even be sound (valid with true premises); however, we only are lead to the conclusion of such arguments if we accept the truth of their premises at the outset. Kierkegaard claims we are not really proving God when we start out assuming premises which cannot be otherwise proved.

Given our earlier overview of Kierkegaard's critiques of speculative attempts to prove God, we can see why he believes personal prejudice affects how one follows a proof. If we accept that rationally unjustified motives move us to ascend to the proofs' conclusions, then we cannot recollect or discover a logical route to God. Should we be shut off from rationally relating eternal truth to our existence, we can either arrest the search for God or subjectively turn inward and relate to god via an interiorization process. This inward turn is a live option for some given a particular strong sense of the divine's reality and/or that divinity's ability to ameliorate existential despair. How this interiorization process proceeds will come into focus by chapter's end. The case of Socrates will be essential for understanding what we find in our subjectively truer inward turn and how immanence is connected, if at all, to the knight of infinite resignation. Socrates, as a practitioner of the maieutic method, not only demonstrated the ineffectual nature of speculation (according to Kierkegaard), but also that he could help others find the truth within. What exactly does this mean though? What did Socrates help us

find within? Did he merely show that we ought to be primarily concerned with ethical existence and its relation to God? Is this discovery of God via ethical existence an essential aspect of Religiousness A/resignation or is Socratic midwifery on this issue, and immanence in general, an equivalent term for what was discussed as the ethico-religious stage? All we know right now is that the immanence perspective has two components: 1) one cannot know God speculatively and 2) knowledge of God comes from within, from a subjective perspective. Now we turn to Kierkegaard's conception of Socrates to fill out this conception of immanence and to see if it is in fact one and the same with religiousness A/resignation.

In the *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard revisits the Meno, where Socrates contemplates whether or not the truth can be learned. Socrates resolves the infamous disjunct concerning the incompatibility of seeking what we already know and our inability to seek what we do not know, by claiming that all learning is a form of recollection. Socrates believed it was his purpose to act as a midwife and help people recollect what is innately within them and Kierkegaard calls such a relationship the highest two human beings can have with one another. A human being cannot introduce a truth to another, but they can help tease out what is already there. As we will see later on, Kierkegaard thought only something very special could bring truth to man. For now, we go back to one of the questions that we raised in the prior section. What is this truth that we can recollect Socratically?¹³² *"In the Socratic view, every human being is himself the midpoint, and the whole world focuses only on him because his self-knowledge is God-knowledge."*¹³³

Socrates' Maieutic method supposedly extracted self-knowledge from an individual;

¹³² Kierkegaard, Soren, *The Philosophical Fragments*, pp.9-11.

¹³³ Ibid., p.11.

however, what exactly is self-knowledge? Is it more than mere geometry? Kierkegaard seems to think so, specifically that it is a divine knowledge of sorts. Does this mean that the knowledge placed within man, discovered Socratically, is assumed to be implanted by God or does Kierkegaard mean that as we turn inward we somehow find God? How does self-knowledge become God-knowledge, especially since Kierkegaard has forcefully insisted that no amount of philosophical cogitation will lead one rationally to God? Are we over-thinking the matter? If the Socratic thesis on learning as recollection really has merit, then are we not then led to necessarily posit a God that has implanted eternal knowledge within us, even if said God cannot be logically derived?¹³⁴

Where is Kierkegaard getting this idea that Socrates is brushing up against the idea of God (*an absurdity without rational justification*) and positing Him nonetheless (*a conclusion Mooney cannot endorse*)?¹³⁵ This seems to be where a form of qualitatively progressed religious inwardness or subjective truth creeps into Socrates and is ultimately surpassed by those who struggle with the Christian revelation. To answer these questions concerning

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp.11-12.

¹³⁵ Contra all this God-talk, Mooney believes that Socrates never actually gets to the conclusion that there is a God and for this reason cannot be rightly called a knight of infinite resignation. The self-knowledge that Socrates acquires is vaguely spiritual, but not religious enough to be an acknowledgment of God. True, Socrates in his persecution and daily life has divested the importance of physical life and thinks largely in spiritual terms, making his identity bound up in the capacities of integrity, freedom, and self-command. All of which transcend the merely biological. All these capacities distance Socrates from the worldly and give him something that the knight of infinite resignation might also be in possession of; “eternal consciousness”; however, the notion of God is not a live one for Socrates, according to Mooney, therefore eliminating Socrates and, all those operating from the immanent perspective, from infinite resignation knighthood. On this view, Self-knowledge does not equal God-knowledge.

We will have to see if Mooney’s interpretation of Socrates is the same shared by Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard in *The Concept of Irony* explores this immanent figure a great deal more. Perhaps in that exploration we will learn enough about Socrates and the immanent perspective to say that both the perspective and the individual are a category and exemplar of resignation. We will not be able to reach that conclusion definitively until we’ve elaborated upon resignation/religiousness A in detail. We ought to be able to render a tentative conclusion after a review of Kierkegaard’s dissertation (Mooney, *Knights of Faith and Infinite Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling* p.140).

¹³⁶ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, p.205.

Kierkegaard's interpretation of Socrates, we now turn to *The Concept of Irony*.¹³⁶ To effectively grasp the concept of immanence, we will examine Kierkegaard's views on Socratic knowledge, methodology, and the supposed god-relationship. Socrates resisted the infatuating taunt of speculation, for he felt divinely called to demonstrate to all men that they were unwise and knew nothing at all. Kierkegaard points out that this knowledge of one's own ignorance is not pure or empty, but rather it understands the limitations and negativity of all worldly finite content. With the negation of all finite knowledge, one begins to turn inwards and this is what will ultimately lead to a new type of infinite knowledge. Socrates is a necessary step towards that progression. So when Socrates disarmingly questioned supposed experts, he actually helped them turn inward in their confusion and perhaps helped them to understand the limitations of their cognitive claims.¹³⁷

We witness Socrates' own turn inward when he realizes that none of the laws or the objective state has any authority over the individual. Socrates rises above them all and Kierkegaard imagines that a sort of dizziness sets in as we alienate ourselves from this world via Socratic irony. Socrates is so capable of negating all of these finite modes of knowledge and power, that he even neutralizes his fear over the loss of his life. His consciousness is of another realm and it has distanced itself from anything earthly. If we can conclude that Socrates and the immanent perspective is one and the same with infinite resignation, we can say something about the invalidity of the world for the knight of infinite resignation and the corresponding nausea or dizziness one experiences upon a retreat from the objective world toward a new, inward form of consciousness. It should be noted that Socrates experienced more than just dizziness as he demonstrated the empty knowledge and corresponding futility of every finite domain. There was a certain contentedness that came along with his aporia inducing queries, likely a result of illustrating the self-consistency of the deeply skeptical negative

perspective.¹³⁸

We have discussed the inward turn of the immanent Socrates and the subjectivity he has cultivated to a point. There is a limitation to the subjectivity he can apprehend, according to Kierkegaard, for Socrates was ignorant of that which grounds all being. He certainly felt assured that the divine, the good, the beautiful, and the eternal was, though he could not say what it was. How could Socrates be assured of this ground of being or divine of which he could say nothing specific? Kierkegaard would claim that this natural knowledge of God is one of the few things implanted in our immanent consciousness. The confessional scene from Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* comes to mind:

What will happen to us who want to believe, but cannot? What about those who neither want to nor can believe? Why can't I kill God in me? Why does He live on in me in a humiliating way - despite my wanting to evict Him from my heart? Why is He, despite all, a mocking reality I can't be rid of? I want knowledge! Not faith, not assumptions, but knowledge. I want God to stretch out His hand, uncover His face and speak to me.¹³⁹

- Antonius Block, the knight from *the Seventh Seal*

Socrates was simultaneously conscious and not conscious of this ground of being. For Socrates, the idea of the divine was a boundary that he could not surpass philosophically.

Socrates' subjectivity, claims Kierkegaard, is limited by this boundary and this ought to be the case for any individual outside of the Christian revelation. The authority Kierkegaard musters for this claim arises from his own subjective testing and mirroring of

¹³⁷ Kierkegaard, Soren, *The Concept of Irony*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp.173-175.

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp.196-197, 264.

¹³⁹ *The Seventh Seal*, dir. Ingmar Bergman (Stockhold, Sweden: Svensk Filmindustri, 1957), DVD

the mental life of Athens' gadfly. Kierkegaard points out that only with the introduction of Christ can the inwardness and the subjectivity felt within the confines of the Socratic boundary expand and reach depths previously unknowable. What's rather fascinating about this entire interpretation of Socrates by Kierkegaard is how divinely inspired Kierkegaard believes Socrates to be, as if Socrates were essential to God's design for humanity. This sentiment is illustrated eloquently in the following quote:¹⁴⁰

The sacred was not to be taken in vain; the temple had to be cleansed before the sacred would once again take a seat there. Truth demands silence before it will raise its voice, and Socrates was to bring about this silence.¹⁴¹

Have we answered one of our most fundamental questions for this section? How did Socratic irony turn inwardness and subjectivity into God-knowledge? How is self-knowledge God-knowledge? Why wouldn't Socrates, like the German Romantics, employ irony to call into question the ethical order and behave in hedonistic fashion? What confidence does Socrates have that he is brushing up against this Boundary of the Good and the True, namely God?

Socrates seems to have been in a personal relationship with a god of some sort. This god- consciousness would, according to Socrates, rein him in and warn him when needed. It never offered positive instruction, but it did seem to look after him (*advising Socrates to stay out of politics*) and he trusted his personal daimon when instructed to ask the public questions. It doesn't seem like the ironic posture leads one to the boundary, rather one must have the god- consciousness intact first and then irony leads to the boundary. But how did Socrates get this god-consciousness? Did he not merely assume it or posit it?

¹⁴⁰ Kierkegaard, Soren, *The Concept of Irony*, pp.165-169, 196-17, 210-211.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.210.

Might the guidance of the irrationally posited daimon simply reflect the lack of rational justification for philosophical undertakings? Socrates would be a figure within transcendence and not immanent, if he received a special revelation, so this knowledge/relationship to a god comes from within. He must have made the assumption, for Kierkegaard thinks that god-knowledge cannot be speculatively proved and was not in keeping with Socrates' own *modus operandi*. Perhaps, we do not need to dwell on this point, since the aim of this dissertation is not to unearth Socrates reasons for assuming God. The entire point of exploring immanence and Socrates was to determine if immanence and immanent individuals fall under the category of infinite resignation and if what we take infinite resignation to be can be enhanced by a study of immanence. We cannot answer this question fully at the moment, but will do so at the section's end.¹⁴²

So far we know that immanent individuals, including Socrates: 1) Do not know God speculatively, 2) Knowledge of God comes from their own consciousness, 3) Irony is employed to turn inward and find this truth/relationship, 4) Immanent individuals have a sense of self-satisfaction from their ability to demonstrate the limits of human knowledge and legal authority, 5) Immanent individuals experience a sense of alienating dizziness when everything finite appears invalidated, 6) Immanent individuals appear to have a sense of freedom from the earthly realm, 7) The God immanent individuals subjectively know is known as the ground of all being, but nothing more can be said of it. This creates an inner tension, for on the one hand something objectively uncertain or speculatively unknowable is felt as a brute fact of consciousness. The tension is compounded given the complexity of explaining this

¹⁴² Ibid., pp.160-161, 164.

relationship. This tension between the objectively unknowable and subjective certainty is ultimately surpassed in degree of intensity once one has migrated towards faith, and 8) 2-7 appear to be a form of subjective truth. We have to investigate if this type of subjectivity is a forerunner to resignation or is equivalent to it.¹⁴³

Kierkegaard saves discussion of Religiousness A primarily for the *Concluding Unscientific Post-Script to the Philosophical Fragments*. As it has been mentioned throughout the entire chapter thus far, Religiousness A is widely thought to be synonymous with the Knight of Infinite Resignation. McLane, drawing from the Post-Script, points out that the inwardness of Christianity is something distinct from Religiousness A: “The inwardness of Christianity is, however, said to be qualitatively different from that of Religion A; the inner tension is infinitely greater than in the case of Socratic inwardness”¹⁴⁴ Here we have an indication that Kierkegaard did in fact intend for immanence to be associated with Religiousness A.¹⁴⁵ In Kierkegaard’s discussion of Religiousness A in the *Post-Script*, we learn a little more about the nature of this inner tension that is surpassed qualitatively as a faithful Christian.

¹⁴³ Before moving on to our discussion of Religiousness A and Resignation, we should note that not everyone is content with Kierkegaard’s treatment of Socrates. It is not our contention to assess the validity or invalidity of Kierkegaard’s thought on this matter, though it seems obligatory to provide some critical context. John Wild, in his article “Kierkegaard and Classic Philosophy” (pp.538-540), raises at least three concerns with the Kierkegaardian reading of Socrates. First, in order for Kierkegaard to claim that Socrates had no positive doctrine to teach, Kierkegaard has to attribute what we have of the positive Socratic doctrine to Plato. This includes the discussions relating to the following topics: the difference between opinion and knowledge, the nature of the good and the universal striving towards it, the primacy of some goods over others, the virtues’ unity, and the equivalence of knowledge and virtue. This is by no means an uncontroversial way of separating Socrates from Plato. Second, there is little evidence to show that Kierkegaard critically revisited his youthful assessment of Socrates, which was heavily influenced by Hegel’s own treatment of Socrates. Third, and this affects Kierkegaard’s feelings on speculative systems and Socrates’ infinite negativity, there isn’t a great deal of evidence to indicate that Kierkegaard had familiarity with scholastic philosophers. Wild seems to think that had Kierkegaard spent more time with the scholastics, he would be kinder to the classic tradition and perhaps provided him with a fuller picture of Socrates and his influence. None of this derails our aims, so long as we trust the picture that Kierkegaard provides us of Socrates. Whether Wild’s concerns are valid or not is a matter for another time. They should momentarily give us pause.

¹⁴⁴ McLane, Earl, “Kierkegaard and Subjectivity”, p. 225.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 225.

Earlier, we discovered in our discussion of Socratic inwardness that this tension consisted in subjective knowledge of a logically unknowable ground of all being. This ground of all being is recognized and assumed to be legitimate. What more do we learn of this tension? The tension seems to also involve the uncertainty of an immortal soul that will one day participate in an eternal happiness, and by extension that all humans are inevitably participants in that happiness. If one is going to cling to this Absolute over the world of ephemera and It does not demonstrably show itself, via speculative proof or triumphant inner revelation, then it makes sense to long for an eternity of divine communion that beatifies man. Are we not witness to this uncertainty in Socrates, when in his preparation for death, he is untroubled by the cessation of life for one possibility is that innumerable goods may await him.¹⁴⁶

The idea of Religiousness A coupled with an objectively uncertain and supposed eternal blessedness that is not necessarily earned through moral performance raises many questions. First, where are we getting this idea of the immortal soul that experiences posthumous joys? Is it an idea that is inevitably posited when we posit God in the turn inward? Are these separable ideas? Also, the Religiousness A of the *Post-Script* appears very similar to the previously discussed ethico-religious stage. Was it wrong to establish the ethico-religious sphere as a forerunner existence stage to that of Religiousness A and its corresponding gradation of subjective truth? To see if there is a real distinction between the two stages, especially on the conception of eternal happiness, we have to wait until the discussion of the equality of Religiousness A and infinite resignation. Infinite resignation will fill in some gaps concerning the nature of immortality one step prior to faith and how the ethico-religious sphere

¹⁴⁶ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, pp.556, 581.

is autonomous.

Kierkegaard tells us in the Post-Script that Religiousness A, though it always appears before decisive Christian faith, can consist of pagans, cultural Christians (i.e. individuals born into the cultural trappings of the faith, who yet have not made a serious commitment to beliefs casually parroted. It is not uncommon for the intellectually inclined born within this tradition to seek objective answers to many of the problems that faith and life itself presents), and those characterized by Socratic Immanence. This is an interesting turn of events. Immanence is not limited to existing Greek philosophers, like Socrates. Presumably, someone who is trying to understand Christianity, solely from an objective standpoint, via philosophy or historical truth, has not made the movement of faith, and thus they are Christians in name only. Perhaps, Kierkegaard had Hegel or his own Johannes Climacus in mind when he conceived of the immanent Christian in Religiousness A. Maybe it is incorrect to deem speculative theologians exemplars of Religiousness A. They may start out with conviction, but get slowly enticed by lengthy philosophical and theological excursions away from committed religious existence altogether. This idea should become clearer as we explore the inner life of the religious individual in the next few sections.¹⁴⁷

To recap, we found: 1) textual support to indicate that Kierkegaard believed Socratic Inwardness to be Religiousness A, 2) that part of the dialectical tension experienced in immanence/religiousness A involves not only an uncertain belief in God, but also that the soul is immortal and that it will be made happy eventually (though we could not definitively conclude precisely how the conception of eternal happiness evolves from the ethico-religious

¹⁴⁷ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, p.557.

stage to religiousness A), and that immanent/Religiousness A individuals can be either pagan or indecisive cultural Christians.

If Immanence, Religiousness A, and Infinite Resignation are equivalent, a deep exploration is needed of Kierkegaardian resignation to further illuminate the stage prior to faith. In our discussion of Religiousness A, we learned that such an individual has turned inward and posited or somehow discovered god and the corollary of the immortal soul that eventually gains access to eternal happiness. We still have many questions concerning where this subjective knowledge comes from. Our review of what Kierkegaard says about the movements of the person dwelling in Religiousness A/infinite resignation, will fill out the description of the person's experience a bit more and offer a glimpse of the origination point of such subjective knowledge.

In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard reveals to us that the knight of infinite resignation has an intense desire to see a particular set of events occur in this world, yet knows that it is an impossibility to see such matters come to fruition temporally. So he gives up his earthly demands and expends all his energy renouncing these finite demands and brings his consciousness in harmony with the eternal being. The knight of infinite resignation's sole desire is to love God and, via that relationship, experience felicity in a separate future realm. The knight of infinite resignation is not necessarily an ascetic; however, he has given up hope in any earthly delectation. Resignation is a painful process; however, there is consolation in it once the love of God triumphs over the individual's concern for worldly happiness.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, p.44.

Kierkegaard, as Johannes de Silentio, regales us with the lad and the princess story to emphasize the aforementioned points. The lad falls in love with the princess, yet their love cannot be realized for he is a commoner. This is terrible for the lad, for his love is the defining center of his world. It stabilizes and should it be lost, his life would be shattered. In time, he realizes that it will never be. To leverage control over the finite, the lad renounces the princess and discovers the infinite perspective. The finite can now no longer painfully control the lad, for the lad has transformed his love of the princess into love for the eternal being. His world regains repose with worship of the orienting absolute. When we say that the love for the princess has been transformed, it should not be taken as lost or completely jettisoned. It stays with the knight of infinite resignation, but it no longer has the priority it once had. Loving the eternal being is now the primary focus.¹⁴⁹

Review of relevant text concerning resignation from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, prods us to ruminate upon the nature of resignation further, specifically the enduring decision to renounce finite ends and the pathos involved in such decisiveness. Kierkegaard tells us that the decision for the eternal being cannot be something scratched off on our chore list; rather, it is a decision that we must continually struggle to make. It is far from easy to turn our existence into a testimony for the eternal happiness. Speaking about it is one thing, but performing the transformation is an entirely different and more difficult idea. The absolute telos of loving God over finite ends must be made at every moment. We have not properly made the move of resignation if our lives go back to being consumed by willing the finite.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Mooney, Edward F., *Knights of Faith and Infinite Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling*, pp.46, 49, 50.

¹⁵⁰ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, pp.391, 394, 401.

Again, why is this move to infinite resignation so dramatically difficult? The precise difficulty experienced in infinite resignation is the correlative suffering referred to as the *dying to self*. In the dying-to-self suffering, the individual has recognized that he is absolutely nothing without God and that he must cleave himself from the impulse to will the finite over the absolute. Once the individual has brought himself before God, with knowledge of his own inefficacy and nothingness, then he has successfully died to immediacy and the self. There is a consolation in this process of suffering for knowledge of our own nothingness brings with it the corollary that all things are possible with God in eternity. Humility is the proper outward manifestation of the God-relationship in resignation. Resignation might also be made more difficult and induce humility given the intensification of the guilt we have already felt during the ethico-religious phase. There, the guilt largely originated from our misunderstanding of priorities and placing the finite ahead of the infinite. In resignation, there appears to be the self-flagellation of having to depend on the finite at all, not just that it was made a priority over ethical performance. Further, we would wager that the guilt intensifies here in regards to our pride. In the ethico-religious stage, there is an element of self-sufficiency even though God as the ground of moral reality has been posited. In resignation, the self properly sees itself as useless without God, so there must be an intensification of guilt stemming from our ethical and intellectual vanity. Kierkegaard does not say this explicitly, but it would seem to naturally follow from what we have covered thus far. We know from Kierkegaard that guilt is involved, yet it cannot be merely a repetition of the guilt experienced in the ethico-religious stage. This would appear to be a more comprehensive form of guilt-consciousness.¹⁵¹ In previous existence stages, guilt was experienced by the individual either for not becoming a moral self sooner or with the acknowledgment that one's particular moral self could not attain perfection. If there is

going to be an intensification of guilt- consciousness in resignation, it must come from only partially depending on God in the ethico- religious stage as the force that ensures an opportunity for heavenly moral work and perfection.

The knight of infinite resignation grieves over the simultaneous willing of the infinite and the finite, of moral perfection and connubial bliss with his perceived dream partner.¹⁵² Kierkegaard does not intend knowledge of one's own nothingness to culminate in ascetic inaction or self-mortification. We are to perform humbly in continual dependence on God. What does this mean and how? We are never to cease relating to the absolute telos absolutely, yet we must relate to the relative relatively. Kierkegaard's language is equal parts inspirational and mystifying. What he likely intends to say is that the resigned man performs his given temporal role, while simultaneously fixated on a future happiness apart from this world. Such a perspective ought to motivate the endurance of tribulations and temper earthly expectations of joy. Essentially, the absolute telos attains supremacy in our life while we continue with existence's relative objectives. Presumably this does not have a universal expression, given the diversity of human beings and the relative ends to which they find themselves thrown, though Kierkegaard acutely describes the sense of alienation the knight of infinite resignation feels if

¹⁵¹ Ibid., pp.492, 525-527.

¹⁵² Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, pp.164, 17.

he is correctly relating to the absolute telos and the relative ends:¹⁵³

In immediacy, the individual is firmly rooted in the finite; when resignation is convinced that the individual has the absolute orientation toward the absolute telos, everything is changed, the roots are cut. He lives in the finite, but he does not have his life in it. His life, like the life of another, has the diverse predicates of a human existence, but he is within like the person who walks in a stranger's borrowed clothes¹⁵⁴

What did we learn about the knight of infinite resignation from our above discussion? First, renunciation of the finite involves an inward and loving turn towards God. This is more than a mere intellectual positing. Second, the move of resignation is one that has to be constantly affirmed. There is no decisive moment that prevents us from immersion in finite ends again. Third, the process of resignation is made so difficult, given the suffering involved in cleaving ourselves entirely from finite ends. This suffering is known as *dying to the self/dying to immediacy*. Fourth, resignation may also be made so difficult given the intensification of a guilt- consciousness already in place from the ethico-religious stage. This guilt consciousness may consist of an even greater distancing from finite ends and the acknowledgement of moral/intellectual hubris. Fifth, in this suffering, the individual is brought before God and there is the realization that she is nothing without God. The individual recognizes her complete dependence upon the eternal and her own inefficacy. She is made humble. Sixth, acknowledging our dependence upon God also provides freedom from the world of contingency. Finally, the individual must go about her finite existence, while simultaneously relating absolutely to the Absolute. Asceticism is not an option.

¹⁵³ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, pp.407-408.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p.410.

The significant difference between ethico-religious and Religious A individuals

At the outset of this chapter, the concern was raised that the ethico-religious stage and religiousness A might not be distinct existential spheres. This concern gained traction as we learned that the knight of infinite resignation seems to posit eternal happiness, renounce finite ends, and endure suffering in ways similar to the ethico-religious person. This is no doubt a primary reason why some Kierkegaardian scholars do not even acknowledge an ethico-religious stage; however, it is our contention that there are three very good reasons for thinking ethico-religiousness and resignation to be two distinct existential spheres. The individual within the ethico-religious stage takes his moral commitments to be of the utmost seriousness, for it is through ethical duty that the individual relates to a God he supposes will extend his life indefinitely so that moral perfection (aka eternal happiness) can be attained.

From our study of *Fear and Trembling* and *The Concept of Irony*, we have reason to believe that the person within Religiousness A does not share the same view on the ethical. The knight of infinite resignation understands that his life is not in a universal ethic, in large part because such an ethic cannot be defined. To understand this point better, one ought to consult Kierkegaard's portrayal of Socrates in *The Concept of Irony*. Here, Socrates is the figurehead of the immanent perspective and by extension Religiousness A and Resignation. Socrates employed irony to show that nothing positive could be said about the nature of the ethical. Whoever thinks they are in possession of the good, Socrates reduces to *aporia*. It is for this reason Kierkegaard does not found the Religiousness A perspective upon the objective ethical. Reason cannot properly render a universal definition of what it means to be ethical, let alone a moral theology that would allow for immortality. This point is emphasized again in *Fear and Trembling*. Kierkegaard identifies a number of scenarios, Antigone and Captain

Vere for instance, that demonstrate the ethical's internal contradictions. The freedom the autonomous individual supposes that he captures in his universal ethical performance is ultimately diminished, when no true sense can be made of the ethical and despair and guilt sets in.¹⁵⁵

What about the different types of relationships ethico-religious and Religiousness A individuals have with the Absolute? The religiousness of the ethico-religious person is of a Kantian variety, where the individual does not relate directly to God even though she may have a belief in Him. The ethico-religious person's knowledge of God is derived entirely from moral service. God is intellectually posited as the ground of ethical duty and the insurer of immortality so that we can perfect our moral performance. We have covered elsewhere that the intensity of moral duty felt by the ethico-religious individual culminates in concentrated feelings of guilt, despair, and repentance, paving the way for a new way to conceive of the relationship with God, specifically Religiousness A. The religious A individual no longer seeks an objective route to God. She turns inward and relates directly to God. The religious individual does not see herself as largely self-sufficient needing God to only insure an afterlife so that moral practice can continue. Those who are the Religiousness A type are transformed by the direct relationship with God and see God as a more active force in their life than the ethico-religious individual.

For the Religious A person, God is not just the ground of morality. God is the foundation of everything, without whom we can do absolutely nothing, let alone achieve moral performance

¹⁵⁵ Dupré, Louis K., *A Dubious Heritage: Studies in the Philosophy of Religion after Kant*, pp.39-40.

in the afterlife. In this subjective relationship, God begins to take an active role and is more than a premise/conclusion within a moral theology.¹⁵⁶

Eternal happiness figures into the worldviews of both the ethically religious person and the religious A individual, inducing further confusion between the two. Upon closer scrutiny, a conceptual distinction emerges between the types of eternal happiness spoken of in these two realms. It is difficult at this juncture to describe precisely what the eternal happiness of Religiousness A is. It is somewhat easier to describe what it is not, precisely the happiness spoken of by the ethico-religious individual.

We saw in our discussion of the ethico-religious stage that the posited eternal happiness has as at least four components: 1) happiness is a state and the highest ethical goal earnestly strived for by the individual, 2) happiness cannot be defined aesthetically, 3) happiness is felt, whilst attempting to perfectly fulfill ethical obligation, and 4) happiness is predicated upon an ethical understanding of the God-relationship.

We have learned from our discussion of Religiousness A that the eternal happiness of the Knight of Infinite Resignation differs in several key ways from the above ethico-religious conception of eternal happiness. There is an aesthetic element to the eternal happiness of Religiousness A. In the tale of the lad and the Princess from *Fear and Trembling*, it appears unproblematic that God is conceived as the force that will reunite the lovers in another realm one day. This does not appear to be the self-fulfilling happiness of the ethico-religious stage. The princess looks to be an external reward one can redeem if the individual has the right kind

¹⁵⁶ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, pp.42-43, 45, 139.

of God-relationship. Secondly, the knight of infinite resignation, due to a fair amount of skepticism accrued from practicing Socratic irony, has an understanding of the ethical's limitations and does not connect up his happiness with moral performance and the God-relationship. In religiousness A, there is thought to be a deeper understanding of happiness and the active God-relationship recollected via immanence, one that involves humility on behalf of the individual. In the Religious A stage, this personal commitment to God has more passion and meaning for the individual. This is not to say that the Religious A individual gives up on ethical pursuit. They are to perform what they sense to be their moral duties just as they did before, but everything does not hinge on this. A more direct relationship with God is built and one's ethical self-sufficiency is taken down a notch when the individual encounters god and is made aware of her personal inefficacy.¹⁵⁷

Now that we have established the equivalence of Socratic Immanence, Religiousness A, and the Knight of Infinite Resignation, all the while maintaining the ethico-religious sphere as an existential stage unique unto itself, it is time to focus our attention upon a set of questions that are paramount in importance with regard to the aim of this chapter and the dissertation as a whole. We could not effectively answer them until Religiousness A was illuminated in a more robust sense. Now we can proceed to answer the three following questions to the greatest extent our conception of Religiousness A and Infinite Resignation will allow: 1) How does the Religious Commitment of A provide inward deepening and significance?, 2) Why do suffering and guilt define our lives as significant?, and 3) How does Kierkegaard associate the above feelings with subjective truth?

¹⁵⁷ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, pp.144-147, 173.

In early chapters, we saw the credibility of the emerging Kierkegaardian theory of meaning when ethical performance transformed the individual from raw subjectivity to a subject or an ethical self. Crafting of the self occurs when one takes ethical duties seriously. A universal end is posited to anchor the self in the sea of existence; however, now we are confronted with the question of how that ethically victorious and tortured self (*see the painful pangs associated with becoming a self*) can experience qualitative improvements in individuality. It would seem that whatever account we are able to extract from Kierkegaard on these points will remain uncertain in a philosophically/objectively knowable way. Kierkegaard can illustrate a theory of meaning both poetically and philosophically, but ultimately ascending to his point of view might require one to make the same movements that Kierkegaard has personally lived out. We will reserve judgment on this matter until later, especially in regards to the issue of indirect communication. It should be noted that if Kierkegaard's account remains unprovable from a logical perspective (a fact he would relish given his efforts to preserve our freedom), the view can still be assessed in regards to internal consistency.

So as not to get overwhelmed, let us see if we can develop a cohesive conception of the meaningful individuality Kierkegaard communicates during his discussion of resignation/Religiousness A. We can make some passing remarks about the trajectory of Kierkegaard's theory of significant individuality, but a full on assessment might require patience until we have developed the entirety of Kierkegaard's view on significant individuality. We cannot know this outlook until we have exhaustively considered his view of Religiousness B (otherwise known as *Authentic Christianity* or *faith*). Right now our goal is to articulate Kierkegaard's vision of meaningful or significant individuality for those Religious A individuals.

Before we get into the matters relevant to the three enumerated questions, let us meditate upon this quote: “The rigor of the religious is that it begins with making everything more rigorous, and its relation to poetry is not as a new wishing device, not as a totally new subterfuge that poetry has not dreamed of, but as a difficulty that creates men just as war creates heroes.” What is Kierkegaard getting at here? It would be incorrect to read it as an endorsement of religion in general as necessary for creating morally heroic individuals. We have seen from our discussions of the ethical and Religiousness A, that one need not believe in God at all to possess moral virtue according to Kierkegaard. Heroism, in this respect, is not something germane to the religious attitude. It is open to atheists and theists alike. Kierkegaard is not claiming that religion leads to ethical formation; rather the rigors and struggles of the religious attitude proffer the individual with an intensification of subjective truth. Kierkegaard is inclined to speak about this intensification of subjective truth as an enlargement of the self. Speaking of subjective truth in such a way might not be tremendously helpful when contemplating an immaterial entity.

What we have seen thus far is the qualitative progression of the interior life of a resigned person over his prior subjectively true existence in ethical life. What form of despair does one exchange for the defiance seen in ethical existence? Is there a sense in which the self feels validated to a greater degree than in ethical life? What becomes of guilt consciousness? Is there something resembling temporal joy in resignation? The greatest grade of subjective truth, claims Kierkegaard, is in the commitment to a particular revealed religion. There are limitations to the subjective truth (a.k.a. meaning) in the Religious A commitment that, according to Kierkegaard, must be overcome. The question before us now is what does the gradation of self/subjective truth look like in regards to Religiousness A? When we figure this out, we will

know why this type of individuality is more significant than the individuality of existential stages we are emerging out of and why it is not the consummate form of significant individuality that humans can attain.

Thus far in our investigation we have determined in passing fashion that the individual in Religiousness A is characterized by a sort of freedom, a sort of inwardness, suffering, guilt, and even passion in resignation; however, we have yet to determine in a meaningful way how all these qualities constitute a more significant form of individuality than experienced in ethical or even aesthetic existence. We will dissect each of these traits to determine the qualitative character of the Religious A subject and in it what sense it can be viewed as a higher form of individuality, but not the highest. We will begin an in depth look at the freedom, passion, and the inwardness of the Religious A individual.

Why did we elect to examine these traits (*freedom, passion, and inwardness*) of the Religious A individuals as a group and why did we prioritize them over the qualities of guilt and suffering? There is an interconnectedness between the freedom, passion, and inwardness of the Religious A person. Collectively, they will come to be known as the constitutive factors that comprise the corresponding gradation of subjective truth for the Religious A individual. Once we explain these constitutive factors we intend to demonstrate why these factors constitute subjective truth of the A variety or what we might want to call Subjective Truth A. This section will conclude with a discussion of suffering and guilt as proper expressions and indicators of one's position in Subjective Truth A.

On Kierkegaard's view the aesthetic point of view is one where the fundamental elements of being lay in disarray. Only at the inception of ethical existence does a properly constituted subject emerge that can properly enter into the interiorization process that is

subjective truth A. Now our task is harder with the establishment of the ethical self. How can the self become more significant after the ethical progression? Why ought we to consider the evolution of the self that Religiousness A holds out before us, especially when there seems to be something blatantly contradictory about a freely established autonomous self gaining even more significance by subservience to God and the hopeful promise of an eternal happiness? Ought dependence upon presuppositions, such as God, inhibit freedom and passion, not enhance them?¹⁵⁸

Perhaps, an honest assessment concerning the autonomous ethical subject is needed. To think of it as an unlimited free self without room for subjective improvement would be a mistake. What grounds do we have for thinking that this self is limited in regards to freedom? It is true that existing ethically for Kierkegaard involves a subject, but this subject experiences limitations to its freedom that may be difficult to initially articulate. The ethical self feels guilt for its bad beginning and senses a type of despair that we pointed out in the last chapter, not to mention that it is brought beneath an ethical absolute that it slavishly follows and leads it into greater guilt when apparent ethical duties conflict (i.e. Antigone and Captain Vere).¹⁵⁹ One might contend these are not really limitations to begin with or that limitations are perfectly acceptable and that freedom need not be perfect. Kierkegaard attempts to make the case that our lives and freedom are enhanced in the movements of resignation and especially faith. So how is our freedom and with it, our significant individuality, increased in the movement of infinite resignation?

When the subject recognizes God in infinite resignation, he makes a movement away

¹⁵⁸ Dupré, Louis K., *A Dubious Heritage: Studies in the Philosophy of Religion after Kant*, pp.30, 33.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p.39.

from the universal and directly draws closer to the divine object. Through resignation, the self is liberated from the ethical universal, yet continues on with his ethical performance. The self no longer has his entire being concentrated in moral performance. So the self is now “free”, in a sense, from the universal. This is not the only kind of freedom the self enjoys in resignation.

