

KIERKEGAARD'S POST-ENLIGHTENMENT SUBJECT: THE GRAMMAR
AND GOAL OF BELIEF

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Tell me “how” you seek, and I will tell you “what” you are seeking.

Ludwig Wittgstein, *Philosophical Grammar*

You have asked me whether, and I have answered with the how. Faith can do without the whether, but if it is asked, the only way it can be answered is with the how; and so long as the how is not established the whether will not cease to come and go.

Gustav Theodor Fechner, *Leben nach dem Tode*

ABSTRACT

Søren Kierkegaard's thesis, "Truth is Subjectivity", is presented in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, as the central philosophical concept of his pseudonymous authorship. Contrary to most readings, it is argued here that Kierkegaard's subjectivity principle is epistemologically normative, not for ethical and religious beliefs only, but for a wider, general epistemology as well. The significance of Kierkegaard's claim that truth is subjectivity is that Kierkegaard is recasting epistemological issues in theological and ethical terms.

Part One argues that Kierkegaard formulates his subjectivity principle as a response to the Enlightenment epistemologies, specifically of Kant and Hegel, and more generally Descartes, that seek to ground epistemology infallibly in the metaphysical resources of human rationality. Kierkegaard limits the scope of reason and philosophy in a manner that is reminiscent of the late Wittgenstein, and understands the activity of philosophy as analogous to grammar. What is glossed over by Enlightenment epistemology is the human subject's involvement in any act of belief. Rather than seeing human subjectivity as a hindrance to the pursuit of truth, Kierkegaard understands subjectivity (for humans) to be the means of attaining truth.

There are two basic types of subjectivity for Kierkegaard. Constitutional subjectivity refers to human persons as beings who achieve subjectivity, or a first-person perspective on the world. Reflexive subjectivity, on the other hand, refers to the general subject-forming activities that comprise the process of becoming subjective, and has as its primary constituent a reflective component. These senses of subjectivity combine to provide Kierkegaard's subjectivity principle with its normative and critical capacity.

Part Two outlines how Kierkegaard's two senses of subjectivity function normatively with respect to beliefs. This section demonstrates that Kierkegaard's grammar of subjectivity in the end is a grammar of belief also. The conclusion of the dissertation is that Kierkegaard's subjectivity principle is a meta-epistemological principle through which Kierkegaard details an ethic of belief that is ultimately theological in nature.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

References to works of Søren Kierkegaard will employ the abbreviations in the following list. The primary English translation of Kierkegaard's works used in the notes (except in specially noted cases) will be the newly completed Princeton University Press translations of Kierkegaard's literary corpus, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 26 volumes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978-1999). These works will be indicated by *KW* followed by the volume number and page number(s). Immediately following this reference, preceded by a forward-slash, are the corresponding volume and page numbers in the third Danish edition of *Søren Kierkegaard's Samlede Værker* [*The Collected Works of Søren Kierkegaard*], ed. A.B. Drachmann, J.L. Heiburg, and H.O. Lange, 20 volumes (Copenhagen: Glydendalske Boghandel, 1962). The following is an example of such a citation: *KW* VIII 50/*SV* VI 143.

English reference to the journals and miscellaneous writings of Kierkegaard are from *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, assisted by Gregor Malantschuk, 7 Volumes, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967-1978). As listed below, the abbreviation is *JP*, and is followed by a forward-slash and the location of the miscellany in *Søren Kierkegaard's Papirer* [*Søren Kierkegaard's Papers*], volumes I-XI³ and XII-XVI, ed. P.A. Heiburg,

V. Kuhr, and E. Torsting, first edition, 16 volumes in 25 tomes (Copenhagen: Gyldendahl, 1968-1970). The abbreviation, listed below, is *Pap.*, followed by the volume, group, and entry numbers. For example: *JP* I 560/*Pap.* XI² A 49.

Kierkegaard's Works in Danish

SV *Søren Kierkegaard's Samlede Værker, Volumes I-XX*

Pap. *Søren Kierkegaard's Papirer, Volumes I-XVI*³

Kierkegaard's Works in English

KW *Kierkegaard's Writings, Volumes I-XXVI*

JP *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, Volumes I-VII*

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Modern theorizers are so foolishly objective that they completely forget that the thinker [her/]himself is like the flutist's instrument and that it is of utmost importance to know one's instrument . . . yes, of a quite different kind of importance, for the thinker has a relation of infinite inwardness to [her/]his object such as no flutist has to [her/]his instrument.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*

The aim of this project is to investigate the role played by the pseudonymous formulation of the “subjectivity principle” in Søren Kierkegaard's (1813-1855) understanding of the nature and regulation of belief, as a significant alternative to modernist, Enlightenment epistemology. Our contention is that Johannes Climacus's thesis, “truth is subjectivity”, provides a doctrine which inaugurates Kierkegaard as the first thinker in Western philosophy to wrestle with the issues of subjectivity and belief in a self-consciously post/after-modern manner. Thus the problem we want to address revolves around two central questions. The first question asks what the Climacus's subjectivity principle is and how it functions as a critique of modern epistemology, and the second question concerns how this Kierkegaardian emphasis on subjectivity makes sense as an epistemological principle. We will attempt, then, to address the question: Can there be an epistemology of subjectivity and, if so, what shape does this take in the Kierkegaardian literature? In this investigation into the significance of Kierkegaard's epistemology for the post-Enlightenment situation, it is not my intention to unpack these concerns so handily referred to as “postmodern”,¹ but rather to address the general situation resulting from the materialisation of them. I will further argue that in Kierkegaard's philosophy of subjectivity we have (already in the nineteenth century) a viable way to move the discussion forward, beyond the narrow province of Enlightenment epistemology.

¹ It is by no means clear as to what properly counts as “postmodern”. The term here is simply used to designate the conditions materialising after modernity.

Finding an epistemological theory in Kierkegaard's writings is similar to piecing together scattered parts of a puzzle. Nowhere in the Kierkegaardian literature is there an explicitly spelled out epistemological theory, although his literature as a whole is fueled by epistemic concerns, and there are (scant) specific passages in which he makes epistemological statements. This leaves us in the position of having to make the best sense we can of his *de facto* epistemology by treating the various comments and principles we find throughout the various strains and strands of his literature and evaluating them for their epistemological relevance.

What will help us in this task with respect to the subjectivity principle is to distinguish between *meta*-epistemology and *substantive* epistemology.² Meta-epistemology, as the name suggests, is not first-order epistemology, but is (roughly) reflection on the nature, conduct, methodology, and prospects of epistemology. Substantive epistemology, on the other hand, attempts to *do* epistemology. Substantive epistemology pursues the defining features of knowledge and the specific conditions under which justification and truth are obtained for beliefs. In other words, substantive epistemology tells us when we have a clear instance of knowledge and when we do not, and gives us a method for making these determinations. Kierkegaard engages in very little substantive epistemology in his writings, and, at any rate, it is apparent that his subjectivity principle is more obviously a meta-epistemological position—on how to go about the tasks of epistemology—than it is prescribing a set of procedures. The subjectivity principle, therefore, is treated in this project as a meta-epistemological principle that tells us about the nature of the epistemological task, and to that degree limits and delimits how that task this will proceed. What is not offered in this project is a full-scale (substantive) epistemology that tells us what epistemological reflection will uncover, how doxastic practices are structured, what the criteria of epistemic justification and

² William Alston uses this distinction (although it is not peculiar to him) in, "A 'Doxastic Practice' Approach to Epistemology", in *Knowledge and Skepticism*, ed. Marjorie Clay and Kieth Lehrer (London: Westview Press, 1989), 24.

rationality are, etc. Such a substantive epistemological enterprise may be possible to perform on Kierkegaard's writings, but it is not the task of this thesis.³

What is offered here is admittedly *a reading* of Kierkegaard's texts—one that presumes to offer a great deal by way of explanation, but does not claim exclusivity. The method used acknowledges that the concepts employed throughout the strata of the Kierkegaardian literature are contextually situated, but examines them for their explanatory power and relevance for present-day issues. This approach will remain sensitive to historical-critical concerns, but focuses more on forming a conceptual link running through the Kierkegaardian texts that makes sense of them.

Writing on Kierkegaard's Thought

Any attempt to write on Kierkegaard's thought is confronted with a unique set of objections that one is not faced with when writing on most other thinkers. Kierkegaard's insistence upon, and preoccupation with, human subjectivity, the *existentiell*, appears *prima facie* to undermine any attempt to objectively state, discuss, analyse, or get to the (objective) "truth" of his thought. Is he not the prophet of the Paradox and the Absurd? Is he not the harbinger of irrationality and subjective truth, and does he not insist that direct communication is not possible, that truth must be communicated indirectly? Is it not contradictory and self-refuting to attempt an academic and philosophical inquiry into the thought of someone whose exclusive interest was Being in subjectivity, to the exclusion of the objectivity of abstract thinking?

These are all legitimate objections and demand a response, but it is in large measure one of the subsidiary functions of this thesis to undermine these sorts of concerns. All of the aforesaid objections stem from a common denominator—one that takes Kierkegaard's subjectivity principle to be a denial of objective truth or knowledge, and subsequently interprets his category of the paradox as an assertion that the resources of human reason are wholly bankrupt, superfluous, and unreliable

³ For an attempt at discerning Kierkegaard's substantive epistemology, see Marilyn Gaye Piety.

as a means of aiding humans in the pursuit of truth. This position is a caricature of Kierkegaard's thought and a prosaic, inadequate reading of his literature. Kierkegaard is surely emphasising being over thinking, and subjectivity over objectivity, but his insistence that being (human existence) cannot be thought does not mean that being cannot be thought *about*. It is instead a reminder that the concepts we employ when thinking about something are not identical to actually being that thing (as it is as it goes about being what it is). In all our talk about being we must not forget that we are simply letting "ideas compare with ideas", which is legitimate in itself, and that "all this contending is still at a distance and is like shadowboxing".⁴

In light of this, we may conduct academic inquiries into Kierkegaard's thought with no (necessary) impunity to the integrity and internal coherence of its subject matter.⁵ One must take great care to never mistake the academic exercise with a qualitative transformation in one's essential being, or to think that one has communicated that ability to someone else simply by virtue of a philosophical treatise. We must keep clear in our minds that our ability to think correctly about reality does not correspondingly translate into our being appropriately in that reality. On Kierkegaard's account, if we are fully or appropriately *to be* in reality, and thus achieve a type of existential understanding of what this means, we must also think correctly about reality. Linguistic expressions of this understanding and philosophical remarks designed to articulate its inner logic, are legitimate and even necessary when confusion reigns. However, these linguistic exercises do not amount to this special understanding but are only expressions *of* it.⁶ Kierkegaard himself

"Kierkegaard On Knowledge", (Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 1994).

⁴ KW XVI 78/SV XII 81.

⁵ Indeed, in *Postscript* Climacus argues that: "To ask abstractly (*even though it is proper to ask about it abstractly, since the particular, the accidental, is indeed a constituent of the actual and in direct opposition to abstraction*) and to answer abstractly is not nearly as difficult as to ask and answer what it means that this definite something is an actuality. Abstraction disregards this definite something, but the difficulty lies in joining this definite something and the ideality of thinking by willing to think it"; KW XII.1 301-02/SV X 9, my italics.

⁶ Paul L. Holmer, "Post-Kierkegaard: Remarks About Being a Person", in *Kierkegaard's Truth: The Disclosure of the Self. Psychiatry and the Humanities, Volume 5*, ed. Joseph H. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 11-12 (my italics).

engaged in written philosophical and theological discourse (and even wrote a Magisters dissertation in philosophy) in order to “remove confusion” and oppose wrong thinking. Paul Holmer notes that for Kierkegaard,

*The ideal structure of things is open to every [hu]man who has a capacity to reason abstractly - one can therefore know that subjectivity is truth. . . . The definition is for the philosophical, the reality is for all. . . . Kierkegaard is objective about this subjectivity - but again he is consistent. He never says that the objective propositional form he gives to truth is the truth itself. His definition is ideal - it exists for another’s thought.*⁷

This dissertation engages in the same type of intellectual exercise Kierkegaard himself engages in and seeks to explore one of the central “doctrines” of Kierkegaard’s writings and to make explicit the philosophical and academic resources of this for the world of ideas.

Reading Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard’s penchant for signing pseudonyms to certain of his works (often referred to as his “aesthetic” works), while publishing others (“religious” works) under his own name, opens an hermeneutical Pandora’s Box.⁸ To make matters more complicated, Kierkegaard repeatedly refuses his ‘authorial rights’ to a privileged interpretation of the pseudonymous books, claiming to have, “no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader”.⁹ Accordingly, there are virtually as many readings of his authorship as there are scholars who approach this task.¹⁰ No

⁷ Paul L. Holmer, “Kierkegaard and Truth: An Analysis of the Presuppositions Integral to His Definition of the Truth” (Ph. D. diss., Yale University, 1945), 272.

⁸ Joakim Garff wrestles admirably with this issue in his, “The Eyes of Argus: *The Point of View and Points of View on Kierkegaard’s Work as an Author*”, in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, eds. Jonathan Reé and Jane Chamberlain (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 75-102. Garff draws out many of the seminal issues one confronts in Kierkegaardian exegesis. His salutary contribution in this piece is his rigorous demonstration that Kierkegaard’s progressive (and vacillating) understanding of his own authorship and its “meaning” was ambivalent and ultimately was an issue he never completely resolved. However, whereas Garff finds this to undermine the “normative status” of Kierkegaard’s various comments on the authorship, I am more optimistic about the possibility of finding a unity in the plurality of points of view represented in Kierkegaard’s authorship. In many respects, Kierkegaard’s understanding of his authorship is irrelevant to this task.

⁹ KW XII.1 626/SV X 285.

¹⁰ For example, David Gouwens identifies 12 categories of approaches to reading Volume One of Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or* alone. See David J. Gouwens, “Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or*, Part One: Patterns of Interpretations”, in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Either/Or, Part One* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), 5-50. For other discussions of the relevant literature regarding approaches to interpreting Kierkegaard see: Roger Poole, “The Unknown Kierkegaard: Twentieth-

doubt this lack of academic unanimity was, in some respects, an aim of Kierkegaard's strategy of imposing pseudonymous authors between "himself" and "his" works. While the significance of the pseudonyms cannot be fully addressed at this point, it is necessary to indicate Kierkegaard's authorship will be approached in this study.¹¹

The general strategy will be to take the pseudonyms seriously but also (at various times and in specific contexts) to refer to them interchangeably with Kierkegaard himself, as belonging to the literary corpus written (historically) by him.¹² Kierkegaard's pseudonyms are understood to express different ontological perspectives or ways being in the world, with divergent points of view revolving around one central concern: "[the problem of] becoming a Christian in Christendom".¹³ In other words, Kierkegaard claims that becoming a Christian is the one unific issue his authorship, both direct and indirect, pseudonymous and veronymous,¹⁴ is an attempt to address. In this case, the individual pseudonyms are

Century Receptions", in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, eds. Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 48-75; C. Stephen Evans, Chapter One, "Reading Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Literature", and Chapter Two, "Reading Johannes Climacus", in *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Postscript": The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1983), 1-32; C. Stephen Evans, Chapter One, "On Reading Kierkegaard and Johannes Climacus", in *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's "Philosophical Fragments"* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1992), 1-12; and Steven M. Emmanuel, Chapter One, "Revelations of Self in the Pseudonymous Authorship", in *Kierkegaard and the Concept of Revelation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 1-22.

¹¹ The following is not intended to be a defence of a position. It is rather an outline of the position adopted throughout this project. A full-scale defence of this position on Kierkegaard's authorship is beyond the scope of this project and the reader is referred to Steven Emmanuel's and C. Stephen Evans's polemical discussions of this point noted above.

¹² In "A First and Last Explanation" which he, under his own name, appended to the *Postscript* in order to "explain" his relationship with the pseudonyms, Kierkegaard requests: "Therefore, if it should occur to anyone to want to quote a particular passage from the [pseudonymous] books, it is my wish, my prayer, that he will do me the kindness of citing the respective pseudonymous author's name, not mine . . . My role is the joint role of being the secretary and, quite ironically, the dialectically reduplicated author of the authors. . . . but on the other hand I am very literally and directly the author of, for example, the upbuilding discourses [published alongside every pseudonymous work] and of every word in them"; *KW XII.1 627/SV X 287*.

¹³ See Kierkegaard's statement in *KW XII 90/SV XVIII 137*: "Thus my entire work as an author revolves around: becoming a Christian in Christendom".