The self enjoys a further freedom from the aesthetic contemplative level and the ethical sphere. As noted earlier, Kierkegaard believed one could not objectively demonstrate the existence of God. In resignation, all objectivity has been cut away and now the self exists in an existence sphere no longer governed by logical deduction or moral coercion. Is this something really to celebrate? Can we say that the self is somehow improved because it has this freedom from objectivity? On the surface it would seem not. The self looks morally suspect and a product of irrationalism, at the expense of getting out from underneath objectivity and asserting a new kind of individuality. What good is the self using this freedom for and why ought we to take it as a significant improvement over the subjective truth cultivated in ethical existence?¹⁶⁰

This is where Kierkegaard’s ingenious move occurs. If existence is to have truth in it, it does not consist in objective knowledge, or an unchanging commitment to the good, rather truth, subjective truth, is an interiorization process or task that is relentlessly pursued. It may strike some as odd that Kierkegaard views truth as a process. Why call such a process truth?

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., pp.40-41.

Kierkegaard deems it proper to call this truth for it involves a “true” relation to the Absolute. Subjective Truth A is a “correct” process that is connected to the penultimate truth. The word “penultimate” is used for Kierkegaard believes our existence can become truer in relation to the ultimate truth contained within Christianity. If the ethical has been left behind and the divine object cannot be objectively appropriated, then the subject must turn inward and concentrate on its own interiority. Of the two elements involved in subjective truth of this variety, the relation and the independently true divine object, the relation matters more, whereas the same cannot be said of the objectively unknowable divine. When we are denied objective truth all that is left is to create a true relation to that unknowable divine object. The question then becomes, what makes the relation “true” or correct? There appear to be two tests that confer truth upon the subjective relation: 1) Is the relation providing a qualitatively superior mode of life over a prior existence stage? Is this relation providing an amelioration of despair, an enhancement of freedom, and other such benefits which are still under investigation? And 2) is the relation progressing us towards knowing God intimately? One can look back and see we were quite far away from God in aesthetic existence. Ground was gained in ethical existence for something enduring was prioritized (the universal). In resignation, we come closer than ever to God; however, as we shall see there is further to go on this journey. If we are tempted by objective means to know the divine object, we are only being led away from the process of inwardness. In fact, the objective uncertainty of the divine object makes it possible for us to turn inward and initiate the task of resignation/subjective truth A to begin with. Had we objective knowledge of the divine object, then we would make no commitment to it. We would simply know it via reason, but because we cannot know it, we are forced to make a commitment in the face of uncertainty. When we make a commitment, as we saw with

our ethical commitment, there is a return upon the self. In the case of the ethical, a properly constituted self emerged from the inchoate mess that is aesthetic life. The religious commitment, as alluded to elsewhere, displaces some of the limitations a pure ethical self encounters with new existential benefits/challenges.

For these reasons, Kierkegaard would claim that we have progressed in regards to significant individuality, to subjective truth A, when we have made the movement of infinite resignation. Before we can entirely ascend to this account of subjective truth A as an interiorization process characterized by freedom and passion made possible by objective uncertainty and the commitment to a divine object, we have to know something more about this passion, otherwise the individuality asserted here is suspect. Why would it be a regression of significant individuality if the universal ethical were abandoned all together for aesthetic pursuits, but a progression if the self separates itself from the universal and commits itself to God? In the first case, the marriage of the eternal and temporal elements of the self would disintegrate, causing either a regression back to immediacy or a flight back into intoxicating imagination and fanciful speculation. Is this a complete divorce of constitutive elements of ethical self? It would be impossible for man to completely expel one dimension of his self, so the constitutive elements will likely, in sometimes erratic ways, still influence one another and episodically unite in the absence of firm ethical resolve. This comports with the oft observed unpredictable behavior of those still living solely for aesthetic ends.¹⁶¹

We have spoken of the supposed progression of freedom enjoyed by the Religious A individual, though our understanding of the corresponding pathos that accompanies this

¹⁶¹ Ibid., pp.45-46, 49.

freedom remains a bit opaque. This is in part due to the fact there is an inherent difficulty with communicating the interiority of the subject as it expands in subjective truth. We will address this shortly; however, we can elucidate the rough sketch of the correlating pathos that Kierkegaard cryptically gives us. Earlier in our efforts to establish the equality of Socratic Immanence/Knight of Infinite Resignation/Religiousness A, we highlighted the parallels between the interior lives of these Kierkegaardian figures, but we did not dwell on these aspects for too long. It appears that the subjective truth experienced by the Religious A individual has a positive component and a negative component. The positive component appears to be the types of freedom enjoyed in resignation and the negative component seems to be the corresponding pathos experienced. This pathos can be further broken down into three components: Resignation (*passion*), Suffering (*action/expression of the relation*), and guilt (*decisive qualification/higher expression of the relation*). Let us look at resignation first.

Those experiencing resignation, the passion for the infinite, encounter the enumerated:

1) If the eternal happiness is the individual's highest good, then the finite elements are surrendered in relation to that eternal happiness. A knight of infinite resignation lives in the finite, though his life is not in it.¹⁶² 2) An existing person directly relating to the Absolute will find some rest given her newly acquired freedoms; however, personal testimony to an anticipated future happiness cannot insure against restlessness, for there are intensifications of inseparable suffering and guilt in this existence stage.¹⁶³ 3) The commitment to the absolute telos, must be renewed throughout our finite lives, therefore resignation is a perpetual task that continually fills existence with freedom, rest, suffering, and guilt.¹⁶⁴ And 4) This passion for

¹⁶² Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, pp.391, 410.

¹⁶³ Ibid., pp.391, 394.

the infinite is not pharisaical and seeks no public encomium. Those with the passion of resignation crave the repetition of the subjective truth interiorization process or inwardness.¹⁶⁵

As mentioned, the passion for the infinite in resignation brings comfort, but it is also spiked with hardship. Renunciation is by no means easy. Being lodged in immediacy and inverting our relationship to it, causes a significant uptick in suffering. How could it not when base animality and materialism is culturally thrust upon us in our infancy and adolescence?

Overcoming worldly attachment is one of the oldest conundrums and challenging achievements for an individual. Kierkegaard says suffering is the action of inwardness and it expresses that we are in fact relating correctly to the Absolute. In summation: 1) When one experiences the suffering of pathos inwardly, one exists essentially. Inessential existence by contrast is divested in external trivialities, fantasies, and endless moral performance. Suffering is the action of inwardness, for the individual cannot completely transform himself. He is stuck in immediacy.¹⁶⁶ 2) Inwardness understands how essential suffering is and wants suffering all the more. Why? Since suffering is the essential expression of the pathos, this continued suffering ensures the individual is still relating to the eternal happiness. Suffering is the essential expression of the resignation pathos for we have seen forms of guilt, passion, and freedom in prior existence stages. Kierkegaard speaks of suffering here is as if he is introducing a radical emotion into our existential perspective.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, p.401.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p.414.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p.433.

And 3) Suffering cannot be found in eternal happiness. Suffering only happens terrestrially because the eternal happiness is realized imperfectly with an existing individual. He cannot express the relation absolutely because the finite cannot be made commensurate with the Infinite.¹⁶⁸

Should one get the hang of resignation, the individual will be continually afflicted by what Kierkegaard calls the decisive qualification of the pathos of subjectivity A (aka guilt). So again, what is distinctive about this form of guilt and how does it figure into the mix of our pathos? 1) One is guilty before God if she has not realized the correct attitude toward God.

Presumably this means guilt is felt for not sooner making the passionate commitment to God in resignation.¹⁶⁹ 2) Guilt demonstrates a relationship to eternal happiness, but joy in this cannot cancel out the guilt. The guilt will remain with us, no matter how efficient we become at renunciation. If Kierkegaard thought that guilt could be negated in resignation, we may have little reason to hear him out on the forthcoming existence stage of faith. There seems to be something peculiar to the human spirit that requires a very dramatic form of atonement in order to cancel out the accrued guilt for persisting so long without the proper prioritization of God.

Can we say anything about this peculiarity that accounts for the persistence of guilt even when God is related to directly? It has something to do with the nature of the actors in the resignation relationship. The actors are finite beings with an eternal dimension and an eternal

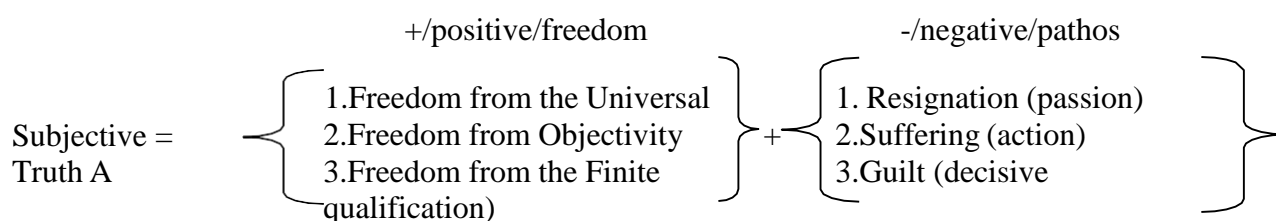
¹⁶⁷ Ibid., pp.435, 443

¹⁶⁸ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, pp.484, 452.

¹⁶⁹ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, pp.176-177.

absolute devoid of all finitude. These actors are incongruous in some way.¹⁷⁰ 3) Though guilt can be agonizing, it assures us that we are relating to our eternal happiness. Viewed correctly it can also be seen as an expression of our freedom.¹⁷¹ And 4) Kierkegaard notices a bit of a contradiction when meditating upon guilt. The religiously resigned person senses guilt the most, despite the new relationship to God and a hoped for eternal happiness. The impulse arises within the Religious A individual to place the guilt onto the one who placed him in existence or to express the guilt externally, but neither can be done; thus it is stored up on the pathos of inwardness.¹⁷² Now that we have covered the elements of freedom and pathos that constitute the interiorization process known as subjective truth A, we can perhaps step back and admire what Kierkegaard has put forward here. We might be able to conceptualize a formula for subjective truth A, which is the advancement in significant individuality that is at the crux of this chapter and the dissertation in general.

Table 3: Subjective Truth A Formula



*If one objects to the categorization of the enumerated freedoms as positive, think of their correlates: 1. Freedom to directly relate to the Absolute, 2. Freedom to cultivate Subjective Truth, 3. Freedom to leverage control over the worldly.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p.182.

¹⁷¹ Kierkegaard, Søren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, pp.527, 534.

¹⁷² Ibid, pp.528, 538-539.

The Development of Significant Individuality up to Religiousness A

Once we inhabit this Religious A existence, it clarifies itself, especially in contradistinction to thought. So as much as we may believe we have a grasp on what Religious A existence and Subjective Truth A are, we will not understand them in a profound way until we have made the movements for ourselves. Subjective truth A is an inwardness, an interiorization process that we cannot fully directly communicate to others. If that is the case, can subjective truth A be indirectly communicated adequately? Obviously Kierkegaard thinks that it can be if he judged his authorship to be worthwhile at all.¹⁷³ How can one deny that through his creative masquerades as an aesthetic, an ethicist, a knight of infinite resignation, and eventually a knight of faith as well that Kierkegaard does not reveal resonating truths about the psychological lives of each? What would count as evidence against the Kierkegaardian authorship? Would one have to find an unlimitedly happy aesthete, an ethicist that feels no bonds of despair, or a resigned knight content in this world? This seems to be a suspect form of verification. Would any such results be trustworthy? Though this author would like to believe he has simplified Kierkegaard and offered a direct rendering in each chapter of the progressions towards significant individuality (a.k.a. the gradations of subjective truth), to take this alone as the truth about the interiorization process would be a distortion according to Kierkegaard. Essential existence cannot be appropriated by thought, but something universal can be said of it nonetheless. What allows for a partial rendering of what ought to be the universal experience of subjective truth and by extension significant individuality? When one asks this question, the implication is that there is something particularly problematical about an

unfinished direct communication of universal experience. If this is a problem, it is not one that afflicts Kierkegaard alone. Any domain of philosophy that makes reference to a subject and asks its audience to search its conscience in regards to a hypothesized truth, will share this dilemma with Kierkegaard. Is Descartes' "*Cogito, ergo sum*" an analytic truth or is it one our personal experience must validate? It is not so obvious; however, Descartes' proclamation resonates with us upon increased meditation. Kierkegaard's project has objective contours which can be sketched, but only validated or rejected by the discernment of lived personal experience. How adequate is a partial depiction of supposed universal subjective experience? The answer to this question is contingent upon the degree of specificity of the partial depiction. Our project, in large part, has attempted to not only clarify Kierkegaard's own theory of personality and enhance it where a discovery is made, either after the consultation with conscience or in the search for cohesion between the texts of the authorship. One aim of this text is to make Kierkegaard's general theory of meaningful individuality that much more relevant to subjective reality. Do Kierkegaard's efforts to directly communicate something about deepening subjective truth, contradict his aforementioned position that objectivity can never fully grasp the realm of spirit? Not at all, insofar as one does not become doctrinaire and believe that spirit has been pinned down and vivisected. Kierkegaard views his efforts as ever evolving approximations of the self. What truly is significant individuality/subjective truth will remain a bit of a personal secret.

Through Kierkegaard's own efforts, an individual may be able to clarify his knotty

¹⁷³ This question raises an interesting question in turn. Could someone have more masterfully indirectly communicated subjective life than Kierkegaard? This question seems a bit arbitrary, akin to asking an individual to rank Samuel Barber's "Agnus Dei", Mozart's "Requiem in D Minor", and Handel's "Messiah" in order of greatness. Perhaps the person asking whether or not subjective life can be adequately communicated is not after whether or not someone could surpass Kierkegaard's adeptness at indirect communication, but rather does indirect communication, in the hands of the most skillful master or not, tell us anything about subjective life? To a certain extent, we would have to say "yes".

emotions via concepts; however, in a moment of confidence with a friend he can only communicate the conceptual dimension to his lived experience. One has to strike a balance between the contours one can provide and attempt not to intellectually convey all the content of each existence posture.¹⁷⁴

There are some notable limitations to Religiousness A which will be eclipsed by a yet to be discussed form of Religiousness (Religiousness B/Christianity). There are at least two limitations we can address at this moment, which will be surpassed in our discussion of Kierkegaard's conception of Christianity. First, Kierkegaard thinks the immanent concept of guilt is one that not only taints the meaningful individuality we have accrued through the movements of infinite resignation, but also the recollection of our guilt poses the real threat of our abandoning the Religious A perspective altogether. We desperately need a way to cancel out this guilt or somehow shove it onto something or someone else. It is an inhibiting factor in the transformation of self. Second, Kierkegaard believes that we do not have to settle for the subjective truth A or the significant individuality attained in the heights of immanence. With the revelation of the God in time, an unthinkable paradox, the individual is provided not only with the opportunity to negate the impinging guilt, but also an opportunity to relate to a faith object the uncertainty of which is unrivaled.¹⁷⁵ With this unique uncertainty and the relation to it, there is an unparalleled qualitative intensification of the interiorization process that is subjective truth.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Dupré, Louis K., *A Dubious Heritage: Studies in the Philosophy of Religion after Kant*, p.45.

¹⁷⁵ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, pp.559-560, 572-573.

¹⁷⁶ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, p.45.

We have noted the primary catalytic effect of despair upon the progression of self towards qualitatively superior subjectively true existence stages. The unconscious and conscious despair of aesthetic existence yielded autonomy in ethical life and the defiantly proud despair of ethical life led to increased freedom in a direct relation with the Absolute. It would stand to reason that there ought to be a despair type endemic to the Religious A perspective that simultaneously limits the Religious A individual and pushes him towards the ultimate encounter with the God in time. Kierkegaard does not appear to dwell on a form of despair experienced by the religiously immanent individual. Why he does not is a bit mystifying, for despair is such an essential feature to describing the gradations of subjective truth experienced within each existence stage and the catalytic effect of despair. Further, for Kierkegaard if man is outside of faith (*Kierkegaard means the Christian faith alone*) he cannot help but be in despair. To be outside of faith is to be in sin and to be in sin is to suffer from despair. Since our resigned knight does not know the Lord, he must be in sin and therefore despair. These concepts are mentioned in passing only to illuminate that Kierkegaard overlooked an essential feature of his account by not identifying a form of despair within Religiousness A. This is an odd oversight that requires serious attention by the community of Kierkegaard scholars. Since Kierkegaard does not name a despair type for Religiousness A, it shall be done for him. The despair of resignation will surely be constituted by the agony of recollected guilt. Guilt is the highest expression of the relationship to God and an eternal happiness in this existence stage. Recollected guilt is dreadful, but it at least assures the religious A individual that he is relating to God and allows him to take some comfort in this

movement before Religiousness B.¹⁷⁷ The other component to *Resignation Despair* has got to be a longing to be in a more perfect world, to take off the stranger's clothes and put on the proper attire, to be done with this whole earthly mess. Guilt and longing are a natural combination to make up *Resignation Despair*.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Kierkegaard, Søren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, p.554.

¹⁷⁸ We are almost at the point where we can critically evaluate all the discoveries made in this chapter, though one more thing seems worth mentioning before progressing any further in our conceptual schema of the Kierkegaardian trajectory of self. In our discussion of the aesthetic stage back in Chapter 1, we made mention of a conditional boundary zone known as Irony that Kierkegaard believed to be possessed by those with a sophisticated intellectual understanding of the demands of the ethical, who at the same time had not realized the ethical existentially.

Kierkegaard believes there is another boundary zone known as humor and it is an intellectual understanding of the truth of Christianity without an existential realization of that truth. Evans remarks that it is not entirely clear where Kierkegaard intended for us to think of the placement of humor as a boundary zone. Should it fall before or after Religiousness A? Given that we have found grounds for thinking of the ethico-religious sphere as an existence sphere in its own right, there really exist at least three places for humor; before the ethico-religious stage, before Religiousness A, and before Religiousness B. We have made note of this and have incorporated it into the cartography of the self presented in the introductory chapter (Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, pp.185-186, 196.).

Some may wonder why Humor is not an appropriate boundary zone at every existence stage. Why limit one's possession of it to the moments before different types of religious movements. The reason one might want to keep humor associated specifically with the different types of religiousness is because Kierkegaard also seems to claim that humor is mixed into the different existential realizations of religious attitudes. Whether one is practicing ethico-religiousness, Religiousness A, or faith in Christianity difficulties are sure to be experienced in some form of struggle. Kierkegaard thinks that humor is a temporary way out, an existence posture we inhabit or flee to, when our comic sense detects that all the sacrifice, suffering, and guilt appears to be absolute lunacy, especially when we feel we will never get our temporal efforts together in order to achieve the infinite goal of eternal happiness. Since humor is something resorted to even within types of religious existential realizations, it does not seem to be appropriate to include it as a possibility before an ethics without God or intermixed with the immediacy of the aesthetic level (unless we are dealing with an intellectual aesthete that has paradoxical interest in Christian theological philosophy without any corresponding commitment). Presumably irony adequately describes the transition between the aesthetic and the ethical stages (Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, pp. 201-202, 205.)

Concluding Questions and Ruminations

Throughout this discussion of Religiousness A a menagerie of questions has emerged without immediately apparent answers. Also, no doubt there are serious concerns with the adequacy of Kierkegaard's account of the immanent existence sphere of resignation. Let us first address the questions and critiques compiled as we progressed through our discussion and then close with a thorough evaluation of the description of Religiousness A.

First, is a question concerning the number of existential stages that could be considered immanent in nature. The term immanence was first brought up in this chapter and as we can recall it refers to the view that God can be found within the individual, rather than being introduced from without. If we are to retain this definition and maintain that the ethico-religious stage is an existence stage all its own, then we will have to allow for at least two immanent existence stages: the ethico-religious and Religiousness A. This really should not be too much of a surprise, since Kierkegaard often remarks how the Socratic relationship is the height of religiousness outside of Christianity. Such musings would provide for there to be gradations of immanence. The ethico-religious stage would be a lower form of immanence within the larger set defined as immanent. Since God is internally discerned and postulated as the fount of moral obligation in the ethico-religious stage, the term "immanent" appropriately applies to this stage. The need to appoint God as divine judge arises from a pang and not an objective moral proof.

Second, there may have been some confusion concerning our discussion of irony within our review of Socratic Immanence. Did we not discuss irony before and determine it to be a conditional boundary zone between the aesthetic life and ethical life? How can it be that irony

is re-emerging in our conversation concerning the religious, especially when we spoke of Irony earlier as an intellectual understanding of the ethical that goes unrealized existentially? The confusion can be cleared up in light of a review of Kierkegaard's dissertation *The Concept of Irony*. Kierkegaard thinks there are at least two forms of Irony; the irony employed by German Romantics and Socratic Irony. They do not necessarily differ in form, but are employed with divergent intentions. The German Romantics, Kierkegaard believed, used irony to undermine the ethical and justify their nihilistic/hedonistic vision, whereas Socrates used irony for a different end. On Kierkegaard's interpretation of Socratic irony, Socrates properly employed irony with the intention of moving beyond the ethical and drawing closer to God. Socrates used irony to demonstrate our limitations in conceiving the good, earning immortality, and objectively conceiving of anything positive. Via irony, one becomes awakened to the necessity of the direct subjective relation to the Absolute. Indeed, these are very different intentions and warrant a distinction between the two forms of irony.

Third, given our presentation of how the Knight of Infinite Resignation is cut away from objectivity, the concern about whether or not existence stages can be skipped necessarily comes to the forefront. We specifically would like to know if ethical life is necessary in order to experience religious life. It would seem plausible that we can bypass ethical life and progress from the aesthetic straight to the religious. Evans adamantly disagrees that this is permissible on Kierkegaard's account. Why? Let us examine this quotation to see if we can better understand his objection:

without the presence of the ethical the religious life is reduced to, and confused with, this aesthetic life. The religious life, though not reducible to the ethical life, is nevertheless inseparable from it. Religious existence is impossible without ethical existence, though ethical existence of a sort is possible apart from a religious existence.¹⁷⁹

There are several reasons for this. First, there has to be the initial concern that if the individual has not passed through the ethical stage, then there has not been the proper formation of an existential self in the first place. As Kierkegaard sees it, the ultimate purpose of the ethical stage is to coordinate the elements of the pre-moral self, so a steady and enduring subject can emerge and progress towards the experience of meaningful individuality. Without an ethically existing self, it really makes little sense to then begin speaking of an interiorization process of self that enriches its individuality. Given Kierkegaard's comments, it appears the primary nature of religious commitment is to fuel the development of subjective truth. Subjective truth arises in the ethical stage as well, but only after the subject has been born and baptized in ethical commitment. There seems to be something especially stabilizing in ethical commitment.

Collapse appears inevitable if ethical life is bypassed altogether. Second, if one is to really grasp she is absolutely nothing without God and humble herself before Him, it appears necessary for an individual to spend time defiantly admiring her moral autonomy, only to find out the error of this miscalculation. Is humility even possible if one has not cultivated an immoral narcissism and pride concerning one's ethical performance? If humility is going to be an essential ingredient in the process of subjective truth A, we must descend from great heights. Third and perhaps lastly, if the ethical life is not intact before a turn to religion, religion, like Kierkegaard warned, becomes some passing amusement that resembles the ephemeral fancies of aesthetic life. Religion would not be unlike good theater that entertains the imagination for a short time with story and song, yet leaving the individual relatively

¹⁷⁹ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, p.139.

unchanged and restlessly searching for the next pleasure to sooth a persistent pang of despair.

This would likely explain why we see such tremendous hypocrisy amongst purported “religious” people. Why does this follow? It goes back to what was said earlier about the role ethical life has in the stabilization and the coordination of the elements of self. Without this mold imposed upon the pre-moral self, it remains wild, erratic, and only momentarily attentive to a higher good.

The subjective truth A equation formulated in this chapter allows for a fuller understanding of how sought for, yet unattained objective certainty affects the qualitative character of resigned subjective life. If God were objectively knowable and we could turn inward still, would that inward turn suffer a loss of significant individuality as the result of God’s objective knowableness? In other words, must we be uncertain of God’s existence in order to have the pathos of subjective truth A? Would there be some diminishment of the freedom experienced and passion felt, if we could know Him by objective means?

Let us examine freedom first. In our formulation of subjective truth we spoke of there being two components to it. A positive component of freedom was accentuated by a negative component of pathos. Both freedom and pathos could be broken down into three species. The types of freedom experienced in subjective truth A were freedom from the universal, freedom from objectivity, and freedom from the finite. If we objectively knew God, it would appear that we would not have this freedom from objectivity in our formula for subjective truth A. Let us have a closer look. What does it mean to lose the freedom from objectivity? Is it really such a loss that it makes the interior experience of the individual inferior? Is there not some offsetting gain that would enrich our interior life should God’s existence no longer be uncertain? What are we really losing when we lose the freedom from objectivity? When we

speak of our freedom from objectivity, the idea here seems to be that we make the decision to believe in God under no intellectual duress. We are not bullied or coerced into it. It is a commitment we make all on our own. It is personal and not shared universally. If God is proved objectively, it would seem that God becomes a fact of the universe, perhaps as an essential and foundational fact as the law of gravitation or any other physical law. Under this scenario, we would be a crazy person if we did not believe in God. Not believing in God would be as automatic as believing that we will not float away from moment to moment. We would not make a personal commitment to this. What appears to be Kierkegaard's worry here is that if God could be demonstrated, then we wouldn't make a commitment to Him. We would take Him for granted, just as we do with the law of gravitation, so when we lose the freedom from objectivity; we pretty much lose the entire relationship to God. One could make the case that the freedom from objectivity, not only makes subjective truth A better, but that it makes it possible at all.

Is this convincing for why God must remain objectively unknowable on Kierkegaard's account? It doesn't seem convincing for this reason. Should God be proven, it does not follow that all individuals will take Him for granted, so long as we don't confuse intellectual knowledge of God with a relationship with God. If one is assured of God, then one can again leave the proofs behind and begin forming the right relation to God, which involves resignation, suffering, and guilt. Would objectively demonstrating God change these itemized variables of the subjective truth A equation? If the passion of resignation is in large part conceived as rest and a love of that which provides such solace, how is it impacted by objective proof? The rest might mean less to the individual if he did not have to struggle with God's existence; however, if God's existence is assured (*and there is no urgency to figure out whether or not God exists*

for him) perhaps the individual spends more time in immediacy being tormented by materiality. Extending the time in immediacy may make the direct movement to God equally consoling, even if God's existence has been proved. There does not seem to be an obvious reason to think that the passion of resignation will alter significantly in light of the objective discovery of God.

What about the factor of suffering? Suffering results from the cleaving of ourselves from the aesthetic and the ethical universal. Is that suffering minimized if we know God exists in advance? Possibly, if the domain of suffering also includes the anguish of not knowing if what we are doing ultimately matters. If we are uncertain that we are connecting with God, might one anguish more than the person who objectively knows God exists? It seems likely. The worry that our efforts are in vain might afflict us. Does the person who is objectively certain of God experience an offsetting uptick of suffering? It is hard to see how. What about guilt? The persons who know God objectively have got to experience it more intensely for they were gifted with knowledge of God from the start and yet they persisted in vanities. In a universe where God is objectively unknowable, we can be a little easier on ourselves. Does the uptick in guilt offset the downtick in suffering? Perhaps, but it is hard to say with certainty since we are dealing with existential emotions that resist metrics. For all intents and purposes, the pathos of resignation, regardless of universe (*be God objectively calculable or not*), looks very similar if not equatable. We can still make a personal commitment to God that differs from accepting his existence as demonstrably true. This is the personal and non-objective commitment of infinite resignation, which induces the interiorization process of subjective truth A. We can still go about forming the right or subjectively true relation to Him, even if we believe His existence has been comfortably objectively proven. So what does this tell us about how freedom from objectivity figures into our account of subjective truth A? Is it inessential? It almost appears

that we do not lose our freedom from objectivity should God be proved. In either case, whether God is knowable or not, we leave the proofs behind and choose to form the right relation to God that becomes subjective truth A. Why is the “right” relation to God subjective, rather than objective? It comes down to what is most efficacious for solving existential problems. The objective relation to God is a) an intellectual relation that is b) rationally unattainable and c) even if it did obtain would not by itself solve any of the problems humans experience in regards to despair. The subjective relation is the right relation for it abandons the intellectual pursuit and drives out existential demons. The Buddhist parable of the poison arrow is oddly relevant here.¹⁸⁰ We don’t enjoy the freedom from objectivity if we try to do two things at once, specifically work on our relationship to God and continually check on the proofs for God’s existence to see if enough evidence or criticism has piled up. The other species of freedom do not seem to be affected by God becoming objectively knowable. This claim needs to be substantiated. What are the remaining forms of freedom? They are the freedom from the

¹⁸⁰ “It’s just as if a man were wounded with an arrow thickly smeared with poison. His friends & companions, kinsmen & relatives would provide him with a surgeon, and the man would say, ‘I won’t have this arrow removed until I know whether the man who wounded me was a noble warrior, a priest, a merchant, or a worker.’ He would say, ‘I won’t have this arrow removed until I know the given name & clan name of the man who wounded me... until I know whether he was tall, medium, or short... until I know whether he was dark, ruddy-brown, or golden-colored... until I know his home village, town, or city... until I know whether the bow with which I was wounded was a long bow or a crossbow... until I know whether the bowstring with which I was wounded was fiber, bamboo threads, sinew, hemp, or bark... until I know whether the shaft with which I was wounded was wild or cultivated... until I know whether the feathers of the shaft with which I was wounded were those of a vulture, a stork, a hawk, a peacock, or another bird... until I know whether the shaft with which I was wounded was bound with the sinew of an ox, a water buffalo, a langur, or a monkey.’ He would say, ‘I won’t have this arrow removed until I know whether the shaft with which I was wounded was that of a common arrow, a curved arrow, a barbed, a calf-toothed, or an oleander arrow.’ The man would die and those things would still remain unknown to him.” - “Cula-Malunkya Sutta: The Shorter Instructions to Malunkya (MN 63)” Chroniker Press. Book, *Epitome of the Pali Canon* (Place of Publication Not Identified: Lulu Com, 2012), 110.

universal and the freedom from the finite. The freedom from the universal is the freedom from total determination by ethical decree. In freedom from the universal, the individual finds new life by staking existence on a personal relationship with the divine, not an ethos. The freedom from the finite, once again, is mastery over conditioning immediacy. If God's existence is proven, something we are likely interested in after we sense the futility of moral effort and the postulation of God as celestial lawgiver and enforcer, does our freedom from the universal increase or decrease? In order for the freedom from the universal to decrease, proof of God would have to carry with it a moral theology as well, specifically that virtue by itself leads us heavenward and that the subjective commitment is extraneous. These now certain truths might return us to our divinely ordered Sisyphean task. Since we are not considering that possibility, only that God's existence alone is proven, what are we to make of freedom from the universal? If the certainty of God is obvious, then the passion for God remains at the forefront and the nature of moral work is a secondary priority. It is hard to see ourselves reverting to the idolatry of the ethical and the ethical performer, when God's existence is common knowledge. The freedom from the universal remains the same in infinite resignation even should God be demonstrated. What about the freedom from the finite? The only way the inferior realm of materiality could overwhelm, would be if certainty in God's existence automatically led to religious malaise and indolence. That is a possibility; however, it was shown above to not be a necessity since objective certainty need not dictate the decision to develop the further subjective relationship.

If freedom does not seem to suffer a setback as the result of God being objectively knowable, then is there another part of the equation that noticeably regresses, therefore animating Kierkegaard's strong stance against divine objective certainty? Let us re-consider

whether or not the passion of resignation would somehow be different. When we resign, we draw closer to God, continue to perform ethically, and hope that all we desired in this world, even if it is aesthetically defined, is rewarded to us with God in eternity one day. It is a pious hope. Should God be revealed as a fact to us, then it might not be fair to call this a hoped for conclusion anymore, rather it would be a certainty to us, so long as we go about cultivating a relationship with God. If God is certain, then our place in eternity is certain should we relate correctly. If one knows he can earn his spot in eternity, that it is practically guaranteed and no longer a hope, how does this affect the existential pathos? Does relating to God become like some passionless overture, akin to doing just enough to stay in the good graces of a wealthy benefactor, so that a future inheritance is not forfeited? This has to be a real concern and would seem to be the real reason why God must remain objectively uncertain for Kierkegaard.

Knowing God objectively does not necessarily prevent the inward turn. Knowing God objectively does not appear to negate the freedoms detailed in our equation, but if God and our lot are known in advance it is the passion that plummets. We can hardly say that a life has become more significant when the passion has been drained away. Further, this passionless God-relationship, despite having the enumerated freedoms, will in time resemble indentured servitude. We do not intrinsically act out of the love of God, as much as we do the fear that a bounty may be denied or a wrath imposed. This revelation more clearly demonstrates the interconnectivity of pathos and freedom. As the passion nosedives, so does the sense of freedom.

Now that we have addressed nagging concerns, we can focus our attention on whether or not Kierkegaard adequately describes the subjectivity and qualitative characteristics of Religiousness A. Our first question deals with the robustness of the Religiousness A account.

Is it possible that Kierkegaard was not thorough enough? Did he leave out some obvious features of Religiousness A? Kierkegaard repetitiously reminds us of the passion of resignation and its expressions in suffering and guilt. We hear a little about the corresponding freedoms, but it comes off as a remarkably bleak account, that can be faulted for not persuading enough individuals to entertain the religious life. We are told that the generally religious person is not incredibly bothered with suffering and guilt, for it only assures her that she is relating to the eternal. Presumably something must be experienced in this passion of resignation, this harmony with the absolute that adds real warmth and color to our lives. What might these things be?

Here are a couple candidates. It is a little odd that in all this talk of the religious life, Kierkegaard speaks little of the role of prayer. If the point of resignation is to bring our finite consciousness in line with the infinite, then prayer would seem to be a pretty essential element in the passion mix. Perhaps, prayer is an extraneous spiritual activity extraneous within resignation, but it is hard to see how this is possible (*even Socrates infrequently prayed*).¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Socrates: Shouldn't we pray to the gods here before going?

Phaedrus: Yes, surely.

Socrates: Dear Pan and ye other gods who dwell here, grant that I become beautiful within, and that my worldly belongings be in accord with my inner self. May I consider the wise man rich and have only as much gold as a moderate man can carry and use. Is there anything else we need, Phaedrus? For me our prayer was said with due measure.

Phaedrus: Make it a prayer for me, too. Friends have things in common. Socrates: Let's be going. (279b4-279c7)

Stephen Scully, *Plato's Phaedrus: A Translation with Notes, Glossary, Appendices, Interpretive Essay and Introduction* (Newburyport, MA: Focus, 2003).

If all objectivity is cut away, can a mere sense of the divine, as a fact of our consciousness, be enough to sustain us through all the supposed agony involved in the extrication from this realm and the reliance upon a future one? Would not prayer, in some way, act as a form of assurance as we perpetuate the interiorization process of subjective truth A? How else does one draw directly before God if not through prayer? Does shouting out from mountaintops and “mindfulness” do the trick? Though the resigned individual may do these things, such activities likely strike us as behaviors of people still desperately searching for God. Prayer ought to be one of the most effective modes for stirring our passion for the eternal. Similarly, Kierkegaard oddly does not speak much of how contemplating the divine, of seeing Him as the ground of all being affects the wonder with which we see the world. Perhaps, this is included in his claims that the commitment to the absolute brings about humility, for we begin to understand our proper place before God. One could go on to identify other dimensions and aspects of the passion of resignation, such as trust and hope. Why Kierkegaard does not say something more about these potential constitutive elements of the resignation’s passion remains a bit mysterious. It might just be the case that Kierkegaard’s gloomy disposition downplays these uplifting elements and fixates on the suffering and guilt of the pathos. Throughout Kierkegaard’s discussion of resignation and our own reflection upon the term “resignation”, there is an apparent confidence in our knowledge of what is meant here, but has Kierkegaard offered us a clear enough portrait of what it means to resign finite ends for the absolute telos? What do we know about resignation? We know it involves a dependence on God, a relocation of our expected happiness to another and future realm, a divestment of interest in things of this world, and a sense of alienation. The metaphor of walking around in a stranger’s clothes comes to mind again. We are not perform in the finite,

but our being and happiness is not in it. It sounds like we would be in a supposed to be ascetics. We continue to mode of otherworldly detachment. The concern here is that the way Kierkegaard defines Religiousness A would eliminate our enjoyment of seemingly harmless and very wonderful temporal goods. If we are knights of infinite resignation, can we not become enraptured by the occasional football game or lose ourselves in the arts or even fall in love with another person? Are our lives somehow made less significant or meaningful from the infinite resignation perspective, should we prioritize some of these earthly goods and become immersed in them? Must we be passionless observers of them in order to maintain our God-relationship and the progression of subjectivity? If the answer is yes, does there not seem to be something skewed with the account?

Maybe some clarity can be shed on this concern if we ask ourselves how Kierkegaard thinks we ought not to relate to these identified temporal enjoyments. The situations Kierkegaard would want us to avoid would involve feeling sincere despair should they be frustrated. If our happiness is bound up in the love of another, the performance of a sports team, or the moods of a symphony, these are clues that we have not prioritized the right things and related properly to an eternal happiness. Presumably then, the knight of infinite resignation can participate in all of these events and relationships as well, but his existence is not decimated should they leave him or let him down. Does this not mean that the knight of infinite resignation feels no sorrow when things go in an unanticipated direction? The knight definitely feels pangs and perhaps these would best be classified under the umbrella of suffering, of ripping ourselves from immediacy and focusing on the God-relationship.

Throughout our conversation concerning Religiousness A/resignation, freedom and its varieties have surfaced time and again, especially during our articulation of a conceptual

formula for subjectivity and the discussion surrounding whether or not the objective knowledge of God would affect the freedom experienced in Religiousness A. Some may argue that what we have preoccupied ourselves with is not freedom at all; rather freedom ought to be thought of more in metaphysical terms or political terms. How can Kierkegaard articulate general guidelines for how the self attains increasing significance or subjectivity, which is constituted by freedom and pathos, before addressing these types of freedom? Kierkegaard shies away from speaking about metaphysical freedom (*a.k.a. freedom from God's predestined plan or the universe's physical laws*) for it probably falls into the category of unknowable speculative knowledge, a diversion from our essential existence and as for political freedom, it probably does little to even begin considering that question until we have determined freedom means in an existential context. One may ask if political freedom is a concern of someone within the ethical stage? No doubt Kierkegaard believes individuals can become ethically inspired and aspired to all sorts of political liberation movements, but for Kierkegaard such an arc would be a diversion.

Kierkegaard skirts any constructive conversations concerning a forthcoming just state.¹⁸² So, this is why Kierkegaard trained his attention on what probably is best described as existential or subjective freedom. If we concern ourselves with only this variety of freedom, Kierkegaard has provided us with enough of a sketch to think that there is an increase in subjective freedom through and up to every existential phase thus far, though we know there is

¹⁸² The question then becomes, "When is it appropriate to discuss political freedom on Kierkegaard's paradigm?" Given that Kierkegaard articulates a second ethics after consideration of the Christian faith, it would be fitting to entertain political freedom there. The second ethics layers over the first ethics and perhaps a political freedom conversation can be derived from this ultimate ethics. Also, it might make sense to discuss what political freedom looks like at the conclusion of Kierkegaard's existential project, so we can see what institutions best suit the cultivation of subjective truth.

something limiting about the freedom experienced in Religiousness A. An existential phase with increased subjectivity, meaning more freedom and more pathos, awaits a discussion.

One might wonder if there is something a little excessive in regards to Kierkegaard's account of Religiousness A. Why is positing an absolute, such as God, not enough? Why must the further idea be posited that we will enjoy an eternal happiness? This is a warranted question because we have supposedly understood the difficulties endemic to the ethico-religious stage and its intimated Kantian moral religiousness, also it would seem that the progression of significant individuality requires a God-relationship, not necessarily the idea that we will live on with Him in some respect after we are done with this mortal coil. If Kierkegaard's account is one that is concerned primarily with enriched subjectivity of the temporal self, what can we infer about the coupling of God and immortality? The concern here is that if immortality were taken off the table, the account of significant individuality would not be strong enough for anyone to make the movements of resignation. Why would one rescind the immediacy of this life if there is not a promised future life, where all is perfected? It is the preservation of life and not the pursuit of meaningful individuality that is drawing the individual closer to God (*at least initially*). How big a problem is this? It need not be too large a scandal if it is natural for individuals to conceive of God and eternal happiness with Him, only then to find that in the personal commitment of infinite resignation one experiences a progression of meaningful individuality over prior existence stages. Perhaps, this is missing the point. There seems to be something contradictory in the account in general. If it is pivotal for Kierkegaard that God remain unknowable, so that individuals freely choose Him and have a passionate God-relationship, there appears to be something coercive about keeping an eternal reward in his discussion of religiousness. Actually, what we are beginning to see evolve here in the absence

of speculative proofs for the existence of God are other kinds of arguments for God and then the further acceptance of Christ. These arguments would all take on a more sophisticated form of *“A personal relationship with God (alleviates despair/achieves significant individuality/insures salvation), therefore God (a specific type of God) is real”*. Perhaps these are not arguments in the way that we conventionally conceive of arguments, but they do appear to have psychological or existential force. This may not mean very much considering how we typically evaluate arguments. It might just be the case that these “arguments” are persuasive and yet preserve the passion and freedom that make up the subjectivity of meaningful individuality.

Thus concludes our analytical remarks on the adequacy of Kierkegaard’s description of Religiousness A. We have raised legitimate concerns about how Kierkegaard overlooks dimensions to Religious life in favor of others and how there could be real conceptual problems involved in an emerging line of subjective argumentation for the Religious life. On balance, is Kierkegaard’s conception of the Religious life in general and significant individuality highly implausible? In a sense it does seem rather plausible, even if our academic-philosophical scruples will not allow us to make a personal commitment to a God that is unknowable. The personal commitment may not even be a philosophical matter. Proper philosophical argument does not shove us into God’s vicinity, but to claim there is no philosophy involved in the choice presupposes a very specific form of legitimate philosophy. The uncertain choice cannot really be undertaken unless one discerns the limits of philosophy to begin with (a philosophical matter!). The decision may not be explicitly philosophical, but is made either with the help or hindrance of philosophy. Are there other issues that may be troubling us about the account of significant individuality, thus far? Undoubtedly one of the persistent concerns of this account is going to take on the following form. An individual may find a superior level of meaningful

individuality in this sort of existence over others; however, how is it possible to assert that this form of significance outmatches other sources from which we draw meaning? Kierkegaard may indeed be showing us how we attain significant individuality, but is religious life more of a well-spring of meaning than what we gain in family life, romantic love, meaningful work and industry, social change, or art? In the next chapter, we will try to understand how the movements and limitations of resignation set up a qualitatively superior form of subjective truth intimately associated with a certain form of Christianity.

CHAPTER 4

RELIGIOUSNESS B

Thus do the gods justify the life of man: they themselves live it—
 the only satisfactory theodicy!¹⁸³
 - Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*

Kierkegaard presents a further form of religiousness, Religiousness B, which he crowns as the consummate form of religious attitude. Kierkegaard holds that Religiousness B overcomes the limitations of religiousness A. Religiousness B revolves around the paradoxical representation of God as a god-man. The paradox cannot be grasped by reason. We saw in the previous chapter that the resignation of religiousness A involves renouncing everything by my own strength and finding peace in the pain. Here, in the step beyond resignation, Kierkegaard says we qualitatively further our essential individuality by embracing the absurdity of the paradox. Kierkegaard claims that by staking our faith on the paradox of the God-man, our selves are given further essential meaning by the passions associated with such a leap of faith. A clarification is warranted. The way in which we have spoken of faith thus far in this chapter would make it seem that, for Kierkegaard, faith is a type of movement endemic in all existential commitments. That would be a misrepresentation. Kierkegaard equates true faith with the process of cultivating meaning in passionate Christian commitment (a.k.a. Religiousness B).

¹⁸³ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*. (New York: Modern Library Edition, 1992), p.43.

Kierkegaard thinks the flagrant incomprehensibility of the Incarnation leads to even greater objective uncertainty that we must overcome by setting aside our understanding and trusting belief in the paradox, God will return everything to us, including our earthly happiness. In short, Kierkegaard posits that believing the paradox is essential to our temporal and eternal happiness and develops greater essential inwardness than the movements made by the knight of infinite resignation.

Upon taking the leap via acceptance of the paradox, Kierkegaard tells us that a new passion or cognizance of sin is felt. What precisely is sin as Kierkegaard understands it and what kind of transformative power does it have when we recognize it via the Incarnation? The answer to this question emerges in time.

Kierkegaard thinks the promise of temporal and eternal happiness figures prominently in Religiousness B; however, it is unclear what constitutive role happiness plays in subjective truth, how Kierkegaard defines happiness, and if it is ever really attained via the leap of faith. To begin with, it is worth pointing out the factors that might call into question Christianity's privileged status as the consummate religion. Kierkegaard frequently identifies Abraham as having faith for being prepared to sacrifice Isaac at God's request, despite the obvious ethical prohibition against doing so. If one can have faith and inhabit Religiousness B as Abraham appears to do, must we conclude that the Incarnation is inessential to Religiousness B?¹⁸⁴ It would seem that by including Abraham as a knight of faith, Kierkegaard has undermined the

¹⁸⁴ As we shall see, Kierkegaard thinks we can employ the term faith to other scenarios. For instance, I can have faith in science or moral faith; however, it is a particular relationship to the faith object of Christianity that provides the ultimate furtherance of significant individuality. And for this reason, Kierkegaard has this form of faith in mind when he writes extensively on this matter.

supposed special status of the Incarnation and Christianity.¹⁸⁵ If the Incarnation is inessential, does that mean any paradox will do and non-Christian faiths replete with paradoxes can precipitate just as much significant individuality as Christianity or perhaps even more?¹⁸⁶

Throughout our discussion, we will witness why Kierkegaard saw the distinguishing figure of Christianity, that of God becoming an individual being to be so important. The following considerations play central roles: 1) If God was going to radically redefine His relationship to individuals within creation, He had to present Himself as the indissoluble paradox of the divine in human flesh, 2) By taking the form of a human individual, God Himself emphasizes the importance of individual embodiment over collectivist forces and the desire for disembodied objective being, 3) Individual embodiment was the only way, though it is mysterious, that God could properly alert our attention to the proper conception of sin-consciousness, and 4) The constitution of the human being is a synthesis of eternal and temporal parts. In becoming an individual, a synthesis of the infinite and finite, individual humans could subjectively relate to a divine nature similar to themselves, an impossibility without individual embodiment.

A Blueprint

The questions posed here are tremendously complex. Kierkegaard touches on all the mentioned themes to varying degrees in nearly every book of his authorship, providing them different emphasises in each work. Before we can properly engage these questions, we need a

¹⁸⁵ Evans, C.S., "Is Kierkegaard an Irrationalist? Reason, Paradox, and Faith", *Religious Studies* 25, no. 3, (1989): 348, 353-354.

¹⁸⁶ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, p.59.

prism or a blueprint to orient us. The closest thing to such that Kierkegaard provides us is a framework laid out in *The Philosophical Fragments*. In this slim book we experience some of Kierkegaard's most rigorous and concise philosophical writing. Below, nearly all of Kierkegaard's "arguments" from this book have been schematized in the order they appear (barring the ones concerning proof of God's existence, which we discussed in the last chapter). Many individuals will find these arguments to be lacking because they require presuppositions or stipulations that might not meet their justificatory standards. The fair-minded approach would be to grant his arguments their assumptions and see if there is real connectivity between what one begins with and what follows.

In the section of the *Philosophical Fragments* entitled "Thought-Project", Johannes Climacus begins by asking if the truth can be learned, summoning up the issue that plagued Socrates in the *Meno*: "For what a man knows he cannot seek, since he knows it; and what he does not know he cannot seek, since he does not even know for what to seek"¹⁸⁷ Socrates resolves the issue by claiming learning is a form of recollection and the highest relationship human beings can have with one another is one of midwifery. Socrates could not bring truth to an individual, he could only hope to provoke them towards self-knowledge or the immanent knowledge implanted within them via God. Thus, if any further truth is to be brought to man, it cannot be another man's responsibility.¹⁸⁸ Socrates showed that the truth rested in me from all eternity. I simply did not know it. Therefore, the teaching of any philosophers, be they Socrates or Prodicus, can only be of historical interest. The truth comes from within, not without.¹⁸⁹

In section B, Kierkegaard via Johannes Climacus asks, "What if the historical moment mattered and something changed the midwifery relationship? What if this monumental happening was the eternal coming into existence?" So, now Johannes Climacus re-examines

the question of whether or not the truth can be learned. In the preceding state, Socrates solved the disjunct in learning by deeming learning recollection; however, if a moment is going to have decisive significance, the seeker up until that point must not be in possession of the truth. This contradicts the Socratic explanation by placing the seeker outside of truth/dwelling in untruth. Only when dwelling in truth can Socratic midwifery be practiced. Thus, reminding the individual is pointless since he cannot recall what he does not possess.¹⁹⁰

It should be noted that Kierkegaard is once again playing fast and loose with the terms truth and untruth. Generally, Kierkegaard sees the self evolving towards greater qualitative gradations of truth. The self experiences subjective truth of the highest variety in Christian faith. The way Kierkegaard speaks here in the *Philosophical Fragments* is such that it appears to negate everything we have written about the value of existence stages prior to the embrace of Christianity. To think this would be a mistake. What Kierkegaard is attempting to say here, is that though those existential stages may have temporal value for the attainment of individual significance, from an eternal perspective they remain in a state of apostasy. Transitioning into faith via a new kind of teacher, a non-socratic teacher, brings with it not only temporal goods in regards to subjective truth, but also soteriological effects. That is why Kierkegaard feels comfortable speaking of this existential domain as Truth and prior domains as untruth, even though there are progressions towards the subjectively true relationship in ethical existence and infinite resignation.

¹⁸⁷ Kierkegaard, Soren, *The Philosophical Fragments*, p.11.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p.11.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., pp.12-13.

In this alternative scenario, the teacher cannot remind the learner for the learner is in untruth.

What can the teacher do? Two things: a) the teacher brings the truth b) the teacher brings the condition for understanding the truth (the learner could Socratically recollect the truth if he possessed the condition). Since the learner must be given the condition and is consequently transformed, the teacher is something more. No human being can transform another. Thus, this is a done by the God. So man has been transformed and given the condition to understand the truth. For some reason, man is/was deprived of this condition. Why? It would be a contradiction for God to deprive him of it (God is by definition that which brings the condition). This cannot be the result of an accident for something inferior (an accident) cannot vanquish the superior (the condition). An accident is less than the condition. Thus, the only conclusion is that he (the learner in untruth), himself, is responsible for being deprived of the condition. Therefore, the teacher/god prompts the learner to recognize that he is in untruth via self-sabotage. This is how the state of sin is to be defined.¹⁹¹ More of Kierkegaard's conception of sin will be addressed in this section and throughout the chapter, but it is worth noting that Kierkegaard has a golden opportunity to say something of original sin here. How exactly does man engage in self- sabotage? Is this proclivity for self-sabotage transmitted biologically or spiritually? Does each generation and individual experience their own Edenic fall apart from sins of our forefathers and foremothers? Something to keep in mind as we progress.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., pp.13-14.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p.15.

If man could will that he be in truth again and out of error, then it should happen instantaneously, but this does not happen. Man cannot set himself free. Man becomes a slave to unfreedom/untruth. It only becomes harder and harder to break free from untruth. This is why the moment is so decisive. Therefore, the teacher who gives the condition and the truth is: a) a savior, for he saves the learner from unfreedom/himself, b) a deliverer from self-imprisonment, c) a reconciler, for he takes away the wrath, incurred in untruth/sin, and d) unforgettable.¹⁹² Though a teacher in the traditional sense of the word may be able to set one free from rational and even ethical error, only Christ as the Incarnation can set us free from sin. No mortal can do this.

When the learner receives the condition and the truth he does not become a person, since he already is that. Prior to encountering THE teacher, we saw the learner departed from the truth and was living in untruth. Whilst undergoing conversion, the learner recognizes that it is his own fault for being in untruth and experiences sorrow/the feeling of repentance for dwelling so long in this state. Thus, the learner is reborn when he receives the condition and the truth. To be reborn is akin to the change from “not to be” to “to be”. In Socratic midwifery, the learner discovers everything within and owes no human anything; however, in this scenario the learner owes the divine teacher everything. The rebirth would not be possible without the teacher.¹⁹³

Only the person who has undergone rebirth/conversion can judge it. One who has not undergone it is not in the position to judge. The person in untruth may think he understands

¹⁹² Ibid., p.17.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p.19.

it all, but can easily be reduced to aporia by Socrates. The moment is of decisive significance because the learner realizes that his previous state was one of “not to be”. If it had been one of “to be”, the moment would not have decisive significance.¹⁹⁴

Under Socratic midwifery, the pupil and the teacher use the occasion to understand themselves and owe each other nothing.¹⁹⁵ The god, differs from a teacher such as Socrates, for the god does not need the encounter with the pupil to learn something about Himself. So, why does the god make the appearance? The god is not moved by need because he moves himself. Thus, the god is moved by love. The love is for the learner, so that the different can be equal and there can be understanding.¹⁹⁶ It is an unhappy love because the learner and the god are unequal. Their inequality makes it so they cannot understand one another. It is hard for the god to make himself understood without destroying that which is different. It is hardest on the god for he understands the misunderstanding.¹⁹⁷

What does it mean for the god to love the learner? This love appears to be motivated by the intention to make the learner equal. Can the god really make the learner equivalent to Himself? Of course not, otherwise the god would no longer be considered the god! So if the god does not aim to make the learner identical with Himself, he must love to make the learner equivalent in a particular regard. In what way could this be? If the god is without sin, he aims to increase the learner’s likeness to Himself by removing sin. Removing sin ought to remove death as well. Presumably, it is the stain of sin which prevents unification with the eternal being and God, via the Incarnation, has offered a purification mechanism that allows for co-existent immortality. In these two respects, the learner is made equivalent to the god.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., pp.20-21.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p.24.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p.25.

The unity cannot be brought about by elevating the learner, for an act of deception is involved here. Is the learner just overwhelmed by the experience? Does he really love? Kierkegaard thinks he is overwhelmed and does not really love. Why does Kierkegaard regard this as an act of deception? The king, or the god, does not seek his own glorification but the glorification of the beloved. If this does not happen, then the love is incomplete. Thus, the learner would be happy, but not the teacher. That is why this is an unhappy love. Since unity cannot be brought about by ascent, it happens by descent. The learners are not just the most brilliant minds. The learners include the lowly ones. For unity to come about the god will appear as an equal to the lowly. The lowliest of all is a servant; therefore the god will appear as a servant. By becoming a servant, there is not the deceit that was involved earlier. The beloved and the lover are equal now. To become less than a servant, would be to take the easy way out and it would not be complete love:

Therefore the god must suffer all things, endure all things, be tried in all things, hunger in the desert, thirst in his agonies, be forsaken in death, absolutely the equal of the lowliest of human beings... so you love only the omnipotent one who performs miracles, not him who humbled himself in equality with you¹⁹⁸

Kierkegaard claims the god experiences an unhappy love if a heavenly aperture is opened up, a ladder cast down, and a booming voice heard. This is an unhappy love for the god because He is not loved and understood, only worshipped and an object unto which we grovel. This is potentially problematic for Kierkegaard on two fronts. If god is motivated by love to get the sinner out of his condition, why ought it to matter what way God reveals Himself? If one way of manifestation is better than another, there must be an accountable difference. Revelation

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p.25.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p.33.

through Christ, on Kierkegaard's account, is preferred for it increases understanding between learner and the god. The trouble is that the god seems to more heavily weigh understanding than we would think a totally self-sufficient being would. Is Kierkegaard saying that the god is motivated by need, the need to be understood, and not pure love after all? Whenever the words "god" and "need" are combined in a sentence one enters shaky theological ground. Perhaps, Kierkegaard thinks understanding (outside of God's need) is a precondition for atonement. Maybe this is how God's justice works. It would seem Kierkegaard would have to tack that way to defend the god's divine attributes. Is it obvious how understanding allows for us to avoid a death sentence, whereas animal sacrifices and pelagianism do not? It does not seem obvious at the moment. This is a question that must be revisited once we have digested a bit more of the Christian Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard, having explored how the truth must be brought to us and the form that truth must take, begins to meditate on the paradoxical nature of the Incarnation and man's relation to it. Every passion Kierkegaard maintains, will its own downfall. Take falling in love. Self-love is the initial motivating factor, but it then transforms itself into love of the other (a type of selflessness).¹⁹⁹ Kierkegaard claims that the same is true for the passion of understanding. The understanding is ultimately seeking paradoxes that it cannot think. There is an ultimate paradox that the understanding cannot grasp. It cannot be anything human or anything known. The unknown paradox equals the god incarnate.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ The passion of self-love may culminate in selflessness and the passion for understanding may culminate in something that cannot be understood, but do other passions culminate in their own downfall? It can be said that humans have an innate passion for beauty and justice. Do we see similar results to what Kierkegaard points out in the passions for love and understanding? What is the paradoxical end of the passion of beauty? If self-love seeks selflessness, would the passion for beauty give way to the non-beautiful? If beauty is defined as a physical phenomenon, like ornamentation, that draws us in one could see that a superficial beauty gives way to a deeper beauty. If we find a person beautiful, in time we grow accustomed to his physical beauty and concentrate on

internal beauty of character and mind. Does this beauty then fall away to a state where beauty is not even a factor, perhaps a state where what was once found physically and morally beautiful is just another thing in an individual's world? Is this perhaps how we will the downfall of beauty? Does the same thing happen for works of art? Do they catch our eye, provoke a deeper appreciation, and then melt away in significance? One can only stare at Warhol's Goethe for so long, right? Answering these questions would require articulating a larger aesthetic theory, but it is perhaps slightly more plausible than it was a few paragraphs ago to believe that passions will their downfall. What about the passion for justice? Does the pursuit of orderly civilization give way to vigilante courts and utilitarian edicts? That seems plausible as well. Kierkegaard, as to be expected, may have hit on something very profound here.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., pp.37, 74-76.

If the learner is to know the god, Kierkegaard maintains, he must first know that it is absolutely different from him. Why is this the case? Man is unable to find an enduring communion with God based off of extrapolation from his own existence and faculties. The fragility of his own frame does not indicate that there could be even something of greater power in the universe. In fact, man's frailness may be a very refutation of the divine. Further, as we have discussed throughout this dissertation, man's rational faculties do not lead him to a certain terminus of religious belief. If anything, objectivity illuminates the fragility in all rational constructions of God. That is why the understanding by itself cannot come to know God and needs a radical re-introduction. "Just to come to know that the god is different, man needs the god and then comes to know that the god is absolutely different from him."²⁰¹ The difference is the sin for which we are responsible. What is meant here about the sin for which we are responsible? The idea must be that God is somehow devoid of something that we actively incur, yet it is so subtle that we fail to acknowledge our own participation in it. Is it the infinitude of God that frees him from sin? Possibly, if it is understood that human finitude means susceptibility to immediacy, intoxicating objectivity, and incompleteness. Each of which are activities or states that culminate in despair. Finitude leads to what can be thought of as existential insobriety. The proper relationship with God, who is infinite, ought to be an awakening state of sobriety, where temptation and limitation no longer sicken. Socrates could not teach us about sin, only the god can do this in his lowly appearance. Socrates could not teach us of sin, deep sin, the sin that afflicts every aspect of life, for he had no encounter with the Incarnation. Therefore, the paradox comes to illuminate sin via absolute equality.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p.46.

“Absolute equality” here signifies that sin is inescapable and in a sense, woven into the frame of man. The understanding cannot conceive of the paradox, of a God in a mortal frame, even though it is driven to do so. When the learner is presented with the paradox in the moment, he becomes confused about his Socratic self-knowledge and acquires sin-consciousness. How does the paradox entail sin-consciousness? What about the paradox alarms us of our depravity? Perhaps, a contemporary could cite the miracles, but what of us moderns?²⁰² Does the totality of divine magic tricks confer a divine hue upon an otherwise forgettable frame? Does the divine bleed through the most feeble imaginings of the son of God? How does it all work? It is not obvious and potentially unanswerable. Drawing from personal experience (where else is one to draw?), knowledge of Christ’s sinlessness and our own utter depravity occurs only when we dismissing the whole affair as episodic lunacy that large swaths of humanity never entirely shake. All offense is the misunderstanding of the paradox. From the Socratic point of view, the paradox does not happen. It is foolishness. The Infinite cannot take on finite form. It is a knock on the door of faith. Then the secret is revealed and one can heed

²⁰² How does Christ alert us to our sins? The obvious answer would be if Christ, in contradistinction to all humanity, was demonstrably sinless. It is easy to learn of sin when one is presented with a clear paragon of incorruptible innocence and perfection. How did those early disciples of Christ discern His sinless character, especially when He was prone to act very much like an embodied man (i.e. enjoying oils and driving out money-changers? How can sinlessness be announced? If sinlessness cannot be demonstrated by unparalleled kindness or wisdom (which we are not ruling out), what other options are there? Miracles seem to be the answer. Those who categorized Christ as a mere moral hero, could have their minds changed if Christ could perform the supernatural. Take the resurrection of Lazarus and Himself for instance. It looks as if the quality of sinlessness emerges from the coordination of “perfect” human behavior and miracle working. One might claim that other candidates, such as Moses, would meet this criteria; however, Moses was not God, whereas Jesus, though sometimes cryptically, confesses to be that special sort of savior.

What might still be questioned here is how the lowly nature of the god yields sin-consciousness. What about a god in human form, upright in action and with command of otherworldly powers, which emphasizes the distinction between us and Him? Was it not already established amongst the people of Israel that God had a dominion like no other, and bending space and time were nothing for Him? Why might human form dramatize this relationship in contrast to God’s previous manifestations? Is there a loving act of deception going on here? Could it be the case that an approachable God, one who would not annihilate us if we were to catch a glimpse of His divine countenance, communicates that we too can be made pure like Him? Does the bodily form of Christ entice us down a relational path of sinlessness that a distant Yahweh or oracle could not? If these are the motivations behind Kierkegaard’s arguments, they become increasingly plausible.

it or withdraw, delusion. Offense at the impossible conceptual duality and the unearthing of our sin-consciousness emphasizes the distinction between the learner and the paradox. The greater the offense the greater the distinction between the two parties. Offense prepares the way for an unnamed happy passion.

Without having our attention grabbed, how can we possibly decide to take on a new existential identity? Without offense, the paradox would not register and we would lull ourselves into contentedness. Therefore, offense is a good, which makes us indebted to the paradox:²⁰³“If the god did not come himself, then everything would remain Socratic, we would not have the moment, and we would fail to have the paradox”.²⁰⁴ So how does the learner come to an understanding with this paradox? The understanding has to be set aside, the paradox gives itself, and faith occurs. It is a happy passion (faith) therefore: “This passion, then, must be that aforementioned condition that the paradox provides”.²⁰⁵ One may ask, what does this setting aside of the understanding consist in and how does it permit the transition to faith? The rational understanding must simultaneously acknowledge the tension of the paradox and engage the perspective that perhaps there is life beyond rationality. Faith does not require a complete disavowal of rational understanding, but a contextualization of reason’s limits. If this dynamic tension can be sustained, there is the opportunity to hand one’s life over to the savior.

Indicative of how the relation to Christ is not a Socratic relationship, is that one owes the god something as a follower. Obsessing over the historical details of the god will not make

²⁰³ Ibid., pp.51-54.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p.55.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p.59.

one a follower. Obsessing over the teachings of the god will not make one a follower. Faith is what the followers owe the god. So what is the object of the condition known as faith, the teacher or the teaching? Again, we are not working on the Socratic model. On the Socratic model, once the method was learned the teacher could be thrust away. Not so with the paradox. The learner clings to the teacher in faith: “If this is not the structure, then we are left with Socratic recollection.”²⁰⁶

Kierkegaard disparages those fascinated by the historical Jesus and his teachings. Is Christ’s historicity and religious instruction merely an accidental feature of his being? It is hard to see how one can answer in the affirmative here. Kierkegaard’s point is that an unhealthy fixation on historical details and hairsplitting over divine commands is to miss the essence of the subjective Christian point of view, yet teachings and some historical facts have to matter. For nstance, Christ’s instructions to love God intensely and one’s neighbor as oneself have to be thoughtfully implemented. Further, as Christians we must have some grasp on the historical situation to think it plausible that a man named Jesus even existed.

The Absurdity of the Paradoxical Incarnation

Throughout the framework of the Philosophical Fragments, numerous allusions are made to the paradoxical nature of the Incarnation. What makes the paradox a paradox? Why cannot sense be made of the paradox from the human perspective? Why cannot sense be made

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p.62.

of the paradox from God's perspective? Why might God not want the Incarnation to be objectively knowable? What kind of paradox is the paradox? What are the functions of the paradox? Why do individuals take offense to the paradox? What, finally, does the paradox teach us about proper relationship between faith and reason?

What makes the paradox a paradox? Climacus does a fairly decent job establishing the paradoxical character of the Incarnation in the philosophical fragments by ruminating on how incomprehensible it is for the necessary (God) to come into being in the midst of contingent historical reality. The infinite taking on finite form does not conform to our concept of the eternal. Are there other senses in which the Incarnation is paradoxical? It is puzzling how via the relationship with the historical Incarnation, the believer can become eternal. Just as the infinite taking on finite form is a paradox, so is the finite taking on an infinite form. How a finite, lowly being can transfer believers over to an eternal happiness one day is paradoxical to human eyes. The finite cannot become infinite, let alone bring others with it. The third way in which the Incarnation is a paradox deals with appearances. How could a finite and lowly embodiment that seems to share much in common with other sinners, come to embody the eternal in all its strength and moral righteousness? How could the eternal be contained and perhaps sullied in this human form?²⁰⁷

Why cannot sense be made of the paradox from the human perspective? The absurdity of the paradox prevents it from being subsumed beneath the categories of human reason. If

²⁰⁷ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, pp.226, 229.

we were to treat it as a mere historical fact, it would not make the absurd any less absurd. If there were a million observers of Christ, it would not establish that He was in fact the Incarnation.

Any number of conclusions could have been drawn about him, such as that he was an illusionist or possessed by demons rather than the embodiment of God Himself.²⁰⁸ Observations may make believing in the Incarnation more probable, for increased testimonies to the supernatural events surrounding the Christ events reinforce the notion that such a man existed and was perhaps special in some way; however, such testimonies will never eradicate the absurdity of Christ or normalize it, for what threshold of evidence must be met to prove without a doubt that Christ was the son of God? How does one prove that He is the son of God and not a gifted illusionist or the devil incarnate? Alternative explanations of Christ will still persist.²⁰⁹

Christ cannot be understood philosophically either, for doing so would require having complete concepts of eternity and infinity, which then would be rationally coupled with historical narrative. Without a full understanding of the constitutive concepts of the Incarnation, how is one to intellectually untie the knot that is the Christian paradox? Are we in such a position to say that we are in complete possession of them and can therefore exclude the possibility of the necessary taking on contingent form? We would have to admit that our understanding is limited and that whatever the paradox is it defies our human conceptions. Further, it might be that even if the philosophical concepts involved in the paradox could be

²⁰⁸ Emmanuel, Steven M., "Kierkegaard's Pragmatist Faith", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol. 51, No. 2, 1991, p.300.

²⁰⁹ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, pp.211-212.

understood, the paradox may remain a paradox. It is conceivable that an understanding of finitude and infinitude may only dramatize the tension epitomized by the god-man.²¹⁰

Why cannot sense be made of the paradox from God's perspective? Why might God not want the incarnation to be objectively knowable? Presumably Kierkegaard thinks that God intentionally clothed Himself in an objectively unknowable paradox for a good reason. Why would God want the Incarnation to be objectively mystifying? There seem to be at least two reasons and they look to be interconnected. First, Kierkegaard sees the Incarnation as a confirmation of his larger thesis that God did not intend for individuals to become colorless and dispassionate algorithms entirely caught up in objective truth and processes, but rather to find the truth that was always sought for in a passionate and subjective relationship with Christ. The Incarnation breaks all rational appropriation because God, via the nature of consummate divinity and religion, wants it that way. He wants us to be maximally existing and passionate individuals and this can only be done when the limits of reason are demonstrated and it is understood that the paradox cannot be objectively comprehended. All of this leads to the second point of why Kierkegaard believes God did not intend for the Incarnation to make sense from the human perspective and bestowed a paradoxical nature upon Christ. Did God have a choice in bestowing a non-paradoxical nature upon the Incarnation? The Incarnation may have come in different forms, but so long as God came into historical reality we have a paradox. Where there is latitude is how God presents himself to humanity. He could have continued to practice shrubbery ventriloquism or sending wraths and prophets. We have already mentioned this, but it bears repeating. The paradoxical Christian revelation is intended to teach humans that they are completely without the highest truth by negating the powers of the intellect. If the

²¹⁰ Emmanuel, Steven M., "Kierkegaard's Pragmatist Faith", p.300.

highest truth cannot be discovered intellectually and is an intensified subjective truth induced by the personal relation to the god-man, then the highest truth is impossible to know prior to the Incarnation, for we do not even have the condition to grasp this truth. The condition of the condition (sin- consciousness) and the condition (faith or the highest subjective truth). The Incarnation provides the condition of the condition by demonstrating sinlessness to the sinful and the condition of faith occurs when offense is overcome and Christ as savior from sin is accepted. The paradox as the objectively unknowable highest truth frustrates our reason and provides us with the condition (the happy passion of faith) for appropriating the highest truth.²¹¹ So the Incarnation is a paradox for mutually reinforcing reasons.²¹² It disables reason and in reason's suspension we are allowed to live a more meaningfully individualized and subjective passionate relationship with the highest truth (i.e. Christ).²¹³

What kind of paradox is the paradox? The Incarnation is often referred to as the Absolute paradox, implying there is something unparalleled about this paradox in comparison with other paradoxes we might be able to think up, such as a square-circle. Is there something special about this paradox? Does it exist in a category of paradoxes that is inhabited by no other? What type of paradox could the Absolute paradox be? One candidate is a formal known to be formally contradictory, then it follows that a clean understanding of the contradiction. Evans defines it in the following manner: "If a particular proposition can be concepts involved is attainable."²¹⁴ Evans contends that the Incarnation cannot be a formal contradiction.

²¹¹ Emmanuel, Steven M., "Kierkegaard's Pragmatist Faith", pp.289-290.

²¹² Ibid., pp.289-290.

²¹³ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, pp.214, 230.

If it were, then it could be added to a long list of formal contradictions (i.e. the square-circle) and we would cease to be able to distinguish the Absurd from absurdities. True, that may take away from the uniqueness of the paradox; however, whether or not the Incarnation's uniqueness is in play ought not to determine whether it is a formal contradiction. So what is the way out? It would be to claim that the two concepts involved in the Absurd (God and Man) are beyond the sphere of human reason. This is a "way out" for formal contradictions consist of rather easily defined terminology. "God" and "man" though we think of them ever so often elude rational definition. One may ask, "How can the paradox be known as a paradox without concepts clashing with one another?" Partial understanding of the concepts involved in the paradox may be possible, providing enough insight into the nature of the contradiction, but not enough to resolve the antipodes. If we could have full understanding of the involved concepts, would the paradox endure? That question is unanswerable. Full knowledge of the concepts may reinforce or completely resolve the paradox. To the extent that we cannot have complete knowledge of either, we cannot with confidence claim that the concepts are in formal contradiction. For all we know, becoming "man" might be an essential part of the God concept. So if we are not dealing with a formal contradiction, what do we have on our hands?²¹⁵

Evans has suggested that the Incarnation is an apparent contradiction. He defines an apparent contradiction as follows: "An apparent contradiction is a purported fact or state of affairs that nevertheless appears counterintuitive or even impossible because attempts to describe the situation require the use of logically contradictory expressions"²¹⁶ So on this

²¹⁴ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, p.217.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p.217.

definition the Incarnation would be an apparent contradiction because our human conceptual equipment is confounded by the postulate of a god-man. When our conceptual understanding is limited by the encounter with this reality, we need not conclude that the paradox is in fact paradoxical. It may only appear as such to us lowly humans. If one believes that our conceptual apparatus is in fine working order and is in some sense limitless, the Incarnation will be offensive to reason and accordingly dismissed. Someone of such an intellectual posture might have a rather strict notion of what God is capable of and deem what is an apparent contradiction to be a logical contradiction, unworthy of further consideration.²¹⁷

So let us grant that the Incarnation is in fact an apparent contradiction given that our logical conceptions of God and man are too thin to embrace the realities of each, yielding an illusory tension of the synthesis. Had we God's perspective, nothing about the idea of a god-man would trouble us, at least logically. One preoccupies oneself with the notion that Christ may be the only apparent contradiction to set the Incarnation apart from the litany of formal paradoxes. Has its uniqueness been preserved now? Possibly, if all paradoxes aside from one can be placed in the formal contradiction category; however, is this in fact the case? What might be some other contenders for this category? Consciousness could be one. Do we fully understand the potentially antagonistic concepts of brain and mind involved in consciousness?