¹⁴ The neologism "veronymous" will be used throughout the dissertation as the opposite of pseudonymous, to indicate those writings Kierkegaard wrote under his own name. This word occurs in some places in the literature on Kierkegaard. It is adopted and used here because it is an efficient device to communicate that a work or quote of Kierkegaard's is one that he either wrote or published without appending a pseudonym, under his own name.

conceived as aesthetic constructions of Kierkegaard's literary imagination designed to provide a communicative space¹⁵ in which the readers are confronted by a set of existential possibilities that they must relate to their own existence.¹⁶

It is on this basis, and not because he has abandoned all concepts of human agency, that Kierkegaard refuses his authorial rights to interpret the pseudonymous authorship. In *Point of View* he comments on his relationship to the pseudonyms,

If I were to begin *qua* author to protest [on behalf of his right to a privileged interpretation], I might easily bring to confusion the whole work, which from first to last is dialectical. . . . So I cannot make any protestation [about how to be understood] . . . for *qua* [hu]man I may be justified in protesting, and it may be my religious duty to make protestation. But this cannot be confounded with authorship: *qua* author it does not avail much that I protest *qua* [hu]man that I intended this or that".¹⁷

Here Kierkegaard affirms that he had express intentions "*qua* human"¹⁸ for his pseudonyms and that they were intended to produce a unified effect on his "reader". What he categorically refuses to do is to interpret how this ought to play out in the reader's imagination (the realm of ideas). The importance of this is underscored for Kierkegaard precisely because *he has very specific intentions for his literary production* which he dare not jeopardise and thereby "bring confusion to the whole work". His pseudonymous dialectic is designed specifically to engage the reader's imagination in relation to her/his own actual, concrete historicity (i.e., her/his *existence*). Kierkegaard therefore rightly denies his own authority to interpret

¹⁵ This Edward Mooney's apt term from his *Selves in Discord and Resolve: Kierkegaard's Moral-Religious Psychology in Either/Or and Sickness Unto Death* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. xii.

¹⁶ Kierkegaard's pseudonyms are treated in more depth in Chapter Two of the dissertation.

¹⁷ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 15. Lowrie's translation is preferred to make this point, over the Hongs's, who translate the same passage thus: "If I *qua* author must first make declarations [that the author must know what is best], I easily alter the writing, which from first to last is dialectical. Consequently I cannot make any declaration In other words, *qua* human being I may be justified in making a declaration, and from the religious point of view it may be my duty to make a declaration. But this must not be confused with the authorship—*qua* author it does not help very much that I *qua* human being declare that I have intended this or that"; KW XXII 33/SV XVIII 87.

¹⁸ Kierkegaard's distinction between "*qua* [hu]man" and "*qua* author" refers to his concept of different modes of being in the world, corresponding to his theory of existence spheres. On this reading the "*qua* [hu]man" distinction is a reference to Kierkegaard's ethical-religious self—his "true" self, if you will—that assumes responsibility for itself as a unified subjectivity with ethical obligations and therefore is fundamentally concerned with actualising itself in a concrete, historical existence. The "*qua* author" is a reference to his aesthetic mode of being in the world, which deals in possibilities, not actualities, and therefore is the realm of thought, imagination, and knowledge. Kierkegaard's theory of existence spheres (or "stages") is part of the subject matter of Chapter Six and is more fully explained there.

how this will happen *for the reader*. S/he must take this responsibility upon her/himself.¹⁹ Kierkegaard is not, however, denying that he had intentions, nor that he can communicate them, nor that these intentions have in some respect a regulative capacity.²⁰ Kierkegaard in fact states that his intentions are normative—just not in respect to the *essential truth* of his authorship.²¹

The approach to Kierkegaard outlined above is a species of the genus of Kierkegaardian interpretations referred to by Roger Poole as “the blunt reading” because in this I “may be counted as one of those who take the pseudonymity seriously and yet manage to argue consequentially and rigorously within those constraints at a philosophical level”.²² Poole finds these “fundamentalist and literalist assumptions” about “readerly intentionality” to render “the entire

¹⁹ Compare Paul Holmer’s comment that, “Kierkegaard was not trying to conceal himself in the pseudonymous authorship. Rather, he thought it preposterous to invoke his own authority for something like a fundamental mode of living and erected ideal ‘personae’ really to divert attention from himself and to maximize the activation of the capabilities and power of each of his readers. The intrusion of the author’s authority would vitiate the creation and sustaining of an authorizing activity on the part of the reader”. See Holmer, “Post-Kierkegaard: Remarks About Being a Person”, 11.

²⁰ Compare Sheila Walsh’s statement against Joakim Garff’s deconstructive reading of Kierkegaard: “Kierkegaard maintains the possibility of ambiguity of interpretation by readers while at the same time setting forth three criteria of substantiation: 1) the phenomenon cannot be explained in any other way; 2) in this particular way it can be explained in every detail; and 3) the explanation fits at every point KW XXII 34/SV XVIII 88. Kierkegaard applies these criteria to the thesis that he is a religious author and finds that explanation incongruous because it cannot explain the edifying discourses”. See Sylvia Walsh, “Reading Kierkegaard With Kierkegaard Against Garff”, *Søren Kierkegaard’s Newsletter* 38: (July 1999), 6. For Garff’s response to Walsh see, Joakim Garff, “Reading Oneself”, *Søren Kierkegaard’s Newsletter* 38: (July 1999), 9-14.

²¹ Kierkegaard has Climacus carefully distinguish between *essential truth*, which pertains to Socratic ethical self-knowledge, and *accidental truth*, which consists in information about the universe. Essential truth is “the *highest* truth for an existing person”. See Chapter Four of this dissertation for more on this distinction. While Kierkegaard does not believe propositions actually *exist*, in the sense that humans do—they instead have a kind of thought-existence unlike existing in actuality—he does believe that as ideal objects they are instantiated as acts or states of existing beings. These propositions may express cognitive relationships to the objectively real world and are able to provide approximate, fallibilist “accidental” knowledge (as possibility) whose “degree and scope is indifferent” to the subjectivity of the existing person. See KW XII.1 205/SV IX 170.

²² Poole, “Twentieth Century Receptions, 65. Poole contrasts the blunt readers to those who have accepted the “deconstructive turn”. See *ibid.*, 58-68. I actually find C. Stephen Evans’s analysis of the topology of Kierkegaardian literature in *Passionate Reason*, 2-5, more helpful (although not more comprehensive) than Poole’s. Evans argues that there are three types of Kierkegaard literature: (1) those who read Kierkegaard as a straight philosopher and therefore draw on Kierkegaard’s literature as a whole, disregarding the nuances of the pseudonyms; (2) those who take “the literary approach” and see Kierkegaard as a proto-deconstructionist whose literary work fundamentally subverts its apparent content; and (3) those who combine the first two approaches and, on one hand, take the pseudonyms and the literary structure of Kierkegaard’s works seriously while, on the

dialectical structure of the Kierkegaardian text . . . invisible”.²³ He opts instead for a more refined approach that accepts the “deconstructive turn”. Poole’s deconstructive reading sees Kierkegaard’s use of pseudonyms, irony and humour, and alternative literary forms as part of his commitment to a view of language and authorship that is proto-deconstructionist and deliberately subverts the “objective”, philosophical content of his own texts.²⁴

The purpose here is not to argue conclusively for one approach or for the poverty of all other methods of reading Kierkegaard. (For instance, there is much of value in the “deconstructive reading” of Kierkegaard.) However, to distinguish the manner in which Kierkegaard is interpreted here from the way Poole does, there are three points that generally indicate why this stance towards the Kierkegaardian authorship is adopted, and a thorough-going deconstructive interpretation and methodology resisted.

To begin with, C. Stephen Evans is correct to say that Kierkegaard’s rejection of the Enlightenment (Hegelian) idea of pure objectivity and an ahistorical self that knows itself transparently does not mean that the concomitant construal of a situated subjectivity entails a complete jettisoning of (objective) truth.²⁵ Indeed, it is the task of this project to secure the idea that for Kierkegaard subjectivity is instead a medium which may grant us access to truth, and that without appropriate subjectivity truth may not be obtained by finite, human knowers.

Second, Evans is also correct to say that reading Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms as if they had genuine philosophical content, organized around a unifying theme (as Kierkegaard indicates in several places he understood his authorship),²⁶ provides a

other hand, do not find this hinders but rather promotes the texts’ philosophical gravity. This third option is the type of approach taken in the present study.

²³ Poole, “Twentieth Century Receptions”, 62.

²⁴ Poole comments that, “The [Kierkegaardian] texts demonstrate to a nicety the Lacanian perception that all we are ever offered in a text is an endless succession of signifiers”. See Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1993), 6.

²⁵ Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 3.

²⁶ In “The Eyes of Argus”, Joakim Garff argues that Kierkegaard understood his authorship variously and notes that Kierkegaard’s miscellaneous comments on how he read his own literature exhibits this tension.

powerful and illuminating way of interpreting him that accounts for the content of his authorship in the most comprehensive manner.²⁷ This does not imbue Kierkegaard with unwarranted authority “*qua* author” beyond his professed authorial rights, or make him out to have direct and pristine access to the contents of his consciousness. It does however, take his opinion “*qua* human” seriously as a valid opinion regarding the texts. Ultimately, reading Kierkegaard in this manner is the best way to be fair to his wish to distance his own voice from the pseudonyms voices in order that they may speak for themselves, with their own contributions to the central, organisational point in the discourse—namely, how one stands (individually) in relationship to Christianity.

Furthermore, as Anthony Rudd poignantly observes, if the deconstructive reading is correct, then Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous authorship may be regarded as “representing a colossal failure to communicate on Kierkegaard’s part”, given the fact that, “For a century and a half no one understood what their true meaning was, until now, at last, ‘a Professor’ has arrived who is clever enough to see what Kierkegaard was really getting at”.²⁸ The argument implied by this is that those of the deconstructive bent are actually guilty of the same cognitive sin they find calumnious in the “blunt readers”—both of making the significance and meaning of the pseudonyms dependent upon one’s success in finding Kierkegaard’s own voice in the pseudonyms (or in the attempt to be “true” to Kierkegaard’s intentions), and then of thinking that one has actually discovered Kierkegaard’s voice. For example, Poole argues that, “The efforts of the ‘blunt reader’ are ultimately doomed to failure, though, because the direction of attention is 180 degrees in the *wrong* direction. Kierkegaard’s text does not offer itself to be the object of the question ‘What does it mean?’ It instead offers itself as the proponent

²⁷ Ibid., 4-5. Evans, in fact, goes so far as to assert that, “Whether Kierkegaard intended it or not, the unity is there in the text, in the sense that an honest reading of the authorship beginning with *Either/Or* and continuing through the later explicitly Christian writings can discern a consistent [religious] *telos*” (p. 5).

²⁸ Anthony J. Rudd, “‘Believing All Things’: Kierkegaard on Knowledge, Doubt, and Love”, in *International Kierkegaard Commentary, Volume 16: Works of Love*, ed. Robert L. Perkins

of the question ‘What do you think?’”.²⁹ In this assertion Poole implies three things:

1. Kierkegaard’s voice or intention is something that has both the possibility of being determinate and has significance for how we read him.
2. The voice Poole hears in the text, if not the *true* voice of Kierkegaard (i.e., Kierkegaard’s “real” intentions), has at least a ring truer to Kierkegaard’s voice than those who read Kierkegaard bluntly.
3. The only freedom of speech available to the pseudonyms is freedom *from* speaking, as opposed to freedom *to* speak

Number 1 is precisely the charge Poole levies against the “blunt reading”. Poole is claiming to have discerned an intention in Kierkegaard that is not being acknowledged by the blunt readers. This sounds suspiciously like Poole has found some content in the pseudonyms for himself. Number 2 is a position that has self-referential problems relative to other components in Poole’s deconstructive position. With 2, Poole apparently gives up the thesis he praises Kierkegaard for (putatively) holding; the “Lacanian perception that all we are offered in a text is an endless succession of signifiers”.³⁰ Whatever else this last statement means, it appears to support the deconstructive position that the author is “dead”, and thusly all we ever “hear” in a text is our own voice. This, again, is not something Poole may claim over the blunt readers. He seems merely to be saying that he does a better job at blunt reading than most. Poole also is very concerned that the more blunt of us not close off the texts of Kierkegaard and foist our interpretations onto the text. Number 3, however, is a position that itself does not seem to be overly imbued with liberality towards the pseudonymous voices and closes them off from ever being able to speak.

(Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 129n5. Note that Rudd’s comments are in specific reference to the Climacus pseudonym, not the whole pseudonymous authorship.

²⁹ Poole, “Twentieth Century Receptions”, 61-62 (my italics)

³⁰ Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication*, 6.

Finally, I find the deconstructive reading is too “thin”. It attenuates the Kierkegaardian texts, both “aesthetic” and “religious”, to their aesthetical component “*qua* author”, and neglects any ethical and religious dimensions that his texts may have for their readers “*qua* human”. This results in a picture of the literature that occludes the inherent and intended³¹ multi-dimensional character of the Kierkegaardian texts, and thus disregards their ability to address the reader across the existence-spheres s/he inhabits. It is worth noting that Kierkegaard argues in his university thesis that irony can be a sickness as well as a healthiness.³² And later Johannes Climacus suggests that the master of irony refuses to be trapped in any relativities, but ironically comprehends all of life’s relativities—including the irony that irony itself is not an end, but a means to an end.³³ In the final analysis, the deconstructionist reading is afflicted with an ironical malaise that has not comprehended all of life’s relativities. Instead of using irony as a disposable, contingent strategy (i.e., as itself a *relativity*) to dislodge untruth³⁴ so that this use of irony may in turn create the existential space for ethico-religious commitment, the deconstructionist fixates on irony as an end in itself—and is thereby trapped in life’s relativity. Thus, I follow Paul Holmer and read the polynimity of Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms, on the one hand, to *say* a plurality, but on the other, to *show* a unity.³⁵ Having said this however, we must heed Anthony Rudd’s caution to treat the pseudonyms carefully, respecting their individual personalities and perspectives, as it is “far from obvious that Kierkegaard was doing just the same thing with, for instance, Johannes the Seducer, Nicholas Notabene, Vigilius Haufniensis, and Anti-Climacus”.³⁶

³¹ “Intended” is used here because it is taken to be uncontroversial that whatever else is going on in the Kierkegaardian texts: (a) the use of pseudonyms are at least attempts at indirect communication—that is, attempts (at least) to engage uniquely the reader; and (b) his veronymous upbuilding discourses are, as quasi-sermons and biblical exegesis, obviously religious in nature.

³² *KW* II 77/SV I 128.

³³ *KW* XII.1 502/SV X 179-80.

³⁴ Sylvia Walsh, “Kierkegaard and Postmodernity”, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 29 (1991): 121.

³⁵ Paul L. Holmer, “Post-Kierkegaard: Remarks About Being a Person”, 11.

The Project

Kierkegaard's emphasis on subjectivity is levied by him as "the rock against which metaphysics founders", including the modern epistemological project with its attempt to establish the presuppositionless beginning on the metaphysical foundations of a self-transparent epistemological subject. The point of departure for this study of Kierkegaard's relevance for postmodernity and the theory of knowledge is Johannes Climacus's intriguing statement in the *Postscript*, "There is a How that determines the What".³⁷ Kierkegaard later remarks that, "In all the usual talk that Johannes Climacus is mere subjectivity etc., it has been completely overlooked that he later points out . . . that *when the How is scrupulously rendered the What is also given*".³⁸ This, he continues, demonstrates that there is a normativity inherent in the subjectivity principle for, "Right here, at its very maximum, inwardness is shown to be objectivity".³⁹ With his doctrine of "truth is subjectivity", Climacus brings the philosophical problems surrounding the human self/subject, belief, and language together in such a way that epistemological, metaphysical, and ontological issues are inextricably interwoven. Thus it is that Climacus's grammar of the post-Enlightenment subject becomes a grammar of belief.

The primary challenge to our project is that of sorting the epistemological issues out from Kierkegaard's literature. The objective is to expound Climacus's subjectivity principle so that it provides a way to read the epistemological discussions taking place throughout the various strands of the Kierkegaardian corpus. It has already been noted that, on the reading taken here, Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms are fundamentally interested in theological issues—namely, how one becomes a Christian in Christendom. This, however, does not prohibit the Kierkegaardian authorship from having other issues in mind, and on examination it is apparent that epistemological issues are central to this basal theological concern. Therefore, while

³⁶ Rudd, "Believing All Things", 129.

³⁷ *KW* XII.1 610-22, 613n-614/*SV* X 272-281, 274n-275.

³⁸ *JP* IV 4550/*Pap.* X² A 299.

there is no explicit (*de jure*) development of an epistemic theory, Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms both inform us about epistemological issues and in fact operate (*de facto*) with an underlying theory about the nature and regulation of belief and how to appropriately broach these questions—bits and pieces of which surface from time to time in the literature.

The nature of our project is, then, primarily conceptual and not historical, and we do not make any pretensions to have commandeered the authorial intentions of Kierkegaard so as to provide (the substantive) “Kierkegaard’s Theory of Knowledge”. This is to say that our project is more of a “Kierkegaardian” project than straight-forwardly an exegesis of Kierkegaard’s thought. We situate this task substantially in the Kierkegaardian texts “authored” by (and about) Johannes Climacus, in whose writings we have the formulation of the subjectivity principle. The goal in this project is to render the Climacean subjectivity principle coherent as a meta-epistemological principle, showing how it is augmented by, and at work in, the various strata of the Kierkegaardian literature. Although historical and exegetical accuracy is vitally important for this task, we aim to draw out the epistemological dimensions of the Kierkegaardian subjectivity principle and reveal his “hidden” meta-epistemology within his literary corpus. Because an epistemic theory is never overtly developed in his authorship, in some instances elucidating it will entail that these issues are taken beyond Kierkegaard’s explicit discussions and will involve our rendering them in the most plausible manner.