If the mind is something non-natural, then would not this have to be an apparent contradiction for man as well? We may not have the conceptual equipment to untangle this theoretical knot. Many will argue that the mind is not a non-natural entity and that it is just a formal contradiction yet to be resolved. Let us suppose that it is an apparent contradiction for

²¹⁶ Ibid., p.219.

²¹⁷ Evans, C.S., "Is Kierkegaard an Irrationalist? Reason, Paradox, and Faith", pp.353-354.

the sake of argument and that there are two apparent contradictions: consciousness and the Incarnation. Has the Incarnation been diminished in some way? Is it no longer special? It is hard to see how the uniqueness has been tarnished. A great deal of what makes the Incarnation special is its offense to reason, but also what it promises. Faith in the Incarnation supposedly markedly improves our subjective life by a significant degree and reconciles man with his Creator therefore ushering in an entirely new status (born again) in God's eyes. Consciousness might also be an apparent contradiction, but it makes no promises. It is a mere phenomenon or miracle or whatever you want to call it, to admire in wonder. It makes no claim upon us. It does not invite us to have a salvific relationship with it. So it is the promise of Christianity, plus its paradoxical nature, that makes it unique.

Do other religions have this promise married with a paradox? What would truly be a threat to any special place for Christianity would be if there was something in the world that could fill the same role, such as another divine incursion into reality that made a similar sort of promise to mankind. The divine promise is a promise to rescue us from the deleterious temporal and eternal effects of sin. On Kierkegaard's view, sin in its despair impedes the development of the self towards meaningful individuality and creates a lacuna between man and God that must be bridged for endurance beyond this life. This lacuna does not only affect the afterlife, but this life as well. The infinite chasm between God and man leaves the self afflicted with the despair that arises from the exhaustion of all conceivable goods that each non-Christian existential stage advocates. The Incarnation lives up to its promise if It can remove the two-tiered ruinous sin- effects by uniting man with God. One may wonder how this unification removes those effects. The answer must lie in what causes sin in the first place. Sin at its most basic level implies a neglect of the eternal, whether it be a willful disobedience to

ethics or simple ignorance of the divine due to the rational incomprehensibility of God. Christ, as a conduit to the Infinite, puts an end to intentional or unintentional neglect of God. This is a relatively shallow explanation of what will be elaborated upon; however, does such an understanding allow for an answer in regards to what other faiths offer? Does another faith have a paradoxical candidate that performs the exact same function? Judaism, the well-spring of Christianity, acknowledges something commonly understood to be sin. Sin, as depicted in the Old Testament, seems to occur when individuals directly disobey a commandment of God. God punishes or rolls back his vengeance with supplications and burnt offerings. The Old Testament emphasizes the dependence of people, a select people for God, to overcome sin. Is there a doubly paradoxical faith object that truly allows for this to occur? There is a God who is the ground of all being; however, His face is never seen. He does not Incarnate. It is unknown to an outsider if the covenant made to the Jewish people involves a triumph over a two-tiered conception of sin and if an Incarnation will ever come for this precise purpose. Hinduism, will employ terminology approximating sin; however, sin seems to mean wrong action and cause for demerit and demotion in regards to personal metempsychosis. The concept of sin that Kierkegaard thinks Christ brings is much more illuminating than “wrong action”. Sin-consciousness in Christianity points to the imperfection of every individual and the fallenness of humanity and no amount of Pelagian feats bring atonement. For Hinduism, moving up the chain of being does not require an intercessor, merely right living and certain mindfulness practices. There does not seem to be a candidate that rivals Christ here, nor might there be one in Buddhism for there it is about annihilating the self to achieve a state of Nirvana within. Such pursuits give up on the project of meaningful individuality for individuality is seen as part of the problem and it is not clear if the Buddhist cares where his eternal destination

may be. Islam has its prophets like Judaism and one might conclude that there is not a competitor to what Christ claims to offer there. For now, it appears we need not worry about Christ's unique status being challenged by religious figures from these other religious traditions.

What are the functions of the paradox? Evans believes there are at least four other main functions of the paradox that have a significant upside. Itemizing the functions of the Absolute paradox is not some meaningless errand. It has been demonstrated that the distinctiveness of the Incarnation arises more from Its function than from Its logical stature. The more functions one can consider, the greater our understanding grows in regards to the paradox's uniqueness.

i. "The Paradox preserves the transcendent character of Christianity"²¹⁸

Evans points out that there is something peculiar about the Christian religion that distinguishes it from Greek thought and other faiths. Within Christianity, there is this stipulation that man is not in possession of the truth (and therefore in sin), making it the case that the Truth must be brought to mankind from without. Other world religions presuppose an innate human understanding of ethical action which is derived from conscience. Prophets, gurus, and miracles may occur intermittently to remind us of what is already known or command a specific action of God's will. The Christian Incarnation dramatizes the absolute otherness of God and the relative lowliness of mankind. Embodiment brings the reality of

²¹⁸ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, p.240.

a faceless God and the interpenetrating presence of sin to its apogee. A meek and destructible Incarnation of the divine order's creator is preposterous to anyone who thoughtfully meditates on it, and that It, in a way, proves that Christianity cannot arise from the human mind. This claim might give us pause. Is it the case that no religion prior or contemporaneous with the Christian faith involved a divine incursion into reality? If there were, then that would seem to undercut the notion that humans could not dream up Christianity. Of course these incursions would have to not only involve God becoming man, but also teach us something otherwise unavailable. The first requirement might be more easily satisfied than the second. The idea that an embodied God teaches of sin might be the requirement that insulates Christianity from the charge of a fanciful story. Can the human mind dream such an idea? Can it even put words to it, since it is something largely felt within experience? Nietzsche has given an alternative narrative for how the Incarnation came to be, one that is quite earthly in origination.²¹⁹ This latter concern might disable this evidence for Christianity.²²⁰

What if there are other faith objects that inspire the same level of passionate intensity when other individuals relate to them? Could not another faith object achieve what Christ does for us on Kierkegaard's formula? Given what we know and what we will come to know, this becomes an increasingly unlikely proposition. In order to precipitate the passion of faith one needs a) a paradox repellant to reason, b) the paradox must arouse one's sin-consciousness, c) the paradox must then be able to heal through the atonement, and d) create an eternal being in time (the believer in Christ) with experiential knowledge of the

²¹⁹ We will revisit our discussion of Christian similarities to other faiths towards the end of this chapter and the effect that might have on our estimation of Christianity and Kierkegaard's understanding of its uniqueness.

²²⁰ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, p.240.

Incarnation, which continues to inspire both the love of God and the task of joyfully loving creation. We may find other strange religious paradoxes or non-sense faith objects, but it is hard to imagine one that would meet these criteria and therefore produce the passion of faith. What if the question is asked differently? What if someone has intense subjectivity that would seem to rival the passion of faith? What if this passionate subjectivity was for a cult leader? Would not the subjectivity these individuals have legitimate the object of their faith? Or what about pagans, can they not have subjectivity for their idols? Kierkegaard would certainly acknowledge that forms of subjectivity can be had outside of the passion characteristic of hristianity; however, Kierkegaard's thesis is not "Subjectivity is truth", but rather, "truth is subjectivity", meaning that the Incarnation conditions a specific subjective appropriation, which culminates in living in the truth and experientially "knowing" the truth. The passion of subjective truth in Religiousness B cannot occur outside of the relationship with Christ.²²¹ So, other forms of subjectivity are possible and may be very intense, but they do not reconcile man with God, they do not cure despair, they do not incite a love of neighbor and the world after drawing before God in atonement.²²² Kierkegaard would refer to these other effusive forms of subjectivity as "subjective madness" as escapist pursuits preventing a transcendence

²²¹ Dupré, Louis K., *A Dubious Heritage: Studies in the Philosophy of Religion after Kant*, p.45.

²²² Jacoby, Matthew Gerhard, "Kierkegaard on Truth", *Religious Studies* 38, no. 1, Mar., (2002): 31, 40.

into and a subjective awareness of truth.²²³

Some would claim that it is not abundantly clear what the connection is between the Christian faith and this notion of “Truth is Subjectivity”. Others would further maintain that a better connection cannot be drawn between the two because the concept of “Truth is Subjectivity” has not been adequately clear from the beginning. If the individual develops subjective truth in ethical existence and the mode of immanence, how can Kierkegaard dismiss the idea of “subjectivity is truth”? Kierkegaard dismisses the notion of subjectivity being truth, when he speaks of the truth being brought to man from the outside. Christ is the truth and the best we can achieve as humans is to have a subjectively true relationship with that paradoxical Incarnation. If Kierkegaard does not deny that subjectivity is truth, then this would mean the subjective points of view in non-Christian existential stages would be just as true as the existential Christianity. If there is equality to the subjective points of view in regards to truth then is the Christian revelation truly extraneous? Kierkegaard affirms the statement that “Truth is Subjectivity”, which is not identical to “Subjectivity is Truth” because one can only participate in the Christian relationship subjectively. One can form a subjectively true relationship with the divine incursion. Stepping back, existentially subjective modes prior to Christianity approximate the subjective truth of Christianity; however, insofar as they do not reference the Christian truth, they are ultimately untruth. Religiousness A is more subjectively true than ethical existence; however, until one appropriately encounters Christ, on Kierkegaard’s view, both existential stages dwell in sin and despair, which are synonymous with untruth. To make sense of this apparent contradiction, one has to look at the larger arc of

²²³ Levine, Michael P., “Kierkegaard: What Does the Subjective Individual Risk?”, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 13, no. 1, (1982): 19.

Kierkegaard's project. For Kierkegaard, the individual gains a truer form of existence with each involution of the self; however, Kierkegaard simultaneously considers Christ to be the only truth for which to live and die. Christ is God, the ultimate truth, embodied for human subjective appropriation. Should humanity exist apart from the incarnated truth, then humanity regardless of how close or removed it is from the truth subjectively, is in untruth. For Kierkegaard, when one really expands the frame of reference, Faith is synonymous with truth and aesthetic, ethical, and religiousness A modes of being are untruth. Now these different forms of untruth can involve approximations of subjective truth, yet fall short of it. This is why Kierkegaard says subjectivity cannot be truth.²²⁴ Further, truth is subjectivity because the only appropriate way of relating to the incarnate truth is subjectively and by that what is meant are the previously discussed subjective movements made in relation to the faith object (i.e. Offense at the paradox, limiting reason, repenting, handing one's life over to Christ, forgiveness).

Kierkegaard reserves the use of the term "faith" for a subjectively true relationship with Christ. Religiousness A, the somewhat vague postulation of God and moral theology, is not faith for Kierkegaard. What about other faiths such as Judaism or Islam? Are those instances of "faith" for Kierkegaard? On his own strict usage, one would have to say no. As presumptuous and self-righteous as it sounds, Kierkegaard seems to not believe that one can have "faith" as a non-Christian. There may be an Islamic religion, but not Islamic faith. Socrates may have had a religious attitude, but since he did not know Christ, Socrates did not know faith. Nonetheless, that faith has made an appearance before Christ, is ironically brought to our attention by

²²⁴ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, p.197.

Kierkegaard himself via the Abraham story in *Fear and Trembling*.

In the *Philosophical Fragments* and elsewhere, we are told that faith is predicated on a particular type of relationship with Christ. This is why the Abraham story seems odd.

Abraham is, on Kierkegaard's view, a man of faith, yet how is this possible if he lacks the Incarnation? Many of the movements going on in the relationship with Christ are present with Abraham. He has to struggle with a paradox (i.e. obey the ethical universal and not murder his son or unconditionally follow the divine command and sacrifice Isaac), pin all his hope on God, and receive back the world with Joy; however, not all the elements of faith are there in this story.

We do not know if Abraham acquired sin-consciousness via the encounter with God and we do not know if his sin was forgiven. We do not know for it is unclear if the Christian concepts of sin and forgiveness have entered into the established religious narrative of the Old Testament. Without the Incarnation, sin-consciousness and forgiveness may not even be possible. We might have good reason to think here that Abraham was not quite a man of faith (on Kierkegaard's own definition), but a prototype that falls somewhere in between Religiousness A and Religiousness B. This makes the case of Abraham especially curious and would complicate an already beguiling understanding of existential stages and subjectivity. Let us grant that Abraham is a knight of faith in the exact same way as a properly relating Christian is. Does this not present conceptual problems? It would seem, on Kierkegaard's account, that prior to Christ's arrival faith happened in scant episodes. A few select individuals, such as Abraham, were given faith, but it was not until the arrival of Christ that all of humanity had access to faith.

We face the following difficulties if Abraham had faith prior to the Incarnation: 1) This

would mean that God favored an elite few prior to His own incursion into reality. On Kierkegaard's own account, we are to be made god-like in our encounter with Him, meaning we are to love everyone equally. If God favored Abraham, is this not showing disproportionate love? 2) God had the ability to provide faith all along. This is problematic because it makes God look erratic and irrational. What if we were to be more generous and claim that God was merely testing out the introduction of faith to humans? Abraham was a kind of a theological guinea pig. Once the experiment had been conducted, God could meditate on the prudence of introducing faith to humanity writ large. This is a slightly better conclusion and preserves God's loving nature; however, it seems to do so at the expense of His omniscience. Why would God need to test faith out? Ought He not to have already known its blessings at the moment of creation?

If we set Abraham aside and relegate him to a story with a lesson, does that solve all the issues? It perhaps takes care of the concerns with God showing favoritism or experimenting with faith on mankind, but it still raises questions about faith and history in general. If God knew faith was a blessing and mankind was in sin, why did he wait so long to introduce Christ? Why did so many scores of humans live and die and not know Christ? The only seemingly plausible answer is that God thought it unwise to do so. Maybe He knew we were not ready for it. Maybe he had to employ people like Abraham to prepare us for it. Maybe the only way mankind would receive Christ at all would be if there were faithful elites to arouse our attention before the divine incursion into reality. Maybe Christ wouldn't have happened without the Abrahams? These questions call for examining why pre-Christian man was not ready for the Incarnation and how Abraham prepared us for faith.

ii. "The paradox ensures the existential character of Christianity"²²⁵

The Incarnation, by disabling our ability to conceptualize it, demonstrates that Christianity is not an objective doctrine that can be appropriated as such. Intellectual contemplation of Christianity will not do, for Christianity is what Kierkegaard calls “an existence communication” that requires commitment in lieu of speculative detachment.²²⁶ What is meant by existence communication is what has been trumpeted so many times before. Being a Christian is a mode of being, it is the ultimate cultivation of subjective truth and in the imitation of Christ we communicate the occurrence of that form of existence occurring within.

iii. "The paradox preserves and strengthens human freedom and selfhood."²²⁷

Since the paradox cannot be grasped objectively, if it is to be grasped, it must be passionately and freely committed to in a qualitatively intensified version of subjective truth (*Subjective Truth B/Religiousness B*). The greater the passion and inwardness of subjective truth, a richer experience of self. Thus for Kierkegaard Christian transformation means that we become the most subjectively true form of individuality possible. How dependence upon Christ breeds a further form of subjective truth and provides even greater leverage over the environment is far from obvious.²²⁸

²²⁵ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, p.241.

²²⁶ Ibid., p.241.

²²⁷ Ibid., p.241

²²⁸ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, p.243.

iv. "The paradox guarantees human equality by reducing the intellectual differences among men to insignificance."²²⁹

If the paradox confounds the most intelligent of us (perhaps, especially the most intelligent), then faith is equally difficult for everyone. The clever are not granted an advantage when it comes to faith since it is not an intellectual doctrine. Is this in fact the case? Is faith equally difficult for all individuals? It would seem that there are some rather simple-minded Christians that make the transition into their faith rather easily, yet are apparently similar in subjectivity in regards to the more cerebral person. Both the simple and the complex person may set their understanding aside and enter into faith; however, it seems to be significantly easier for the simpleton. The simple man senses the absurdity of a God contained within such a lowly body that is so easily destroyed by nails and gravity. The intellectual understands this absurdity as well, but in meditating on this obvious inexplicable synthesis she comprehends the absurdity on a deeper level. She seeks a clarification of the logical concepts involved (i.e. God and man) and is dissatisfied. She seeks a historical narrative that will normalize or schematize the god's appearance and is frustrated. She turns to science for empirical confirmation of the incarnation event and is disproportionately left with questions rather than answers. Philosophy, on Kierkegaard's account, is utterly inept on this matter as well. If this is in fact the case, then it is not equally difficult to enter into faith. It is actually more difficult for those with the greater education and intellect; however, this need not be a bad thing. It might make the entrance into faith all the more dramatic and passionate at the outset, for more has to be risked. The intellectual is more invested in the religious

²²⁹ Ibid., p.243.

decision for Christ because her intellectual integrity is at stake. The commitment may be easier for the simpleton for her is less concerned with objective truth. He risks little. What does Kierkegaard want? If being more intellectual increases the likelihood of passionate Christian subjectivity, is it worth encouraging, despite the tempting dangers of objectivity? How much does an enlightened understanding of the paradox's irrationalism foment the inwardness of passionate Christian faith?

Why do individuals take offense at the paradox? Offense accompanies the Incarnation at every turn. We may think that the paradox offends only those men that have deified human reason as the ultimate judge of all things discernible. Those in possession of such a viewpoint will find the paradox odious. The Incarnation teaches nothing rational; rather it elicits belief. If there is one thing madder than being such a fanatic, then it would be to set aside one's divine reason in subservience to Him. Supposing that we ought to become followers of the paradox is offensive to even consider.²³⁰ Yes, this is one way that the paradox is offensive, but there are at least four more that we can pin-point from *Training in Christianity*.²³¹

The first new form of offense has to do with an individual parading himself in public as God. It is offensive to many (if not all) that a human individual has the gall to consider himself to be apart from humanity and that he is in some sense superior to everyone, just as a function of his being. He does not provide proofs in the strictest sense to establish this fact, so undoubtedly this would be offensive to a non-Christian public within which reason is elevated to a god-like level and judges all that is fit for belief. To have one man step out and say that he is God and is unique from all those in possession of divine reason cannot help but offend.²³²

²³⁰ Ibid., p.237.

²³¹ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Training in Christianity*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p.51, 55.

²³² Ibid., pp.84, 96, 98.

The next form of offense has to do with the lowliness of the man claiming to be God. Is it not offensive that this impotent servant could be the physical embodiment of the eternal? A man who could not pull himself down from the cross? This was especially offensive to the apostles who had such faith in him. How could they comprehend that he would suffer like a mere man, like one of them if they were in the same position?²³³

The third form of offense really does not have to deal with Christ as a god-man, but rather as a teacher of inwardness and godly fear. His insistence on turning away from the empty externalism represented by both the state and the institutionalized religion, offended many cultural mores of the time (*and still does!*). Challenging individuals to reconsider their loyalty to the established order, symbolized by Caesar and the Pharisees, was a pretty astonishing happening that ultimately cost Christ his earthly life. Christianity offends the established order with its appeal to the god-relationship. When an individual appeals to the god-relationship, she often asserts her individuality against the forces of institutions. Those in power cannot tolerate individuals coming off as something more than mere men, which brings us to our final form of offense.²³⁴

There is a form of offense that goes along with offending the established order. To be a Christian, as demonstrated by Christ and countless disciples, invites earthly persecution with no obvious temporal reward (*and heaven remains a hypothetical*) for all the self-imposed immolation. It would be offensive to a natural man's logic to take up the Christian life if it meant harassment and the possibility of a frightful end. So it is offensive to the intellect to even consider Christian discipleship. Discipleship goes against humanity's most

²³³ Ibid., pp.105, 107-108.

²³⁴ Ibid., pp.86-88, 91-93.

primordial drive of self-preservation. To natural reason, the demand to lay down one's life for the god-relationship, comes at too high a cost.²³⁵

Why is Kierkegaard bringing all this attention to the offensive nature of the paradox and Christian life? Presumably he believes that there is something good about the possibility of offense and a grave error when offense has been removed from Christianity. He seems to believe that it is the possibility of offense that makes faith possible. If God had presented Himself in an inoffensive manner, then Christianity would be merely a thought doctrine that could be directly communicated. What would be the harm in that? Kierkegaard seems to be of the persuasion that thought doctrines do not breed an interiority that gives life any passion or richness. No truths to live and die for, only truths that can be disinterestedly admired. God does not want admirers. God does not want observers of truth. God wants individuals fully engaged in existence and in an active relationship with Him through Christ. This, he thinks, can only be achieved if an individual is offended by Christianity and chooses to have faith regardless of all the pending offensiveness. By detailing all the offensiveness of the paradox, Kierkegaard is driving home the point that everyone, regardless of intellectual gifts, experiences offense at the paradox. So our concern about intellectuals having an advantage in faith because they grasped the god-man dichotomy better than a simpleton is moot, for surely the simpleton can be offended in a myriad of other ways. He can be offended that a mere mortal took himself so seriously. He can be offended at the weakness of God. He can be offended by how that God challenged the establishment norms and he can be offended by

²³⁵ Ibid., pp.118, 121-122.

what that God demands of him in a faithful discipleship. So, if one type of offense does not trip you up, another will, and if you are lucky, perhaps they all will. All of these stumbling blocks only serve to engender faith.

Do the different forms of offense contribute to one's faith in a similar fashion or do they each enhance faith distinctively? If they enhance faith similarly is there a greater cumulative effect should one experience all four forms of offense versus the experience of just one or two? The first two forms of offense make the idea of a god-man conceptually irrational. They create a tension between our notions of god and man. The third form of offense prompts the feeling of moral irrationality, for Christianity clashes with established mores. One cannot imagine life differently. And the last form of offense, yields a sense of irrationality in regards to survival.

Why are these distinctions important? Why does it matter if the incarnation induces at least three senses of irrationality when it offends us? Maybe different forms of offense and correlating senses of irrationality add something to the passion of faith. For instance, if we only find the paradox to be conceptually irrational and not morally or evolutionarily irrational, our interiorization process (Subjective Truth B) may be different from another's, meaning there could be subjective truth B1, subjective truth B2, and so on (*all this depends upon forms of offense perceived and senses of irrationality detected*). Is this a major problem for Kierkegaard? One has to grant that the more offended one is by the paradox (*meaning that different senses of the irrational are sensed*), the more dramatic the passion of faith will be for that individual initially. The greater one is offended by faith, the greater one will experience relief in the beginning of Subjective Truth B. This is only really a problem for Kierkegaard if the passion for faith remains distributed unevenly amongst individuals with conflicting senses

of the paradox's irrationality. In time, those differences ought to fall away (*though there is no way to know this for certain since no man is in a position to know the leveling effects of Christ*).

The different forms of offense do not contribute different qualities to Subjective Truth B; however, they can affect its initial intensity. Christianity is in trouble, from Kierkegaard's perspective, when this abyss between man and God is mediated. Cancellation of all the scandals results in colorless theory, that can be affirmed and debated, but not lived in true faith.²³⁶

Kierkegaard expresses his dissatisfaction with those who believe they are helping Christianity by nullifying the paradox via philosophy with this wonderfully penned passage: "Oh, frightful infatuation! Oh, that there were someone (like the heathen who burnt the libraries of Alexandria) able to get these centuries out of the way—if no one can do that, then Christianity is abolished."²³⁷ What does the paradox teach us about the proper relationship between faith and reason? We have seen how the paradox is offensive to reason on many grounds, leaving the impression that Kierkegaard is an enemy of reason in all its forms. Is this a fair assessment? What is the proper understanding of how Kierkegaard believed reason and faith to interlock?

Earlier in this chapter, we saw that in *The Philosophical Fragments* Kierkegaard makes the argument that all passions, whether we recognize it or not, will their own downfall. The full potential of every passion is to will its own downfall. Take falling in love for instance. Self-love is the initial motivating factor, but then transforms into love of the other (a type of selflessness). Kierkegaard thinks the exact same is true for the passion of understanding. The

²³⁶ Ibid., pp.139, 141, 143.

²³⁷ Ibid., p.144.

understanding is ultimately seeking paradoxes that it cannot think. This trajectory of passions is so common we don't even notice it. There is an ultimate paradox that the understanding cannot grasp. It cannot be anything human or anything known. Therefore, the unknown paradox equals the god incarnate (necessary/contingent etc.).²³⁸

These are perhaps controversial stipulations, but ought not to be totally foreign to us. After all, Kant himself illuminated the limits of reason via reason and we would hardly categorize him as an irrationalist. The case is similar with Socrates. Socrates' philosophical inquisitions ultimately led him to posit a limitation to human understanding as well. The Delphic oracle ranked him the wisest for he was the only one who knew that he knew nothing. If philosophy alone does not lead us to grasp the limits of finite human understanding, we are gifted with the paradox that ultimately breaks the cognitive apparatus of all, regardless of philosophical erudition. With the emergence of the paradox, one does not need to devote a lifetime to philosophical study in order to understand the precise limits to our human understanding. The paradox announces those deficiencies to all as a mere fact of its existence.²³⁹

When we encounter the paradox, we potentially have good reasons to dethrone the understanding and open ourselves up to an encounter with Christ. This encounter, if legitimate, can produce faith (the condition/the happy passion to dwell in the truth). So, the relationship between reason and faith need not be an antagonistic one. If reason has a healthy understanding of its limitations, then setting our understanding aside for contact with the

²³⁸ Kierkegaard, Soren, *The Philosophical Fragments*, pp.37, 74-76.

²³⁹ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus*, pp.225, 227.

Incarnation can be a happy transition. Reason can be seen as a preparatory organ for the happy passion of faith.²⁴⁰ If philosophy and reason could not communicate the limits of objective understanding, then we would not have the good sense, in the face of so much offense, to even entertain a new subjective path in faith.²⁴¹

This appears to be a relatively good way to understand the relationship between healthy faith and healthy reason, though it leaves us wondering the following. If individuals are offended at the Incarnation, they are still seeking a rational explanation of all existence and have not been convinced of reason's limit. If they have²⁴², then they properly understand the Incarnation as the proper route. But what about those individuals that understand reason's limit, encounter the paradox, and yet still do not have faith? Ought the proper view of reason and the encounter with Christ give the individual faith? What explains the lack of faith in someone with a healthy view of reason? Perhaps, it could be claimed that they have not really encountered Christ. A true encounter would insure faith. Or maybe another form of offense, as outlined earlier, neutralizes or will not permit the faith bestowing encounter with Christ.

What does this tell us about faith if another form of offense could undermine a relationship with the paradox? The first offense, the offense to the understanding of a being both finite and infinite, was overcome by setting aside the understanding. What else must be overcome in order to have faith? The first two types of offense might be overcome with the discharging of the understanding, but what about the latter two (*Christianity offends because*

²⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.235, 355-359.

²⁴¹ Berthold-Bond, Daniel, "Lunar Musings? An Investigation of Hegel's and Kierkegaard's Portraits of Despair", p.53.

it challenges the established order and Christianity offends because it invites persecution of its adherents)? It would seem that faith would require a setting aside of fear, specifically a fear of not matching up with the prevailing social order and of what ill consequences may be visited upon us.

Christian Faith/ Religiousness B

Do we really know what it means to have faith in Christ? Do we understand how Christian faith connects up with Kierkegaard's idea of deepening inwardness and significant individuality? To answer these questions, the following issues must be addressed. What is the relationship between Religiousness A and B?²⁴³ What kind of appropriation characterizes the one who has Christian faith? What do the Isaac and Abraham in *Fear and Trembling* tell us about Christian faith and the possibility of faith outside of Christianity? How does individuality fit into Kierkegaard's conception of faith? Does faith require historical evidence? Does faith involve a transformation of the self that we do on our own?

What is the Relationship between Religion A and B? Last chapter, we looked at Religiousness A, a form of religion that must precede Christian faith (aka Religion B). In Religion A, we saw a dialectical form of religiousness that because of the objectively non-provable nature of God, necessarily further intensifies the interiorization process of subjectivity. The religious A individual suffers a great deal of guilt-consciousness in his

²⁴² When the term "faith" is employed here and elsewhere it generally refers to the subjective relationship with Christ alone. This is how Kierkegaard employed the term; however, Kierkegaard was willing to bestow the status of faithful upon certain heroes of the old testament, specifically Abraham.

relation to the absolute and an eternal happiness. This guilt consciousness has the ability to repel us away from the absolute, unless our eternal happiness is of the utmost concern. How does the individual escape from this liberating, yet agonizing state of being? Had it not been for the guilt-consciousness of Religion A, we might not have an impetus towards the further development of meaningful individuality and move away from the general pathos to religion B.²⁴⁴ What kind of appropriation characterizes the one who has faith? What makes one have faith has little to do with the beliefs one professes. One can be a Christian who knows every biblical line and is well versed in philosophical theology and yet still not have faith as Kierkegaard conceives it. In fact, a concern with such “objective” Christian matters might be an impediment to faith. What matters most is how the doctrine is appropriated. Kierkegaard says that the type of appropriation in faith requires that we live and die in it. What exactly does this mean? Thus far, we have a few hints about what a life of faith looks like, specifically how it involves a proper understanding of reason’s limits, a certain degree of courage, cancellation of guilt-consciousness, the prioritization of eternal happiness, and a type of particularism before God.²⁴⁵

What is the qualitative difference between the passion of a lover and the person walking in faith? There seem to be as many examples of lovers living and dying for one another as Christians for their faith. Or similarly, what about those who live and die for an idea, such as the state? How is the appropriation of faith different from these other cases?

²⁴³ For aesthetic purposes, they will be referred to as Religion A and B henceforth.

²⁴⁴ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, pp.556-557, 559-560, 582.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p.608.

Kierkegaard offers a clarifying remark on the matter:

to have faith is specifically qualified differently from all other appropriation and inwardness. Faith is the objective uncertainty with the repulsion of the absurd, held fast in the passion of inwardness, which is the relation of inwardness to its highest. This formula fits only the one who has faith, no one else, not even a lover, or an enthusiast, or a thinker, but solely and only the one who has faith, who relates himself to the absolute paradox.²⁴⁶

So here we have a formula that in part explains the differences between the faithful and lovers or enthusiasts. The special repulsion of both belief in God and the Incarnation precipitates a qualitatively unique and supposedly more meaningful form of passion than those of romantic love and nationalism. Kierkegaard is well aware of the difficulties in communicating exactly what the passion of faith is, so he employs several illustrations in *Fear and Trembling* to assist in our understanding.

What does the portrayal of Isaac and Abraham in *Fear and Trembling* tell us about Christian faith and the possibility of faith outside of Christianity? Frequently, those who have had their curiosity aroused by Kierkegaard, ask where they should begin their investigation of the thinker's philosophy. It has always been a difficult question to answer, for Kierkegaard rarely provides straightforward answers. *Fear and Trembling*, being one of his most popular books, is often cited as the entry point. Kierkegaard, however, recognizes the imposing challenge the text involves, owing to how difficult it is to understand Abraham's point of view. There are passages where Kierkegaard asserts that Hegelianism is easier to understand than Abraham, the founder and paragon of faith. Let us see if Kierkegaard clarified the nature of faith through *Fear and Trembling's* psychological-theological evaluation of the Abraham and Isaac story. We will begin with a general

²⁴⁶ Ibid., p.611.

overview of the story and Kierkegaard's insights and then we will break our discussion down into five smaller topics to bring out the nature of faith. Those are: i) The Knight of Infinite Resignation vs. The Knight of Faith, ii) The Knight of Faith vs. The Tragic Hero, iii) Knight of Faith vs. The Fanatic, iv) The Role of Silence, and v) Objectivity vs. Faith.

General Overview

Anyone with a passing knowledge of the Bible is likely to be familiar with the story of Abraham and Isaac. God makes a promise with Abraham that he and his wife shall produce a child that will set in motion a great historical faith. They do not conceive Isaac until they are very advanced in age. One day God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Moriah. Abraham does not tell a soul and leads his son up the mountain. There he binds him, raises a knife to sacrifice, and at the last moment his hand is stayed by an angel and a ram appears as an alternative sacrifice. Abraham returns with Isaac and all is well. Many devout Christians do not take this narrative too seriously. They interpret it metaphorically and conclude that it is a teaching device, aimed to instill in us a sense of obedience to God or something about how God tests us, but preserves us. These interpretations are not entirely wrong on Kierkegaard's view, but they are incredibly simplistic. Kierkegaard's perspective is that there is much more going on in this event that communicates to us the real nature of faith, one that is congruent with much of what he has to say on the matter in *The Philosophical Fragments*. This might seem odd, since Kierkegaard in the *Philosophical Fragments* appears to link faith exclusively with the Incarnation and Abraham did not have access to the Incarnation. Nonetheless, for Kierkegaard the Abraham and Isaac story presents a deeper truth about faith than many within Christendom have previously misunderstood, one that harmonizes with much of what has thus far emerged in regards to faith, specifically that it involves a paradox, a setting aside of logical

categories, individuality, completeness before God, and a receptivity to the temporal. Let us explicate the parallels between this reading of Abraham and Isaac and what Kierkegaard has said thus far about faith.

In the Eulogy on Abraham from *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard discusses how great men are made:

Everyone shall be remembered, but everyone was great wholly in proportion to the magnitude of that with which he struggled. For he who struggled with the world became great by conquering the world, and he who struggled with himself became great by conquering himself, but he who struggled with God became the greatest of all.²⁴⁷

Given Kierkegaard's admiration for the psychological complexity of Abraham's task, we can deduce that he thought of Abraham as one of the greatest men who lived, despite how horrific we may find his actions. What is the clue to all this? There seem to be at least two parts: 1) Abraham was made great because of a struggle with God²⁴⁸ and 2) unlike other types of great men, Abraham was not made great by conquering that with which he struggled, rather the struggle itself made him great. How can a struggle that does not result in conquest make Abraham great? It is because what Abraham had to struggle with forced him to admit his powerlessness, acknowledge his limited rational understanding, hope for the impossible (*because through God all things are possible*), and love not himself, but God and whatever God delivered to him in this world. This description may sound heroic and great to us, but do we really understand how this constellation of traits that one might refer to as faith makes a person great or greater than others that struggle with themselves and the world?²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, p.16.

²⁴⁸ One could say Abraham, in a sense struggles with himself; however, that designation is typically reserved for someone attempting to live ethically.

²⁴⁹ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, pp.16-20.

What is the Source of the Struggle?

The Christian must struggle with the paradox of the Incarnation; however, the Incarnation is not available to Abraham. Abraham must have something as paradoxical, if not more so, to struggle with in order to fit Kierkegaard's definition of faith. What could this paradox be? We learn of it in the section entitled "Is there a Teleological Suspension of the Ethical?" The paradox is this: So far as anyone knew prior to Abraham the ultimate goal in life was to bring oneself into harmony with the ethical universal and morally hope for some eternal redemption.

Kierkegaard believes this idea has been in play since the Greeks and if one asserts one's individuality ahead of the universal, one has in a sense "sinned"²⁵⁰ and must be hammered back into accord with the ethical.²⁵¹ The Abraham and Isaac story, though, complicates things and it appears to Kierkegaard to introduce faith to the world for the first time. Abraham is given a private command that is antithetical to the universal. This command requires Abraham to "isolate himself as higher than the universal", so the paradox looks like this. From the ethical point of view, killing Isaac is impermissible and is murder. From the religious point of view, killing Isaac is a commanded sacrifice. This is the paradox. Killing Isaac is both strictly forbidden and must be done. Reason cannot mitigate the paradox, just as reason cannot mitigate and dialectically synthesize the finite and infinite components of the Incarnation. Kierkegaard can only imagine the sleeplessness and anxiety such a trial would have caused Abraham.²⁵²

²⁵⁰ A subject we will treat with greater detail later on.

²⁵¹ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, p.54.

²⁵² Ibid., p.30.

If Abraham is not an exemplar of faith, wrestling with a paradox, setting his earthly reason aside, and simultaneously thinking nothing of himself and only loving God and Isaac, then Abraham is lost. Abraham is a madman, who does not stand before God as an individual, but rather fights the phantoms in his head. He is more of a schizophrenic than something resembling the father of a faith. Further, if Abraham is a madman and hallucinates an imperative outside of the universal ethical, faith was mere ethical obeisance all along, an idea nearly as old as civilization itself.²⁵³

Several tellings of the story

Kierkegaard believed that Abraham's unique situation had much in common with the correct way we are to have faith in God and in the Incarnation. Given that Abraham is a concrete person with a concrete reaction to the trial he undergoes, more can be said about the nature of faith than what Kierkegaard has already argued elsewhere. One of the ways in which we can learn more about faith is by comparing the faithful Abraham to others who do not quite measure up (i.e. the Knight of Infinite Resignation, The Tragic Hero, The fanatic). Kierkegaard invites us to make such contrasting judgments, when he begins *Fear and Trembling* by poetically describing four types of alternative scenarios with failed Abrahams, who come close to representing faith, but fail in some crucial respect.²⁵⁴

²⁵³ Ibid., pp.55-56.

²⁵⁴ Mooney, Edward F., *Knights of Faith and Infinite Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling*, p.25.

In the *Attunement: Finding the Symbolic Key of Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard gives us the following failed Abrahams: 1) Abraham tells Isaac he will be sacrificed, but acts like a madman so Isaac will retain faith in God. 2) Abraham goes through with everything, receives Isaac back, but becomes old and joyless. 3) Abraham falls down in confusion, begs for forgiveness thinking God could demand this. And 4) Abraham draws the knife in anguish and Isaac sees this, which causes him to lose faith.

These failed Abrahams teach us that faith cannot lead individuals away from or to faith. Faith cannot involve deception, nor lead us into troubling despair and confusion. All of this furthers the idea that faith involves transcending complex ordeals with love, strength, courage, hope, and a type of understanding that is not objective or philosophical.²⁵⁵

i. Knight of Infinite Resignation vs. the Knight of Faith

In the last chapter, we spoke extensively of Religion A and its relation to the Knight of Infinite Resignation. Many conflate the knight of infinite resignation and the knight of faith, but they are different in some crucial respects. The knight of infinite resignation appears to be a lesser evolved stage that is absorbed in the movements of faith. The knight of infinite resignation breaks with the temporal and imagines that if everything is made right, it is done so in another realm. In his resignation, he may find some peace in his pain, but is ultimately thrown off by anything thrown to him in the temporal. Should he get Isaac back, he does not receive him with joy; rather he is old and joyless. Should his love be returned to him, he cannot fully embrace her. The knight of faith is an improvement upon the knight of infinite

²⁵⁵ Ibid., pp.27-28.

resignation most obviously when it comes to receptivity. The knight of faith resigns the delights and joys of this world as well (while maintaining care); however, he has limitless hope and faith in God that even the seemingly impossible will be returned to him. So in the knight of faith's case there are at least two movements.²⁵⁶ There is the infinite renunciation coupled with the openness that through God all things are possible (even what seems naturalistically impossible), then by virtue of the belief in the absurd (be it that God can save man in human form or that the individual is higher than the universal), God can bless man with the humble courage to joyously receive whatever his lot may be, even if it falls short of that which was renounced (one's flesh and blood or a departed lover).²⁵⁷

ii. Knight of Faith vs. Tragic Hero

If Abraham is a knight of faith, why would he not also be a tragic hero? What constitutes the difference? A tragic hero, on Kierkegaard's view, is usually an individual completely within the ethical realm. Such an individual is met head on by opposing ethical principles and must elect which to fulfill or obey. The tragic hero elects to choose the higher expression of the ethical, which will most likely mean he will indirectly cause some harm to himself or someone else. His dilemma is a public one. Most individuals can intuit the ethical principles they must choose between and their rationale for choosing the way they did. The tragic hero is ultimately pitied for having to make a choice no one would wish to address.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., pp.52, 54-55, 57-58.

²⁵⁷ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, pp.40-46, 46-47, 49.

Agamemnon, Captain Vere, and perhaps even Harry Truman are examples of tragic heroes.²⁵⁸

Abraham is not operating within the ethical realm. He is either a murderer or a man of faith. Abraham cannot appeal to a higher expression of the ethical to justify the killing of his son. Abraham transgressed the ethical entirely and had a higher telos outside of it causing him to suspend the ethical. Nearly everyone has confidence in the actions of the tragic hero, but because Abraham is not operating within the publicly demonstrable ethical realm there is no certainty or confidence in his actions. Our instincts and reasons, find something completely horrific about what he does.²⁵⁹

There are perhaps one or two more distinguishing characteristics. The tragic hero's ordeal resolves itself relatively quickly. Once he decides for what ethical principle he will enact, he then rests securely in the universal. This is not the case with the knight of faith. The knight of faith's ordeal never ends. He is made sleepless in his task by being always tempted by that which is lower, the ethical, where he might rest securely with so many others, who can understand the trials of being an ethical being. The knight of faith's task never concludes, nor can anyone understand it. A tragic hero would not be able to sustain such loneliness and isolation.²⁶⁰

iii. Knight of Faith v. The Fanatic

How do we delineate between faithful knights and religiously inspired fanatics who may be willing to perform acts of violence? Is Kierkegaard getting dangerously close to endorsing

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p.59.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., pp.59-60.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., pp.78-79.

terrorism of some variety? Kierkegaard doesn't appear to be too troubled about the matter. Abraham is an outlier, an anomaly that Kierkegaard can consider exemplary because no one would want to be in his situation. Who would abandon the comfort of knowable virtuous action, in order to do something that society and reason would find insane? People are not going to assert their individuality against the ethical. It is too stressful, anxiety inducing, and immoral. No one would desire such a trial.²⁶¹

Mooney gives us six other reasons to not think the fanatic can be mistaken for the knight of faith: 1) The Knight of Faith would show unwavering love for Isaac. The same cannot be said of the victims of religiously inspired madmen. 2) The Knight of Faith would not be making a political/general point. Isaac is not a pawn in a larger game. 3) The Knight of Faith is caught between legitimate claims, while the fanatic is committed to decisively unjustified claims such as "Murder, plain, and simple."²⁶² 4) The Knight of Faith is of upright moral character before his ordeal and welcomes the return of the universal, while the fanatic is not part of such a moral community. 5) The knight of faith has a high standard for what counts as a message from God, barring individuals from reading their ideology into religious text. 6) Mooney thinks, and this is Mooney talking, that the narrative of Abraham is most likely "a narrative construct"²⁶³ meant to demonstrate the limits of reason, ethics, and speech. It is not an endorsement of violence or fanaticism.²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ Mooney, Edward F., *Knights of Faith and Infinite Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling*, p.83.

²⁶² Ibid., p.83.

²⁶³ Ibid., p.83.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p.83.

Is this an endorsement of Mooney's points? In general and for this specific episode, yes. Where one could quibble would be with the last one. It is not obvious that Kierkegaard viewed the Abraham story metaphorically. Further, these points generally hold for the Abraham scenario, but might break down when applied to someone like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a devout German pastor who involved himself in political conspiracy to stop the madness of Hitler's objective order. If Bonhoeffer could be determined to be a Knight of faith and not a tragic hero or a madman himself, then Mooney's first and second points could be in doubt. Bonhoeffer likely did not love Hitler and Bonhoeffer was a religious man who entered into the political, but in those very dire circumstances abstention from the political might have seemed more feasible than participation in it.

iv. The role of silence

Abraham shows us that faith cannot be communicated objectively. Society cannot make sense of his direct relationship with the absolute. It is a burden that no one else can take up. Whatever demands we encounter in faith are not ones for which we necessarily feel any need for public justification. Abraham's ordeal, like being a Christian in general (*Kierkegaard views them as synonymous with one another*) is not something that can be reduced to a universally objective creed or ethic. There is a very private dimension to it that is never captured by code alone. In fact, once one has drawn close to the divine in faithful encounter, a faith that is mere creed seems hollow and borders on idolatry.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p.73.

v. Objectivity v. Faith

Fear and Trembling, through its three problemata, pits an all knowing rationalism against faith, in order to confound readers, so that they can begin to see that reason is not omnipotent. Rationalistic ethics cannot mediate faith. Faith offers something more. This is not to say that faith dethrones reason altogether. It just reels it in and cordons it within the proper boundaries. There are aspects of the self and its formation that do not neatly fall under the domain of rationalism. Faith will always remain misunderstood from the objective standpoint; however, it seems so essential for creating a self that is (in some yet to be described sense) free, integrated, and open to whatever life throws at it.²⁶⁶

Kierkegaard does not deny that there is in fact an ethical dimension, but he highlights its limits through his understanding of Abraham and Christianity in general. Kierkegaard believes that the ethical takes on a new circumscribed form once we relate directly to God. Through an individual connection with God, love will now move us to perform obligatory and supererogatory acts, rather than some moralistic and abstract sense of duty. The ethical is not suspended or invalidated from the perspective of faith, it merely takes on a new expression in religious life.²⁶⁷

The Abraham story does not provide us with an objective expression that will help us navigate the impasse between ethics and obedience to God. Kierkegaard is not saying, “Always do what God commands”. The point of the Abraham story is to amplify the brute fact of the paradox. There is no real advice on what one must do. Does one refuse God? Does one defy

²⁶⁶ Ibid., pp.64, 69, 78.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p.80.

the ethical? No one can really say. This is for the individual to work out in his own relationship with God and his conscience. If a simple objective creed could be given, then there would be no struggle, and the struggle from Kierkegaard's view is absolutely essential for the evolution of the self. A general rule would be self-defeating to the existential project.²⁶⁸

Since Kierkegaard analogizes the faith of Abraham to the authentically committed Christian, do they both have the same paradox as their focus? If not, does Abraham have a different faith? Is Abraham's subjective experience different from the Christian's? Does Abraham deal with God as an individual? Is Abraham motivated by love? The paradox of the conflict between the universal code of ethics and direct command from God is not the exact same paradox as the Incarnation. There are certainly similarities. The ethical code is analogous to the finitude of Christ's embodiment, just as the personal call from God is analogous to that divine element in opposition to the finite. Nonetheless, the Abraham story presents a paradox between ethics and divine mission, whereas the Incarnation presents the distinct paradox of the Absolute coming into contingent history. Still, if Abraham deals with God as an individual, is motivated by love for the god object, and reciprocates this gift, the faith experience for Abraham closely resembles that of the committed Christian. Abraham does seem to deal with God directly. He is immediately involved with commands and God intervenes at the last moment.

There are, however, salient differences. First, Abraham is not really dealing with God as a subject in a person-to-person confrontation. Supposedly the Christ relationship involves such a direct confrontation. God reveals Himself as a subject in the body of Christ. Abraham's

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p.81.

God is still remote and there are layers between the two (i.e. angels and sacrificial rams). In addition, the individualized interaction that God has with Abraham has the character of a dictate. Within the Christ relationship, few dictates are given. The individual rather is invited into a loving partnership. Taking this into consideration, one can ask if Abraham's religious individuation leads him to be motivated and reciprocate the salvific love extended to those in Christian faith.

Abraham obviously loved his son. To overcome this love, Abraham must have either feared God or loved Him more than his son. An admixture is possible and likely the most plausible scenario. Do we not simultaneously fear the things we love most? Ultimate attachment begets fear that we may be deprived of the thing that we hold to be the highest. Damnation would be the extreme deprivation of the God one loves. Does one experience fear in the Christ relationship? That does not seem to be a salient quality of authentic Christianity. Before Christ, God issues external decrees, dictates, wraths, laws, and blessings. After the Incarnation, the relationship between God and man is one of an invitation. Christ invites us to enter into a relationship with the divine. When one receives an invitation, it is hard to be fearful in the same way. The different paradoxes of Abraham and the committed Christian lead to different types of individuation and faith, even if Abraham appears to be only a breath away from the significant individuality experienced in Christian life.

vi. Independence

Currents of freedom run through Kierkegaard's work. The self attains greater degrees of freedom as it transcends existential stages. One witnesses the self elevate itself out of immediacy by a commitment to the ethical and experience other types of freedom in Religion A, specifically a freedom from the condemnation of the ethical and objectivity in general by

positing, yet not proving the existence of (a certain sort of) God.

What type of freedom or independence is on display in both Christian and Abrahamic faith? Although the Christian and Abrahamic paradoxes are offensive to reason and irresolvable, we are not bullied or lured into Christianity. Our freedom to turn down the offer is dramatically affirmed when presented with such maddening paradoxes. But did we not already know of our free choice? We knew we could persist in immediacy rather than become ethical agents. We knew we could remain godless and ethical. All of the decisions that led us to this point have assumed free choice and the struggle to make such free choices reiterates the matter. So what does our radical free choice in faith free us from? Does it have to do with the guilt and sin consciousness incurred as the result of a confrontation with the Absolute? Does it involve liberation from despair, because we now rest in God in faith?²⁶⁹

God in human form introduces²⁷⁰ the pervasive nature of sin and amplifies guilt consciousness. The subjective truth dynamic with Christ is such that we can leave ethical guilt behind and have the newly emphasized sin-consciousness negated via the atoning relationship. One might claim that Christ's existence can free the individual from these constituent elements of despair only after He has increased the sentence. Before Christ, guilt-consciousness was perhaps felt less intensely and if we are to believe that sin-consciousness was first introduced via Christ, then it looks as if Christ's initial appearance only tightens the noose of existence around our neck. He can achieve a greater degree of freedom for us only after more severely

²⁶⁹ Thompson, Curtis L., "From Presupposing Pantheism's Power to Potentiating Panentheism's Personality: Seeking Parallels between Kierkegaard's and Martensen's Theological Anthropologies", *The Journal of Religion* 82, no. 2, (Apr., 2002): 240-241.

²⁷⁰ How precisely is still a bit of a mystery.

condemning us. Some would claim that this is a deceptive act, akin to being led to the gallows unjustly and then receiving a reprieve. Are we supposed to be joyous in this freedom that Christ bestows? To mitigate this critique, one could claim that sin was unconsciously there all along and that humanity did not feel ethical failure enough. Therefore, it is a blessing to have our collective shortcomings pointed out in a dramatic revelation.

vii. Integrity

Throughout the effort to understand how the self attains significance, reference has been made to the beguiling quote in *The Sickness Unto Death* concerning the self as a relation to itself that ultimately relates itself to the power that established it. In prior chapters, we examined the multitude of ways that the self cannot get itself together or why it endures certain sorts of misrelation. The self cannot be in harmony with the power that established it as well. This is another form of misrelation with which we are walloped over the head when we encounter God as individuals. Only after we are brought before God is the misrelation brought to our attention in the form of sin-consciousness. It appears the self needs God as a means of ironing out all the misrelations internally and externally. Once that is done we can say something about the structural integrity of the self. In the struggles with paradoxes, knights of faith appear to have a humble courage that allows them to finally find their place in the world. Dwelling in faith with God appears to not only bring us some type of rest, but a full integration of all the virtues that make us human.²⁷¹

²⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 245-246.

How does the Incarnation specifically iron out those spoken of misrelations? Internally, the loving relationship with Christ ought to assuage our feelings of failure against the backdrop of an objective morality. Further, the anxiety that interpenetrated every prior mode of being ought to be quieted. Similarly, the horror of our sin-consciousness ought to be something one recognizes to be atoned for, primarily because the individual is no longer misrelating to God objectively, through resignation, animal sacrifice, moral performance, or not at all. The correct relation to God via Christ restores what was once a fractured human psyche.

viii. Receptivity of Immediacy/ Place in the natural order

The integration of the aspects of the self and the harmony brought about as the result of the unification with God, spills over into the temporal world. Since the self is no longer in misrelation, the self is not unlike an eternal being in time; however, the self is not to shrink from actuality and retreat into asceticism; rather there is always a significant enough task before it to attend to with love. No matter where one is after the encounter with God, there is an actuality to receive back and to embrace. We are to imitate the divine being of Christ and how it incurred into reality. Our ultimate love for God is indirectly expressed in the love for others.

Why does this follow? Why this route and not asceticism? Why not keep our relationship with Christ a secret? Does the lover want to share his beloved with the world? The Incarnation is an open invitation to all to either be offended at the paradox's nature or appropriate it and experience an inward deepening of the subjective truth relationship that transfigures individuals. If one failed to mirror the love bestowed upon one from Christ, one

would be acting antithetically to Christ's example. One would be no imitation of Christ. One may ask where the imperative to imitate Christ even comes from. To put it simply, it is almost an unconscious call of conscience one experiences in the faith relationship. The image of a cup flowing over is an inescapable one in this context. Faith restores our sense of purpose and place in the natural order. The encounter with Christ emphasizes the importance of our individuality in a given geography and time. If God takes the time to know us as individuals He must have some use for us. If one keeps demanding what this sense of purpose is after the encounter with Christ, one can look again to the call to imitate Christ. If the individual's life has been transformed and he adopts a loving approach to the given world, it is possible that he will indirectly lead another to that divine relationship. Even if we are all alone, stranded on a desert isle, our lives have purpose. We lived long enough to draw nearer to God, experience relief from existential maladies, and anticipate a future of beatific communion. We have been fully drawn out of the immediacy of life, gotten ourselves together as individuals before God, and naturally set to work expressing that love in our own particular epoch.²⁷²

Does faith involve a breaking of the self (i.e. a transformation)? Is it to be thought of as something we do on our own? The existential stages considered prior to this chapter involved revolutions of the self; however, the self seemed characterized by fluidity, giving the impression that existential relapse or even collapse is very real and must be fought for at each developmental stage. The case appears different in faith/religiousness B. The line of demarcation seems firmer, if not inviolable, between the self in faith and all those stages that preceded it, as exemplified by the talk of being "reborn" in faith.

²⁷²Ibid., pp. 246-247.

From the perspective of Religiousness B, there was something severely limiting to Religiousness A. Immanence could not really salve the guilt consciousness built up from the seriousness associated with our ethical duties and our inevitable shortcomings, nor harmonize us with the temporal when our joys are ripped away. If God wishes to see us transformed and the self brought out of its misrelation, then God needed to enter time. It has already been mentioned elsewhere that the internal and external misrelations could only be ironed out when the individual is called forth and enters into a relationship with a divine subject, rather than an impersonal universal ethics or a distant and utterly mystifying deity. Why does knowing God, divine subject to finite subject, culminate in the best existential situation for ourselves? If we look at prior commitments there was not a reciprocation of intense devotion. The ethical cared not for us and God remained a vague moral/spiritual positing. God matching us in the form of a servant-savior seems to have made all the difference. Why could we not experience meaningful individuation in a relationship with another human? Whatever is occurring in our romantic and platonic relationships, as good as they may be, is not permanently negating despair and anxiety. The love God has for us in the incarnated relationship smothers those existential maladies in a way that allows for a renewed purposiveness both within and without.²⁷³

The Incarnation affords an opportunity to break with the old self and re-establish the proper relation to the power that established the self. Confrontation and belief in the Incarnation, as we have discussed earlier, arouses our sin-consciousness and the happy passion of faith. The passion of faith, in ways that exceed our comprehension, annihilates the

²⁷³ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's, "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, p.45.

old self and allows us to embrace a new self. In our experience, the passion of faith truly is life transforming. Our life can seemingly be divided into epochs of before and after the encounter. Man cannot complete the task of self-hood without the gift of the Incarnation. The Incarnation allows for the old self to die and a new one to be established in unity with both the eternal and the temporal.²⁷⁴

If we do have a divide, where the former self is cast off and a new one is embraced, does this then mean that conversion is a onetime affair and we remain in faith rather easily after the first movements are made? It seems that our freedom is reduced in faith (we are not free to fall away from faith) and it makes faith not seem like a life-long affair, but rather a one-time personal and divine ceremony. How can Kierkegaard have it both ways? How can being born again be a definitive point by which we define our lives and yet a task we must continually renew? Are these contradictory views? Perhaps they need not be. We can recognize how the self in faith is qualitatively better than previously, for the religious B self has attained some victory and mastery over what once limited it and because we are aware of this difference we work ever the more to maintain the proper relationship with God. Fair enough, but what is that relationship like after the initial leap? Are we still fretting over paradoxes as our faith matures or have we left all that behind? Can the self mature in faith? Are there further gradations of faith beyond our young faith?

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p.268.

Increased Subjectivity/passion

If faith is subjectively dwelling in truth, for Kierkegaard, what else can be said about the qualitative aspect of this inwardness? How is it different from the other forms of subjectivity that preceded it and were still stages within untruth? How is passionate inwardness amplified in the subjective relationship to the divine incarnate?

Kierkegaard believes that in faith, a passionate interiority fulminates so intensely, that a qualitatively new self is born and an old one is shed, so that we may live in the truth. Kierkegaard thinks the objective realm tempts us away from our own lives, causing us to live a more disinterested existence without any real commitments. There are returns upon the self with certain types of existential commitment (i.e. ethics, religion A, and Religion B). The greater the objective uncertainty, the greater the intensification of impassioned meaning. Faith in Christianity not only involves the objective uncertainty concerning the question of God in general, but also the incomprehensibility of the god-man. We have an inverse correlation between certainty and the passionate inwardness of subjectivity. Is there something causal going on here? Kierkegaard has said that objective certainty tempts us away from the subject. If we are constantly searching for the proof of God's existence and Christ, faith may never become an actuality for us, but rather a plausible hypothesis in constant need of support or defense. If the belief in God and Christ cuts away all connection to the objective realm, this would lead one to focus on one's own subjectivity. We may reject the Father and Son and go back to ethical or aesthetic tasks and their corresponding subjectivity.

What remains unclear is how the objective uncertainty aids in fomenting the passion of faith. It is possible that when objective certainty is off the table, a space is cleared for subjective

truth corresponding to Religiousness B. It need not foment the passion in some way, but merely get out of the way. This seems partially acceptable; however, there is more to it. Does not the anguish of not having objective justification for God and the paradox contribute something to the passion of faith? Is there not a tension that feeds into the passion? We had free choice when it came to faith given the obstacles to belief, yet free choice and freedom are not the same thing. The objective uncertainty of the doubly paradoxical Religiousness B²⁷⁵ finally liberates the subject from externality and objectivity. In the initial movements away from immediacy and aesthetic life, one takes refuge in a supposedly objective ethical or perhaps even in God. To fully get out from underneath the objective, one follows Christ down the path of intensified subjective truth. When the objective is shed, the self can focus on dwelling in this unity with God. It is finally free to live in truth and free from objectivity. To live in truth is to relationally exist in such a way to Christ that the constitutive elements of the self are properly aligned and the individual is at peace with the power that established it.

What about freedom from objectivity? It is a legitimate and non-deleterious escape from the universal's all encompassing condemnation and the obsessive need to rationally demonstrate God to ourselves and others. Although there was some freedom from the universal and objective realm in Religiousness A, now we have a greater degree of freedom from this, which allows the self to resolve misrelation.²⁷⁶ The self has the freedom to become a whole being before God.²⁷⁷ By becoming a whole being before God, the individual can coordinate the elements of the self to correlate with the incarnation, thus unifying the psyche,

²⁷⁵ Doubly paradoxical for it requires 1) belief in an intuitively understood, yet unprovable God 2) belief in a God-man.

²⁷⁶ Dupré, Louis K, *A Dubious Heritage: Studies in the Philosophy of Religion after Kant*, p.46.

²⁷⁷ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, pp.385-386.

and driving out the despair endemic to an individual deprived of faith. The individual is properly constituted, on Kierkegaard's view, and it no longer suffers from a privation of temporal and eternal happiness. This is what Kierkegaard means by the individual becoming whole in the relationship to Incarnation and this is what it truly means to have significant individuality.

Is there a qualitative or quantitative difference in the passion of faith compared to the inwardness of Religiousness A? When we speak of the highest passion or greatest inwardness of subjectivity in Faith, are we discussing the matter in qualitative or quantitative terms? Is the subjectivity experienced in Religiousness B of greater quantity than earlier existential stages or is it an intensification of something pre-existing? Actually, both of these options are quantitative, one extensive, the other intensive. Difference in degree is not a qualitative difference.

Kierkegaard suggest as much when he ranks interpretations of existence in regards to dialectical inward deepening in the *Concluding Unscientific Post-Script*:

If in himself the individual is undialectical and has his dialectic outside himself, then we have the esthetic interpretations. If the individual is dialectically turned inward in self-assertion in such a way that the ultimate foundation does not in itself become dialectical, since the underlying self is used to surmount and assert itself, then we have the ethical interpretation. If the individual is defined as dialectically turned inward in self-annihilation before God, then we have Religiousness A. If the individual is paradoxical-dialectical, every remnant of original immanence annihilated, and all connection cut away, and the individual situated at the edge of existence, then we have the paradoxical-religious. This paradoxical inwardness is the greatest possible, because even the most dialectical qualification, if it is still within immanence, has, as it were, a possibility of an escape, of a shifting away, of a withdrawal into the eternal behind it; it is as if everything were not actually at stake. But the break makes the inwardness the greatest possible²⁷⁸

²⁷⁸ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, p.572.

One can say that if the self dialectically evolves, it retains some of the meaning gleaned from a prior existence stage. A Religious B self is going to have more meaning than the one merely ethically existing. The religious B self has surpassed both the ethical and immanence and taken those quantitative experiences with it as it dwells in the new subjectivity of faith. The subjective character of those previous life views are vividly held in memory and exist as enduring preconditions for what mode one inhabits now, which becomes all too obvious when we let our commitments to God and the ethical lapse. What we began stays with us, not unlike a dormant virus whose symptoms no longer visibly manifest.

This suggests how objective certainty sets the conditions for faith and how the tension induced by the absurd underlies the passion of faith. Further, the tension brought about by the objective uncertainty of the paradox might be the first of several moments within subjectivity/passion of faith and a causal relationship need not be established between the tension induced by uncertainty and the movements to follow. When objective certainty disappears in a confrontation with the paradox, producing a tension that seems impossible to affirm, the immediate result is not the happy passion of faith. There are several steps in between. Tension may be the first, but it is not the cause of fulfilling and meaningful subjectivity. After the tension, one confronts God directly and has one's guilt-consciousness transformed into sin-consciousness. As one deals with this new awareness, one is forced to resolve the tension by either bailing on belief or handing one's life over to Christ. If the latter is elected there is an alleviating forgiveness that can only be magnified by the terrible tension initiated by uncertainty and then amplified by sin-consciousness. One then is oriented in existence in such a way that one can receive one's life back with joy. There are thus at least four movements involved in the grand passion of faith. It is undetermined at this moment if the

movements need to be repeated in order for faith to be renewed, so that we do not become complacent in our faith. Moreover, the individual is not solely responsible for the passion of faith. There is a divine-human interaction, so of course the presence of tension alone cannot induce faith. Faith is also induced by God illuminating us to our sin and giving us forgiveness.²⁷⁹ The tension, God's illumination and forgiveness, and our own choice form a causal chain that can in total be recognized as the passion of faith.²⁸⁰

How then does objective uncertainty in regards to a universal ethical, God, and His potential manifestation on Earth in Christ grant us freedom beyond freedom from the objective realm? What can freedom from the objective realm signify for a worldly finite self? When the self attains freedom from the objective world the self is not defined by external ends. For instance, when the obsession with an objective ethical is dispensed with and drawing subjectively closer to God becomes a priority, the neurosis of ethical failure is surpassed in relationship to the divine. Similarly, when the objective fixation with proving what is unprovable (i.e. God) is jettisoned, failure to attain meaning through intellectualism is surpassed in a direct encounter with God. The self takes control of itself as it develops subjective inwardness. Its life is predicated less and less upon rationally intuited values or the intellectually demonstrable. The self emancipated from objectivity is in a dynamic relationship. Though it is a process that must be reaffirmed, there is a sense in which our restless searching no longer torments us and is made sense of. The obsession with objectivity was merely misplaced passion, which was waiting to be properly channeled via the

²⁷⁹ McLane, Earl, "Kierkegaard and Subjectivity", p.225.

²⁸⁰ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, p.188.

incarnation. If the tension is seen as a first cause in the chain of causes known as the passion of faith, then ultimately objective uncertainty frees us from the guilt and despair still haunting our lives and it frees us to enjoy God's love and earthly existence, regardless of the situation we are thrown into. Admittedly, each of the movements in the passion of faith frees us. It is a chain of movements. The objective uncertainty, in conjunction with the other movements of faith, frees us.

Enjoying God's love means that the internal and external misrelations have been properly ironed out. The components of the self no longer exist in an internal antagonism or with that which is greater than it. To enjoy God's love is to be no longer in despair or rather to know joy, both in relation to God, but in relation to others. So we now have at least three types of freedom that are marks of Subjectivity associated with faith (Religion B): 1) freedom from the objective, 2) freedom from despair, and 3) freedom to love God and life itself.

Can more be said about the concealment of faith? When we contemplated why Abraham could not relate his ordeal to another living soul, we came to understand that private calls by the divine are not really translatable into the public domain. A private call, audible or not, occurs when God communicates directly to the individual. Private calls appeared to be for an elite in the Old Testament. Kierkegaard's Christian existentialist project affirms that the private call is made available to everyone in the relationship with Jesus Christ. Even though contact with God through Christ is experienced more widely, this does not diminish the sacredness of the call or make it any less of a secret. The private call is dramatized by the Abraham story. Had he tried to convey what God had asked of him, he would have been thought to be a zealot opposing societal ethical standards and most likely physically deterred from his task.

Even if faith could be expressed to a third party, Kierkegaard warns against it, for he

fears that it will become secularized and take us out of the passion of faith. There are at least two ways faith can be mishandled if conveyed to a third party: 1) it sets up a comparison of religious effusions, where individuals compare their piety to one another for the sake of social status, power, what have you. An obsession with comparison only shows that one has not completely drawn close to God. One has other priorities in mind. These acts of comparison cheapen faith. If one enters into a spiritual competition, the individual becomes pharisaical.

Such people care more about how they appear in society's eyes than knowing God subjectively. This is a dangerous temptation away from authentic faith, just as dangerous as aesthetic caprice or objective intoxication and 2) Kierkegaard is concerned that a fixation with sharing faith might lead to the formation of groups with the aim of transforming the world into their conception of Christendom.²⁸¹ This worries Kierkegaard, not only because it distracts the self from drawing before God, but also because if successful, a world that has normalized Christianity perhaps takes away some of the offensiveness that is essential to creating the tension that foments faith.²⁸²

How does knowledge fit into inwardness of faith? Is there subjective knowledge in faith? What is it of? Since the Incarnation cannot be objectively appropriated, many who study Kierkegaard presume that it does not really matter if Christ historically intruded. All that really matters is that the relation to the presupposed faith object is such that the sought for subjective truth is grasped and despair is rooted out. Dupré claims that all that matters is that the process of subjectivity must be constantly renewed in order to find the truth and freedom in existence.

²⁸¹ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Training in Christianity*, pp.218-219.

²⁸² Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, pp.508, 510.

It is of no real concern whether or not the religious object of the Incarnation “exist objectively” or otherwise.²⁸³

This seems to be an odd conclusion given that we cannot accomplish the subjectivity associated with Religiousness B without divine help. Kierkegaard is very clear on this point. Faith is not an immanent mode. It is a gift brought to us by a transcendent action of God in the form of the Incarnation. Must then the Incarnation be real? If by real we mean that to this day, God through Christ reveals to us our sin-consciousness and continues to forgive our sins, resulting in repose in him, then we would have to conclude that he is real. Is this the definition of “real”? Could Christ alternately be just a religious fanatic 2,000 years ago or could it be that God did incarnate for a moment, but then that moment has been reabsorbed into the Absolute? If Christ were a mere man then there would be no paradox and this paradox has no power to transform us existentially. Kierkegaard has then guided us towards error and delusionally holds out a promise that will never be fulfilled temporally or eternally. If God has no Christ aspect, then Christianity loses its distinguishing character and reverts to Religion A. If Christ were not real, the passion of faith would never happen, so it matters to an incredible extent that Christ is real. Kierkegaard’s understanding of the subjective deepening of faith requires an actual divine human interaction. There are things that only the faith object can do (i.e. alert us to sin-consciousness and forgive us for those sins). Anything meaningful gained in the subjectivity of Religion B hinges upon the reality of Christ.

If we are only concerned with the right relation to God as an individual man (who may or may not actually exist), then Dupré and others such as Friedman would have to claim that if

²⁸³ Dupré, Louis K., *A Dubious Heritage: Studies in the Philosophy of Religion after Kant*, pp.45-46.

there is knowledge in the passion of faith, it is knowledge of the self, since the Incarnation cannot be objectively appropriated. Such knowledge might include how the self weathers complex ordeals with courage and humility and how the self learns to live in harmony with the temporal. No doubt these are important things for the self to know of itself, but does it really cohere with what Kierkegaard thinks we know in faith and what our own experiences as disciples tell us?²⁸⁴

Gil and Levine see things differently. Yes, the Incarnation cannot be appropriated objectively on Kierkegaard's account. And yes, the how of the how/what distinction is incredibly important. One must correctly relate to the faith object in order to enrich one's individuality with the passion of faith. The story does not end there though. If the relation (the how) to the faith object is properly structured, then subjectively we ought to come to know the faith object that we sought all along. When we draw before God in our individuality, we experience his forgiveness. We experience his love. We experience his transformative power. These experiences cannot be communicated nor understood objectively, yet they lead to knowledge nonetheless. One can rightly claim one has experiential knowledge of the Incarnation. Not only would this conform to certain passages in the text, but does it not speak to our own experience in faith? Would we keep renewing our faith if we did not feel that we not only lived in the truth (due to the right relation/the how) but came to know the truth (Christ/the what) in that right relation? Why else would we stay in faith if we weren't given some glimpse

²⁸⁴ Friedman, R.Z., "Kant and Kierkegaard: The Limits of Reason and the Cunning of Faith", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 19, no. ½, (1986): p.14.

of the divine? Would we not stray, thinking we had deluded ourselves?²⁸⁵ It must be emphasized here that we cannot subjectively know the faith object in its entirety in the subjective passion of faith. We catch glimpses.²⁸⁶ Christ as the truth and the way possesses ultimate knowledge of Himself.²⁸⁷

Sin

Throughout our discussion, we have mentioned sin in passing, as if it is something we implicitly understand. We might, but we are in need of exploring this concept just a bit more so we can see how it properly fits into the Kierkegaardian plan. Do we understand the difference between guilt and sin and our awareness of either? This is a point that often suffers confusion amongst Kierkegaard scholars, probably because Kierkegaard's own use of the term "sin" shifts over the course of his authorship. In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard is prone to speak of sin as an action that goes against the ethical, whereas in the *Fragments and Post-script*, sin is something we only become aware of during the encounter with the Incarnation and sin is an explicitly Christian concept that the intellect cannot apprehend. Thus, the Greeks did not know about sin. What then is guilt and guilt consciousness?