As noted above, our primary objective in this dissertation is the elucidation of the epistemological dimensions of Climacus’s subjectivity principle. Our aim is to provide an account of the normative resources of the subjectivity principle and a general outline of the basic characteristics of such an epistemology. We will not deliver a fully developed and substantive epistemology. “Truth is subjectivity” is a meta-epistemological statement that orients or situates a more substantive epistemic theory. The focus, therefore, is on developing the major points of the central

³⁹ JP IV 4550/Pap. X² A 299.

argument in order to recommend and justify this Kierkegaardian approach to epistemological issues. This entails that we forego detailed analyses of minor arguments regarding epistemological minutiae, important and relevant as they be for other purposes. These arguments do exist and such an account is possible, but they must be referred to other projects as they do not strictly fall within the purview of our present concerns.

Lastly, although this Kierkegaardian approach to epistemic issues is situated within an ontology of human subjectivity, we will not be developing a complete philosophical anthropology, nor will we conduct a full excursion into an ontology of the human self in all its multifarious expressions and dimensions. We will instead be concerned with these issues only in so far as they relate to the subject-of-belief, or the epistemological subject (i.e., the subject that has beliefs), as a critique of the Modern, Cartesian *cogito* which Kierkegaard saw as the understruction of all Modern epistemology.

Part One analyses the relationship of subjectivity and truth in Kierkegaard's philosophy. The following chapter begins this task by establishing a firm understanding of the philosophical backdrop to Kierkegaard's concept of subjectivity and his critique of reason. Chapter Two also introduces the epistemological significance of Kierkegaard's category of the paradox as a response to the implicit notion of the epistemological subject that Kant and Hegel inherit from Descartes. Chapter Three details Kierkegaard's rejection of metaphysics. Kierkegaard's understanding of the role of philosophy is similar to Wittgenstein's view that philosophy is a grammatical enterprise. Chapter Four focuses on Kierkegaard's epistemological shift away from understanding truth objectively, to his thesis that "truth is subjectivity". This is treated by an examination of Climacus's account of truth in *Philosophical Fragments*. The grounds of epistemology are shown to be ultimately theological, as the truth of subjectivity is that subjectivity is untruth.

Part Two turns to the ontological ground of belief established by Kierkegaard's subjectivity principle. Chapter Five therefore examines one aspect of Kierkegaard's grammar of subjectivity. This grammar focuses on the ontological establishment of a situated human self in terms of thin and deep subjectivity. In Chapter Six we have the second half of Kierkegaard's grammar of subjectivity in terms of the self's relation to time, others, and itself. In this stage, Kierkegaard's grammar of subjectivity is developed as a working out of the inner logic of *Salighed* (eternal blessedness) as the central passion of a deep subjectivity. The end or goal of *Salighed* is self-transparency. Chapter Seven outlines, then, Kierkegaard's grammar of belief, and includes a discussion of Kierkegaard's radical and theological, subjective orientation to epistemological issues. Kierkegaard's concept of belief is essential to his account of epistemological and ontological transitions. It is argued that Kierkegaard's grammar of subjectivity is in fact a grammar of belief as well, for they each have *Salighed* as their *telos*. Kierkegaard's subjectivity is thus a meta-epistemological principle that takes a doxastic practice approach to epistemology and transforms the epistemological enterprise from a *science* of belief to an *ethics* of belief.

The conclusion will review the manner in which Kierkegaard's subjectivity has been shown to be epistemological. It will then make draw out some of the implications of the meta-epistemology of the subjectivity principle for a substantive epistemology, and how knowledge could further be analysed.

PART ONE

SUBJECTIVITY AND TRUTH IN KIERKEGAARD'S PHILOSOPHY

CHAPTER TWO

KIERKEGAARD'S CRITIQUE OF REASON

Modern philosophy, being abstract, is floating in metaphysical indeterminateness. Instead of explaining this about itself and then directing people (individual persons) to the ethical, the religious, the existential, philosophy has given the appearance [*Skin*] that people are able to speculate themselves out of their own skin [*Skind*], as they so very prosaically say, into pure appearance [*Skin*].

Anti-Climacus, *Practice in Christianity*

Kierkegaard develops the “subjectivity principle”, a term he uses in his journals,¹ primarily through the mouthpiece of his pseudonym Johannes Climacus in the two works, *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. In Chapter One we noted that this principle can be simply paraphrased from *Postscript* as, “Truth is subjectivity”, or more pragmatically, “The How determines the What”.² Climacus defines this more elegantly as, “an objective uncertainty, held fast through an appropriation with the most passionate inwardness”.³ The pseudonymous declaration of Kierkegaard that “Truth is subjectivity” postulates an interesting, if cryptic, philosophical principle; one that appears to be aimed directly at the issues of epistemology and belief.⁴ This chapter looks at the philosophical context in which the Kierkegaardian pseudonym, Johannes Climacus, formulates his subjectivity principle and examines it in light of its orientation to modern epistemology.

It is characteristic of modern epistemology (at least since Descartes) that epistemic justification is conceived as requiring a metaphysical guarantee of infallibility. The term “metaphysical-epistemological” will be used throughout this thesis to refer to a species of inquiry that adopts a robust confidence in the ability of human reason to inquire into the nature of “reality” on its own terms and achieve veridical answers. The chief characteristic of the metaphysical-epistemological inquiry of modernity is its

¹ Kierkegaard's emphasis on subjectivity properly regarded as a formal principle of his thought as Kierkegaard himself refers to it as such. See *JP IV 4550/Pap. X² A 299*.

² *KW XII.1 610-22, 613n-614/SV X 272-281, 274n-275*.

³ *KW XII.1 203/SV IX 169*.

⁴ See *KW XII.1 203/SV IX 169*. This and other related ideas of Kierkegaard have fuelled many diverse intellectual trends in the twentieth century from the putative existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin

programmatic search to establish absolute, infallible rational foundations for human knowledge from within human noetic resources, absent any external aid. It will become clear in this and the proceeding chapters (especially Chapter Three) that Kierkegaard's challenge to the metaphysical-epistemological project of modernity is not a complete jettisoning of either metaphysics or epistemology. The term "metaphysical" here denotes a particular sort of intellectual inquiry—the kind which lays claim to uncover the hidden substance of things. This does not, however, imply that Kierkegaard ultimately denies all metaphysical "presence". We will find that Kierkegaard's concern is to rescript the map of belief by returning to "Kant's deviation" from modernity, which placed limits on the scope of reason. What primarily interests Kierkegaard is *existence*—human existence.

Kant, Hegel, and Descartes: Kierkegaard and Modern Philosophy

Kierkegaard was one of the earliest critics of modernity (predating Nietzsche by a handful of years) and its attempt to establish indubitable foundations for human knowledge from within the resources of human noetic capabilities. Kierkegaard's importance lies in his ascertaining that the root of the problem with modernity lay in its (re)conceptualisation of the human subject as a purely rational, self-relating subject who possesses radical autonomy. The modern notion of human subjectivity that Kierkegaard rejects is the one advanced in René Descartes's formula, *cogito ergo sum* [I think therefore I am], as a self-transparent knowing subject, able to hold the objects of its consciousness, including *itself*, before itself with diaphanous clarity. Despite his dissension from Cartesian philosophy, Kierkegaard remained fundamentally interested in the issues of modernity—what concerned him was the wrongheaded approach to these issues taken by modernity, an approach he saw embodied in the speculative metaphysical System of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). It possible then, and instructive, to view Kierkegaard's project as a reconfiguration or a rescripting of the

Heidegger, and Karl Jaspers, to the theologies of Karl Barth and Paul Tillich, to the "postmodern" thought of Theodor Adorno.

issues of modernity, rather than a complete forsaking of them as some would have it. In this sense Kierkegaard is more properly *post-Enlightenment* than he is postmodern.

Immanuel Kant and Georg W. F. Hegel are only two of the thinkers who contributed significantly to Kierkegaard's intellectual legacy. There are a variety of persons to whom Kierkegaard's thought owes a debt, including Friedrich W. J. Schelling, Gotthold E. Lessing, Johann G. Hamaan, Johann G. Fichte, Nikolai F. S. Grundtvig, Hans L. Martensen, Fredrick C. Sibbern, and Martin Luther, to name only a few. However, Kant and Hegel are treated here as primary influences in Kierkegaard's intellectual development because they are deemed to be seminal to the whole direction of Kierkegaard's thought and are basic and fundamental to Kierkegaard's philosophical undertaking. Kierkegaard himself claims that Kant and Hegel are the pinnacle of modern philosophy—especially Hegel. In fact, all of modern philosophy bears (for Kierkegaard) the “birthmark” of René Descartes's philosophy.⁵ In other words, Hegel, for Kierkegaard, presents us with the ultimate logical extension of Cartesian philosophical method and assumptions. Regardless of the resources gleaned from other thinkers, it is the legacy inherited from Kant and Hegel with which Kierkegaard wrestles throughout his philosophical life (while it is more obviously Luther with whom he contends in his theology). As such, Hegel and Kant are of particular importance for the aspect of Kierkegaard's thought under scrutiny here.

It is generally agreed that the driving force behind Kierkegaard's literary effort was a polemical response to the speculative philosophy of Hegel.⁶ While we must heed Merold Westphal's warning that “Kierkegaard is never simply anti-Hegelian”,⁷ it is important to frame Kierkegaard's criticisms of modern epistemology, particularly those found in Johannes Climacus's *Fragments* and *Postscript*, against the backdrop of

⁵ *JP* III 2338/*Pap.* IV C 11.

⁶ This fact is so widely attested—with varying opinions on the degree and significance—that one need only choose at random a piece on Kierkegaard to find this claim in some form, especially in the various biographies written on him. For three good treatments of Kierkegaard's philosophical relationship with Hegel, see Merold Westphal, “Kierkegaard and Hegel”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, eds. Alastair Hannay and George Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 101-124; Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); and Steven M. Emmanuel, *Kierkegaard and the Concept of Revelation*, 24-34.

Kierkegaard's response to Hegel's speculative philosophy and Hegel's Danish exegetes.⁸ Kierkegaard's severest criticisms of Hegel (*et al.*) were directed against what Kierkegaard regarded to be the apotheosis of Reason in Hegel's "System" inherent in the claim that philosophy has an absolute and presuppositionless beginning.⁹

Hegel is concerned in his philosophical project to overcome the sort of dualism modern philosophy inherited from that posited an unbridgeable gulf between the subject of thought (who thinks) and the external world of perceived objects. He therefore searches for a way to unite thinking and being so that the strict dichotomy between them is overcome and human reason becomes *embodied* reason.¹⁰ Hegel argues that,

the beginning [of the science of Logic] must be an absolute, or what is synonymous here, an *abstract* beginning; and so it *may not presuppose anything*, must not be mediated by anything nor have a ground; rather it is to be itself the ground of the entire science. Consequently, it must be purely and simply and *immediacy*, or rather merely *immediacy* itself. . . . The beginning therefore is *pure being*.¹¹

For Hegel, human reason, or "logic", is the self-mediation of being. Reality is a manifold evulcation of the Absolute Idea (or Spirit) and as such is *constituted* by concepts.¹² Hegel uses "thought" in a broad way to refer to a self-unifying or self-determining process whereby one thing distinguishes itself from another as the result of the development of its own internal *telos* (versus an external manipulation).¹³ The idea is that reality and thought are embedded in a shared underlying logical structure¹⁴ such

⁷ Westphal, "Kierkegaard and Hegel", 101.

⁸ Kierkegaard's understanding of Hegelian philosophy shaped his thinking about epistemology. Whether Kierkegaard actually read Hegel "correctly" is superfluous. The discussion here concerns what Kierkegaard understood Hegel to be saying, since it is this to which Kierkegaard responds.

⁹ For Kierkegaard's comments on this feature of Hegelian philosophy, see *KW* XII.1 111-113/*SV* IX 94-96, and *passim*.

¹⁰ Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 16-23.

¹¹ His emphasis; see *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (New York: Humanities Press, 1969), 70, 73.

¹² Hegel, in his *Hegel's Logic. Part One of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. W. Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), states that thought "is the constitutive substance of external things" (§24Z), and that "a living being is a syllogism" (§217).

¹³ Frank B. Farrell, *Subjectivity, Realism and Postmodernism—The Recovery of the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 16-17.

¹⁴ Hegel calls this "the Notion [*Begriff*—concept]", and it bares comparison to Pythagoras's concept of numbers. See, for example, Aristotle's comment, in *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Treddenick, in *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Aristotle*, Second Edition, ed. Reginald E. Allen (New York: The Free Press, 1985) 1090a 20: "The Pythagoreans, because they saw many attributes of numbers belonging to sensible bodies, supposed real things to be numbers—not separable numbers, however, but numbers of which real things consist". Hegel himself notes the affinity of his "Notion" with the Pythagorean

that logical principles are “immanent” in living things which, accordingly, are able to be prehended unaided by human Reason.¹⁵ Reality is comprised not only of a hierarchy of forms of life, but modes of thought as well, so that human rationality is *developed* rationality.¹⁶ In the end, thought and Being are substantially homologous. Thus, a carefully thinking (logical) person, with a fully-developed rationality, has direct and unmediated access to reality *as it really is* and in the act of thinking is able fully to ideate what is actual as it is in itself (given that one possesses the adequate mental faculties). Spirit is absolute Reality/Truth and consequently truth is not found in the variegated components of one’s experience (or thoughts); instead one must think the whole of reality to have truth. What is often contradictory at one level eventually will be resolved as one comes to a more clear and comprehensive understanding. Thus, Aristotle’s law of noncontradiction¹⁷ is cancelled or annulled in Hegel’s celebrated

theory of number in *Hegel’s Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Volume I*, trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (New York: The Humanities Press, 1974), p. 210, and states that, “the Pythagoreans did not accept numbers in this indifferent way [i.e., as the static differentiation and enumeration of individual units], but as Notion”. Hegel elaborates further: “In the Pythagorean system numbers seem . . . to be at once the thought-determination of unity, of opposition and of the unity of these two moments. In part, the Pythagoreans from the very first gave forth universal ideal determinations of numbers as principles, and recognized . . . as the absolute principles of things, not so much immediate numbers in their arithmetic differences, as the principles of number, *i.e.* their rational differences. . . . These are not differences of one thing from another, but universal and essential differences within themselves”. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, pp. 211-12. Hegel’s fundamental criticism of the Pythagoreans in this passage is that they were not content with these “first determinations of unity” and attempted to go beyond them to provide universal, concrete determinations for empirical objects. These attempts, Hegel says, result in a static and shallow dogmatism that is unable to account for the dynamic and manifold unfolding of being. See *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, p. 212.

¹⁵ In *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, p. 766, Hegel says, “Since the Notion is immanent in it, the purposiveness of the living being is to be grasped as inner; the Notion is in it as determinative Notion, distinct from its externality, and in its distinguishing, pervading the externality and remaining identical with itself”. In *Subjectivity, Realism, and Postmodernism*, p. 17, Frank Farrell comments that for Hegel, “Just as the middle term links universal and particular terms in the well-formed relations of certain syllogisms, so a biological entity is a self-unifying whole that joins in a successful ‘mediation’ a universal character and particular differences or determinations. Because living things embody, so he believes, those patterns of logical activity, Hegel feels free to say that they are ‘thoughts’ or ‘syllogisms.’” It is important to note (as does Farrell) that this reading of Hegel’s idealism makes him amenable some versions of metaphysical realism which see reality as articulated into units and sorts; and it certainly distances him from Berkleyan idealism, which views reality as substantively dependent upon the mental activity of particular thinkers. It is also important to note in what follows that Kierkegaard’s criticism of Hegel does not depend upon a reading of Hegel as anti-realist.

¹⁶ Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 20.

¹⁷ Aristotle’s law of noncontradiction was one of the fundamental “laws” of logic, hitherto until Hegel. It generally expressed, “A is not non-A”. Or more colloquially put, a thing cannot be both what is and what is not in the same way, time, and space.

Aufhebung.¹⁸ For Hegel's "Reason", all propositions are ultimately reconciled to each other.

Hegel inherited the mantle of transcendental German idealist philosophy from Kant after the latter performed his dramatic reversal in philosophical rationalism, generated by his transcendental scepticism.¹⁹ Inspired by the more radical scepticism of David Hume, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* had effectuated a "Copernican Revolution" by proposing a new hypothesis from which to launch metaphysical-epistemological inquiry. Rather than conceive of perception on the former "geocentric" model, in which our minds conform to the objects of the universe in the act of cognition (analogous to viewing the sun revolving around the earth), Kant argued there was more explanatory power if perception is understood in a "heliocentric" manner, where perceptual objects conform to our capacities to know them. Thus Kant limited the sphere to which *theoretical* reason (the instrument for procuring knowledge) has access to, arguing that the noumenal *ding an sich* is something theoretical reason cannot access—one only *postulates* it *via* practical reason as the basis for free moral action. *A fortiori* this entails a kind of scepticism as to the metaphysical nature or essence of the objects we perceive. For if our minds construct or organise sense-data into comprehensible patterns as Kant would have it, one has no epistemological guarantee that this is according to the nature of the object as it is separate from our perceiving it.