Guilt and guilt-consciousness are immanent concepts that arise from our relating to the eternal, whether the eternal is conceived in purely ethical or ethico-religious terms. There is a recognition that we are responsible for falling short of the posited ethico-religious ideals;

²⁸⁵ Gill, Jerry H., "Kant, Kierkegaard, and Religious Knowledge", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 28, no. 2, (Dec. 1967): 200.

²⁸⁶ Jacoby, Matthew Gerhard, "Kierkegaard on Truth", p. 42.

²⁸⁷ Levine, Michael P., "Kierkegaard: What Does the Subjective Individual Risk?", p.19.

however, we continue to seek perfection in this life in order to assuage the guilt or deem perfection impossible and posit God as the insurer that will make for an afterlife where moral perfection is possible. The essential point here in guilt consciousness is that we have some sense of our inadequacy, but we believe we can transform ourselves or if we have reached the conclusion that we cannot we posit that God will somehow take care of us one-day, just not here in the temporal realm. This guilt is agonizing and represents a misrelation of the self and the eternal. The misrelation seems to arise by our heavily emphasizing the eternal within, that part of us capable of rationality and ethical conceptualization, at the expense of earthly embodiment. There is frustration in the denial of the body and there is no ultimate gratification in our eternal pursuits. The disparity between our own ethical performance and the infinity of God makes us despise our finitude and possibly resent the best part of ourselves for evolving out of mere aesthetic animality. What can possibly fix the misrelation? This, for Kierkegaard, is going to be one of, if not the chief reason, for why the Incarnation intrudes into reality.²⁸⁸

How is sin different from guilt and how do we develop sin-consciousness? For Kierkegaard, sin is not an immanent concept, but rather a theological one. The only way we can learn about sin is if it is shown to us, if it is brought to us. In the encounter with Christ, our guilt from ethico-religious relating takes on new form. The interaction with Christ not only shows us how far we are from God, but also that there is nothing we can do, either in the temporal or eternal realm to rid ourselves of the totality of guilt. No work will wash it away. We are utterly convicted by Christ. Christ demonstrates the severity of our inadequacy and how the only salve

²⁸⁸ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, p.532.

for the guilt-consciousness (now transformed into sin-consciousness) is to have faith in Christ so that we can be forgiven and the chasm between us and God can be bridged.

How does an incarnation demonstrate the extent of our sin, undo misrelation, and bridge the gulf between us and the infinite? Why could not a God on high do this? Before the appearance of Christ, God did relate to humanity without an intercessor. If this plan was working perfectly from the divine perspective, introducing Christ would have been a redundancy. Why might this dynamic not function perfectly? Earlier Kierkegaard claimed that a removed God does not effectively bring about the existential transformation God desired to see in His subjects. A distant God is held in awe and feared. There is an indescribable difference that leads to groveling and the external determination of the subject. One might claim that a removed God need not induce such reactions. If God is distantly removed, resignation and renunciation may become naturally occurring modes of spirituality as demonstrated by figures of the immanent perspective. So it seems that if God did not become man either humanity would be too blinded by awe and fear to comprehend the pervasiveness of sin or would have no powerful point of contact to illuminate individuals to the presence of sin, leaving humanity to grasp at some form of asceticism and lust for a realm beyond this one. A god-man can correct our error and precipitate faith in a way a prophet, an oracle, or a law cannot.

Sin-consciousness is an amplification of the guilt we already feel. It is an amplification that causes an intensification of despair, because we have no hope unless we take Christ up on the offer of salvation. In comparison with Christ, we learn that we are even more convicted of living in untruth than we ever imagined. Sin, in connection with Christ, comes to be understood not just as the things that we regret, but the entirety of the time that we have lived our lives

apart from the passion of faith. Even when we are striving to be good people, Christ reveals to us that we are still in sin. Time spent obsessing over our moral autonomy without reference to God at the minimum indicates remarkable pride in regards to how one can personally reshape the world and one's own internal life. The good news about this revelation of sin is that it can condition us for the condition of faith. Sin-consciousness can actually propel us towards transformation in Christ, whereas guilt-consciousness just left us stuck, waiting and hoping for a day that all impediments to right action will be removed.²⁸⁹

How does one's intelligence/sophistication affect one's ability to grasp sin and live in faith? Kierkegaard's account of sin and faith allows for some exceptions as well as imposes more rigorous requirements upon people of greater intellect. Though children and the mentally handicapped can certainly have Christian faith, they are exempted from the rigors of remaining in faith. Their limited intellect does not allow them to grasp the complexity of the paradox, nor the convicting nature of sin-consciousness. They do not have the proper cognitive apparatus to rightly practice Christian faith. Conversely, those with elevated intellects may be expected to struggle and work harder to stay in faith, precisely because they can grasp the logical absurdity of the paradox and how riddled their life is with sin. There is some leniency on the innocent and the simple, but not for those of us reading these words.²⁹⁰

How is sin connected to despair? The different types of despair that Kierkegaard outlines in *The Sickness Unto Death* are the result of the self's misrelation to itself and God. If

²⁸⁹ Evans, C. Stephen, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Post-Script": The Religious Philosophy Of Johannes Climacus*, pp.25, 271-273.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., pp.590-592, 607.

we have the right relationship with God, then there is no misrelation. Without misrelation there ought not to be despair since we rest transparently in God. Are we in sin if we suffer from despair, yet have not encountered the Incarnation to inform us of our sin-consciousness and the forgiveness of sins? Or are we only in sin once the Incarnation has made it clear to us that we are? Before news of the Incarnation, we would be not unlike the child. For Kierkegaard, from the perspective of faith, an individual then is in sin, but does not have the conceptual equipment to know his distance from the divine. True knowledge of our distance from God is impossible without the Incarnation. There is something unique about the Incarnation that allows it alone to illuminate the full extent of sin. What this is is hard to say. One may intuitively think that the faith relationship illuminates the extent of sin; however, Kierkegaard tells us even before the commitment has been made to Christ that our sin is made readily known to us. Then what feature of the Incarnation is responsible for this sin-awareness? This does not seem to be Christ's earthly appearance and claims to divinity alone. Others before and after Him resemble Christ in this respect. How Christ cannot be imitated is in regard to very unique miracles and probably none more important than the resurrection. Kierkegaard infrequently mentions the miracle working of Christ. Kierkegaard merely asserts that an encounter with Christ has this effect of heightening our sin-consciousness.

Sin is ubiquitous for man, but there must be a special misery that accompanies the despair to being human once it is revealed how far from God we really are. There is no escaping sin and our lives are only made more difficult once it is brought to our attention.²⁹¹ Without this distinction, we could become conscious of sin without the Incarnation. Those

²⁹¹ Kierkegaard, Soren, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition For Upbuilding And Awakening (Kierkegaard's Writings, Vol 19)*, pp.77, 82, 96,126.

outside of Christendom ought to be granted leniency both by us and God. We cannot say such individuals are condemned from an eternal perspective, for this transcends us and distracts us from concentrating on our own individual salvation. This is purely a matter for God to decide. Individuals unfamiliar with Christ, not yet living in faith, would be similar to children and the simple, who God presumably pities because they are unaware of the condition that conditions faith. Lastly, if one encounters the paradox and does not believe, there is an intensification of despair. The introduction of Christ makes life worse since the Incarnation arouses sin-consciousness. For this reason many will go to great lengths to eradicate it, though truthfully once seen it is unlikely that our distance from God can be unseen.

Objective Distractions from Faith

Kierkegaard is on guard against objectivity²⁹² and weary of how it can lure us away from meaningfully existing, dwelling instead in an idea. To live a faithful and Christian life, one must repel the temptations of objectivity for faith is not a thought doctrine that can be directly communicated. What is demanded of us in faith is not disinterested speculation on the nature of the faith object; but rather, unlimited interest in the teacher's actuality. We are to strive to become, as humanly possible, like the teacher.²⁹³

Why is objectivity a distraction from Christianity? Objective approaches to Christianity, be they philosophical or historical are ultimately endless approximations that can

²⁹² Hyper-analytical attempts to define the ethical, philosophical neurosis in regards to proving God or Christ, and becoming overly invested in world historical movements ushering in a forthcoming just state.

²⁹³ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, pp.327, 339.

never push us over into the subjectivity of faith. Objective philosophical Christianity aims to systemize the teachings of the church (i.e. The triune God, free will, predestination, etc.). Many participants in this philosophical theology believe that they are doing a great service. Perhaps, they will win disciples for Christ once they conclude their efforts. Maybe his own heart will finally be at peace. Kierkegaard thinks the paradox at the center of Christianity puts to bed this notion immediately. If God had wanted us to come to Him objectively, the Incarnation would have been excluded from any rationally cognizable faith. Historical approximations of Christianity typically aim at the authentication of Christ or the texts and events that legitimate the Christian religion. One can see how an Incarnation, which is simultaneously human and divine would resist verification by empirical means. It is true that objective efforts might lead us to believe Christianity is more or less plausible, but whether we passionately dwell in the Christian truth or take offense to it, has more to do with a subjective decision.

The notion that objectivity is necessarily incomplete in regards to God and the Incarnation is not a bad thing. In fact, it is the incompleteness that causes uncertainty about the existence of these faith objects. If all was guaranteed, Christianity would be taught as a rational doctrine, a type of metaphysics, something akin to what Kierkegaard saw in Greek paganism.²⁹⁴ It is the uncertainty that forces us into an individuated encounter and subjective relationship with the divine reality.²⁹⁵

Kierkegaard believes the self to be comprised of eternal and temporal components, which the self has trouble holding together. In its attempts to rise out of immediacy and

²⁹⁴ Friedman, R.Z., "Kant and Kierkegaard: The Limits of Reason and the Cunning of Faith", p.18.

²⁹⁵ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, p.204.

become a meaningful self, the self experiences some victories that are accompanied with new pangs of despair. These forms of despair that the self encounters as it journeys towards meaningful self-hood and deeper into subjectivity are the result of different forms of misrelation. Supposedly the life of faith roots out these misrelations and creates a self free from despair and dwelling in truth. Kierkegaard explains that this is in part the result of a connection made between a human who is a composite between finite and infinite and a God that is both finite and infinite. It is as if the self and the Incarnation fit together like a lock and key because they are both comprised of finitude and infinitude (though the admixture of the two is not alike). In regards to finitude, human beings are the genetic result of two biological parents, whereas Christ is supposedly the product of a human mother and eternal father. Kierkegaard does not extensively write on the virgin birth, yet there is good reason to think he would affirm it. The infinite aspect of man concerns his ability to vividly imagine, philosophize, choose the good, and exercise his rational intellect. The infinite aspect in Christ is all this and so much more since we are speaking of God's Incarnation. Whatever is constituted in the Infinity of God should also be present in the body and mind of Christ. If we seek the answers to life's questions by objective means, even if we could do it, the temporal element of the self is left out. It is neglected. As embodied beings, we need to have our imperfect faculties and abilities engaged so that we make meaningful lives for ourselves. That is why we are to view the relationship to Christ as an ongoing project that demands the renewal of our bodily and intellectual efforts. If the relationship to Christ could be accomplished once and for all, we could anticipate that our lives would feel as empty as before conversion. Relating to Christ is a making of meaning in our lives and not just any type of meaning, but a form of meaning that knows no exhaustion, unlike what we think is meaningful in artistic pursuits or love affairs.

That is why rationalistic appropriations of faith, even if “proven” true, are woefully inadequate. Only the eternal aspect of ourselves is satisfied (something again Kierkegaard does not believe is possible). It is the Incarnation and the subjective connection to it that ultimately stabilizes these aspects of ourselves. An objective understanding of religion may make us feel that we are somehow in harmony with the eternal, but as Kierkegaard is apt to say “Existence exercises its constraints...”²⁹⁶ The temporal aspect of ourselves cannot be satisfied because this transcendent happiness, if possible, is not personal. It does not speak to the self.

When Christ enters reality, we finally have the promise of a personal eternal happiness. If we connect to this promise correctly, subjectively, we can achieve a true unification of the eternal and temporal within us.²⁹⁷ We can now see why Kierkegaard thinks objectivity does not take the self seriously and is on a par with suicide;²⁹⁸ “and if philosophers nowadays had not become pencil-pushers serving the trifling busyness of fantastical thinking, it would have discerned that suicide is the only somewhat practical interpretation of its attempt”²⁹⁹ In the relationship with Christ, we are told by Kierkegaard, the proper synthesis of our eternal and temporal components is upheld, and there in that moment of unification of faith, we can have the transcendence that we in vain sought via objectivity. This is not a one time and forever affair, but faith, dwelling in the truth, must constantly be renewed if we are going to have our being in truth and to have the synthesis upheld. Renewal is necessary given the natural temptations presented to both intellection and embodiment. This renewal signifies completion

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p.197.

²⁹⁷ Friedman, R.Z., “Kant and Kierkegaard: The Limits of Reason and the Cunning of Faith”, pp.17-18.

²⁹⁸ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, p.56.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p.197.

and a driving out of the existential maladies brought on by neglect of faith. Having the correct subjective relationship to the Incarnation will allow us to understand that our efforts to appropriate God objectively were inferior and shallower than the type of relationship Kierkegaard advocates.³⁰⁰ This is expressed quite eloquently by Friedman:³⁰¹ “He does not tear the eyes of reason from his head in order to have faith; rather, having faith, he believes that he can see more than reason had allowed him to see. Faith does not deny reason; it transcends it.”³⁰²

Happiness

It is common throughout the American evangelical movement for adherents to speak of the overwhelming joy and contentedness they experience as a result of the encounter and relationship with Christ, but is this how Kierkegaard understands the reality of Christian existence? Is suffering part of Christian happiness? “...the elect is not the unhappy person; but neither is he, directly understood, the happy person—no, this is so difficult to understand that for anyone else but the elect it must be something to despair over”.³⁰³ How do we make sense of this blend of happiness and unhappiness for the believer? It is Kierkegaard’s contention that no one really enters into the faith relationship without first being truly humiliated and brought to his knees. It is after we have exhausted all impersonal and autonomous means to root despair out of our lives that we reach out to the divine helper for

³⁰⁰ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Training in Christianity*, p.202.

³⁰¹ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, p.197.

³⁰² Friedman, R.Z., “Kant and Kierkegaard: The Limits of Reason and the Cunning of Faith”, p. 20.

³⁰³ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, p.582.

assistance. Suffering is blended into the life of the believer and since the relationship must be renewed to continue in faith, either life or the relationship with Christ will humble us again. This type of suffering; however, does not encapsulate the full sense of suffering that Kierkegaard thinks is endemic to even a happy and ideal Christian life.³⁰⁴

Kierkegaard describes how in the passion of faith, believers are compelled (after the initial suffering that brought about the relationship) to suffer in the likeness of Christ. The suffering we incur as the result of merely being humans, and to Kierkegaard's lights, Christian, is endured patiently. Externally, it may seem that the Christian suffers the same as any man, but Kierkegaard thinks that the relationship with Christ is one of gentleness that imparts a sense of tranquility. We can see how suffering and temporal happiness of some sort can go together for the Christian, but something does not seem quite right here. Kierkegaard speaks of Christian suffering as something distinctive. Kierkegaard repeatedly asserts that being a Christian invites suffering at the hands of men. We may have to lay down our lives because our existence is firmly rooted in the Christian truth. Where is all this talk of torture at the hands of men and fantastical notions of martyrdom coming from? Suffering comes from expressing the Christian truth in our lives. Expressing Christian truth might involve a proclamation of Christ as a savior from sin and therefore despair and it also might mean expressing Christ-like love in a world ill-suited for it. It is hard to imagine anyone in the modern age, outside of a handful of pockets in the world, dying or experiencing any legitimate suffering for making a Christian proclamation. The worst one may have to deal with is dismissal or apathy. The real suffering could come from the ideal implementation of God's

³⁰⁴ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Training in Christianity*, pp.172-173.

love in a fallen world. We are compelled by the Christ relationship to not merely love those we show preference for, but we are also compelled to love the neighbor we find before us. If we take this seriously, we might begin to understand how difficult this is (inflicting anguish within us because we so infrequently carry it out) and put ourselves in some very uncomfortable and possibly dangerous situations. There is no assurance that such a generous love towards humanity will result in a blessed and happy life for us. It probably should not, for humanity will exploit it or return it with malice or worse. This seems to be what Kierkegaard is referring to as the suffering unique to Christianity. Supposedly the divine incursion arose out of an abundance of love for humanity and we are to enact this example in our own lives through our own limited means. When we suffer by expressing that abundance of love, we too are suffering in the likeness of Christ, though we can endure it as the result of the relationship with Christ.³⁰⁵

Is Christian happiness a temporal happiness or is it something waited on in the next life? How do eternal happiness and temporal happiness connect? In the literature, many read Kierkegaard as prescribing a solution to the problem of despair by renewing a relationship to an unknowable, and likely non-existent faith object. The constant renewal of this relationship and the corresponding fulfillment in life expire with the expiration of the subject's life. Why is Kierkegaard read as a 19th century self-help guru? It might be because Kierkegaard does not speak extensively of the resurrection and the expectancy of a human afterlife. It is curious that Kierkegaard speaks so infrequently of the resurrection, while simultaneously endlessly pondering the Incarnation.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁵ Ibid., pp.172-173, 194.

³⁰⁶ Rudd, Anthony, "Kierkegaard on Patience and the Temporality of the Self: The Virtues of a Being in Time", *Journal of Religious Ethics* 36, no. 3: 500.

Rudd points out that when Kierkegaard does speak of the resurrection, it is to give us hope and expectancy in the eternal sense. A good deal of our incentive to stay in the faith relationship has to do with a future promise. For Kierkegaard, we come experientially to know the gentleness of Christ and that allows us to endure the aforementioned suffering associated with Christian life, but nonetheless a great deal of our commitment to the Lord arises from a comfort that we too will be resurrected and reunited with those we lost elsewhere. If we do not pine to be reunited with certain individuals, then there is expectancy of drawing even closer to God after death. This sentiment is captured eloquently in this passage from *Training in Christianity*:

As soon as you eliminate the world, the turbid element which confuses the reflection, that is, as soon as the Christian dies, he is exalted on high, where he already was before, though it could not be perceived here on earth, any more than a man who was unable to lift up his head, and so could only see the star deep below at the bottom of the sea, could get the notion that in reality it is on high.³⁰⁷

Christ's resurrection is symbolic of an eternal telos layered on top of the already existing one of attaining temporal meaningful individuality.³⁰⁸

What seemed to be of ultimate interest is that God entered reality, not the details of Christ's death and resurrection. We can see now why the resurrection matters. Christ's life is supposed to be a life that we imitate. If we become Christ-like, suffer like Christ, then we too will ascend like Christ. Of course, it is a great matter of debate as to how this ascension happens amongst Christ's followers. Different sects of modern Christianity hold differing

³⁰⁷ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Training in Christianity*, p.196.

³⁰⁸ Rudd, Anthony, "Kierkegaard on Patience and the Temporality of the Self: The Virtues of a Being in Time", p.501.

views on how the afterlife works. Popularly, it is held that upon death one finds out one's eternal destination, though there is a minority who believe in a mass physical resurrection that will happen when the events portended in *Revelations* unfold. Kierkegaard remains mute on the matter. If the resurrection never happened, our confidence in Christ as the truth we are to dwell in erodes. But does personal resurrection imply that we too become God-men? Does the subtraction of a belief in personal resurrection undo our belief in Christ? Can one affirm salvation and yet deny one's own resurrection? First, we do not become God-men if our life is extended beyond this mortal coil. What makes for a God-man is the synthesis of the infinite and embodiment. Immortality, by definition, does not imply that the individual is reabsorbed into the Absolute. Immortality may be something other than reabsorption that allows for the retention of identity and continued subservience to God. There are Christian sects that hold the view that Christ is simultaneously divine and unable or unwilling to do anything beyond help us with our existential situation.

Kierkegaard's own personal musings are rich with a greater expectancy. He journals about being on a divine mission via his authorship. He expects to be reunited with God in eternity one day. Kierkegaard himself does not subscribe to the notion that this is it. There is a great beyond and developing the right relation to Jesus Christ in this life is essential for attaining it. Further, becoming a Christian in Kierkegaard's view does not necessarily lead to a blessed and happy life here. One has to be prepared to live and die for this truth and experience suffering on some level in dedication to Christ. Expectancy is a constitutive element of the meaning we cultivate in the process of becoming a Christian. If one subtracts hope, can one really believe that one has been saved by Christ from sin? To be saved from sin, is to lovingly know the Lord. If our knowledge of the Lord has a terminus, has Christ truly saved us from

anything? If He does then it is only a temporary salvation,, which can only make us despair over the absurdity and pointlessness of life.³⁰⁹

In conversion, does one find repose or restlessness? Is it tranquil or a struggle? Can it be both? We have partially answered this question in the previous sub-sections, when we examined how suffering and happiness may be intermixed within the interior life of the Christian. Here we will clarify and augment that tension by focusing on how restlessness and tranquility integrate into that mixture. This tension was first noticed in the conflicting sentiments expressed generally in two of Kierkegaard's own works: *The Sickness Unto Death* and *Fear and Trembling*. On the one hand, we are told that the soul rests transparently in the power that established it as a meaningful subjectivity when we ascend to faith. On the other, we are told that faith is a daunting challenge, taken up by only the most courageous of men, and is always in danger of slipping away. Thus, we cannot rest and must constantly appropriate the faith object. How can Kierkegaard have it both ways? If he can have it both ways, have we learned something new about the unique type of suffering associated with Christian happiness and subjectivity?³¹⁰

³⁰⁹ Many Christians claim that the resurrection is the central truth of the religion and if it were to ever be proven untrue, then everything would come crashing down. Do we really need to worry about this? Would Kierkegaard's understanding of Christianity and Christianity in general fall to pieces should Christ's body be found? If the resurrection were proven untrue, but the Incarnation remains intact, we might be given pause, but ought not the experiential encounter with Christ be enough for us to remain in the faith? As the hymn states, "You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart." Would not that experiential knowledge still give us hope and expectancy that unification can be had with God even if Christ did not physically resurrect? Further, is not their disagreement on the nature of the resurrection and what type of resurrection humans can have? Do not some streams of Christianity believe that Christ was spiritually resurrected, meaning given a spiritual body rather than a physical body? And by extension, would that not mean that we too would be granted *soma pneumatikons*? Would not this fit better with the logistics of a mass physical resurrection? What a Christian must believe about the resurrection is not the top priority of this project. It just seems that the resurrection does matter in so much as it reassures us of immortality in Christ; so much is offered us in the relationship of faith that we can coherently press on in belief and expectancy, regardless of whether or not Christ's body is ever found.

³¹⁰ Davis, William C., "Kierkegaard on the Transformation of the Individual in Conversion", *Religious Studies* 28, no. 2, (Jun., 1992): 146.

Are there real threats to our transformation in Christian faith? Kierkegaard, in general, dwells on three sources that threaten the faith relationship: 1) perdition or regressing to an earlier existence stage, 2) assuming that one's faith relationship is static and triumphing too early, leading to neglect of the relationship, and 3) speculation, where we are seduced into an eternal and distracting perspective, that causes us to not take our own lives and the faith relationship seriously.

These seem like legitimate threats to our faith relationship. So the Christian struggle is very real to us and can now be integrated into the larger conception of Christian suffering. Thus far, we have been able to conclude that Christian suffering involves: a) humbling in the constantly renewed relationship, b) suffering as the result of an imperfect expression of the Christian truth in the temporal world, c) anguish over how we can be seduced away from the faith relationship via perdition, triumphalism, and speculation. How does all this comport with the idea that the encounter with Christ is irreversible and that there is legitimate rest in Him?³¹¹

Davis thinks he knows how to resolve the situation. It is possible to claim that faith involves a genuine transformation marked by repose in the gentleness of Christ and legitimate restlessness caused by the above mentioned threats to passionate subjectivity, if we identify the individual as epistemologically limited. The individual can never have complete certainty that she has been authentically reborn in the relationship with Christ. Uncertainty will always persist due to our inability to objectively verify and communicate the existential relationship with the Incarnation. It is impossible to know if one is in fact a Christian for being a Christian is not an objectively knowable fact. It is not something certified by the state or a scientific

³¹¹ Davis, William C., "Kierkegaard on the Transformation of the Individual in Conversion", pp.149-150.

methodology. In fact it is probably incorrect to even think of ourselves as being Christian; rather, we should opt for the idea of “becoming” a Christian. Our epistemological limitations can at most indicate that we are in a constant state of renewing and subjectively appropriating the relationship. We know this with some certainty for it is a datum of consciousness. Just as Descartes could not doubt that he was a thinking thing, we cannot doubt the legitimacy and the inadequacy of our efforts towards becoming a Christian. This account makes perfect sense since we are beings located in a world of becoming. So it would be foolish to stridently claim that I “am” Christian. The more appropriate attitude would be one of striving to become one.³¹²

This is a plausible interpretation of how Kierkegaard understood the tension between restlessness, repose/suffering, and happiness; however, it does have some problematic ramifications. First, if the transformation of faith is authentic and irreversible, then whether the subject knows it or not he is not free to leave the faith relationship. He may believe that he is free to do so and act under the presupposition that falling away is very real, but in actuality the individual will not fall away. The question here is, “does it matter if the subject does not have this freedom to fall away?” Kierkegaard is concerned almost exclusively with the development of the self. Whether or not our lives are unknowably metaphysically or physically determined for us might not really matter, so long as they seem free to us. If we know they are determined for us, one could rightly expect the Kierkegaardian project would fall to pieces, but he certainly would not be the only philosopher to suffer such a fate.

Second, what about those who sincerely claim they lost their religion or their relationship with Christ? If this is possible, would we not have grounds to think that the transformation is reversible? A good deal of the answer must depend on the timing. If people

³¹² Ibid., pp.151, 157, 159.

end up rejecting the juvenile or cultural Christianity they were brought up with, they were likely never in the appropriate relationship to begin with. What they lost was a cultural connection more than a relationship with Christ. What of a fully mature adult, who has chosen Christianity on his own accord, only to rescind it later in life? Surely, in the history of humanity, someone fits this mold. It was rumored after her death that Mother Theresa fell away from her faith; however, it is not entirely clear if she was testing it or if these were just rumors. It is a moot point because it might not be discernible from an external perspective. Kierkegaard maintains that if the correct approach to faith is taken, it is not really possible to leave it behind. Why is this the case? The correct approach incentivizes the individual to maintain the relationship for it bestows meaning, eliminates despair, and provides loving knowledge of the faith object. It would be the height of irrationality to leave these things behind once tasted. Furthermore, one has had to transcend lower existence stages to get to this point. The individual knows that no lower temptation is worth the cancellation of this commitment. If anyone testifies to the contrary, Kierkegaard might merely write them off as never having the correct relationship.

Christian Ethics/Love/Discipleship

The ethical for Kierkegaard is never really suspended; however, it does receive a new expression once one has made the leap into faith. When a rationally meaningful life is sought in ethical existence, moral behavior is seen as a way to evolve out of immediacy and express the eternal idea that has been prodding us. It appears to be a salve for the despair bred in aesthetic life. After Christian transformation, Kierkegaard reimagines ethical activity, in the most general terms, as an overflowing of gratitude and an outward imitation of the subjective truth process occurring within. Some may argue that this attitude does not constitute an actual ethical

perspective? It is true that a Christian ethics would assemble itself differently from a secular ethic; however, to call into question its value as an ethical perspective is unnecessary. If Kierkegaard did not attempt to articulate how the faith relationship established a new ethical relationship with the world, would one not draw the erroneous conclusion that Christianity is meant only for reclusive monastic types? Christian ethics, like nearly all ethical paradigms, is driven by a supreme principle. It just so happens that this principle emanates from the love of God, that is we are to love our neighbor as ourself. All, this would indicate that there is a first ethics and a second ethics. The first ethics is speculatively unknowable and ultimately must be posited, not understood. The second ethics seems to be quite different in regards to the certainty with which we “know” it and how it compels us. The second ethics is “known” from the authorized divine teacher. In true conversion, there ought to be little compulsion; however, that is not to say Christians do not need reminding from time to time. In fact, Kierkegaard’s entire project is to awaken “Christians” to the reality of the faith for which they signed up. If one senses that the second ethics is compulsory, perhaps it becomes easy to identify as a Christian. Perhaps, one has forgotten the intellectual obstacles to faith. Maybe the state has made the process of becoming a Christian as simple as checking a census box. Ironically, for Kierkegaard, it seems the more difficult it is to become a Christian, the easier it may be to express the Christian truth via a religious ethics. The less adversity one experiences towards Christian development, the more likely one is to experience cessation of that development.³¹³ What can be said of Christ’s teaching (or lack thereof) in regards to ethics and other modes of

³¹³ McKinnon, Alastair, “Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms: A New Hierarchy”, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 6, no. 2, (Apr., 1969): 1.

objective knowledge? Kierkegaard, in *Training in Christianity*, notes that philosophers often object to the notion of God as an incarnate savior because He doesn't really provide a codified teaching. There are bits and pieces that Christ may communicate aphoristically here and there, but nothing really comprehensive and cohesive. Where is the system? Where is the fundamental knowledge?

Kierkegaard notes that the frustration originates with philosophers treating Christ as a mere man, for only a mortal can have a teaching more important than himself. Christ offered no real doctrine to believe in because it was He, Himself, that was to be believed in. To expect a metaphysical or elaborate ethical system from Him is, for Kierkegaard, to be on the cusp of blasphemy. Doctrines are what mere men give. Christ was not a mere man and to try to take who He was and what He said to constitute a completely rationalistic metaphysics was an anathema for Kierkegaard. What is the harm in making Christianity rationally defensible?

Predictably, Kierkegaard argues that a rational defense normalizes Christianity and takes away the possibility of offense. Without the possibility of offense and the ruse of objective certainty the subjective relationship is never ventured into and not renewed with the vigor necessary to keep the right relationship. For Kierkegaard, certainty is an enemy to passionate subjectivity.³¹⁴

What does it mean to be a disciple? Kierkegaard elaborately muses on this subject in both *Training in Christianity* and *Works of Love*, after first introducing it in the *Philosophical Fragments*. Kierkegaard deems it necessary to make a distinction that is often conflated or

³¹⁴ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Training in Christianity*, pp. 51, 123, 193.

overlooked. Christ did not come to be served. Christ did not come to be worshipped. These are the actions of admirers. Christ commanded individuals to follow him, to be followers in discipleship. A follower of Christ is one who strives to resemble him as much as possible. A follower is not a mere admirer, aloofly meditating on the greatness of the teacher. As a true disciple or true follower, one is not an adherent to some doctrine. Discipleship is about constant action to appropriate the contemporaneousness of Christ, even in the face of worldly adversity.³¹⁵ Those who do not accentuate the striving necessary to be a follower of Christ and the frustration that will come with it are peddling a cheap imitation of what Christ intended.³¹⁶

What is Christian Love and does it constitute an ethical viewpoint with which Kierkegaard aligned himself? What does it mean to Love Thy Neighbor? A Christian ethical point of view that re-establishes the ethical proceeds from the faith relationship that the individual enters into directly with God. We can describe the totality of that relationship with God as love. It might sound odd to describe the totality of the relationship with God as love given our attention to things such as humiliation and sin-consciousness. One can really only object to this idea of love issuing from both God and man if love is conceived of monolithically and with excessive purity. Love is not so simple and involves the inclusion of elements not typically associated with gentle purity. So long as we can conceive of love encapsulating a range of emotions, there ought not to be a problem in conceptualizing the divine-human relationship as love. This relationship, as love, binds together our temporal and eternal components to God.

³¹⁵ Ibid., pp.227, 231, 234.

³¹⁶ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Works of Love: Some Christian Reflections in the Form of Discourse*, pp.154, 187.

God's love endures and preserves us as everything else in life passes away. This is why Christ prioritized the commandment of loving God with all thy heart, soul, and mind. If there is something or someone else that takes on this role for us, then we have what Kierkegaard would deem ungodliness, even if that love for a beloved is noble in earthly terms. If we are in doubt that we are a participant in God's love, we need merely consult ourselves and our passion for God. If we claim to believe and are yet indifferent to the object of our claim, then we are not on fire for God and in the faith relationship of love. Moreover, God's love is available to us at every moment of life, even if every friend and relation were to desert us. Even if we are on our sick beds and cannot speak, God's love is still available to us. We can never be deprived of it:³¹⁷

The hidden life of love is in the most inward depths, unfathomable, and still has an unfathomable relationship with the whole of existence. As the quiet lake is fed deep down by the flow of hidden springs, which no eyes sees, a human being's love is grounded, still more deeply, in God's love. If there were no spring at the bottom, if God were not love, then there would be neither a little lake nor a man's love.³¹⁸

Kierkegaard thought it nigh impossible for human beings to perform selfless acts. Regardless of the scenario, self-love could be identified somewhere in the moral equation apart from God. The self-love could secretly animate ethical existence altogether. The existential psychologist could say it is there to overcome the exhaustion of immediacy, the insobriety of objective thought, or the disturbing thought that one's life may come to an end and without ethical performance no enduring virtue is etched upon the earth's surface. The fact that self-love may be involved in a secretive way within the first ethics does not defeat those ethical

³¹⁷ Ibid., pp.24, 36, 40, 42, 44.

³¹⁸ Ibid., p.27.

projects, as it would for the strictest Kantian. It is only when God functions as the middle term between men, can love be purified and made a matter of conscience. With the mediation of God, man is enabled to love constantly the man before him, regardless of what our instincts of preference may exert. The process of faith humbles man teaching the equality of sin, while simultaneously demonstrating the powers of grace and forgiveness. Such lessons instruct us to love in every direction and to be generous with our own powers of forgiveness. This is a major difference between friendship/erotic love and the love that is baptized in the relationship of faith. Secular love only has preference as the middle term for it has not been existentially introduced to total depravity and divine forgiveness. Those who only know secular love can be so efficient at its practice that they exceed the rather meager attempts of Christian love amongst those who call themselves disciples. When we speak of how Christian love and secular love ought to function, abstraction and ideality is employed. The reality of loving practice may not accord with the neatly defined categories. In Christian love, God is the middle term and there is no preference when it comes to loving. Ideally, practitioners of Christian love ought to not only love those in their immediate sphere of being, but also those deprived of the same social and economic standing. How this differed from secular love is most evident when one considers the subject of enemies. It is hard to imagine a secular justification for loving one's enemies, yet this is a core aspect to Christian love and likely contributes to the offensiveness of Christianity. This should not be surprising for Christ offers himself up to all of humanity. A Christian ethics ought to have that exact same openness and impartiality. We find our neighbor everywhere and must act for their good wherever we may find them.³¹⁹

What does it mean to love our neighbors for their own good? Does that mean we just

freely love them so that they may overcome whatever difficulty they have at hand, such as fixing their lawnmower or finding a way to put shoes on their naked feet? If we truly practice neighborly love it will lead to short term results like this, but ideally we want to practice Christian love such that it leads individuals to discover their own relationship with God. Our acts of love, if properly motivated by the love of God, ought to exhibit the divine grounding of our being to others. How precisely does Christian ethical performance manifest the love of Christ? One is not to be triumphant in one's Christianity, so nothing directly can give it away. It was perhaps easier to comprehend the internal life of the Christian, or at least discern that something unique was occurring within, when martyrs were made of the early disciples. Having Christians fed to lions and crucified likely made a strong impact on those the slightest bit curious about Christ. But what of today's Christians who no longer experience persecution? How are their ethical acts distinguishable from anyone else engaged in moral performance? Cosmetically it would seem that there is no difference. Perhaps this troubled Kierkegaard and requires greater research. One would suppose that the Christian ethic ought to include more supererogatory action than those of us merely seeking to be good people, such as donating more of our lives and resources to the poor and oppressed or actively seeking out our enemy in the name of Christian love. This might be the reason for the emphasis on Christian mission work and why otherwise sensible Christians put themselves in harm's way to help others. Maybe this is how Christians ought to properly distinguish themselves and ideally lead others to God as well. Now, our existence is not to be such that we turn our loving acts into a spectacle to be observed. This is dangerous territory for we tempt ourselves into a life of

³¹⁹ Ibid., pp.30, 70, 112-113, 147, 158.

comparison and high-minded narcissism. We need to just be resolute in our love, so that God's love pierces through.³²⁰ Through neighborly love we find out if selfishness has been displaced with a higher love.

We may find that it is an extremely difficult task to find a friend or a lover, but the neighbor is theoretically everywhere, making it easy, in a sense, to practice our duty to love.³²¹ If we are to be Christians perfectly reflecting the love God extends to us, does that then mean we cannot have preferences for certain individuals? Are we not to take spouses or have close friends insofar as that would mean that we are not treating all of humanity equally?

Kierkegaard consoles us that it is permissible to retain our beloveds, with this caveat:

“No, love your beloved faithfully and tenderly, but let love to your neighbor be the sanctifier in your covenant of union with God; love your friend honestly and devotedly, but let love to your neighbor be what you learn from each other in the intimacy of friendship with God!...Insofar as you love your beloved, you are not like unto God, for in God there is no partiality, something you have reflected on many times to your humiliation, and also at times to your rehabilitations. Insofar as you love your friend, you are not like unto God, because before God there is no distinction. But when you love your neighbor, then you are like unto God.”³²²

Kierkegaard seems to be saying that Christians can retain preferential relationships, so long as the concentric circles of care are extended beyond the confines of those that we elect. In this way, Christian love is something grafted onto naturally occurring platonic and erotic love. The question becomes “With what intensity and resources ought we to love the neighbors that we encounter?” Are we to redistribute our energy and wealth in the direction of the neighbor?

³²⁰ Ibid., pp.119, 113.

³²¹ Ibid., pp.37, 39.

³²² Ibid., pp.74-75.

Are we doing something ungodly if we move heaven and earth for a friend or spouse, since those activities take our attention away from humanity writ large? If serving others demonstrates to God and ourselves the firmness of our commitment to Him, ought every moment of time be devoted to the other? This seems like a predicament that is not going away for Kierkegaard.

What could be a potential solution? If to love anyone means to will their good and to will their good ultimately means they are to find God through our own displays of love, then what if all the responsibilities we find ourselves mired within in life could be redirected towards this aim? What if we could love all those that we have varying degrees of responsibility to, such that they find God and in turn their actions will eventually help those they do and do not have preference for? All those that we share some degree of intimacy with are to be subtly oriented towards God through our acts of love. Would we be able to keep our spouses and friends then? If this will not work, it is not clear what will. It might seem to be the case that we would need to live some sort of monkish life that would eventually lead to the extinction of the human race. Perhaps this is why Kierkegaard broke off his engagement to Regine. Perhaps, he thought his entire life had to be devoted in service to God and man through philosophy. Marrying Regine may have distracted him from that effort and dragged down another few souls from heaven. Is this, however, really an intractable conflict? Are we to be so hamstrung by this issue that we cloister ourselves and love no individual at all since to love one is to unfairly treat the nebulous abstract whole? Asceticism is not the telos of the Kierkegaardian authorship. There is no formula for precise Christian ethical action, except to test one's covenant with God by demonstrating love for the indiscriminate other.

The love of friendship or erotic love is predicated upon perfections in the object of love.

We love those that have certain special qualities. We admire them because they are like ourselves or unlike us in ways that inspire us. So this type of love is determined by the object. This is not the case with Christian love. Christian love perfectly loves all those that it encounters. It ignores all distinctions in men, which means that Christian love, if executed correctly, cannot differentiate between friend and foe. It is for this reason that Christian love is so difficult to express in the temporal. Unconditionally loving one's enemies can raise a great deal of ire within a secular context. It invites ridicule and harsh earthly judgment. Think of how bizarre it is to love the very people with whom we are engaged in a conflict. To love those who cause us and others harm -does this not sound like absolute lunacy?³²³

How is Christian Love different from other forms of Love? Kierkegaard claims that in the absence of Christianity self-feeling reaches its heights in erotic love and friendship; "...the I intoxicated in the other-I. The more securely the two I's come together to become one I, the more this united I selfishly cuts itself off from all others. At the peak of love and friendship the two really become one self, one I..."³²⁴ If this is Kierkegaard's understanding of worldly love, what does this bode for the spiritual love between two neighbors? Do they too, in a sense, become a united self? In spiritual love, the natural determinants that draw us towards individuals are ideally parted with and we are, according to Kierkegaard, "eternally qualified as spirit".³²⁵ What does this "eternally qualified as spirit" mean?

³²³ Ibid., pp.77, 79-80, 127.

³²⁴ Ibid., pp.68-69.

³²⁵ Ibid., pp.68-69.

Again, we are well served to examine Kierkegaard's own words:

In erotic love and friendship the two love one another in virtue of differences or in virtue of likenesses which are grounded in differences...In this way the two can selfishly become one self. Neither one of them has yet the spiritual qualifications of a self; neither has yet learned to love himself Christianly. In erotic love the I is qualified as body- psyche-spirit, the beloved qualified as body-psyche-spirit. In friendship the I is qualified as psyche-spirit and the friend is qualified as psyche-spirit. Only in love to one's neighbor is the self, which loves, spiritually qualified simply as spirit and his neighbor as purely spiritual....In love and friendship one's neighbor is not loved but one's other-self, or the first I once again, but more intensely....If anyone thinks that by falling in love or by finding a friend he has learned Christian love, he is in profound error."³²⁶

Kierkegaard here maintains that in erotic love and friendship, it is not God that is loved, but a narcissistic duplication or perfection of the self. The lover and the friend are reflections and completions with which we become enamored. Only by loving God do we stop determining the objects of our love based upon our own self-feeling. It is then that we can love people purely, regardless of how they reflect our own image or complement it.

As much as Kierkegaard insists that Christians can retain their preferential relationships, these dynamic differences between friends/lovers and Christian spiritual lovers increasingly challenge how we can have it both ways. Before our concern was that the exclusivity of preferential relationships took away from our ability to completely serve men and God. We were able to skirt that issue if the aim of our preferential relationships is to help others find God through our own acts of love, regardless of our intimacy to them. How do things stand now? If we take delight in the physical and psychological virtues of those who we prefer, we are idolizing ourselves and not God on Kierkegaard's account. How can we resolve this tension?

³²⁶ Ibid., p.69.

A synthesis of the views is possible, where our love is eternally qualified and yet also allows for us to have lovers and friends. This can be provided loving God creates some distance between us and those that we love, preventing complete fusion of selves. God as the intermediary term acts as a buffer. So long as God is a priority that we constantly renew we need not reject friends and lovers. We just must now love them differently. We love them, but not with a misplaced intensity that ought to only be reserved for God Himself. Further, preferential relationships cannot be all bad. Even Christ had friendships in the apostles.

Since Christian spiritual love is qualified by and grounded on the eternal, we need not worry about its mutability. It will endure, for it is a duty that we can never escape. It is a reflection of that which nourishes it. Can the same be said of the spontaneous love that characterizes romantic love and friendship? We are all too familiar with the transient nature of these relationships and if they do endure, the credit has to be chalked up largely to good fortune. Kierkegaard believes the insecure and transient nature of spontaneous love is on full display when we test those that we love. After all, why would we test such love unless we were uncertain of its duration?³²⁷

Kierkegaard observes a phenomenon associated with those intoxicated with the self-feeling of worldly love. When the beloved is lost, individuals are overcome with crippling grief. Kierkegaard deems such people to be in despair. Not only are they in despair when a loved one has vanished, but they loved the person despairingly even when they were their happiest. What Kierkegaard means here, as we have seen elsewhere, is that despair is the result of not properly appropriating the eternal. When we fuse our identities with others and

³²⁷ Ibid., pp.46-48.

do not eternally qualify our love, it can be said that we have bestowed upon them misplaced intensity. We have loved them despairingly. The despair was perhaps covered up by the intoxication, but the despair is unmasked in departure. Does this mean that Christians don't grieve and suffer or find themselves in the grips of despair should they lose a loved one? Kierkegaard would not affirm the idea that because Christian love is first qualified by the eternal and then commanded to have all for its object, that individuals remain blissfully happy when someone of great intimacy is lost. The Christian suffers, but ideally he is not so bereaved that he despairs in his suffering. Christians remain comforted in the special god-relationship, which allows them to endure the loss without despair.³²⁸

How does Christian Love affect sin? Kierkegaard's understanding of Christian salvation and forgiveness is not one that requires mere belief. Christianity is a continuous action of becoming, where our encounter with God ought to inspire us to forgive those that trespass against us, to be merciful to every man, and to lovingly work for the good of every man (meaning we are to love in such a way that helps others reconcile with God). Kierkegaard goes on to claim, that to the extent we do these things, we too are to be forgiven. The more loving and forgiving we are the more forgiving God is of us. The more merciful we are, the more merciful God is towards us. Conversely, if we do not forgive, we find ourselves in sin. God can justly punish us for the sin of not forgiving. Should we retain wrath, then God is wrath for us. Now anyone who truly loves God, by conscience, loves and forgives. It is not calculated that if I do this, then God will spare me. The encounter and experience with Christ motivates and, as an indirect consequence, brings about our own forgiveness.³²⁹

³²⁸ Ibid., pp.54-55.

On the one hand, these are sentiments many of us would want to applaud. If Christianity needs anything, it needs more forgiving people. It needs more examples of other worldly mercifulness. We never have a surplus of such acts. On the other hand, this notion of Kierkegaard's might be philosophically/theologically alarming. First, of all it prompts the question of whether or not some individuals are more saved than others. What if by and large I am a forgiving person, but there was an event in my life that I just cannot get over and forgive? Am I marked in some way? Will I incur some wrath because of my human frailty? It is sentiments like these that might give rise to a tiered afterlife, with those of us who were mostly Christian consigned to some upper chamber of purgatory. Secondly, the way Kierkegaard has phrased things, might diminish the importance of Christ's crucifixion. If our salvation is only partly due to our faith in Christ and his sacrifice, then we may find ourselves in a situation where works are the final determining factor in our ascendance, a position with which Kierkegaard must have felt some degree of discomfort given his Lutheran upbringing. Perhaps, we can all agree that love of Christ, by conscience and not intellectual calculation, inspires us to forgive or it ought to.

What about how Christian love affects the sin within us alone? Kierkegaard is apt to describe how God's love smothers sin from coming into being, as demonstrated in this passage

³²⁹ Ibid., pp.262, 275, 302-303, 348, 349, 352.

from *Works of Love*:

The authorities must often devise many shrewd ways to imprison a criminal and the physicians often employ great inventiveness in order to develop restraints to hold the insane: with respect to sin, however, there are no conditions so coercive, but there are also no constraining conditions so rehabilitating as love. How frequently anger, smoldering within, only waiting for an occasion, how frequently it has been smothered because love gave no occasion! How frequently evil desire, watching and waiting for an occasion in the sensual anxiety of curiosity, how often it has perished in birth because love gave no occasion at all and lovingly watched lest any occasion at all be given!³³⁰

In short, God's love is such that if we seek it, it can annihilate many evil urges.

Indirect Communication

Faith qualifies as a form of personal experiential knowledge that we acquire after subjectively appropriating posited ideas such as God and Christ; however, precisely because Christianity is personal experiential knowledge it cannot objectively grasp the paradox which is at its heart. This does not mean that existence is fundamentally irrational; rather only that existence and objective thought can never match. If one earnestly takes up the passion of faith, it will become apparent how little of a thought project faith is. Faith's passion clarifies the difference.³³¹ The fundamental inwardness of existence in faith makes it impossible to transform this experiential understanding of God and the self into something objective.³³²

Kierkegaard gives us one more reason why faith cannot be communicated directly. The subjective thinker has the infinite and the eternal as his certainty; however, because the subjective thinker is in existence and existence is a process of becoming, he cannot possibly

³³⁰ Ibid., p.277.

³³¹ Dupré, Louis K., *A Dubious Heritage: Studies in the Philosophy of Religion after Kant*, p.45.

³³² Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, p.73.

express something eternal (which by definition is necessary) in the realm of becoming. Any expression of the eternal cannot help but be elusive to some degree.³³³

We perhaps understand better now why subjective appropriation of the eternal, even if it is a form of experiential knowledge, cannot manifest itself via objective and direct means. There are fundamental limitations of the intellect that prohibit it divulging the secrets of faith. Beyond this primary reason, Kierkegaard has theological injunctions against strenuous attempts to get the objects of subjectivity into objective form.³³⁴ The subjective thinker is not under any obligation to make himself any clearer. Individuals are to go their own way and it is up to God, whether such communication encourages anyone else to seek a subjective relationship. If someone does make adaptations and tries to make the existential relationship easier, what are the conceivable risks?³³⁵ In *The Concluding Unscientific Post-Script* Kierkegaard lists frauds one commits if one attempts to make the existential relationship more easily understood via direct communication:

1) Fraud toward God (where direct communication conveys an inappropriate way of appropriating the faith relationship and deprives God of another that could worship him subjectively), 2) Fraud toward himself (where direct communication displaces the proper subjective appropriation of the faith object), 3) Fraud toward another human (where direct communication deludes individuals into thinking that the cheap facsimile of objectivity is actually faith), and 4) Fraud that precipitates contradiction (where the subjectivity of faith cannot be distilled objectively. Direct communication betrays the

³³³ Ibid., p.82.

³³⁴ Ibid., p.79.

³³⁵ Ibid., pp.276-278.

fundamental difference between existence and pure thought).

Are we truly committing all these types of frauds if we merely enjoy trying to understand God and creation objectively? One can see the danger in preaching philosophy as the sole route to the divine. The endless speculative approximations may never lead one to faith or encourage individuals to reject it entirely, yet what are we supposed to do after we have given our life over to Christ? Can we not take some delight in our powers of objectivity? Can we not use them to demonstrate the very Christian love that has interpenetrated our being? Is the attempt to render God objectively knowable the source of all these frauds? If one acknowledges the limitations of reason, must objective thought be abandoned altogether? Are intellectually inclined Christians unintentionally defrauding themselves, others, and God by engaging in a speculative activity that delivers so much satisfaction? Would that not be like saying that romance, friendship, art, and anything else outside of the faith relationship is mere intoxication and a path to perdition?

Humans, be they philosopher or not, or Christian or not, want God to reveal Himself directly. Is it not an in-built feature of the human being to know with certitude its origins? If individuals become atheistic and agnostic it is not because they are uninterested in the divine, but because they see no clear sign of It. What is it about the fundamental nature of God that will not allow for Him to be anything other than a qualified sign in the temporal?³³⁶

If God is eternal and necessary, the temporal and the contingent cannot contain the fullness of Him. The very qualities of God preclude him from entering into the world of becoming completely. Any instantiation of Him in existence will necessarily be incomplete

³³⁶ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Training in Christianity*, pp.127, 135-137.

and an indirect sign of His nature. What more can be said? What if we revisit this maxim of “subjectivity is truth”? We have concerned ourselves with this notion of Kierkegaard’s throughout the entire dissertation. We have examined all the qualitative gradations to subjectivity. We have even acknowledged that humans can come to the near pinnacle of subjectivity in a relationship with Christ. They are said to be dwelling in truth when the passion of faith is at its highest. Why did we just note that individuals attain the “near pinnacle of subjectivity” in a relationship with Christ? We saw earlier that if subjective knowledge or experiential knowledge of God is truth or a renewed appropriation process of the faith object, then there is only one entity that can come closer to the truth than a mortal and that is God Himself. We dwell in truth via faith in Christ, but Christ (God incarnate) is the actual truth. This would mean God would be the ultimate subject. If we become our most subjectively true in faith with Christ and become the most meaningful subjects permissible in this life, it would only follow that God is the ultimate subject since he purely relates to the truth that is Himself. Is there something about being the ultimate subject that precludes direct communication?

The subjective thinker understands that faith and objective thought are disentangled in the subjective relationship, resulting in an understanding of how dwelling in subjective truth is not a thought project that can be communicated objectively. Faith’s subjectivity eludes objective conceptualization. If Christ is truth and truth is subjectivity and God is self-same with Christ, then God too is a subjective appropriation process. If God is such a process of relating to Himself, then this process is action and not a detached form of pure thinking or contemplation.

God is the ultimate subjective relationship/process and this prevents an objective communication about His inwardness. Is this problematic? If God is ultimate subjectivity and is a process, does this conflict with God’s eternality? Can God be both a subject and necessary?

In other words, does eternity allow for inward change within God or does eternity dictate strict immutability not allowing for movement within God? We are running into the paradoxical nature of God from perhaps a different angle. We are perhaps brushing up against the conceptual incomprehensibility of God again and why He cannot communicate Himself directly. The intellect cannot understand God as both necessary and inwardly evolving. Even if God desired to, He would be unable to make this understandable to us.

Given this difficulty, how do the frauds of direct communication apply to God? The first Fraud noted earlier was the *fraud toward God* or that direct communication conveys an inappropriate way of appropriating the faith relationship and deprives God of another who could worship him subjectively. We would have to reverse the directionality of this and call it *Fraud toward God Himself*. God must set the example of how we are to relate to Him and if he encourages an objective avenue through direct communication then He steers individuals away from the subjective relationship.

What about the *fraud toward himself*, where direct communication could displace the proper subjective appropriation of the faith object? It is unlikely that anything could distract God from being the ultimate subject, so this fraud is not applicable to God. What about the *fraud toward another human*, where direct communication deludes individuals into thinking that the cheap facsimile of objectivity is actually faith? This fraud is applicable to God for the same reason that the first form of fraud is applicable.

What about the *fraud that precipitates contradiction*, where the subjectivity of faith cannot be distilled objectively. Direct communication betrays the fundamental difference between existence and pure thought. If God is the ultimate subject, it would contradict His very nature to communicate Himself objectively.

God cannot communicate Himself directly based upon his very nature and theological injunctions to do so, but what is meant by God being the ultimate subject? Knowing the qualitative difference between our subjectivity and how God relates to Himself might forever be inscrutable so long as our identity is separate from God's.

What is Indirect communication? Direct communication has to do with that which can be conveyed objectively. Forms of objective direct communication include empiricism (both scientific and historical), speculative philosophy, logic, and mathematics. All these forms of direct communication attempt to describe some essential non-personal features of the universe, the world, and/or thought projects. The problem with objective and direct means of communication is that they cannot grasp the subjective dimension to our lives. Kierkegaard tells us that if we are to communicate the double reflection that is subjective inwardness the expressions of it must possess just as much qualified reflection.

If direct forms of communication are associated with universal and agreed upon objective truths, subjective truths may be best expressed in highly individualistic ways that do not lend themselves to immediate understanding and rote memorization. The arts might seem to be candidates for indirect communication. This should not surprise us if this is Kierkegaard's position, given that nearly his entire authorship is an embodiment of indirect communication. He embraces pseudonyms, writes from a multiplicity of perspectives, employs poetic techniques, and literary figures to nurture the culminating viewpoint of his philosophy. What else does this tell us about indirect communication and direct communication? Direct communication does not presuppose freedom. We are not free with respect to our own "facts". Indirect communication contains enough ambiguity in it, permitting us to interpret and decide on truths differently. Part of the reason God indirectly communicates Himself through the

absurdity of the paradox is the desire to retain our human freedom.

Is there something contradictory about Kierkegaard's use of philosophy, an enumerated form of objective, direct communication, to explicate the nature of faith, something he frequently acknowledges cannot be grasped in an objective manner? Kierkegaard's problem with speculative philosophy concerned its ambition to render every part of existence a component of a larger unfolding system. Kierkegaard obviously does not denounce philosophy entirely. He simply implores that it stem systematic efforts in certain domains, not simply because such efforts do violence to the significance of an individual's life, but also because such missions are fools' errands. The paradox of Christianity, from the speculative philosopher's point of view, was something that could not be left alone as a miracle. It had to be mediated somehow and transformed in some way to fit into the system. It had to be made sense of. So perhaps it is wrong to claim that Kierkegaard was anti-philosophy. He was just contra a particular type of philosophy. Judging from the perspective of the larger authorship, Kierkegaard believes it permissible to use philosophy to carve out a space for the speculatively/scientifically inexplicable. He lays waste to rationalistic attempts to prove God and attacks the form of Hegelianism popular in Copenhagen at that time. Kierkegaard, when employing his own formalistic rationalism, is a negative figure, limiting the ambitions of philosophy, and describing a non-philosophical route towards meaningful individuality and a subjective relationship with God. This understanding of Kierkegaard might allow for him to use philosophy to a certain extent, while simultaneously claiming that faith is something objectively unknowable and directly incommunicable. Kierkegaard would be a hypocrite had he ushered in an alternative speculative understanding of Christian faith.

Conclusion

Many agnostics and atheists perform moral acts that come from what can only be discerned to be a pure conscience. They feed the homeless, simply because it is the right thing to do. They work in the Peace Corps simply because they want to help and serve people. So it ought to strike us as odd that Kierkegaard divides up the world into non-Christian individuals who do not act from pure conscience (and are therefore only driven to help those they prefer) and those that know Christian love and serve all humanity in such a way that others will find God. It is not that secular ethics cannot lead individuals to serve all humanity. Kierkegaard would just conclude that virtuous non-believers are really acting out of some sort of inclination or calculation that still involve self-feeling; however, is his position on Christian love immune from the same critique? Could the tables not be turned and the claim leveled that even those inspired by Christian love are motivated by self-feeling and calculation if one really plumbs the depths enough?

Secular humanitarians, who seem to be moved by conscience to perform supererogatory actions, perform their actions divorced from the Christian relationship and without promoting the end of other humans finding God. Kierkegaard would have been well-served if he acknowledged this in *Works of Love*, for it does not do his own view much violence and it captures more of the nuance of moral activity.

Earlier in this chapter, we pondered whether Kierkegaard would actively encourage individuals to become erudite or if he was profoundly anti-philosophy and anti-scholarship. On the one hand, elevated intellectual cultivation may make the passionate subjectivity of Christianity harder to attain and in turn more meaningful once experienced. On the other, increased philosophical ability raises the likelihood of seduction away from passionate

subjectivity to an impersonal objective viewpoint. It bears repeating that Kierkegaard is likely mislabeled as an anti-intellectual or an irrationalist. Philosophy and higher thought modes are not to be eschewed entirely; they just must be recognized as having limits. Specifically, they cannot rightly take the place of religion and ought not seek to render a picture of the human spirit as something base, material, and thoroughly determined. Does this answer our question concerning the advice Kierkegaard would give? Would he say pursue erudition with the aforementioned caveat? Such encouragement might reinforce an idea Kierkegaard has tried very hard to deny, specifically that faith is something for those who cross a certain intellectual threshold and not others (i.e. the lowly ones have a less sophisticated form of faith or do not fully possess it). For these reasons, Kierkegaard cannot endorse an imperative for every man to become a scholar. The only imperatives in Kierkegaard's philosophy of religion are for each man to become an individual before God, a process that need not involve attaining the highest degrees in the sciences and humanities.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Kierkegaard, more than any other philosopher, goes to great lengths to be misunderstood. Confusion is sown to precipitate inner turmoil that leads to decisive choice. This may be a great strategy for accomplishing one's existential and theological ends, but it is near maddening to write about at great length. Has Kierkegaard shown why our lives are more meaningful or significantly individual in the faith relationship? Conceptually clarifying significant individuality seems to be forever problematic given the resistance of subjective experience to words and arguments; however, our individual lives are likely given the most meaning when they are in direct communion with the supposed power that established them. There is meaning in arising out of base animality and becoming a moral force that feels its dignity. There is meaning in seeing the limitations to ethical concepts and living in a religious mental space, grasping for an encounter with the divine subject and not just an immaterial positing. It is just that our lives gain the most meaning when in sacred covenant we are pardoned for sin and healed through forgiveness. To secular ears, it may seem to be hogwash, but we experience this. How can we not feel that our lives have been given ultimate significance? God, the Alpha and Omega, cares about the complex of psychological nuances that makes up the "me".

What about "inward deepening" and "subjective truth"? Inward deepening and gaining subjective truth, as indicated by the use of gerunds, are processes or the same process to be more precise. As we make certain commitments, we become less reliant on the external and

become more concentrated on the internal, until our lives are brought into harmony with the ultimate truth. We move from aesthetic immediacy, to subsumption beneath an objective ethical, to reaching out to an objectively posited God, and finally to abandoning objective endeavors altogether and inviting Christ into our heart. The truth dwells within and we within it and it is thus a subjective truth.

Does it not seem hopelessly myopic of Kierkegaard to think that only in an authentic Christian relationship we can have this significance of individuality? Did not Kierkegaard himself suggest that the passionate pagan possessed more subjective truth than the Christian automaton? Does not Abraham illustrate that significance and meaning can be had outside of Christianity? Subjective truth and significance can be had outside of Christianity, as witnessed in the pagan who passionately prays before his idol; however the ideal situation for Kierkegaard is to have that which is both divine object and divine subject (Jesus) commune with the subjectively existing individual. This true relationship allows for a further appropriation of what we are calling “meaning” from the source that establishes life itself. What of Abraham?

Abraham, through his trial, knew and became known by God in a way uncommon before the appearance of Christ upon the planet. Abraham foreshadows what each individual, if in the proper relationship with Christ, endures. The teleological suspension of the ethical in favor of a direct call from God is symbolic of how we too must leave societal codes behind and enter into a relationship that can only be described as mad. The Christian is not asked to make a sacrifice of a child, but he must be prepared to sacrifice something. What is his sacrifice? The sacrifice is manifold. He must be prepared to give up his acceptance by the crowd. His own life is something to be parted with if an identification with Christianity leads to death at the hands of

captors. The Christian must sacrifice the world of goods and, just like Abraham, be ready to receive them back in some miraculous fashion.

Prior to Christ's incarnation meaningful individuality was particular; hence, Abraham's special scenario. It is now available to the entire human race and in that sense it is universal. Some may wonder if the faith experience of significant individuality is universal given the utter uniqueness of individuals. One does not lose one's particularity in the Christian encounter, yet there is the universal experience of the forgiveness of sins, which applies to all who have lived without faith.

Christianity or Religiousness B, as Kierkegaard also identifies it, is a radical departure from Religion A. One cannot simultaneously convert to Christianity and retain Religion A as the dominant viewpoint, though recollection of Religion A is possible, allowing each pilgrim to mark his existential progress. Christianity alleviates the sin and guilt consciousness built up during the emergence and development of the triadic self. If it were not for drawing so close to God, yet not experiencing his grace (*as is the case in Religion A*), would the despair of not knowing the unknown be there, to be the wind at our back when we make our fateful leap into a new existential paradigm? The two religious types work together (A sets up B) but are in no way conflatable. The sense of a yawning abyss between an unknown God and a potential amelioration of our guilt-consciousness, makes an otherwise rationally unintelligible Incarnation, a seemingly worthwhile ideal to devote our lives to and to imitate. The meaningful individuality offered by Christianity cannot be undercut by what was said during the discussion of Religion A, no more than what was said about the ethical can undercut the religious in general and similarly in regards to the aesthetic's relationship to the ethical.

Christian Ethics Relation to Morality

Kierkegaard's lyrical ruminations upon ethical Christian love may make a strident secularist pine for religious conversion. Is there, however, a problem here? If the subjectively true relationship to the absolute paradox has its expression in a new ethical attitude are we not speaking of a return to the universal and not of religious inwardness of the highest degree? How can Kierkegaard re-introduce ethics without disrupting the hard fought for achievements of religious individuality? To answer this question, we have to catalogue the differences between the secular universal/ethico-religious universal and this new Christian doctrine of love. If the differences between the two ethics are significant, we need not worry about a relapse into an earlier existence stage. The Ethical Universal: a) could be discerned as valid for all (implicit in the very use of the word "universal", b) saves the aesthete from a few forms of despair (unconscious despair, despair over the earthly, and, at least partially, despair over the eternal), c) fosters demonic or defiant despair if the individual fails to progress into religious categories, d) orchestrates the primordial elements of the proto-self into an existing being, e) acts as mediating force between the individual and God if there is an ethical positing of the divine, and f) is somewhat undefined and flexible to interpretation throughout societal and philosophical epochs.

By contrast, the Christian ethic is not seen as "universal" in the same sense as the ethical universal. Why would the claim be made that the Christian ethic is not universal? Would not a Christian view the Christian ethic to be valid for all, thus the need for evangelization? What aspect of the Christian ethic is not universal, but particular? First, the word "universal" must be elucidated. Kierkegaard appears to reserve this term for rationally demonstrable ethical models, which are not predicated upon revelation and are therefore public

to the purely secular mind. A Christian ethic derives its entire force, not from reason, but from the ultimate revelatory gift: Jesus Christ. Thus, it is based on a particular faith claim and is not “universal”. If this is the case, why do Christians expend such energy proselytizing a non-universal ethic? Kierkegaard does not dwell on Christendom’s missionary ethics, since he was primarily preoccupied with addressing errors within Christendom itself. Presumably, he would have found something problematic with his time’s missionary protocol since it often attempted to convert en masse and religious conversion is solely the work of the individual and Christ. This is helpful speculation, but a digression. To answer the question, Christianity is not about promoting a universal ethic or a moral faith. If Christianity promotes anything, it promotes faith in Jesus Christ. If the Christian faith object is appropriated correctly, there should be a procession of Christian ethics amongst adherents, though such an ethos is not the result of reflective objectivity.

The Christian ethic, if it can be said to be a demand, asks of its adherents to unconditionally love God and their neighbor. That may sound positively laudable, given the incredible efforts to normalize the Christian religion by those within and without. Theologians claim God, Christ, and Christian love are merely natural conclusions any reflective mind would ascend to upon meditation of the universe. Secularists, following Thomas Jefferson’s example, simply cut out all the supernatural bits of the Bible and keep the Christian ethos. Kierkegaard, through an example such as Abraham, dramatizes the difficulty of keeping these commands. In Abraham’s case, the unconditional love of God comes in direct conflict with the ethical ways of the world. If properly understood, individuals within faith cannot make their unconditional commitments to God and the other rationally intelligible, especially when such commitments seem to work very much against our temporal needs and goods. Christian work escapes public

codification and intelligibility, for in its purest form seemingly painful sacrifice is required in the choice between societal ideals, which neatly fit us into acceptable cultural categories, and the unconditional love of God and neighbor; therefore it is the opposite of a rationally intuited, openly demonstrable universal. In short order, we will be address the question of whether or not all Christians must endure this painful sacrifice. One might interject, is not painful sacrifice involved in an openly demonstrable universal ethical act performance? Did not Agamemnon have to sacrifice his daughter when he chose a higher expression of the ethical? How is the sacrifice involved in Christian love any different? When Agamemnon sacrifices, though he does something heart-wrenching, he is pitied, comforted, and understood. The public sees him as a man necessitated by ethical duty. No one desires his position, yet no one reproaches him. In contradistinction, to Agamemnon stand Abraham and Job, who also had to make significant sacrifices. These men, while steadfastly obedient to God, are seen or will be seen as the worst people imaginable. One may claim that the examples of Abraham and Job do not adequately demonstrate the nature of Christian sacrifice, since they did not know Christ, yet were given a prefiguration of faith through an especially difficult religious call that clashed with established ethics. It cannot even be said that Abraham was Jewish for there was no Judaism prior to his existence. Many Christians view Abraham and Job as proto-Christians and Kierkegaard seems to have as well. Perhaps Kierkegaard remained silent on a particular Christian example (*other than Christ*) for a host of reasons. Citing an individual as an exceptional Christian would create inequality amongst humans and maybe even idolatry of the individual under consideration.

Further, offering a concrete example may run counter to the dynamic process that is the assimilation of subjective truth into our being. For Kierkegaard, it should suffice to say that the tension each Christian will experience between established moral codes and the unconditional

faith commitments of loving God and neighbor will vary from person to person and epoch to epoch.

Returning to what was bracketed earlier, must all Christians experience incommunicable sacrifice? Can there be an epoch in which there is no tension, such as an enlightened epoch in which Kantian morality and legality is realized? One might view the conflict between society and Christianity as resolvable if the two can be conflated. Would it not be wondrous to have the modern world be a pronounced echo of the Christian message? Would not the Christian cease to feel that his work had an element of sacrifice in it, since society is on his side? Kierkegaard chills such feverish dreams, for he knew how well Lutheran Christendom had fared on the matter. The inbuilt desire of humans to seek difference and separation from one another, leads to a society driven by honorifics and greed, even if it masquerades as what Christ would have wanted. That corrosive tendency within humanity, even if it identifies as Christian, will always generate ideals, which judge the purity of the New Testament as absurd and naïve fantasy.

Christians, regardless of the society within which they find themselves, will inevitably discover the ethico-religious either/or that forces sacrifice. Some may say that this conflict can be avoided if Kantian morality is fully realized. This train of thought is taken up in the following discussion.

The Distinction between Kantian and Christian Ethics

How can there be a Christian either/or between morality and faith if morality (i.e. Kantian Ethics) does not contradict Christianity? Are not practical reason and Christian faith harmonious? What is the difference between secular moral striving and the inwardness of

Christian faith? As illustrated earlier in the dissertation, Kierkegaard is not a Kantian, though he very much sounds like one at times given the deontological language with which he characterizes morality. The lack of ethical commitment by Kierkegaard indicates his perception of a hopelessness endemic to ethical life that does not progress into religious categories. To review, what does the hopelessness of ethical life consist in? Perfect ethical conformity either to Kantian moral precepts is either a fantasy (*given our finitude*) or impossible given the viability of mutually exclusive ethical paradigms. Either scenario breeds moral guilt and does nothing to assuage concerns about our erroneous beginnings. Kant accounted for our moral performance limitations as well and provided his own take on ethical despair. Kant saw a form of counter- purposiveness within the world that did not reward virtue with happiness. In fact, the opposite set of affairs frequently obtains, where ethical sin does not receive temporal just desserts.

Practical reason postulates, in order that we keep our ethical resolve, that morality must be an infinite moral striving, which is eventually united with happiness in an afterlife. All of this is made possible by a posited, yet unknown, omniscient, omnipotent, and perfect God. Ethical autonomy, despite all the good it does relieving aesthetic despair, is subject to its own form of sadness, known as the despair of defiance. The despair of defiance for Kierkegaard includes the guilt incurred during the period between our personal fall from innocence and ethical existence. The notion of *innocence* is a controversial and a complicated one within the writings of Soren Kierkegaard. For our purposes, it can simply be thought of as the move from childhood to autonomous maturity. The despair of defiance also involves the guilt we experience as necessarily flawed beings aiming at moral rectitude. Those who suffer from the despair of defiance are in need of an amelioration of guilt; however, the perceived rational

absurdity or ignorance of a co-eternal and salvific God who dies, limits what Kierkegaard sees as the only hopeful option for transcending said despair.

Let us assume that morality is equivalent with Kantian ethics. For a spiritual ordeal to occur, one must be faced with an ethical-religious either/or. The ethical would have to be fundamentally deficient and at odds with what is required and offered within a faith commitment. Many individuals, including even Kant himself, saw Christianity as a natural extension of the moral project. If true, there would not be much decisive choice in the movement from an immanent perspective (*that is a reflectively objective viewpoint, which does not take into consideration revealed religious truths*) to a transcendental perspective. The transcendental would be a natural outgrowth of the immanent. Why is that problematic for Kierkegaard? Christ becomes unnecessary and it minimizes His historical Incarnation if Christianity is an inevitable perspective growing naturally out of morality. Clarity is needed.