¹⁸ Hegel and Kierkegaard both make use of this German concept of *Aufhebung* which does not have a strict English equivalent. It is variously translated as "sublate" or "annul" and sometimes "mediate". Merold Westphal very succinctly summarises this principle of *Aufhebung*: "X is *aufgehoben* in Y when X is recontextualised, so that instead of standing by itself, it belongs to Y, a wider frame of reference of which it is not the first principle". See Merold Westphal, *Becoming A Self: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1996), 25. Westphal elaborates, "When X is *aufgehoben*, or teleologically suspended in Y, the immediate, self-sufficient form of X is cancelled, and whatever belongs to that mode of its being is relativised as something insufficient by itself. But this has positive significance, for the claim that Y is the truth of, *telos* of, X, and that in this process X realises itself, or at least moves to a higher normative development"; Westphal, *Becoming A Self*, 146. Kierkegaard parodies the Hegelian usage of this term in *KW* XII.1 222-23/SV IX 184, but very subtly employs his own version of the *Aufhebung*, standing Hegel on his head. This is particularly apparent in Kierkegaard's understanding of the leap, or qualitative transition, to faith.

¹⁹ Once again, my concern here is not an exposition on Kant, but rather how Kierkegaard understood him. Ronald Green has argued (too strongly) that Kierkegaard is fundamentally Kantian throughout his authorship and that this is something Kierkegaard was either incapable of discerning or at pains to

Hegel believes that the “severest defect” of Kant’s philosophy is his “subjective idealism” described above.²⁰ Kant, Hegel thinks, has forever and indissolubly isolated our thoughts *of* reality from what reality actually *is*. The “subjective” part of Hegel’s description of Kant’s philosophy is meant by Hegel to refer to the fact that according to Kant the propositional attitudes and dispositional mental states of human subjects in any description of or experience with “objects” in the “world” are dependent upon qualities unique to the subjects who have these propositional attitudes and dispositional mental states. The “idealist” part of Hegel’s label for Kant’s philosophy refers to Kant’s assertion that the possibility of having an experience of the “external world” is dependent upon particular forms of intuition and an *a priori* categorical framework that exists in our minds. Hegel’s problem with Kant’s theoretical, “critical” philosophy, is that it is not critical enough.²¹ The trouble with Kant’s subjective idealism, for Hegel, is that the former *assumes* that having an understanding of a concept is to operate with categories of intuition or judgment. In Hegel’s view, a genuinely critical philosophy will be one that does not take *anything* for granted—even about thought and its own categories—except for the rather mundane assumption that there is such a thing as thought.²² Thus Hegel quests for the absolute starting point for thinking—within thought itself.

disguise. See Green’s, *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

²⁰ Stephen Priest, “Subjectivity and Objectivity in Kant”, in *Hegel’s Critique of Kant*, ed. Stephen Priest (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 109. Priest argues (convincingly) that Hegel is wrong to call Kant a subjective idealist because this depends upon a false reading of Kant’s phenomenal/noumenal split, in which these are taken to represent two ontologically distinct realms of being. Priest claims instead that Kant’s position is a “neutral monism” in which phenomena and noumena are “two ways of specifying the same thing”; (*ibid.*, 110). This reading is not without its own problems, however, and one must wonder with Alvin Plantinga how Kant could think of his philosophy as a constituting a “Copernican Revolution” if this is what he meant by phenomena and noumena. See Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 13. Whether or not Priest’s neutral monist reading is correct, it certainly is the most charitable reading of Kant and renders the phenomena-noumena distinction most intelligible.

²¹ See Stephen Houlgate, “General Introduction”, *The Hegel Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 11, for the following argument.

²² *Ibid.*

In the *Postscript* Kierkegaard has Climacus read Hegel back to Kant and finds Hegel's "method" of answering Kant's scepticism flawed.²³ Climacus argues that,

the dubiousness of 'the method' [of Hegel] is already apparent in his relation to Kant. A scepticism that confiscates thinking itself [like Kant's] cannot be halted by being thought through, because this must indeed be done by thinking, which is on the side of the mutineer. It must be broken off. To reply to Kant within the fantastical *Schattenspiel* [shadow play] of pure thinking is precisely not to reply to him—the *an sich* that cannot be thought is existing, with which thinking has nothing at all to do.²⁴

On Climacus's reading, Hegel attempted to reconcile the tension in Kant between the noumenal and phenomenal realms, between how things *appear* and how they really *are*, by "mediating" being in an identification of the "real" (that which *is* or has *being*) with the rational (autonomous human Reason). Held up to Kant, Climacus finds Hegel to be "fantastical" and to have completely begged the question. That which Hegel assumes (the identity of thought and being)²⁵ from the outset is precisely what has been problematised. Hegel's critical philosophy is itself culpably uncritical.

In his *Journals and Papers* Kierkegaard reminds us of Kant's "well-known (honest) 100 dollars",²⁶ which Kierkegaard understood as an excellent example of "the famous Kantian distinction between what is thought and the actuality [of it]".²⁷ Climacus approvingly calls this "Kant's deviation" from a wrong turn in modern philosophy and interprets him as bringing Kierkegaard's own notion of actuality (which he defined in Kantian terms as "a self-with-holding *an sich*") into relationship with

²³ It is not unscrupulous of Kierkegaard to critique Hegel in light of his relationship to Kant as it is clear that Hegel himself formulates his philosophy against a Kantian backdrop. Houlgate explains in, "General Introduction", 7, 10: "Hegel comes to understand his thought as a radicalization of Kant's *theoretical*, rather than practical, philosophy - in particular, as a radicalization of Kant's theoretical critique of metaphysics. . . . he understands the *historical* source of his mature thought to lie in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), from which paths lead either to the *Phenomenology* or directly to the *Science of Logic*. There is much in Kant's critical philosophy with which Hegel does not agree. But Hegel acknowledges that the critical philosophy involves 'the correct insight that the forms of thinking themselves' - the *categories* - 'must be made the object of cognition' [quoted from Hegel's *Encyclopedia of Logic*]" (Houlgate's italics).

²⁴ KW XII.1 328/SV X 32.

²⁵ KW XII.1 328/SV X 32.

²⁶ Kant points out how, on the one hand, the concept of "a hundred real thalers" and one's actually having them in one's pocket involve (conceptually) exactly the same amount of money and therefore in this sense the two states are identical. But on the other hand, Kant goes on to note, "My financial situation is, however, affected very differently by a hundred real thalers than it is by the mere concept of them". See *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: MacMillan, 1950), 505.

²⁷ JP III 3558/Pap. X¹ A 666.

thinking (possibility) by “referring actuality to the ethical”.²⁸ He tells us that since philosophy—*via* Hegel—has abandoned this “honest way” of Kant’s. It has become “fantastic”.²⁹ The knowledge of Kant’s noumena (Kierkegaard’s actuality) that Hegelian “pure thought” achieves is a chimera. Against Hegelian objectivity, the “pure I-I” that erases the subjectivity or in-itself-ness of the human thinker, Kierkegaard raises his principle of subjectivity and returns actuality to its rightful ethical domain.

Despite this agreement with Kant, we must take care not to collapse completely the Kierkegaardian corrective back into Kant’s rationalist philosophy.³⁰ Kant had proposed his own answer to his brand of scepticism by disarticulating theoretical reason from practical reason, asserting the primacy of the latter.³¹ Kierkegaard rejects the contention that any form of reason could *positively* grasp actuality and saw this as a confusion in Kant. John Heywood Thomas notes that, “[Kierkegaard’s] practical interest meant that he refused to follow Kant in the latter’s strict separation of pure and practical reason”.³² Kierkegaard distinguishes himself further from Kant’s practical postulation of the *an sich* as a “nonknowledge” (Kierkegaard’s term), by arguing that faith grasps actuality *beyond* knowledge.³³ The problem with Kant’s schematic is that ultimately it remains cast in rationalist and metaphysical terms, and thereby persists in its complete dependence upon a Cartesian notion of the human subject (detailed below). Truth must be immanent in the human subject and through reason the self must have itself purely as its own object—as a metaphysical guarantee for its justifications—or one loses one’s

²⁸ KW XII.1 328/SV X 32. Why this is high praise from Kierkegaard will become obvious later in this chapter when we discuss his concepts of possibility and the ethical, where it is proposed that Kierkegaard privileges the ethical over the epistemological. However, he is not to be identified with Kant too closely, even in his provisional endorsement of the category of the *an sich*. Cf. JP II 2235/Pap. X⁵ A 132.

²⁹ JP III 3558/Pap. X¹ A 666; cf. KW II 144/SV I 180-81.

³⁰ This is Ronald Green’s error in *Kierkegaard and Kant*.

³¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), 124-26.

³² See “Kierkegaard’s Alternative Metaphysical Theology”, in *History of European Ideas* 12 (1990), 33-63. For a similar assessment from a radically different reading of Kierkegaard, see also Peter Fenves, “Chatter”: *Language and History in Kierkegaard*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 150-51.

³³ JP II 2252/Pap. II C 48. Kierkegaard’s position on this is discussed in much more detail later in this chapter.

autonomy as a rational agent.³⁴ Kant remains entrenched in the quest to circumscribe and legitimate all things under Reason, and thus Kant's epistemology continues to be one in which the only legitimate candidate for belief (or action) is one that is securely anchored in the infallible foundations human reason (either theoretical or practical).³⁵

These attempts, of both Kant and Hegel, to prescribe the role and limit of reason in regulating our beliefs, form the background for Kierkegaard's criticism of epistemology and account of belief. Following in the tradition of René Descartes, the Hegelian-Enlightenment³⁶ emphasis is on Epistemology as absolute knowledge. This is a very strong conception of Epistemology, which might be characterised with a capital 'E', the tradition inherited from Plato and Descartes (*et al.*), where belief must be certain and indubitable if it is genuinely to be knowledge, and the goal of believing is infallibility.³⁷ Kierkegaard categorically rejects this view of knowledge and the tasks of epistemology.

Hegel's epistemological perspective emerges from its complicity with modern, Enlightenment philosophy. As noted earlier, behind this perspective looms René

³⁴ Kant does not see this as his own position. Kant, in fact, argues that one, strictly speaking, does not "know" one's own existence, as it is noumena. One simply *is* oneself. This may be the case, for Kant, and still the above point stands. Kant must assume that through reason one can discern the contents of one's consciousness (which are phenomena), and do that veridically, or Kant cannot have his philosophy. Human reason must be able to use its categories to understand that it understands, and this must be the truth of the matter, or there can be no transcendental deductions made. If it is the case that reason does not do this for Kant, the premises from which one would deduce anything would be less than necessary, and that would entail that one's conclusions were also less than necessary—something Kant's critical philosophy cannot abide. It is this priority of absolute self-relatedness that is the Cartesian element in Kant.

³⁵ At this point Kant's split of reason into two spheres becomes dubious, as it is not at all clear how reason is *qualitatively* different (as opposed to functionally different) when it has as its content empirical phenomena, on the one hand, or moral action on the other. Despite Kant's protestations to have "found it necessary to deny *knowledge* in order to make room for *faith*", in Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 29 (his italics), he nevertheless continues to subjugate all spheres of human life to Reason and cannot bring himself to deny reason as the final court of appeal in human affairs. This is because of his Cartesian notion of the autonomous subject.

³⁶ "Hegelian-Enlightenment" is used to refer to the coincidence of the aims and goals of Hegel's system of philosophy as typifying the overarching aims and goals of the general approach to philosophical problems taken in the Enlightenment. This term refers then, not to the particularities of Hegel's philosophy *per sé*, nor comprehensively to all of Enlightenment philosophy. It is meant to denote that which Hegel shares with his fellow Enlightened philosophers and what they share with him, thereby uniting in one term the discordant and conflicting array of philosophical movements and systems which historically characterised modern philosophy.

³⁷ See Plato's "Meno", in *Classics of Western Philosophy*, ed. Steven M. Cahn (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1977), 4-27, where Plato defines knowledge as a true belief that is rationally justified. See also René Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy", in *Classics of Western Philosophy*, ed. Steven M. Cahn (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1977), 331.

Descartes. There are two serious features of the Cartesian turn in philosophy that Kierkegaard opposes. The first issue concerns Descartes's radical departure from ancient and scholastic philosophy and its methodological veneration of tradition and authority. Philosophy for the scholastics, as with the ancients, began with *wonder* and took place within a community in which there was endorsed a set of virtues (intellectual and moral) that constituted the context for legitimate philosophical exploration. Instead, the Cartesian philosophical method eschews tradition and external authority and employs doubt to strip our philosophical cogitations down to "indubitable" First Principles.³⁸ The individual has the right—indeed, the responsibility—to determine for oneself, through the exercise of rational introspection and without reference to external authority, the truth, and this because the individual (not religious and cultural institutions) possesses "Reason". We may call this view of human reason autonomy 1. Reason, for humans with autonomy 1, is both self-grounding and absolute in its scope and this provides the basis for Descartes's method.

The second major issue that Kierkegaard has with Cartesian philosophy, and imputes to modern philosophy, is a peculiar notion of human subjectivity that follows from Descartes's assumptions about the supremacy of human reason. It is in fact this conception of the human subject, in the end, that drives Descartes's philosophical method—although Descartes does not present this in a so obviously circular manner. The indubitable ground that Descartes putatively establishes for his beliefs is reflected in his famous axiom: *cogito ergo sum* [I think therefore I am]. Descartes must find a means of securing an epistemic stronghold that is immune from his unrelenting doubt—and that place, he believes, is the clarity and distinctness of his self-apprehension in the act of thinking. This rational self-possession we will call autonomy 2.

³⁸ See Descartes, "Meditations of First Philosophy", 303-346. Compare Kierkegaard's comments in a sketch for *Johannes Climacus*: "[modern] philosophy begins with doubt, one must doubt to philosophize; in that case philosophy presumably must begin with something else (just as when it began with wonder, it began with explaining the wonderful—here with *faith*). Modern philosophy begins with doubt". See *KW VII 240/Pap. IV B 5:4*.

Descartes finds that it is the *clarity* and *distinctness* with which he is presented with his own self in the act of thinking that leads him to believe that he is not (and could not possibly be) deceived in this thought—as he had been deceived by his senses.³⁹ Descartes concludes that, “there is nothing easier for me to know than my mind”.⁴⁰ The reason for this is that the mind and the self are of the same mental substance, while bodies are of a separate material substance. Stephen Priest notes that Descartes reasons from the fact that he may doubt he has a body, but not that he has a mind, to the conclusion that he must therefore *be* a mind and not a body.⁴¹ Priest recalls a parallel passage in Descartes’s *Discourse on Method*:

Examining attentively what I was, and seeing that I could pretend that I had no body and that there was no world or place that I was in, but that I could not for all that pretend that I did not exist, and that on the contrary, from the very fact that I thought of doubting the truth of other things, it followed very evidently and very certainly that I existed: while on the other hand, if I had only ceased to think, although the rest of what I had ever imagined had been true, I would have had reason to believe that I existed; I thereby concluded that I was a substance of which the whole essence or nature consists in thinking, and which, in order to exist, needs no place and depends upon no material thing; so that this I, that is to say the mind, by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body, and even that it is easier to know that the body, and moreover, that even if the body were not, it would not cease to be all that it is.⁴²

Note that Descartes’s method (of doubt), his view of human reason (as absolute), and his metaphysical dualism are nested. These beliefs, in other words, are all logically related to each other and come as a unit. Descartes’s methodological doubt depends upon the sufficiency of reason (autonomy 1) to halt doubt through the rational self-apprehension (autonomy 2) of the *cogito*. That is, Descartes’s methodological doubt logically entails a radically autonomous subject—one that is autonomous in both senses of autonomy 1 *and* autonomy 2. If such a subject is not secured, there is no point in using doubt as a method for stripping away falsehood. Doubt would lose its perspicuity without the radical autonomy of Descartes’s subject. Likewise, metaphysical dualism is required for Descartes’s reason to have complete access to the self of the *cogito*. The epistemological purity of the human subject is made possible by its being one with thought: “I thereby concluded that I was a substance of which the whole essence or

³⁹ See Descartes, “Meditations” (especially Meditations I and II), 309-318.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 318.

⁴¹ Priest, *Theories of the Mind* (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1991), 20.

nature consists in thinking”, claims Descartes above. Gordon Michalson’s description of the logic of Descartes’s position is worth quoting:

It is this Cartesian priority of self-relatedness to other-relatedness that sets the terms for our modern notions of autonomy . . . For on the terms of the reflexive Cartesian scheme there can be no autonomy when some “other” (understood now as anything distinct from my own subjectivity) relates to the self in a way that is prior to or disruptive of the self’s natural relationship to itself. The very possibility of autonomy lies in just this self-relatedness, defined in terms of the capacity to be conscious that one is conscious. Nothing can justifiably disrupt, override, or undermine this reflexivity, for it is the reflexivity itself that is foundational, just as the certainty that he is thinking is foundational for Descartes in the elaboration of subsequent knowledge-claims.⁴³

The point is that the Cartesian notion of radical and absolute self-autonomy (autonomy 1 and autonomy 2) of the human agent requires an epistemological and metaphysical construct (the self of the *cogito*) in which it is guaranteed that the self has itself *qua* its particular self in the act of rational reflection. As Michalson noted above, this is in fact what shapes *all* modern notions of the autonomous rational agent, and without some version of this *cogito* (at least implied), the notion of complete rational autonomy perishes. Autonomy 1 requires autonomy 2 in order to secure it.