Why might one think that Kantian morality does not contradict Christianity? It is conceivable to interpret the Kantian categorical imperative as a prolix articulation of the Golden Rule. To be fair to Kant, he believed his categorical imperative superior to the golden rule for it was supposedly guided by formal reason alone, whereas the Christian golden rule inevitably requires the individual to take into consideration self-love. For instance, the Christian, in the consideration of the Golden Rule, decides not to steal because of how horrifying the thought of theft visited upon him is; in contradistinction to the ethically pure Kantian, who deems stealing immoral simply because it is formally irrational and cannot be universalized in line with the categorical imperative. It is not an argument this author wishes to wage here, but Kant's own ethical formula might be infected with self-love, given the

postulations of rational faith laid out in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*.³³⁷

Briefly, even if one's moral resolve has formal reason solely as its initial determining ground, Kant's postulations aimed at rectifying the incongruence between virtue and happiness to have an incentivizing effect. How can one psychologically separate the rational determination of moral behavior once one has also affirmed belief in a rewarding God? The belief in a God that fixes the counter-purposiveness of temporal injustice is tantalizing. For the sake of argument, let us grant that the categorical imperative and the golden rule are interchangeable. Would such a state of affairs establish the compatibility of Kantian Ethics and Christianity? Only in a very limited and formal respect, in Kierkegaard's eyes, for the existential content of those perspectives is radically different in regards to inwardness. There is something about Christianity that Kantianism cannot capture and it cannot capture it because the Christian individual weathers ordeals that the secular Kantian does not. To be brief, Christianity abandons the notion of a linear march towards God via virtue and advocates a decisive choice of objectively unverified faith over rationally secure ethico-religious commitments. The Kantian takes reason as the departure point, and if he makes faith claims at all, they must fit within rational limitations. Practically reasoned morality will for Kant always be the foundation upon which any kind of rational faith can be built. If there are episodes within Christian biblical theology, such as God abandoning his son to the hordes of humanity, that trespass what practical morality decrees, then they are unfit for Kant's rational faith. Unlike Kierkegaard, a Kantian would never consider the private call Abraham received from God as

³³⁷ Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.3-41.

conceivable. Though Abraham is an Old Testament figure, Kierkegaard believes him to be a rare example of pre-Christian religiousness B (a.k.a. faith). The rational concept of God (*the divine being that unites happiness and moral performance in immortality*) excludes the supreme arbiter of justice from making such unethical demands upon His adherents. To be clear, such a rational concept is merely conceivable for Kant and not knowable, for existence does not proffer us with an intuition for the supersensible divine being. It is a moral postulate that makes moral conduct realizable. Thus, in this particular scenario Abraham is lost on the Kantian perspective and there is no real spiritual ordeal. There are no private calls of faith that clash with established forms of rationality for Kant. The universal is always opted for and there is not a further gain in regards to subjective truth. It is one thing to superficially harmonize with Christianity, but quite another to outright contradict it. If one ventures to take this journey, navigating between the ethical-religious either/or, the individual draws closer to God in confession, humility, and forgiveness, all of which constitute an existential communication between saved and savior.

This existential communication may not be expressible in words, unlike the Kantian program; however, there may be a deep subjective understanding between God and the individual soul that requires no outward expression to a community of perfectly rational and ethical agents. Words, by definition, fail to capture this non-verbal existential communication. It is something only experienced in the dedicated resolution to imitate Christ. Does the inability to verbalize the existential communication stem from the existential communication being a mere feeling? To reduce existential understanding or communication to the realm of emotion or feeling does not seem to do it justice. Kierkegaard would not place it on par with a passing bout of anger, euphoria, or religious enthusiasm. Existential communication appears to hover around

a sublingual midpoint between that which is rationally cognizable and that which is merely felt; hence Kierkegaard had to give it a name all its own. To ask how it can be nonverbal is akin to asking how there is a nonverbal dimension to any activity (*and faith is active for Kierkegaard*). Bryce Harper can only explain so much about hitting grand slams, as is also the case with Fats Domino and his unique piano playing style. By analogizing faith to other examples of incommunicable activity that contain a dimension of intuitive knowledge, the claim is not being made that the nonverbal character of true Christianity is equivalent to these examples. Christian faith, in contrast to these activities, is characterized by the acknowledgement of sin, the liberation from sin, humility before God, joyful receptivity to all God has given, the sacrifice of one's dedication to reason, devotion to the embodied intercessor aspect of the Trinity, and many other qualities detailed throughout this dissertation. It should be apparent what secular conscientiousness lacks in comparison to the religious subjectivity of the existential Christian. In regards to subjective transformation, Christian duties have been shown to be more than mere ethical duties. Perhaps, even more can be said of the difference. If we are able to codify Christian duties, they typically involve loving God with all one's might and loving the neighbor as yourself above and beyond mere respect for his person. Loving the neighbor is usually interpreted as not merely respecting the property rights of an individual, but working for their general welfare as well. Obviously, such Christian duties offer a great deal of latitude in regards to implementation. Such Christian duties go further than the mere rational formalism of the categorical imperative; therefore, greater daylight can now be seen between ethical duties and the Christian ones in regards to subjectivity and supererogation. The Job story, with its Old Testament representative of Religiousness B/faith, illustrates this difference. To his friends (*those with a rational understanding of morality and faith*), Job appears justly rebuked and

afflicted even though he will not concede that he sins; however, Job has a secret. Throughout the adversity of his spiritual trial and the prioritization of his love for God, Job draws closer to the Divine and experiences existential resolution that allows him to persist in spite of shifting external circumstances. The individual trapped between ethical commitments does not have such a secret internal development. From the point of view of the religious B individual, the public sympathy the tragic hero experiences is a consolation prize. The real glory is Christian inwardness that occurs as the result of repentance before God.

Christian ethics, emanating from a later stage of existence, does not aim to smother aesthetic despair (though it may in fact do so given that man can collapse to baser categories at any moment). The aesthete's despair ought to have been vanquished by the first ethics, whereas, Christian life and practice primarily negates the despair endemic to religiousness A. There is a similarity here, but not sameness. Further, true Christian practice does not generate new despair forms. The same cannot be said of prior existence stages. Authentic Christian religiousness is to live in faith and when we live in faith, we are no longer in despairing sin. The Christian ethos must be continually renewed, so as to prevent a lapse into despair.

If the first ethics unified the infinite and finite components of the self via a spirited commitment to the Good, what does Christian ethics do? Love of Christ and the love shown to a neighbor do not unify the triad that is the self (the infinite, the finite, and the willing passion), rather Christian ethics irons out the misrelations within that triad that inevitably lead to despair. In faith and loving service, the self enters a delicate equilibrium of existence, steadied by the constant interaction with God via Christ. How does faith harmonize the triadic self? Prior to faith, commitments are made to that which is reflectively objective. Our conceptions of the Good and God issue from our infinite natures; however, the limitations of those objective

views become apparent not only logically, but also subjectively. There is despair from an overdose of objectivity of each kind. Faith, if its movements are done correctly, surrenders total existence in the objective and attunes us, makes us receptive to our temporal condition again. Just as faith prepared Abraham to receive Isaac again, we are prepared to receive this world again, regardless of what God does or does not provide. The dependence upon the infinite aspects of ourselves is calibrated via an abiding trust in the Absurd. One might be able to say a new self is made here. A theological self, one might call it; however, the theological self still consists of the triad, it is just freed from the limitations of sin and despair.

In ethical existence, one's morality was a way to ascend to some sort of unspecified God consciousness. The ethical mediated one's relationship with God. This is not to say that the ethical cannot be thoroughly secular and without relation to God. Ethical existence can certainly be conceived as such; however, in the transitional stage of ethico-religiousness a sort of Kantian moral theology takes hold. Such postulations, namely that there is a God to judge our moral virtue and extend our lives for the infinite striving to achieve moral perfection, in Kierkegaard's eyes, make God look rather impotent in the whole equation. God may have superpowers on this view; however, God seems ineffectual at working upon the human heart. He is a grand office supervisor (*if one cynically reads Kant*) bestowing raises upon those capable of neatly and diligently filing their paperwork. A divine lawgiver posited at the last second to ward off the despairing feeling of moral ineptitude, turns God into something resembling the Roman keystone. This may be essential for completing the arch, yet it is unexceptional in regards to all the other constitutive rocks. This will not do for Kierkegaard. God cannot be transformed into something so useful. A Christian, supposedly, has direct contact with God. Some may quibble that Christ acts as a mediator. This would be true if

Christ were not fully God. Christ cannot mediate if he is in fact God. So if one does not interact with God through Christian ethics, what is the directionality of the event? It is the contact with the absolute that leads to Christian love and ethical performance. In the second ethics, atonement naturally precipitates the performance of the second ethical. So long as one is in the proper God-relationship, Christian ethics does not express itself as normative or rather it does not feel like a prescription. Being ethically Christian is mere gratitude for the liberation from despair. Gratitude begins as a feeling that ought to carry itself over into loving action.

The principles of Christian ethics are pretty clear (unconditionally loving God and thy neighbor by extension), though how they are implemented in actuality is left up to the discerning conscience of the individual. What seems to matter most about the implementation of Christian ethics is the intentionality behind ethical conduct. Does a love and imitation of Christ drive all moral behavior? This is the test of whether Christian duties are different from moral duties. It should be obvious here that attempts to descriptively demarcate secular ethics from Christian ethics are not without objection. From the outside, it is very difficult to determine true Christian action from Kantian ethics or another moral program. The true distinction comes from the subject's relation to his ethical practice. The distinct subjective quality of Christian ethics is that it first involves a humbling and confessional relationship with the son of God. From there, ethical action proceeds, not from duty or a desire for virtue, but rather an overflowing gratitude that expresses itself in the imitation of the forgiveness bestowed upon us.

It is rather apparent that the first ethics (Secular/moral theology) and the second ethics (Christian ethics) are not conflatable. There is no return to the universal ethical in Christianity. The ethical universal is that which is rationally discerned without reference to a transcendental

revelation. The Christian ethic is many things, as a survey of the *Sermon on the Mount* reveals; however, it ultimately resolves itself in the two joined commandments referenced throughout this conclusion of loving God above all and the neighbor as one's self. Jesus says this much in Matthew. God is not rationally discernible, especially the God that is the father in the Trinity. We cannot return to the universal in Christian ethics, for it contains more than what was scrutinizable by unaided secular reason.

What if the question is asked differently? Does Christianity just become a new ethics? This question implies that the two ethics may have some dissimilarities, but both are from the same family tree. This would be true if there was not a significant dissimilarity between the first and second ethics. All the dissimilarities that arise between the first and second ethics are ultimately traced back to the direction from which God relates to the ethical. In the second ethics, contact with the God incarnate inspires a new way of life conduct. The appropriate divine encounter, the subjective appropriation of God via Christ, leads to not only new rules, but also a different way of abiding by rules. Rules are not seen as boundaries to narcissistic and destructive behavior; rather, they are guidelines for the proper expression of Christian joy. If Christian ethics are dead letters or weigh down like millstones that is an appropriate indicator that the relationship with Christ wants for attention. This relationship was reversed in the prior ethics and God remained a vanishing point, posited to take care of some loose philosophical ends or placate ruling political powers. For instance, Kant's moral lawgiver seems like a superfluous after-thought that taints the rational purity of his system. One is supposed to perform moral right simply because it is rational, not because doing so leads to a greater share of happiness in immortality. Such an eternal temptation undermines the freedom of our will. One would be entitled to speculate that Kant made this maneuver in order to not anger the

powers that be, lest he disrupt his scholarly life. For this speculation to have any merit one must settle the contentious dispute over whether or not Kant had a real theoretical need to introduce the postulates of moral theology. That debate is for another project, though it stands to reason that Kant, even if in error, may have been sincere in his endeavor to establish a moral religion. It is difficult to imagine a disingenuous person going to such great intellectual lengths, when easier means of conveying obsequiousness exist. At the center of Christian life is Christ, not his teachings. It just so happens that when one identifies Christ as the loci of one's life, one's actions bear a striking external resemblance to what we may call morality in general. One may be tempted to claim that one initially needs Christ to access the second ethics, but that then Christ can be jettisoned in favor of these newly found moral principles. Christian ethics, however, cannot be extricated from the relationship with Christ. The demands of loving God and the neighbor are too rigorous without the inner revelation, for God's existence is objectively uncertain and the neighbor never fails to vex, resulting in there not being a nourishing source of forgiveness to inspire us to behave similarly within the fallen world. Think of the psychological barriers in place, which interrupt or impede the process of forgiving those that trespass against us and loving the undefined person with supererogatory ethical action. Even the most starry-eyed ethical enthusiasts will back away from such ideals after their good will has been exploited or taken for granted. Through the Christian revelation, in the moment where we ask for forgiveness and recommit to Christ, our resolve to imitate Christ is renewed. Without the recreation of transcendental grace within, it is hard to see how we remain committed to the other in a godless and weary world. There is no blame, no judgment issued for those secularists who lose hope in ethical ideals. In fact, it might only be natural and rational given the harsh realities of temporal life. Christian ethics in no way calls into question

Christianity as a religious attitude. Numerous reasons for this conclusion were put forth; however, it is the inseparable nature of the faith relationship from Christian ethical performance, which is the decisive factor.

Parting Considerations

Something to entertain in our own concluding unscientific post-script is whether or not Kierkegaard contradicts himself and his entire project by placing limitations upon philosophy. How can Kierkegaard reign in philosophy, show its fallibility, and yet go on to philosophize about our existential condition and the Christian religion? If Kierkegaard weakens reason's authority, from whence does Kierkegaard draw the authority of his own claims? Is Kierkegaard doing something philosophical? If not what is the status of his writing? What presuppositions does he take for granted? Do they need to be argued for and how does that affect the force of the Kierkegaardian project?

Kierkegaard did not dismiss philosophy in its grand totality, but opted instead to issue various critiques towards different forms of philosophy. Empiricist philosophy was an illusion, an approximation that could not obtain full objectivity. Kierkegaard objected to German idealism on the grounds that it tempted the individual with world historical narratives, beneath which the person could be subsumed and inadvertently surrender the loci of all meaning, specifically his or her subjectivity. To be clearer, Kierkegaard took issue with treating history with such prestige for the narrative of history is uncertain and can be told from various vantage points. The philosophers of history can write their books so that the individual appears to be subject to forces far greater than himself. And as for cosmological theories, they treat the individual as an atom in the ultimate unfolding of physical law. These are problems shared

with other forms of philosophy, but not for philosophy at large, for there are certainly those thinkers within existentialist philosophy and other traditions that deeply value the individual.

Kierkegaard's attacks against what we labeled systematizing "secular philosophy" play out in a similar fashion. In order to construct a rational thought system and inhabit it, the subjectivity of the individual has to be denied in favor of communing with universal thought. This brand of philosophy becomes just a very intellectual form of escapism. What type of escapism are we talking about? Kierkegaard thinks an addiction to rational thought and philosophical systemization is a vain attempt to transcend the existential despairs of the individual. Philosophical objectivity holds out the illusion that the individual can be negated or swapped out for some higher perspective that carries with it some ecstatic character. Kierkegaard knew the disease of the learned well from his own melancholy and philosophical pursuits. Systems cannot act as existential panaceas. Escapism concerns aside, Kierkegaard believed systematizing to be a fool's errand. Because the individual's subjectivity cannot be apprehended and incorporated into the system, the system is necessarily incomplete, which Kierkegaard finds to be a contradiction. Kierkegaard would say it is nonsense to offer a semi- system.

Kierkegaard was thoroughly displeased with the attempts of religious philosophers as well. Those doing philosophy of religion in general fixate on maintaining the proofs for God. Kierkegaard intimates that this need to defend the creator of the universe indicates the very flaws in such lines of argumentation. Specifically, in every variation of proof for God, God is in fact assumed in the premises. Kierkegaard identifies the multitude of ways God is "hidden" or assumed in the arguments for his existence. In summation, we would not attempt to prove God if his existence were not already self-evident to us either by experiential contact or the

certainty of our presupposition. Thus any attempt to prove God is a pointless exercise, not unlike rearranging the deck chairs on the sinking Titanic.

What about those doing what we labeled “Christian philosophy”? What errors have they committed? They suffer dilemmas on two fronts. Christ cannot be fit into a thought system, for Christ, as the absolute paradox, cannot be rationally thought. Further, one has to have good historical reasons to take the Christian paradox seriously and no amount of empirical evidence will justify certainty in Christ as God-man. Therefore Christian empiricism is a lost cause. No historical reasons can count as “good” reasons for believing in God. God is ahistorical spirit. Material evidence does not establish the immaterial. One may argue that empirical evidence makes the existence of the historical Jesus more or less likely, which may be true; however, no amount of material evidence will establish Jesus as Lord.

In our analysis of the different critiques Kierkegaard employed against various philosophical methods, the treatment of ethics was separated from the above philosophical systems, for it seemed that ethics was a stand alone discipline or rather figured not as a theoretical position, but as a mode of life. Kierkegaard believed the main problem with ethical philosophical thinking was that it overemphasized how the individual related to the crowd and world historical narratives. Granted not every aspect of ethical theory emphasizes the sublimation of the individual to a monstrous phantom known as the nation, public, or collective, yet the tendency to overdevelop such aspects of ethical theory are there, as witnessed in the calculations of utilitarianism or the higher expressions of the ethical which favor communitarian concerns. Abstract ethical theory presents another way to overdose on objective thought and neglect our meaningful individuality.

Given Kierkegaard's critiques of philosophy, does he engage in something for which he criticizes other philosophers? Can he escape the perceived hypocrisy? If Kierkegaard is not doing something wholly theoretical, what legitimates his activity? How does this change the perception of his writing? And do his presuppositions need to be argued for in order to validate his writing?

In order to answer the first question, we have to know what precisely Kierkegaard is doing. What is Kierkegaard doing throughout his authorship? Do his intentions change over the course of his authorship? In the first authorship (the set of works composed before Kierkegaard's battle with the *Corsair* and the publication of his generally non-pseudonymous theological writings), Kierkegaard employs a host of pseudonyms and explorations of existential life views, so as to demonstrate the limitations of a life outside of Christ and invite the individual into a subjectively true relationship with God. Kierkegaard certainly employs philosophy throughout his entire authorship, but it is merely one technique amongst many. If Kierkegaard dissects philosophy, how can it be said that Kierkegaard employs philosophy? Is it not like a doctor operating on himself? Can philosophy critique philosophy? What Kierkegaard is doing ought not to appear too strange to us. Kant certainly used philosophy to delimit the boundaries of reason. Is not Kierkegaard doing the same and perhaps going further? What is this going further? This going further is merely a philosophical analysis of the subjective point of view as it relates to varieties of objective truth and The "Truth". One wonders what Kierkegaard would have made of Matthew 12:26 in this context (*If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand?*). It stands to reason that he would have had a field day with such scripture. Irony, poetry, theological presuppositions, psychoanalysis, and literary device all figure into his writing as well. The

second authorship, those directly signed theological writings composed after the affair with the *Corsair*, relies more heavily on what he conceives of as the highest art form: sermonizing. Explaining what sermonizing is is as easy as explaining what art is. Each sermonizer will have his or her own style. For Kierkegaard, we can infer that an effective sermonizer poetically expounds upon scripture to aid individuals in their repetition of the faith relationship. Perhaps, there are proto-sermons in the authorship, such as when Kierkegaard meditates on the spiritual ordeals endured by Abraham and Job or when Kierkegaard contemplates the lilies in the field. Had Kierkegaard lived long enough, perhaps he would have abandoned philosophy altogether and found a way to regularly sermonize. It would have been an easy enough career for him to transition into existentially, but possibly impractical given the uneasy relationship he had with the Lutheran church.

Kierkegaard, on the face of it, has not committed the cardinal sin characteristic of empiricist and philosophical systematizers. Kierkegaard has not built a rationally coherent existential system. He has misdirected his true sentiments by leaving it up to the reader to see how all the parts fit together if at all. By misdirection, what is meant is that Kierkegaard leaves his readership guessing in regards to where Kierkegaard himself fell along the existential spectrum, so that they would not be tempted to decide one way or another by the position of the instructor. At least this is the case with the most famous works in the first authorship. One never really knows if Kierkegaard is a poetic aesthete, a religious poet, a speculative philosopher who objectively understands the truth of Christianity, or a knight of faith plain and simple. It all becomes rather clear after Kierkegaard initiates the second authorship; however, those books are not all that widely read amongst philosophers and remain somewhat locked up in Kierkegaardian cloisters. Upon reading those works beyond the

first authorship, there is little doubt that Kierkegaard sincerely pursued Christ, though he would never say that he “is” a Christian, but rather that he is “becoming” or “trying” to be one. Why the emphasis on process? Kierkegaard knew just how dynamic the human personality is and how the truth of Christianity is something one must renew until his last gasp. Secondly, even if Kierkegaard was interested in providing a universal existential system, he knows he cannot give it for existence is replete with inscrutable paradoxes that resist systematic integration. The Incarnation certainly cannot be mediated by thought, but there are countless others, such as the triadic nature of man and the idea of a prime mover. All of these entities are taken as given and at their very core are ultimately inexplicable. So, Kierkegaard does not get lost in the objective clouds as so many others have. Of course Kierkegaard’s treatment of the paradoxes is forcefully philosophical; otherwise there would be no weight to his critique. Simply stamping one’s feet and exclaiming “None shall pass!” is counterproductive. Kierkegaard’s philosophical approach on these matters might be described as an amplification of the absurd. He desires to dramatize the philosophical irrationality of certain postulates and events, so that they resist mediation in what was at that time an all encompassing Hegelian dialectic. Today, Kierkegaard’s approach offensively stings and captures our attention in regards to how philosophical nimbleness can or ought to be employed. Kierkegaard uses philosophy, once he has properly delimited rational thought, to explore neglected virtues of primary biblical figures. He philosophically explicated the nature of Abraham’s silence, Job’s obedience, and the Joy of the Sermon on the Mount. How does one want to categorize this form of philosophical rigor beyond calling it “Christian existentialism”? Any other combination of descriptive words just seems like a heady word scramble. “Christian existentialism” ought to suffice. What is exciting about Kierkegaard’s

work is that he shows us a corrective for how to deal with modernity's permutations and how to learn more about our religious subjectivity by existentially meditating on unaddressed biblical paradoxes. Kierkegaard's philosophical approach, if appropriately handled, can be reimagined in each generation. Just as the self and the world are dynamic, so might Kierkegaard's gift to philosophy be.

What about the notion that philosophy can be escapism? One hesitates to say all philosophy is fantasy because philosophy can act as a corrective. Kierkegaard, the gadfly of Copenhagen, sees himself as a Socratic torchbearer. Has Kierkegaard misled people so that they do not confront commitments? There is much beauty in Kierkegaard's work, but there is an implicit thrust to it all. To be precise, the entire trajectory of the Kierkegaardian authorship is such that people will take existential commitments more seriously, not less. It seems unlikely that one would merely get lost in Kierkegaard's work aesthetically. If there is an element of distraction in Kierkegaard, it is the devotion he acquires through his efforts. This is a distraction for the man becomes greater than his teaching. Kierkegaard shows us that the normal relationship with an instructor is such that the instructor is dispensable. Only when Christ is the instructor, do we have a situation where the teacher is greater than his teaching. There are legions of Kierkegaardian acolytes, who might let their infatuation with the thinker blind them to what he believed to be the true existential task of everyone, namely to become a Christian (not a Kierkegaardian). One may counter that an individual can be simultaneously a Christian and a Kierkegaardian or even that to be a Kierkegaardian is to be a Christian. This circle can likely be squared, but Kierkegaard would find it horrific if his readership obsessed over him and not the guiding source of apostleship (i.e. the call from Jesus Christ).

A potential big problem that could haunt Kierkegaard is his treatment of the proofs for

God's existence. Kierkegaard believed those efforts to be a waste of time because the theological logicians could not see their own prejudice in the attempt to prove God. As mentioned earlier, the prejudice Kierkegaard points out is the unconscious assumption of God in the premises of the argument for the Divine's existence. What are we to make of Kierkegaard's scenario? Kierkegaard certainly is not oblivious to the presuppositions of the ethical, God, and Christ in his own account, so at least in regards to self-awareness he has an advantage over those philosophers of religion and theologians obsessed with making God a logically irresistible conclusion. What of the project though? If the proofs for God were flawed because of unconscious presuppositions, is Kierkegaard's project flawed despite his superior awareness?

Kierkegaard's project would be just as flawed as those other endeavors if his goals were the same. Conscious attunement to errors of reasoning does not make a line of argumentation logically superior. What perhaps makes Kierkegaard's existential reasoning better is that his goals are different. Those alluded to theologians were attempting to make air tight arguments for God and Christ. Kierkegaard is merely interested in showing us the limitations of lived existence without Christ and subjective reasons for entering into a personal relationship with Christ. These revolutions of the self cannot be had without freedom. If one does not have freedom to choose one's commitments, but is rather argued into them, nothing transformational happens in regards to one's character and it is the transformation of the subjective character that Kierkegaard seeks. Proofs for God, the Ethical, and Christ over-determine the agency of the individual and prevent existential flourishing. Logical certainty actually works against Kierkegaard's aims. The projects of philosophical theologians were flawed because everything hinged on deductive reasoning. Other than the aforementioned flaws, deducing God this way is

ill-conceived. For Kierkegaard, God is the royal subject or person and people are not proved, they are experienced. To prove God, would be to put him in the same category as geometric theorems. Kierkegaard's project is not flawed in that way.

What about how Kierkegaard critiqued the fixation with Ethics? Could Kierkegaard's advocacy of Christian ethical life get caught up in the same trappings, specifically that one sees one's ethical performance bound up in society's definitions and a world historical arc? The Christian ethical program has been normalized to some degree (*Who nowadays is in opposition to the Golden rule?*) and adopted by modern liberal culture. Every good person certainly believes in brotherly love now, so one might have to really test the extent of one's commitment to Christian ethics by truly loving the detested. The more significant concern that Christianity and Christian ethics could be susceptible to is a new world historical narrative, that we are agents ushering in heaven on earth, the second coming, or some other controversially interpreted biblical end times. If we are living for this type of religious telos, then our lives appear not to matter much in comparison with the totality, just as they did not matter when subsumed beneath Hegelian narratives. In conversion, one needs to be wary of thinking how one fits into God's plan. Adopting such Christian narratives would make our lives more contingent upon fanciful events obtaining, than the thing we can control, which is the subjective relationship to the faith object. Simone de Beauvoir raises this concern in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.³³⁸ If all our ethical activity can be connected up to a God that forgives, our actions and lives seem to matter less, for God can just go and fix everything. There is not as much at stake in the Christian perspective for de Beauvoir. This is a valid concern and one Kierkegaard would be susceptible to if he had ever dramatically emphasized concepts of eternal destination, but he scantily addresses the issue.

Matters of eternal destination were unknowable on Kierkegaard's view. They are as objectively inscrutable as God Himself. Think of the existential complacency and prideful condemnation bred by such knowledge. Since we cannot know, we stand in judgment of no man and must constantly renew the faith relationship. We are to love our neighbor simply out of imitation of Christ. No otherworldly histories are to matter. After all, Christ comes for all and not all answer that call or answer it in their own time, only once they too have made the proper involutions of self.

Kierkegaard essentially presupposes the New Testament. There are a few other things that he cannibalized from other philosophical epochs (for example, the tone of the ethical sounds positively Kantian), but the outright acceptance of the gospel is the most significant presupposition. How does this affect Kierkegaard's philosophical status? Is he a lesser thinker because of this presupposition? Is he a greater one? How are we to decide the matter? Perhaps, we should look to the critical reception of Kierkegaard. Individuals such as Simone de Beauvoir and Sartre obviously hold Kierkegaard in high esteem. Sartre's famous slogan of existence preceding essence perfectly harmonizes with Kierkegaard's detestation of aesthetic externality determining man's facticity. De Beauvoir would develop an existentialist ethic in concert with Sartre's works. They can follow Kierkegaard up to a certain point. Many do this with Kierkegaard, where they abandon him once the presupposition of Christianity becomes noxious and obvious. Kierkegaard's humanistic existentialism (*his reflections on those activities within the immanent category, specifically the aesthetic, the ethical, and the intellectual*) seems to be done no disservice by the Christian assumption and even those who cannot transcend the ditch into the faith, still appreciate his explication of what a life of faith

³³⁸ Beauvoir, Simone De. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. (New York: Citadel Press, 1976), pp.1-22.

looks like. Kierkegaard is not written off as a kook or a madman for taking Jesus Christ seriously. Serious thinkers merely decline the invitation. No one decries Kierkegaard's Christian turn, even devout atheists. He is like a travel writer, describing a far off place in such exquisite detail. Those that read him must think to themselves, "That place sounds lovely. Unfortunately, I haven't the money for the trip. Good read though." If only Nietzsche had read him. Maybe such a man could have mustered true disgust for Kierkegaard's assumption or maybe he would found a profound connection with this strange Christian.

There are secular philosophers, unlike the aforementioned, who detect the Christian in Kierkegaard and dismiss him without reading a single page. Given the modern academy's obsessive compulsive yearning to turn philosophy into a science, many departments do not even teach him. An analytic philosopher's cold logic colors Kierkegaard a frivolous poet unworthy of the very important title "philosopher" or "professor". Maybe he is something best saved for a literature course. So, is Kierkegaard's Christian assumption a detriment to his status?

Temporarily, so long as the analytics hold sway. If one takes the long view, cold logic will fall out of favor. It will be supplanted by a new movement and that will fall away as well. Two hundred years from now Kierkegaard will likely have grown in popularity. Precedent indicates such a trend Kierkegaard's assumption of the gospel reflects the historical facticity of Christ. This is difficult to get one's head around, for significant portions of this dissertation have aimed to clarify Kierkegaard's view that no empirical evidence can make the belief in Christ more certain. If that was in fact the case, why entertain the New Testament at all? There must be enough empirical evidence to venture the leap. Without a modicum of empirical evidence, why not consign it to the same realm as Arthurian legend? This truth that

Kierkegaard wants us to live and die for may resist complete physical and philosophical demonstration; however it must have sufficient evidence to be considered a viable option. The question then becomes, “What does sufficient evidence amount to?” At a bare minimum, one would need to have some historical evidence for the apostles and their imitation of the life and death of Christ. If the apostles and their actions are rendered fictitious, what confidence can we have in Christ’s remembered words? What confidence can we have in a subjectively true relationship if there is no legitimate authority to be found? How much evidence does this amount to? It will vary from individual to individual. Many find an empty tomb evidence enough, while others require more. An interesting project unto itself would involve determining the sufficient historical standards for the consideration of the Christian option, though nothing, not even a booming voice from the clouds, will make the choice for Christ rational. Why will not the booming voice in the clouds or any other piece of “evidence” justify Christian faith? That voice could be a deception sown by an evil force, be it spiritual or man. An inference is an inference. Inferences do not guarantee knowledge. As stated earlier in the dissertation, all empirical belief for Kierkegaard is predicated upon inference or what he calls *ordinary faith*. Inference as ordinary faith means that we do not in fact have knowledge of a set of affairs, rather we *will to believe* a scientific or historical narrative for any and all sets of affairs. Kierkegaard’s view that empirical belief is mere ordinary faith comports quite nicely with the paradigmatic upheavals littered throughout the history of science. In many ways, Kierkegaard anticipates Kuhn and inadvertently harmonizes with Nietzsche on these matters. Inferences may proceed from premises, but they do not validate said premises. Evidence (*whatever is decided to be legitimate evidence*) will at best allow for inferences that can be hemmed and hawed over. What amount of evidence must amass before one ventures faith (*the*

extraordinary kind) is up to the individual. Furthermore, finite recorded or physical evidence cannot verify that which is Infinite. The Infinite is spiritual and physical manifestations cannot attest to that which is ultimately immaterial. How precisely is a science or a historical methodology going to legitimate the super-sensory? They are the wrong tools for the job. This move of Kierkegaard's hints at the maddening paradox that is the Incarnation. Part of the paradox of Christ is that he can be both proven and unproven simultaneously. He will forever resist the categories of objective human knowledge, yet offer enough to give well intentioned scholars motivation to define Him. The historicity and the ahistoricity of Christ are inseparable aspects of the Religiousness B faith object.

Do those that love Kierkegaard need to come to his defense so he can be in vogue right now? Are his presuppositions in need of argument? Kierkegaard would resist such "help". His irrational assumptions, namely that God fulfilled a salvific promise by offering the divine logos in bodily form to mankind, actually allow for the free choice to existential commitments. These assumptions are irrational because they are not immanent. They are not conclusions that can be reached by one's own reflective consciousness, but rather they are given to us transcendently and that which is given transcendently explodes finite concepts. Argument would be to introduce determinism into a project of freedom. One can fight with Kierkegaard on this point, and it was taken up early, but it is his contention that objective necessity actually works against the existential project of freedom. The more argumentatively certain we are of the propositions upon which we build our character, the less internally changed by them we are. The fact that the ethical is objectively unknowable, means we choose it and not ascend to it. The fact that Christ is objectively unknowable means we choose Christ, rather than do his bidding. The law of contradiction is known. $2+2=4$ is known. These

objective truths mean nothing to us existentially. Further, it should be obvious that Kierkegaard believes he cannot be “helped”. His assumptions defy rational mediation.

Looking Ahead

This work ultimately aimed at clarifying the fundamental authorial telos of Copenhagen’s most notoriously melancholic denizen. Perhaps, it is still unclear just how far Kierkegaard distanced himself from Kant. The subjective dimensions of this existential project have been accentuated to illustrate what is really a battle of inner versus outer description. Since further elucidation of that matter is not the interest of this modest dissertation, we can move on to discuss some remaining difficulties and point to fertile areas of research.

First, many may be uncomfortable with Kierkegaard’s use of Old Testament icons to illustrate his points regarding the subjectivity of faith. One can implore such readers to overcome the difficulty by accepting that privileged individuals were given an advanced screening of the meaningful individuality in store for humanity. That explanation may fall flat if the following point is pressed. Is there not something absolutely essential about God’s embodiment that makes it utterly impossible to have faith, or what has been defined as culminating meaningful individuality, without a Christ encounter? The idea of there being a pre-Christian elect might be graspable. One can entertain that notion; however, on Kierkegaard’s own terms, can he allow for Old Testament figures to be in possession of faith? Abraham never encounters an embodied God. Job speaks into a whirlwind. For Christ not to be redundant, his embodiment must offer more either in regards to a further progression of faith or faith available to a greater audience than the old elect. These difficulties were discussed in our

penultimate chapter; however, they stay with us. Would it be best to think of Old Testament faith icons as intermediaries between Religiousness A and Religiousness B or ought we to think of their revelations as localized, which are then amplified out to humanity in the Incarnation? The latter option seems problematic, for Abraham and Job do not approach God as a person, whereas those of us alive today can. The former route offers problems in a different respect, for it means Abraham and Job really did not experience faith as Kierkegaard ultimately conceives it.

Another problem encountered during the construction of this work, is that given limited time and resources, one can only describe the subjective dimension of Kierkegaard's individual to a certain degree. Kierkegaard's corpus consists of eighty writings and it would take a lifetime to be conversant in all of them. It is this writer's experience that in each obscure text, he adds another layer, another quality to the subjective character of the individual traveling through existential stages. So this is a bit of a practical problem with a terminal dissertation; however, it is this writer's suspicion that Kierkegaard himself did not manage in his short life to capture every dimension of subjective being throughout those eighty works. Kierkegaard's authorship could serve as a foundation for someone to take the Kierkegaardian project further. What one may discover in that process of adding to the foundation is that the project cannot be exhausted. The subjective quality to our inner lives may be absolutely limitless in regards to description and require the need to integrate Kierkegaard with other traditions, such as psychoanalysis.

One final point before signing off. If Kierkegaard is a self-contained existential thinker, meaning because of his faith commitments he cannot be further developed by other existential thinkers or integrated within the larger body of what is considered respectable philosophy,

maybe there is room for him in those doing work in critical theory. Perhaps, the Kierkegaardian authorship can do much to illustrate the post-structuralist and deconstructionist ideas of Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida. Kierkegaard's play with authorial intention via the pseudonyms contained within the polyonymous first authorship and the direct signings of the second authorship can teach us much about the existential status of modes of discourse and the ontological status of the author. Perhaps not enough has been done to put Kierkegaard in conversation with these thinkers, so that an unexpected haul of philosophical knowledge can be produced and advance the academic imperatives of the university.

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