Kierkegaard’s response to the Cartesian *cogito* and its notion of human subjectivity is the focus of the rest of this chapter. For this reason we will move past his criticism of the *cogito* and immediately turn to Kierkegaard’s reaction to Descartes’s philosophical method.

The commitments enmeshed in the “new” Cartesian philosophical methodology lead all of modern philosophy, in Kierkegaard’s view, to participate in a common set of errors, all of which have Descartes as their progenitor. The basic error that Kierkegaard finds in the Cartesian method is its erroneous assumption that human reason is sufficient to establish the truth within in its own resources. Because of this assumption, Descartes (*et al.*) also assume that human reason is the final arbiter for all of human belief and practice. This, of course, immediately raises a problem. If reason is to perform in such a spectacular role, it must also have a metaphysical guarantee that what

⁴² René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, trans. F.E. Sutcliffe (London: Harmondsworth, 1974), 54.

⁴³ Gordon Michalson, Jr., *Kant and the Problem of God* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 9-10.

it *thinks* really *is*. Anti-Climacus expresses this concern by affirming Climacus's conclusion:

[I]n modern philosophy there is a confused discussion of doubt where the discussion should have been about despair. Therefore one has been unable to control or govern doubt either in scholarship or in life. "Despair," however, promptly points in the right direction by placing the relation under the rubric of personality (the single individual) and the ethical. . . . Modern philosophy, being abstract, is floating in metaphysical indeterminateness. Instead of explaining this about itself and then directing people to the ethical, the religious, the existential, philosophy has given the appearance [*Skin*] that people are able to speculate themselves out of their own skin [*Skind*], as they so very prosaically say, into pure appearance [*Skin*].⁴⁴

Kierkegaard⁴⁵ is claiming, here, that modern philosophy had not yet been able to shake Cartesian assumptions about rational self-relatedness—not even in the critical philosophies of Hegel and Kant. So, in Kierkegaard's mind, sufficient to be "Cartesian" is the methodological assumption that philosophy must proceed through doubt, for this carries with it the basic assumptions nested along with Descartes's deployment of doubt. Kierkegaard is recognising the logic of Descartes's *cogito* as explicated above by Michaelson. In Kierkegaard's view, doubt cannot penetrate the depths of the human subject and discern the truth with respect to it because the human person is more than just a *ratio machina* [mechanical reason].

Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel may be re-stated, then, as the charge that Hegel has not overcome the Cartesian split between mind and body. Hegel's attempt to preserve an embodied subject fails. Although Hegel is the primary target of Kierkegaard's attack, it is really Descartes with whom Kierkegaard quarrels. Kierkegaard maintains a healthy respect for Hegel and incorporates much of Hegel's dialectic in his own thought. However, Kierkegaard understands the Cartesian project to have reached its zenith in the Hegelian System, and to have been pushed to its ultimate and logical conclusion. Thus, for Kierkegaard the basic error of both Hegel and Kant is that they continue the Cartesian project with Cartesian tools. Kant and Hegel and the rest of modern

⁴⁴ KW XX 81n/SV XVI 75n-76.

⁴⁵ Although *Practice in Christianity* is published under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus, Kierkegaard attached the pseudonym to the book only moments before publication. The Hongs's note that the above quoted footnote also refers to "the works of some of the pseudonymous authors", one of which, based on the content, must be Anti-Climacus himself. Thus they conclude that, "The reference is no

philosophy (although Kant less than Hegel) follow Descartes' conception of the task of philosophy as that of establishing irrefutable epistemic foundations for human knowledge by proceeding from the assumption, "*De omnibus dubitandum est* [Everything must be doubted]".⁴⁶ As we have already seen, this "wrong turn in philosophy" is deeply connected to Descartes' ontological reduction of the human subject to the *cogito*; the metaphysical guarantee Descartes deduces as the requirement for infallible human knowledge. This subject is the possessor of itself; the objectively certain subject that understands itself with clarity and distinctness.⁴⁷ Hegel may, as Charles Taylor argues, reject Descartes's disembodied subject by arguing that *Geist* is always *embodied* spirit, so that there is no hiatus between life and consciousness.⁴⁸ But Kierkegaard's criticism is that Hegel's *method* fails to take the embodiment of the thinker seriously and operates *de facto* as if the opposite were true—as if all of reality is present in thought.

There are four features of the Hegelian-Enlightenment project that serve as a foil for Kierkegaard's analysis of belief and its concomitant normativity. First, the Hegelian

doubt an unchanged remnant of Kierkegaard's idea of direct authorship before his decision to use a pseudonym"; *KW* 385 n19.

⁴⁶ See Kierkegaard's polemic against modern philosophy in this regard in his unpublished (in his lifetime), *Johannes Climacus, Or, De Omnibus Dubitandum Est: A Narrative*; *KW* VII 113-172/*Pap.* IV B 1. Kierkegaard is surely correct in attributing this view to Hegel, who states in, *Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (New York: Humanities Press, 1955), p. 224: "Descartes expresses the fact that we must begin from thought as such alone, by saying that we must doubt everything (*De omnibus dubitandum est*); and that is the absolute beginning. He thus makes the abolition of all determinations the first condition of philosophy". Kierkegaard does not limit this critique to just Kant and Hegel, but extends it to all of modern philosophy. For example, he begins *Johannes Climacus* with the following epigraph from Benedict Spinoza's *De intellectus emedatione Tratatatus*[On the Improvement of the Understanding], *Opera philosophica omnia*, ed. August Gfoerer (Stuttgart:1830), p. 511: "*Loquor de vera dubitatione in mente, et non de ea, quam passim videmus contingere, ubi scilicet verbis, quamvis animus non dubitet, dicit quis se dubitare: non est enim Methodi hoc emendare, sed potius pertinet ad inquisitionem pertinaciae et ejus emedationem* [I speak of real doubt existing in the mind, not of such doubt as we see exemplified when a man says that he doubts, though his mind does not really hesitate. The cure of the latter does not fall within the province of the Method, it belongs rather to inquiries concerning obstinacy and its cure]" *KW* VII 115/*Pap.* IV B 1 103. For examples of this interpretation of modern philosophy in Kierkegaard, see also, *KW* I 114/*Pap.* II B 16 296; *KW* I 117-18/*Pap.* II B 16 298-99; *KW* II 342/*SV* I 208; *KW* III 462-3/*SV* II 150; *KW* VI 5-6/*SV* V 8; *KW* XII.1 317-18/*SV* X 22-3; *KW* XII.1 195/*SV* IX 162-3; *KW* XIV 93/*SV* XV 145; *KW* XIV 119-20/*SV* XV 168-9. For another contemporary reading of Kant and Hegel as carrying the Cartesian torch in philosophy, see Gordon Michalson, *Kant and the Problem of God*, 6-14.

⁴⁷ See Descartes, "Meditations of First Philosophy", *passim*, where he searches for a *method* of transcending his subjectivity.

project harbours a metaphysical assumption, namely, that thought is (structurally) identical to being—or to use Kierkegaard’s terminology, that possibility is actuality—and thought is therefore able to “mediate” being. This is the cardinal issue Kierkegaard takes up with Hegel, and the metaphysical-epistemological project in general. From this point of departure, the rest of Hegel’s System goes awry. From this metaphysical assumption follows the second feature. Methodologically, it is assumed that there is a presuppositionless beginning that can be arrived at by “pure thought”; i.e., a beginning at the beginning (or end). The way to proceed, then, in an inquiry is “objectively” by employing abstract Reason. A third facet of Hegel’s infallibilist metaphysical-epistemology is that it contains an implicit ontology. It is presupposed that humans are such that they have the self-transparency required to attain to and recognise the achievement of total harmony between subject and object. And lastly, Hegel’s metaphysics includes the epistemological assumption that human cognition and reason have unimpeded access to reality in its fullest and deepest expressions. These four features of Hegelian-Enlightenment Epistemology constitute the constrictive framework which Kierkegaard intends Climacus’s subjectivity principle to correct.

The Category of Paradox

Through Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard introduces his principle of subjectivity as an epistemological thesis to resolve the residual tensions he sees in Kant’s and Hegel’s idealisms. Kant and Hegel have not yet accounted for being in time, as *embodied* being, and thus have not accounted for *knowing* in time either. Kierkegaard chisels out a space in the conversation for his notion of subjectivity by advancing his category of paradox. The category of the paradox emerges from the juxtaposition of thought and existence which occurs as the fundamental “duplexity” of human life.⁴⁹ The insistence upon this

⁴⁸ Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 18.

⁴⁹ In his *Journals and Papers* it is reiterated that the category of the paradox is required as a philosophical category to account for the phenomenon of cognition. Kierkegaard saw Kant’s solution as a self-referentially incoherent *ad hoc* concession but argues that, “the paradox is not a concession but a category, an ontological qualification which expresses the relationship between an existing cognitive spirit and the eternal truth”; *JP* III 3089/*Pap.* VIII¹ A 11.

as an elemental feature of human existence marks the beginning of Kierkegaard's polemic against the Hegelian metaphysical System and its chimeric response to the Kantian dilemma.⁵⁰

Kierkegaard recognised that the problems of epistemology have a dual aspect in a way that Hegel and the rest of modern philosophy never realised.⁵¹ The first problem in this duality regards the nature of the object and the potential problem its ontological status brings to its relationship to the knower, a recognition that modern philosophy did in fact realise. The task here is to find a way of reconciling the object of perception with the perceiver. Hegel did this, as we saw, by collapsing the being of the object into Reason in which the perceiver participates.

With the second epistemological issue Kierkegaard goes beyond Hegel *et al.* to further problematise the *perceiver* in the act of cognition.⁵² Climacus characterises human life as a situated “duplexity”,⁵³ or a juxtaposition of contraries (such as finitude and infinitude, temporality and eternity, and soul/psyche and body) which produce a kind of duality, which in turn generates the category of paradox.⁵⁴ The only way for Hegel to have the absolute knowledge of Kant's *an sich* was to freeze them both *sub*

⁵⁰ Be reminded that Kierkegaard's rejection of Hegel is not inspired by an anti-realist interpretation of Hegel's metaphysics. What elicits Kierkegaard's disapprobation is Hegel's notion that thought mediates being and that the entire structure of reality is the process of thought becoming other than itself in order to unfold its own character (see *Hegel's Encyclopedia of Logic*, §153-4). Kierkegaard's main contention is that even if Hegel is correct in this schema (which Kierkegaard doubts very much), and he is able to finish his program, all he will have achieved is an explanation of how to *think* about being—not how to *be* being.

⁵¹ Again, as noted earlier, Kierkegaard does recognise Kant's “deviation” from modern philosophy with the category of the *an sich*—that is invisible to theoretical reason. However, this is not sufficient, for Kierkegaard, to shake off Cartesianism. Kierkegaard's critique of Kant, then, is that the former did not fully realise all that the *an sich* means for philosophy.

⁵² David R. Law makes a similar distinction regarding Kierkegaard's understanding of epistemology in *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 73. He identifies what he calls two forms of scepticism in Kierkegaard: (1) “anthropological scepticism”, which corresponds to my above second problem; and (2) “ontological scepticism”, which corresponds to my first problem. I do not like his use of the term “scepticism” in relation to Kierkegaard's position here because it could suggest that Kierkegaard assumed the position of epistemological scepticism. Kierkegaard is surely sceptical about certain epistemological claims, but he is not an epistemological sceptic.

⁵³ See Climacus's statement, “Something that is dialectical with respect to time has an intrinsic *duplexity*, so that after having been present it can endure as a past”; *KW VII 79/SV VI 72*.

⁵⁴ This should not be construed as the metaphysical doctrine of substance dualism.

*specie aeterni*⁵⁵ in “pure thought”, thereby isolating them from the flux of time. As Hermann Diem notes, it is at this critical point of Hegel’s “facile acceptance of and assumption of the Platonic idea [however differently conceived] of an immediate unity between thought and being”,⁵⁶ that Kierkegaard concludes Hegel must be refuted and in response launches his category of the paradox.

⁵⁵ Walter Lowrie notes in his translation of *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 560, that the Danish editors claim this phrase in Climacus is borrowed from Spinoza, and doubtless it is, but Lowrie goes on to note that Spinoza’s word is *aeternitatis*. However, because Kierkegaard was a good Latinist and this form is acceptable Lowrie (and the Hongs as well) does alter it in his translation.

⁵⁶ Herman Diem, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Existence*, trans. Harold Knight (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1959), 16.

Paradox and “the moment”

Kierkegaard brings the act of cognition into time and spoils Hegel’s cozy equation. As Kierkegaard would have it, human life is fundamentally paradoxical because of its temporal nature.⁵⁷ Vigilius Haufniensis declares that, “Man . . . is a synthesis of psyche and body, but he is also a *synthesis of the temporal and the eternal*”.⁵⁸ Humans “exist” in time-space extension while at the same time possessing the ability to abstract from this temporal flux by “eternal” abstraction.⁵⁹ For human cognition to be genuine cognition it must resolve this temporal-eternal tension. The horns of this dilemma consist of either an exclusive emphasis on human cognition in time, with the result that all is flux (the existential horn); or one’s sole emphasis is on the immovable, fixed nature of logic and thought (the conceptual horn). Either option leaves us with an account of cognition that fails to account for genuinely *human* existence.

To demarcate its uniquely human application, Kierkegaard develops an idiocratic and technical usage of the term *existence*. As a general concept, existence denotes a temporal unfolding and a *becoming in time*, inherently comprised of motion. To exist, for Kierkegaard, is to be actual and to have come into being. He purposefully aligns himself with the Platonic and Aristotelian approach to and conceptualisation of existence

⁵⁷ See *JP* I 17, 1057/*Pap.* I A 137, X² A 328; *JP* III 3089, 3716/*Pap.* VIII¹ A 11; *KW* VII 13, 41n-42/*SV* VI 17, 41; *KW* XII.1 189-92, 197-99, 311-12/*SV* IX 157-60, 163-65, X 18-19; *KW* VIII 155-60/*SV* VI 234-37.

⁵⁸ *KW* VIII 85/*SV* VI 173; his emphasis. In saying that humans are “eternal” it must not be thought that Kierkegaard is begging a Christian anthropology, ontology, or eschatology. The pseudonym through whom Kierkegaard makes this statement is Vigilius Haufniensis, and we have no reason to believe that he is a Christian. But more importantly, for Kierkegaard, the term eternal denotes something that is not subject to temporal becoming, like thought, not an eternal bliss which is inhabited by God alone. See the quote from *KW* XII.1 308-09/*SV* X 15 in text below. Climacus, another of Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms, certainly uses the term eternal in reference to God, but does not do so exclusively. C. Stephen Evans identifies four uses of “eternal” in Climacus’s writings: (1) abstract possibilities, (2) moral obligations (3) God, and (4) humans’ future life; *Kierkegaard’s Fragments and Postscript* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1983), 59-64. I think it is possible to see a fifth way in which Kierkegaard uses “eternal” and that is to denote a fixed, immovable, numerically self-identical unity. The bottom line for Kierkegaard’s concept of eternity is that it is diametrically opposite from temporality. The sphere of temporality is characterised by fluctuating motility, the present tense, concrete actualities, humanity, and a kind of evanescent immediateness. Whereas eternity is the realm of abstract possibilities, the Wholly Other, infinite obligation, unified truth, logical coherence, and fully realised purposefulness. It is this antipodal sense of eternity in relation to temporality that Kierkegaard is drawing out in the above quotation, the human possession of which is related to the nature of human consciousness.

⁵⁹ *KW* XII.1 311-12/*SV* X 18-19.

against modern philosophy's way.⁶⁰ There are two Danish terms translated into English as "existence". Kierkegaard uses them both to draw important distinctions. *Existere* means to exist as a striving person, and in this sense is something pertaining only to human persons. The other expression, *være til*, is a corollary of the German term *Dasein*, and means to have come into being in time and space—that is, *to be there*, or *to have come to be there*. Humans existence shares with the rest of the natural world the "uncertainty" of having come into being in spatio-temporal existence as *være til*, but humans alone have their own existence, in the sense of *existere*, as a task.⁶¹

The peculiar feature of human existence is the amalgamation of *være til*, with thinking. *Thought*, in the Kierkegaardian literature, is eternal, unmoving, and thus at odds with human existing (*existere*). Regarding this distinction between thought and existence, we read in *Postscript*,

To think existence *sub specie aeterni* and in abstraction is essentially to annul it, and the merit of it resembles the much-heralded merit of cancelling the principle of contradiction. Existence without motion is unthinkable, and motion is unthinkable *sub specie aeterni*. To omit motion is not exactly a masterstroke and to introduce it into logic, and along with it time and space, is only a new confusion. But since all thinking is eternal, the difficulty is for the existing person. Existence, like motion, is a very difficult matter to handle. If I think it, I cancel it, and then I do not think it. It would seem correct to say that there is something that cannot be thought—namely, existing.⁶²

Human existence is distinct from brute existence in that it may be participated in by the object (person) as it moves through time and space. Kierkegaard is concerned with the same philosophical enigma that captivated the ancient Greek philosophers. How does a thing become something else? How is a transition made from possibility to actuality? How is a becoming in time possible, and furthermore, how is such a becoming thought? Kierkegaard adds to these questions the problem of what I am *qua* conscious human being to do with my humanity. How is that I, as a creature of *kinesis* (movement), have any warrants for these decisions about my actions? In other words, how do I bring

⁶⁰ JP II 1097/Pap. II A 290.

⁶¹ See Kierkegaard's discussion of proving the existence [*Tilværelse*] of something in time-space; PF, 39ff. Kierkegaard predicates the same type of existence to these three classes of entities. Howard and Edna Hong make the distinction this way: "'Existence', 'exist', and 'to exist' pertain to temporal and spatial being or actuality. All existence is being, but not all being is existence or actuality"; KW VII 297-8n.6.

⁶² KW XII.1 308-09/SV X 15; his italics.

together my self-as-thinking (thoughts), and my self-as-acting/doing/being (existence), and what is the nature of this relationship?

What is needed to halt this temporal flux for the human knower is a “decisive” and “eternal” *moment* in time, in which “the learner has most fully put on the condition [of knowing the truth] and then, by so doing, has become immersed in the truth”.⁶³ In the *Concept of Anxiety*, Haufniensis pits Plato’s attempt to account for this “transition” and movement with his doctrine of recollecting (*anamnesis*) back to the moment in eternity-past,⁶⁴ against Aristotle’s account of *kinesis*.⁶⁵ The conclusion is that, “The term ‘transition’ is and remains a clever turn in logic [i.e., pure thought]. Transition belongs in the sphere of historical freedom,⁶⁶ for transition is a *state* and it is actual”.⁶⁷ He privileges Aristotle’s *kinesis* account of the transition from possibility to actuality as the historical movement of the individual because, when conceived of *sub specie aeterni*, as with Platonic Recollection (cf. Hegel), the moment is abstracted away and simply ignored, the question having been begged.⁶⁸ The problem with the Socratic/Platonic (Hegelian) ideal of Recollection is that “the moment in time”, in which the learner/knower exists, has no decisive significance. One finds that, “The temporal point of departure is a nothing, because in the same moment I discover I have known the truth from eternity without knowing it, in the same instant that moment is hidden in the eternal . . . there is no Here and no There but only an *ubique et nusquam* [everywhere and

⁶³ KW VII 18/SV VI 22.

⁶⁴ The term “eternity-past”, while literally nonsensical, is used to indicate that for Plato and Aristotle (at least in Kierkegaard’s mind) eternity was something “behind” us (at least logically), so that truth is recollected.

⁶⁵ KW VIII 82-84/SV VI 170-73.

⁶⁶ History, for Kierkegaard, pertains to existing human individuals (actuality), not abstract concepts.

⁶⁷ KW VIII 82/SV VI 170; his emphasis.

⁶⁸ Haufniensis writes that in Platonic Recollection, “the moment appears to be this strange entity . . . that lies between motion and rest without occupying any time, and into this and out from this that which is in motion, and that which is at rest changes into motion. Thus, the moment becomes a category for transition (μεταβολη), for Plato shows in the same way that the moment is related to the transition of the one to the many, of the many to the one, of likeness to unlikeness, etc., and that it is the moment in which there is neither ‘εν [one] nor πολλα [many], neither a being determined nor a being combined. . . Plato deserves credit for having clarified the difficulty; yet the moment remains a silent atomistic abstraction, which, however, is not explained by ignoring it”; KW VIII 83n-84/SV VI 172n-73. Refer to our prior discussion of Hegel’s question begging response to Kant.

nowhere]”.⁶⁹ From the vantage point of eternity-past, there can be no genuine coming into being, no genuine cognition, and human existence itself is confiscated. John D. Caputo observes that, “by opposing the Greek denial of motion implicit in Recollection . . . to the movement (kinesis) of ‘existence’, Kierkegaard takes his stand with Aristotle’s defence of motion against all Eleatic tendencies”.⁷⁰

Climacus develops the logic of the categories of possibility and necessity in some detail in *Fragments* in relation to the transition that occurs in the kind of change involved in “coming into existence”.⁷¹ There Climacus is very careful to delineate the category of necessity as applying to a completely separate conceptual sphere from that of possibility. Necessity is, for Climacus (and Kierkegaard), a logical category which excludes freedom; the necessary cannot *not*-be, for it *must* be and cannot *become*—that is, it is eternal.⁷² Therefore Climacus concludes:

1. Whatever comes into existence cannot be a necessary being, for there was a time when it was not and it is therefore possible that it *not*-be (i.e., it is contingent).
2. Whatever comes into existence does so by a free act, or “transition”, for if it does not come about through freedom, then it is necessary (and not contingent).
3. Actual things, as things that have come to be in time, exist as possibility (i.e., nonbeing) prior to being actualised.
4. Nothing that exists (*er til*) as actual, exists necessarily, for it has come into being (become).

Climacus thus takes issue with Aristotle’s claim that, since whatever is necessary is also possible (since it cannot be impossible)⁷³, there must be two kinds of possibility: (1) the possibility of contingent thing, which when actualised *necessarily* exists; and (2) *mere*

⁶⁹ KW VII 13/SV VI 17; see also KW VII 51-2/ SV VI 50.

⁷⁰ *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987), 13.

⁷¹ See Kierkegaard, KW VII 72-88/SV VI 67-VI 80.

⁷² Kierkegaard, KW VII 74-5/SV VI 69.

possibility of that which is contingent and has not been actualised. Climacus sees this as a confusion in Aristotle stemming from the misapplication (and self-contradictory) of the concept of possibility in relation to necessity.

So how are “possibles” (as non-necessary things) captured cognitively so that truths about them are known in time? Kierkegaard’s answer is that there must be a genuine *moment* in which the individual and the truth are connected in the act of cognition. The Kierkegaardian moment incorporates the intuitive notion of the present (as in past, present, future), but Kierkegaard sees this intuition as an abstraction from “real” time. As such, the intuitive notion “is not a concept of time, except as precisely something infinitely countless, which again is the infinitely vanishing”.⁷⁴ The moment is a tenacious embrace of the present. This category of the moment is essential for any coming into existence, or any knowledge of it, for it is the medium in which we exist and is the unity of actuality (as temporal) and possibility (as eternal).⁷⁵ In the moment, that which is *possible* is made *actual*. If a thing is to become it must *move* from a state of possibility to actuality, it must go through a *transition*. And if this flux is to be prehended, it must be halted in a cognising act. This collision of the individual with the eternal, the act of bringing thought into relation with temporal existence in the moment of cognition, is the paradox “in its most abbreviated form”.⁷⁶ This paradox is an essential philosophical category that expresses the ontological nature of the relationship between the existing spirit and the eternal truth.⁷⁷

Paradox and Reason

Existence belongs to the category of paradox and lays beyond thought as “something which cannot be thought”.⁷⁸ Yet human reason is preoccupied with existence, as it is from within existence that reason operates and it receives from

⁷³ Aristotle, *On Interpretation*, trans. W. D. Ross, in *The Students Oxford Aristotle, Volume I, Logic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942), 21b-23a.

⁷⁴ KW VIII 86/SV VI 174; see also KW VIII 88/SV VI 176.

⁷⁵ KW VII 51/SV VI 49-50.

⁷⁶ KW VII 51/SV VI 49-50. Cf. KW VIII 89-90/SV VI 169-70.

⁷⁷ JP III 3089/Pap. VIII¹ A 11.

existence its content. The preoccupation of reason with existence as the necessary context for its operation is what Climacus calls the “passion of thought”, and this passion “is always to will its own downfall”.⁷⁹ This “paradox of thought” (that it wills its own downfall) in its ultimate expression is “to want to discover something that thought cannot think”,⁸⁰ namely existence itself. Human reason is situated in the temporal becoming of human existence and finitude.⁸¹ It is given to the understanding to explain and “know” this existence but its tools are logic and conceptual abstractions. Logical claims and abstract concepts, as *possibilities*, are substantively different from existence, as *actuality*. For the human subject, the act of cognition is that in which the actual-as-lived is cognitively grasped, when what *is* has been translated into conceptual existence. Concepts express “universals”⁸² and this translation process is always “approximating” reality (insofar as concepts are not numerically identical with that reality) by making what is actual (existence) into what is a possibility or a possible way of being.⁸³

The paradox of reason then, is this “unknown” realm of ‘existing’ which lays outside of reasons purview as its “frontier that is continually arrived at”.⁸⁴ Strictly speaking it is not known because like Kant, Kierkegaard is referring knowledge (insofar as it is defined in the Enlightenment infallibilist sense) to the orbit of rational human

⁷⁸ KW XII.1 308-09/SV X 15.

⁷⁹ KW VII 37/SV VI 37.

⁸⁰ KW VII 37/SV VI 37.

⁸¹ Cf. KW VII 37, 45/SV VI 37, 44-5; and KW XII.2 99/Pap. X² A 354.

⁸² The term universal is in quotes because it is used to signify that which is commonly picked out by the term universal. However, it is not meant to predicate the existence of transcendent and enduring metaphysical properties as the term universal is used in a substance dualist (or classical) metaphysics. This use of “universal” simply designates that concept of sameness or constancy in things which we acquire through life-experience and employ as a means of constructing a wider, more comprehensive system of reference. In this sense it bears comparison with Merleau Ponty’s notion of a “lateral universal”. See Merleau Ponty, “From Mauss to Claude Levi-Strauss, “ in *Signs*, trans. R. C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 120. See also Calvin O. Schrag’s discussion in *The Resources of Rationality: A Response to the Postmodern Challenge* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1992), 170-71.

⁸³ See KW XII.1 328-29, 331-32/SV X 31-3, 35-6. See also Paul L. Holmer, “On Understanding Kierkegaard”, in *A Kierkegaard Critique*, eds. Howard A Johnson and Niels Thulstrup (Chicago: Henry Renery Company, 1972), 44-47; C. Stephen Evans, “Realism and Antirealism in Kierkegaard’s *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, 163-4. The nature of concepts will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

⁸⁴ KW VII 44/SV VI 44.

inquiry. Reason runs up against its own boundaries as it tries to realise itself. This is the above sense in which Climacus means that reason wills its own downfall. Situated within a human person in the process of temporally existing, reason can go no further towards existence than recognising that it is incapable of grasping that which possesses it—a thinking, existing subject. Reason stands incapable of solving its own inherent problem—the metaphysical question of the unity of existence, but it keenly discerns this limit in itself. In this “self-ironizing of the understanding”,⁸⁵ reason cannot actualise—cannot move from possibility to actuality—its own passion (a trait of subjectivity). This “paradoxical passion” of the understanding constantly collides with the unknown thing outside itself—the god,⁸⁶ which is the ground of reason and the basis by which reason is cognisant of nature, “by infusing nature with the idea of fitness and purposiveness”.⁸⁷ Reason, whose function it is to find and give reasons, inquires into its own foundations and finds that it cannot think outside of itself. The paradox is that which is designated as that region beyond reason’s ken, and the acceptance of any existential proposition⁸⁸ by a person is a general instance of the paradox.

Subjectivity and Belief

In the *aporia*⁸⁹ of reason encountered above, we found reason incapable of establishing its own metaphysical grounding as it founders on the rock of subjectivity

⁸⁵ KW VII 44, 45/SV VI 44, 45.

⁸⁶ Again, Kierkegaard may seem to be begging a Christian stance, but Climacus’s (the pseudonym by whom Kierkegaard makes this point) claim not to be a Christian must be taken seriously. This being the case, it is best to understand Climacus’s “god” simply as a reference to the unknown thing, beyond reason, that is the power by which reason operates. Thus, Kierkegaard is simply pointing to the fallibility of reason and the fact that reason does not and cannot inherently ground itself. The “god” is the designation Climacus gives to whatever it may be that does this.

⁸⁷ KW VII 44-5/SV VI 44-5.

⁸⁸ “Existential proposition” is used, here, to refer to any proposition that asserts of the actual existence of the predicate of the sentence. For example, “I see a tree”. In this proposition the existence of the tree is asserted as actual. This is to be contrasted with the parallel (and incorrigible) perceptual proposition, “I seem to be seeing a tree”, which does not assert the existence of the tree, only a perceptual event that is taken to be of a tree.

⁸⁹ The term “*aporia*”, the Greek term meaning “puzzle”, has taken on added philosophical significance with its recent and liberal use in continental philosophy to denote a site of “deconstruction” in a theory. An *aporia* in this sense is an instance in which a theory undermines itself by self-referential tensions

(existence). As Haufniensis puts it, “In actuality, the whole interest of subjectivity steps forth, and now metaphysics runs aground”.⁹⁰ Reason does not exercise infallible and hegemonic rule over belief in some pseudo-sense of objectivity. Now subjective factors are important, as they are equally constitutive of the human person. Kierkegaard writes, “Human reason has boundaries . . . But people have a rattle-brained, conceited notion about human reason, especially in our age, when one never thinks of a thinker, but thinks of pure reason and the like”.⁹¹ Karstein Hopland observes that, for Kierkegaard, “The finitude of reason implies that reflection must always share its place with will and feeling as necessary instances of self knowledge”.⁹² With the category of paradox, Hegel’s metaphysical-epistemological assumption and its attending rationalistic method have been countered. There is a space for a non-rational sphere beyond the aegis of autonomous Reason.

The Subject of Belief

We turn next to the ontological constitution of the human (knowing) self prescribed in Hegelian-Enlightenment epistemology. Not only does Kierkegaard find the metaphysical presuppositionless starting point hopeless in view of the category of paradox as seen above, but he also erodes its ontological and theoretical status as well. Throughout his literature Kierkegaard criticises the “Cartesian method” of “beginning with doubt”,⁹³ which had become the by-word of modern philosophy. But it is in Climacus’s *Postscript* that he directly attack’s Descartes’ formula: *cogito ergo sum* [I think therefore I am]. This innovation of Descartes’ provided modern philosophy with

that cannot be resolved within the conceptual paradigm employed, thereby producing a situation of instability and indeterminacy. Kierkegaard’s following arguments ultimately are designed to demonstrate how reason and epistemology can never account for itself in absolute terms, hence my use of the term.

⁹⁰ *KW* VIII 18n/SV VI 116n-17.

⁹¹ *JP* I 7/*Pap.* X² A 354.

⁹² “Passion (Lidenskab)”, in *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana* vol. 16, ed. Niels Thulstrup and Mikulová Thulstrup (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Forlag, 1988), 70-1.

⁹³ As previously noted, Kierkegaard, in fact, dedicates an entire book to this issue, albeit a book he never submitted for publication. See his *Johannes Climacus, or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est* [everything must be doubted] which chronicles the unsuccessful attempt by a fictive young philosopher to begin his philosophising by doubting everything; *KW* VII 127-172/*Pap.* IV B 1:112-IV B 1:150.

the absolute theoretical foundation necessary for indubitable belief. Descartes and subsequent modern philosophy took the thinking, knowing subject's transparent self-presence as the paradigm of well-founded belief and the given from which we construct knowledge. We have already argued that some form of this self-translucent subject remains a necessary postulate for all modern foundationalist epistemology (in so far as it is infallibilist) and depends upon a radically autonomous, self-relating rational subject. Hegel's metaphysical System is not an exception.

Climacus begins his critique of Descartes' indubitable epistemic starting point by arguing that humans cannot have knowledge of actuality as actuality. Rather, in the act of cognition we "know" actuality by transforming it into possibility (concepts) so that it may be thought. This always includes the chance that something is lost in the translation, and therefore our best efforts at ferreting out the truth is always and only an "approximation". Climacus goes on to say our knowledge of our own existence is an exception to this, for we know what existing is, not by translating it into concepts, but by actually being it, i.e. *existing*.⁹⁴ Because of this unique relationship to our own actuality, Kierkegaard argues that we have *more than knowledge* of it—because knowledge *qua* human knowledge is always of ideality as possibility (i.e., it is conceptual), it always "dissolves an historical actuality into a possibility", and this involves translation.⁹⁵ The unobtainable "knowledge" referred to here is the infallible knowledge of the classical foundationalist. Kierkegaard is saying that if this is how knowledge is defined then we do not have knowledge of these sorts of things. Climacus goes on later in *Postscript*⁹⁶ to drop the qualifier "more than knowledge" and refers to the thinker's actuality as the only thing he *knows* without turning it into a possibility. This signifies Kierkegaard's ambiguous relationship to epistemology, because of his rejection of Enlightenment epistemology, and shows that while he is rejecting the infallibilist epistemology of his

⁹⁴ KW XII.1 316/SV X 21. This is not to say that we cannot think conceptually about our own existence, only that there is another mode of presentation available in our self-presentation. This commits him, in my view, to an alternative to the conceptual theories of perception, of which Kant may be said to be the father, that claim that there can be no nonconceptual component to our awareness of objects.

⁹⁵ KW XII.1 316/SV X 21.

day, there was a sense in which he was willing to maintain a preferential distinction between certain kinds of beliefs.⁹⁷ It is this fact which makes the Cartesian *cogito* a contradiction:

If the *I* in *cogito* is understood to be an individual human being, then the statement demonstrates nothing: *I am* thinking ergo I am, but if *I am* thinking, no wonder, then, that I am; after all, it has already been said, and the first consequently says more than the last. . . . here it is not a matter of my *I* or your *I* but of the pure *I*. But surely this pure *I* can have no other existence than thought-existence. . . .the statement then is a tautology. . . . To conclude existence from thinking is, then, a contradiction, because thinking does just the opposite and takes existence away from the actual and thinks it by annulling it, by transposing it into possibility.⁹⁸

Here we have an application of category of paradox. Existence is that which cannot be thought; it is the “absurd” and the paradoxical. To think in such a manner as when performing the *cogito* is to abstract from one’s existence. The attempt to prove existence by moving away from it is contradictory and circular, and ultimately involves a category error.⁹⁹ Kierkegaard takes the epistemological issue of doubt versus certainty in Descartes’ formula, and makes it an ontological-ethical issue of possibility versus actuality. Climacus continues:

That what I am thinking *is*, in the sense of thinking does not, of course, need demonstration. . . since it is demonstrated [i.e., it is a tautology]. But as soon as I begin to want to make my thinking teleological in relation to something else, interest enters the game. As soon as it is there, the ethical is present and exempts me from further trouble with demonstrating my existence, and since it obliges me to exist, it prevents me from making an ethically deceptive and metaphysically unclear flourish of a conclusion.¹⁰⁰

Climacus’s innovation on Descartes’s equation is to adduce that he was deriving the wrong conclusion from the experience of being a thinking being. We are not given to ourselves as an epistemological subject, a “pure *I-I*”, a mathematical point in the

⁹⁶ KW XII.1 320-21/SV X 25-6.

⁹⁷ C. Stephen Evans in, “Realism and Antirealism in Kierkegaard”, 164-5, interprets Climacus’s claim that we have more than knowledge of our own existence as meaning that the individual’s own existential reality can be thought and known. Evans finds this to be, “remarkably like Kant’s own perspective, which limits theoretical reason to knowledge of the phenomenal world so as to allow room for the perspective of the rational agent, who has rational faith in his own existence as a free being and grounds his belief in God and immortality on this practical faith”. Kierkegaard’s faith is not quite so Kantian and rationalist as Evans would have it. Kierkegaard’s cognitive subject is primarily an ethical, not rational, agent, but Evans’ insight that the individual’s own actuality can be thought and known is correct.

⁹⁸ KW XII.1 317/SV X 22; his emphasis.

⁹⁹ KW XII.1 317/SV X 22. See also Kierkegaard’s comments: “From the logical point of view, the Cartesian formulation: I think, therefore I am [*er*—is a play on words, because the ‘I am’ logically signifies nothing other than ‘I am thinking’ or ‘I think’”. *JP* I 1033/*Pap.* V A 30.

¹⁰⁰ KW XII.1 317/SV X 22; his emphasis.

subject-object structure of representational knowledge and abstract thought.¹⁰¹ The abstracted subject of pure thought (Hegel and Descartes) is a “fictive objective subject”, a “phantom” of speculative thought, employed to prematurely stop doubt.¹⁰² This fiction of speculation is theoretically possible (for a being such as God perhaps), but is not existentially viable for temporal (human) creatures, argues Kierkegaard, for as soon as I make the claim that this subject exists, has come into being in time as actuality, it is no longer tenable. There is an inherent teleology in human thought such that, as situated in temporal existence, all of our thinking is characterised by intentionality. That is, as they pertain to existence, our thoughts are always thoughts *of*, and there is always a temporal object of our thoughts as soon as they have any existential significance. This is where Descartes (*et al.*) runs amuck. As soon as one brings one’s thinking into relationship with one’s own existence, “the whole interest of subjectivity steps forward” and one is no longer referring to thought, but that to which thought has no direct access—actuality. The attempt of reason to establish itself comes to ruin. Reason merely prescribes its own limits.

However, Kierkegaard does not find Descartes’ formula completely bankrupt, only misunderstood. Kierkegaard in fact uses the Cartesian “*cogito ergo sum*” heuristically to deconstruct Descartes’ rational autonomous subject and assert in its place an ethical subject. Climacus ironically declares that, “the abstraction [of Descartes’ *cogito*] nevertheless does indeed become a strange demonstration of his existence”, because the individual’s agency is assumed in the formula as actual.¹⁰³ The Archimedean point on which all turns is still the self, but Climacus replaces Descartes’ epistemological self with an ethically responsible agent. We may attempt to abstract an epistemological, rationally self-related self *ad infinitum*, but when I am engaged as an existing subject with existing, I am continuously presented with myself as an ethical agent, which

¹⁰¹ Westphal, *Becoming A Self*, 138.

¹⁰² *KW XII.1 81/SV IX 69. KW XII.1 117, 189-93,197-98, 219, 305-08, 361-62/SV IX 100, 157-61, 163-64, 181, X 12-15, 59-60; JP III 2338/Pap. IV C 11; JP I 774/Pap. IV A 72; KW II 273ff./SV I 285ff.* Merold Westphal discusses this point in, “Kierkegaard and Hegel”, 116.

¹⁰³ *KW XII.1 316-17/SV X 21-22.*

“exempts me from further trouble with demonstrating my existence, since it obliges me to exist”.¹⁰⁴ Herman Diem describes this dialectic of self:

As soon as the reflecting subject performs this act of self-awareness, it automatically differentiates itself from its empirical reality as an object. [In doing this] it measures the empirical subject against a conceptual ideal subject. By this act, *the ego becomes conscious of itself as an existing ego*. It does not remain the empirical ego; *the position is rather that as the ego which is interested in its own existence as a mediator between the two*.¹⁰⁵

Implicit in this analysis is a distinction between a kind of Socratic “self-knowledge” of subjectivity and objectively acquired pieces of information. Kierkegaard makes this explicit in *Postscript* where Climacus identifies “the truth that is essentially related to the existing person by pertaining essentially to what it means to exist” as “the eternal, *essential truth*”, while all other “knowledge” is merely “*accidental*”, and “its degree and scope is different”.¹⁰⁶ This accidental, “objective” truth is seen by Kierkegaard as comprising a set of possibilities and thus the nature and contours of these are significantly dependent upon their essential, passionate and subjective relating of them to one’s self in inwardness. As Climacus states, “from the ethical point of view, actuality is superior to possibility”.¹⁰⁷

The nascent, “trans-representational self”¹⁰⁸ given to us in our existing is a pre-reflective “presence” to self, but lacks the total transparency of the Enlightenment *cogito*. What I am certain of is myself as an ethically responsible agent. This is not an objective (Cartesian) certainty that provides an absolute foundation for indubitable beliefs and one does not arrive at it by “doubting everything”. Instead, this is a subjective certainty that provides enough normativity for a fallibilist account of belief formation. For example, on this basis one now believes (and not doubt) the proposition, “I exist”, due to the passion, or disposition, coactive in existing itself. This belief is not infallible, but ethically generated as a given.

Kierkegaard’s subjective certainty is analogous, as an ethical passion, to the sort of certainty that one experiences when one feels obligated to perform some act of human

¹⁰⁴ See KW XII.1 317/SV X 22 quoted in text above.

¹⁰⁵ Herman Diem, *Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of Existence*, 21; my emphasis.

¹⁰⁶ KW XII.1 205/SV IX 170, my emphases. See also KW XII.1 197-98/SV IX 164.

¹⁰⁷ KW XII.1 320/SV X 24.

kindness and the such. Furthermore, subjective certainty is as dependent upon qualities directly under the conscious control of the individual as the feeling one has being full after a large meal. In the first instance, when I feel obliged, say, to help an old lady across the street, there is nothing in this “certainty” that lays claim to universality or infallibility. Yet it is a conviction I cannot avoid either. In the latter case, I cannot legislate at whim the sensation that I have had enough to eat. And yet the experience of being full after a meal is one that I cannot display to another person and is in some sense dependent upon states that are uniquely mine. I can neither ignore it nor deem it epistemically capricious. Try as I might, I feel full only when in certain circumstances.

Kierkegaard’s ethical or “interested” ego differs from Husserl’s solitary, intra-subjective and pre-linguistic transcendental ego that grasps the absolute and immobile geometric ideality of truth.¹⁰⁹ The ethical subject is certainly copresent with every thought, but is not the noematic correlate of every noetic act. As Merold Westphal astutely observes, it is much more like Sartre’s prereflective cogito which in reflection has its own self as its object, but most often has a “non-reflective, “non-positional”, and “non-thetic” consciousness of itself accompanying its intentional awareness of objects apart from itself.¹¹⁰

This ethical subject is not a ready-made “ghost in the machine”. It is the task of a lifetime to bring this *I* out in relation to the ethical requirements and all its various meanings. Thus, there is an irony at the very core of human beings which plays a vital role in the way we conduct ourselves cognitively. It is now given to us to make this pre-reflective (and subconscious) self our explicit self-awareness. We are situated such that we have enough of a self to undertake the ethical tasks of becoming a self in fear and trembling, but not enough of a self to think that we have completed those tasks. Descartes’s radically autonomous subject who grounds all knowledge in its self-apprehension is replaced by an ethically autonomous subject responsible for its own

¹⁰⁸ This is Merold Westphal’s term, *Becoming A Self*, 142n.14.

¹⁰⁹ See Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. Dorian Cairns (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1960). See Merold Westphal’s brief discussion in *Becoming A Self*, 110.

actions. Anti-Climacus summarises the development of this theme in the other pseudonyms in *Practice in Christianity*:

In the works of some pseudonymous writers it has been pointed out that in modern philosophy there is a confused discussion of doubt where the discussion should have been about despair. Therefore one has been unable to control or govern doubt either in scholarship or in life. "Despair," however, points in the right direction by placing the relation under the rubric of personality (the single individual) and the ethical.¹¹¹ As a result of this change, *doubt* can no longer be the procedural mechanism that brings one ultimately to self-knowledge and the absolute foundations of truth. Instead one achieves oneself and the ground for veridical belief through *despair*—an existential category.¹¹²

Faith and Belief

The self that I have as my responsibility is not an objective something, but is my subjective "me" that is given (only) to me to possess as the organisational point for my existence. Quite literally this self constructs my world—not the objective world that I experience, but it constitutes the subjective world of my experience, i.e. the world as I experience it. The view of "objective reality" from inside this world cannot rightly be said to be one that is either obtained by or regulated by the exercise of reason alone. In an early journal entry of September 10, 1836, Kierkegaard records J. G. Hamann's comments on the last paragraph of David Hume's "Of Miracles", in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, where regarding belief in Christianity, Hume states, "Mere reason is not sufficient to convince us of its veracity: and whoever is moved by *Faith* to assent to it . . . subverts all the principles of his understanding".¹¹³ Hamann's response, "Well, that's just the way it is", is noted with approbation by Kierkegaard for recognising that Hume simply demonstrates "the complete

¹¹⁰ Westphal, *ibid.* See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Washington Square Press, 1956), 9-17.

¹¹¹ KW XX 81n/SV XVI 85n.

¹¹² Judge William thusly urges A (the esthete) to despair: "Choose despair, then, because despair itself is a choice, because one can doubt [*tvivle*] without choosing it, but one cannot despair [*fortvivle*] without choosing it. . . . Doubt is thought's despair; despair is personality's doubt. That is why I cling so firmly to the defining characteristic 'to choose' . . . Doubt is the inner movement in thought itself, and in my doubt I conduct myself as impersonally as possible. I assume that thought, when doubt is carried through, finds the absolute and rests therein . . . Despair is precisely a much deeper and more complete expression; its movement is much more encompassing than that of doubt. Despair is an expression of the total personality, doubt only of thought"; KW IV 211-12/SV III 195-97. See also KW XII.1 254-55/SV IX 212.

¹¹³ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, in *Classics of Western Philosophy*, ed. Steven M. Cahn (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1977), 681.

misunderstanding of a Christian and a non-Christian”. Instead of destroying faith, Kierkegaard understands Hume to have made room for it.¹¹⁴ Hume’s error is to conceive belief as a purely mental entity that can only be governed legitimately by reason alone. The Climacean subjectivity principle combines with the category of the paradox to alter the whole conception of the nature of belief. It is only in subjectivity that the paradox is reached, for existence—the context of paradox, is the environment for the concretion of the human subject. “Subjectivity is the truth”,¹¹⁵ thusly means that truth for an *existing* person will involve this something more that is beyond mere reason. The word “faith” is the ordinary linguistic designation for this going beyond of reason.

After spending the better part of three chapters spelling out the paradoxical nature of human reason in *Fragments*, at the end of Chapter Three, Climacus refers to “that happy passion”¹¹⁶ of reason that, in subjectivity, goes beyond reason to attain the paradox. In Chapter Four we read that the name of this passion in which “the learner comes to an understanding with paradox” is *faith*, which is a bringing together of the learner with existence in the moment.¹¹⁷ Later in *Postscript*, faith is declared by Climacus to be coterminous with the subjectivity that is truth. We read that, “the definition of truth stated above is a paraphrasing of faith. Without risk, no faith. Faith is the contradiction between the infinite passion of inwardness and objective uncertainty”.¹¹⁸ Faith or, as we shall presently see, belief, is a passion that drives us beyond reason to the paradox. This going beyond of reason is the “contradiction” which makes faith an objectively risky thing. It is something that reason has not stamped with its guarantee and therefore cannot be objectively certain—it is shrouded in subjectivity and penetrated only by subjectivity. As Kierkegaard remarks, “when reflection is completely exhausted, then faith takes over”.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ *JP* II 1539,1540/*Pap.* I A 100, 237.

¹¹⁵ *KW* XII.1 203/*SV* IX 169.

¹¹⁶ *KW* VII 54/*SV* VI 51.

¹¹⁷ *KW* VII 59/*SV* VI 55.

¹¹⁸ *KW* XII.1 204/*SV* IX 170.

¹¹⁹ *JP* I 49/*Pap.* V A 28.

Kierkegaard's most extensive treatment of the nature of belief and faith comes in the "Interlude" of *Fragments* where Climacus discusses the possibility and nature of historical knowledge and its relationship to faith. The Danish term Climacus uses for faith is *Tro*. When translated into English, *Tro* generally denotes faith in the religious sense, but in Danish *Tro* also includes the more synoptic meaning of the English word belief, as in about some fact regarding the furniture of the universe. This term is used to refer to both religious belief and the everyday kinds of beliefs we have about the "real" world, and Climacus carefully distinguishes these two uses for us in the text of *Fragments*.¹²⁰

Kierkegaard calls *tro*-as-belief "faith *sensu laxiori*", or faith in the ordinary sense. As Law notes, this is a "purely epistemological category",¹²¹ and denotes those beliefs concerning objects of historical becoming. It refers to our cognition of the various matters of fact pertaining to the world. On the other hand, Kierkegaard designates *Tro* in the religious sense as "faith *sensu eminentiori* or "*sensu strictissimo*"—faith in the eminent or strict sense. We must not assume that because Kierkegaard is couching his discussion in a religious framework that he is giving us an account of only religious belief. While it is true that he is giving us an account of religious belief, an account of Christian belief to be exact, he is also at the same time giving us an account of doxastic practice in general. Evans notes that Kierkegaard's use of "faith in the eminent sense presupposes or includes ordinary faith [as common belief] as a component. . . . this implies that everything Climacus says about ordinary faith must be true of eminent faith

¹²⁰ KW VII 87-88/SV VI 79-80.

¹²¹ Law, *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian*, 89. For Law's discussion of the senses of *Tro* see *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian*, 86-69. Law's analysis of the nature of belief is flawed on two critical points: (1) his contention that for Kierkegaard the uncertainty of *Tro*-as-belief is the "foundation for the establishment of knowledge" (p. 87) is mistaken, if by knowledge Law includes a fallibilist account as well. Kierkegaard adheres to a fallibilism with ethical foundations for felicitous doxastic practice. And, (2) Law is wrong to claim that the way in which inherent epistemic uncertainty is overcome, for Kierkegaard, is by the individual directly "willing to believe that a particular event has happened or that a perceived object is that which it appears to be" (ibid.). This depends upon a reading of Kierkegaard as a direct volitionalist, a position that will be argued against in Chapter Seven. Cf. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, editorial note 43, *JP* II 311; and Evans, "Realism and Antirealism in Kierkegaard", 171.

as well, a point some commentators have missed” (and *vice versa*, we might add).¹²² In other words, when Climacus describes the structure of ordinary, epistemological belief, he is at the same time making intelligible for us the understructure of faith. It so happens that Kierkegaard thinks that there can be no adequate non-Christian account of epistemology, metaphysics, or belief. What we find is that, for Kierkegaard, religious beliefs have an epistemic parallel with other kinds of belief. What emerges from this portrait, as we shall see throughout the remaining chapters, is that Kierkegaard’s meta-epistemology is a distinctly Christian account of belief, and that subjectivity and belief cannot be treated separately. Who and what we are (and choose to be) is inextricably woven together with what we believe, and we cannot disentangle doxastic evaluations or propositions from the ethical valuations of persons.

Conclusion to Chapter Two

We have seen that Kierkegaard introduces the “subjectivity principle” through the mouthpiece of his pseudonym Johannes Climacus, in the two works, *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. This principle can be simply paraphrased from *Postscript* as, “Truth is subjectivity”, or differently, “The How determines the What”.¹²³ Climacus further clarifies this as, “an objective uncertainty held fast through passionate appropriation”.¹²⁴ What is more, Climacus tells us that this is “a paraphrasing of faith”.¹²⁵

This chapter set out to articulate the philosophical context in which Kierkegaard formulates this subjectivity principle. We noted the Kantian and Hegelian influence on Kierkegaard’s philosophical understanding and concluded that Kierkegaard advances the Climacean subjectivity principle as a corrective to the Hegelian-Enlightenment desire to construct an epistemological System of absolute and infallible human knowledge from within the resources of human reason. Kierkegaard finds Kant more “honest”

¹²² C. Stephen Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 120.

¹²³ *KW XII.1* 610-22, 613n-14/SV X 272-81, 273-75.

¹²⁴ *KW XII.1* 203/SV IX 169.

¹²⁵ *KW XII.1* 204/SV IX 170.

than Hegel because of, on the one hand, Kant's acknowledgement of and insistence upon the limits of human reason, and on the other hand, Kant's placing of existence, as the realm of the ethical subject, outside the sphere of reason. The trouble Kierkegaard has with both Kant and Hegel (and the rest of modern philosophy) lies in their continuation of Descartes' vision of philosophy and their collaboration in his project of circumscribing everything within human reason. This objectifying process requires a metaphysical guarantee that comes in the form of the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*, as the transcendental, atemporal, and presuppositionless starting point for philosophy. Descartes's notion of a radically autonomous subject depends upon the pure, rational self-relation of that subject. This, in turn, can only be guaranteed if that subject *is* as it *thinks*. If one is to have absolute knowledge, one's cognitions must be insulated from the corruption of temporal flux, and must occur *sub specie aeterni*—that is, they must be complete and of the whole, no missing parts or imperfections. Hegel accomplishes this by reducing being to thinking, so that what is rational is real, and *vice versa*.

In response to this, Kierkegaard has Climacus emphasise the disparity between thinking, which he tells us belongs to the category of possibility, and being, which belongs to the category of actuality. Climacus, we saw, argues that actuality cannot be thought (by humans) because that which is actual (for humans) is within time-space—the temporal flux—and humans, as actual, are also temporally bound. This places actuality under the category of paradox for reason, because it lies beyond reason as its object of intention and as that on which reason has no positive grasp. The thrust of this for Climacus is that human reason is a function of, and thus bounded by, human subjectivity (as actuality). Far from being that which must be overcome (Descartes and Hegel), human subjectivity is presented by Climacus as precisely that which *must be presupposed* in human knowledge and is the vehicle of human reason. Climacus thus takes the Cartesian *cogito* and turns it in on itself, so that it merely points to the limitations of reason. The self is certainly present in the *cogito*, not as rational, objectively certain postulate, but as ethically required. The certainty that results from this

inversion of Descartes' formula is the sort of subjective certainty attending the convictions we may have regarding those things we perceive as our obligations—the kind of certainty usually associated with belief (as a subjective state). This chapter concluded by noting that Kierkegaard is, throughout his Climacean account, explicitly linking this epistemological discussion of belief (as *Tro sensu laxiori*), with the religious concept of faith (as *Tro sensu strictissimo*).

Now, throughout the rest of this dissertation, our task is to show how the subjectivity principle displaces the metaphysical-epistemological approach of modernity. In Chapter Three we will focus on Kierkegaard's post-metaphysical philosophical method and how his emphasis on subjectivity challenges the metaphysical approach to philosophy taken by modernity.

CHAPTER THREE

PHILOSOPHY IN THE SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD

What our age needs most to illuminate the relationship between logic and ontology is an examination of the concepts: possibility, actuality, and necessity.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*

Philosophy is life's dry-nurse, who can take care of us—but not suckle us.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*

When detached from life, philosophy is a panacea: a search for “the sunny places of thought”.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy Since Hegel*

In the previous chapter we argued that Kierkegaard is consciously attempting to emend the metaphysical-epistemological approach to belief taken by his modern predecessors and contemporaries. Kierkegaard find this approach to be rooted in Descartes's notion of the radical autonomy of the human subject. One of the most telling portrayals of the hubris of the modern philosophical project found its expression in the philosophical System of Hegel. Kierkegaard's problem with the Hegelian-Enlightenment approach is the assumption that metaphysics could answer the deepest questions of human existence. The exclusive emphasis on the rational and objective dimensions of belief, and human persons, annuls the subject *qua* human subject. Kierkegaard replaces the thinking, rational Cartesian subject with an acting, ethical subject, as the centre of belief. In this chapter we turn to examine how Kierkegaard's new conception of subjectivity relates to his understanding of philosophy and how it affects his approach to philosophical questions.

Grammar or Metaphysics?

Perhaps the most significant and radical feature of Kierkegaard's thought is his complete abandonment of the Enlightened notion of “scientific” method, and the metaphysical mode of inquiry characteristic of modern philosophy, whether that be inquiring into the nature of things (metaphysics) or knowledge (epistemology).

Kierkegaard's refusal to accept the fundamental assumptions of the metaphysical-epistemological project lead him to cast about for new ways of moving the discussion of philosophical and theological issues forward. In a passage from *Journals and Papers* we read,

First of all comes life; then later or sooner (but afterwards) comes theory—not the reverse. First theory, then life. First art, the work of art, then the theory—and so it is in all things. . . . That is why it is easiest to write a *grammar* of a dead language—because it has ended. The *anatomist* must have a dead body because even if he in other respects could use a living body, it changes at every moment, is *in flusse* [in a state of fluctuation]. The guarantee that a theory can be produced is always that the object is in the sphere of being [*væren*] or having been, not in becoming [*vorden*]. It seems as if one has even more in theory than in life. In a certain sense that is the case. In the theory one has the whole thing in every detail and simultaneously; whereas life, poor life, is successive. But then again the theory does not have life. That is the deception which ultimately makes every theory prey to the empty conceit that it is able to fashion life on a scale not known even by the life which precedes it.¹

Kierkegaard employs two very instructive and closely related metaphors to characterise the way he thought the problems of philosophy should be approached and how we should look at the activity of philosophising itself. In what seems to be an anticipation of Ludwig Wittgenstein's "philosophy as grammar", Kierkegaard draws the parallel between the act of theorising (philosophy) and the kind of activity performed by a grammarian or an anatomist. Elsewhere in his *Journals and Papers* Kierkegaard comments that, "Science, theory, always comes afterwards [in this case, after Christianity]. . . . The grammar of a living language can never really be made into a science; this can be done only with a dead language, for the immediate being of the living language makes the science difficult".² The two disciplines (i.e., philosophy and grammar) share a common method and it is clear that Kierkegaard is endorsing a kind of *methodological* naturalism that is descriptive in nature and shuns deontological notions of normativity with respect to belief; that is, he rejects the idea that there are certain *a priori* rational duties that inhere in our investigations which produce and regulate the formation of belief.³

¹ JP III 3716/Pap. X⁴ A 528.

² JP IV 3867/Pap. XI¹ A 557

³ While the question of what counts as a true naturalism is a difficult one, here naturalism is taken to be about a method of determining normative standards. See Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 45-6. There are different conceptions of naturalism, operating across a spectrum of more to less extreme versions. Kierkegaard is not being

The later Wittgenstein also speaks of philosophy as grammar—a concept linked to what he called “language-games” and “forms of life”. Wittgenstein introduces the term language-game to refer to “the whole process of using words” in a specific community, or “the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven”.⁴ These language-games are patterns of processing and referring to reality which share a family resemblance and are the product of specific ways of being and acting in the world.⁵ These ways of being in the world are also called forms of life. Fergus Kerr notes that for Wittgenstein, these forms of life are “equated with the kind of activity that customarily includes some speaking”, but on the whole, “Wittgenstein is evidently concerned with very elementary patterns of social interaction . . . the kinds of activities out of which human life is formed, no matter what language is spoken or what the social structure is”.⁶ The example given by Kerr is that of the collage of gestures, words, activities, etc., involved in comforting a man in pain. Wittgenstein elaborates,

Instead of the unsayable specific, the indefinable: the fact that we act in such-and-such ways, e.g. *punish* certain actions, *establish* the state of affairs thus and so, *give orders*, render accounts, describe colours, take an interest in others’ feelings. What has to be accepted, the given—it might be said—are the facts of life.⁷

Elsewhere he insists that, “Our mistake is to look for an explanation where we ought to look at *what happens* as a ‘proto-phenomenon’”, and that, “we are to look on the language-game as the *primary* thing”.⁸ This turning of our philosophical investigations to the language which is expressed through and out of our forms of

saddled with a radical form of naturalism such as W.v.O. Quine’s, that eschews normativity altogether. See Quine, “Epistemology Naturalised”, in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 69ff.

⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe (London: Basil Blackwell, 1967), 7.

⁵ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 23. Cf. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 19; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, eds. by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967) 173.

⁶ Fergus Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein, Second Edition* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1997), 30.

⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology, Volume 1*, eds. by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 630. Fergus Kerr quotes the above section (ibid., 64) and notes that, “this passage is decisive for Wittgenstein’s forms of life. The focus is clearly on the endless multiplicity of smallscale and ubiquitous social practices such as punishing, noting, commanding, telling, etc. The ‘given’ in other words, is no longer atomic elements of being”.

life amounts to writing a grammar. By paying attention to the concepts expressed through language, philosophy as grammar seeks to uncover the rules of the “game” of which they are a part. This analogously provides a description and explanation of the game and exposes its “sense”.⁹ In reference to the concept of grammar in Wittgenstein, Robert C. Roberts remarks that the job of the grammarian is, “not to invent the rules . . . her ingenuity is to *discover* regularities already there in the practices of the [particular] human tradition . . . and to find neat ways of formulating these regularities”.¹⁰ The kind of grammar being written in a philosophical grammar does not look at individual words and the lexical-syntactical rules that govern their function, but is a “depth grammar”. Such a grammar directs its focus to the concepts the words signify, and formulates the “rules” governing their use by examining how they operate in our lives and by dialectically clarifying their appropriate application across a range of thought. These “rules” acquire their *depth* as a grammar (versus the mere “surface grammar” that governs the lexical and syntactical deployment of language) because they are the rules of a community’s conceptual and linguistic engagement with “reality”. A philosophical grammar of concepts is elicited from the “facts of nature” within the forms of life specific to a language game.¹¹

But how is Kierkegaard like Wittgenstein, apart from some trivial mention of grammar? There are two reasons. First, Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein similarly understand human reason to be limited to conceptual essences. And secondly, Kierkegaard understands the nature and task of philosophical thinking in roughly the same manner as Wittgenstein. Thus Kierkegaard, like Wittgenstein, employs a

⁸ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 654-6; first italics mine.

⁹ See Wittgenstein’s comment, “Grammar describes the use of words in the language. So it has the same relation to the languages the description of the game, the rules of the game, have to the game”. *Philosophical Grammar*, ed. by R. Rhees, trans. by A. Kenny (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), 60.

¹⁰ Robert C. Roberts, “Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and a Method of ‘Virtue Ethics’”, in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, eds. Martin J. Matustík and Merold Westphal (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995), 144-5. Robert C. Roberts draws a parallel between Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein and argues that Kierkegaard is a moral grammarian. Kierkegaard is more than just a moral grammarian; his grammar extends to the formation and regulation of beliefs as well.

¹¹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 230.

philosophical method, or manner of approaching philosophical problems, that takes the form of a conceptual grammar and functions as a kind of therapy to remove confusion and reveal inconsistencies in one's thoughts.

One may divide the methodology of a philosophical grammar into two basic stages. The first stage is a phenomenology. "First of all comes life; then later or sooner (but afterwards) comes theory—not the reverse", reminds Kierkegaard. Here Kierkegaard uses phenomenology in the broad sense of inquiring into the contents of conscious experience. For Kierkegaard (as well as Wittgenstein), there is no other place for philosophy to begin than from the present conscious involvement in the world. This, of course, takes place (especially for Wittgenstein) within a social context, and not in isolation from others. Consciousness is comprised of concepts and the concepts we use shape the way the world appears to us. We must use concepts and so a taking stock of our present conscious involvements in the world is the place from which we begin our theorising. Both Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard understand our present corporal embodiments and our conceptualisations to be corresponding parts of our cognitive life. In this sense a "phenomenology" is a taking stock of our present cognitive position in the world. The second stage involves a logical analysis of the concepts we glean in the first stage. The later stage is an attempt to draw out the logic of concepts we use in order to clarify our world picture and remove conceptual inconsistencies.

A Grammar of Concepts

Let us begin with the first point of similarity between Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard. To understand how Kierkegaard's and Wittgenstein's views are similar regarding the nature of human reason, the category of paradox, discussed in Chapter Two, is essential. Wittgenstein's shift to philosophy as grammar was prompted by his view of the limits and situatedness of human reason. Kierkegaard's shift to grammatical analysis is similarly funded by his category of paradox. Kierkegaard returns to his principal distinction between actuality, as referring to the

existing-ness of a thing, and possibility, as referring to the concept of a thing. The dominant concern of Kierkegaard's is that Hegel's idealism, and by extension all purely metaphysical inquiry, collapses existence into thought, and treats actuality as possibility. Kierkegaard reminds all those of a metaphysical persuasion that as existing persons they are finite and temporally situated and characterised by flux. There is no abstract point of pure self-presence, no presuppositionless beginning point, from which to begin philosophy's task of sorting through existence, and such a place is not humanly attainable. In *Postscript* Climacus argues that an existential system is impossible (except for God).¹² "All philosophising is a reflection of what is already *given in consciousness*", Kierkegaard affirms.¹³ Human theorising must start where it is, with what is given conceptually to it in human existence—as the juxtaposition of the temporal and eternal, existence and thought.

The result of this duplex situation is a gap between our experience and ideas. Mental representations of, and referring expressions to, the actual world, the *existing* world, are always incomplete replicas and of such a nature that they can never fully present actuality *qua* actuality to human consciousness. In *Fragments* Climacus states,

Immediate sensation and immediate cognition cannot deceive. This alone indicates that the historical cannot become the object of sense perception or of immediate cognition, because the historical has in itself that very illusiveness of coming into existence.¹⁴

That which is historical is concerned with the existential concretion of the existing human subject and Kierkegaard often uses the term as synonymous with actuality; the historical is the possible that has come into existence as actual. In the above passage Climacus simply means that in its immediacy the perceptual presentations of experience prior¹⁵ to judgements are simply that. Perceptual presentations are sense reports devoid of propositional content—they just *are*. This is what

¹² *KW* XII.1 109-125/*SV* IX 93-106.

¹³ *JP* II 2274/*Pap.* III A 5; my italics.

¹⁴ *KW* VII 81/*SV* VI 73-4.

¹⁵ The term "prior" here does not denote temporal priority, but rather logical priority. Many would dispute the claim that the two poles of human experience, perceptual "givenness" or "appearing" and conceptual judgements, can be separated in any other way than in abstraction and it is not claimed here that there is a temporal gap between them.

Kierkegaard refers to as *immediacy*.¹⁶ For Kierkegaard immediacy refers to actual states of things—“the immediate is reality [*Realiteten*]”¹⁷—and when used of human perception signifies the state a person is in when being appeared to in a human perceptual mode (traditionally delineated as: visual, tactile, auditory, olfactory, and gustatory). When one is in the state of being appeared to we may call these perceptual states. In a state of immediacy one does not reflect upon the contents of one’s consciousness but directly acts one’s perceptual states (and perhaps other mental states as well).

Howard and Edna Hong make this same point in their editorial comments in *Fragments*,¹⁸ and in an editorial note in *Training in Christianity*, Walter Lowrie similarly explains that for Kierkegaard the terms “immediate” and “immediacy” are philosophical terms used to denote “the direct apprehension of the senses”.¹⁹ Note that Kierkegaard’s category of immediacy is interpreted here as a pre-conceptual mode of perceptual consciousness and therefore he is understood to be operating with a notion of perception that, contrary to sense-data and adverbial theories, sees the relation between the reports of one’s senses regarding an object and the way it “appears” to one’s (pre)consciousness as irreducible. In *Johannes Climacus, or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*, Kierkegaard states that, “*If consciousness can remain in immediacy, then the question of truth is cancelled*”.²⁰

C. Stephen Evans takes Climacus’s statement in *Fragments* regarding immediate sensation (quoted in the text above) to mean that Kierkegaard is “in agreement with both classical foundationalism and classical scepticism, that there is a category of necessary truths”.²¹ Classical foundationalism takes there to be a category of truths about (at least) our perceptual states. Truths like, “I seem to be seeing a tree right now”. These truths are understood to be infallible.

¹⁶ KW VII 167-68/Pap. IV B 1:146.

¹⁷ JP III 2320/Pap. IV B 14:6.

¹⁸ KW VII 311n.41.

¹⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 124n.2.

²⁰ KW VII 167/Pap. IV B 1 146; my italics.

There are three problems with reading the account of perception in *Fragments* as expressing agreement with classical foundationalism.²² First, Evans ignores that, for Kierkegaard, there is a gap between experience and ideas. Thus, if there are necessary truths for Kierkegaard, they must be mathematical or logical truths, and could not be those gained through sense experience. Second, by hypostatizing the objects of cognition Evans's position does not account for Kierkegaard's linking the concept of the historical to the existing person. Consciousness for Kierkegaard is always a situated, historical consciousness that is limited by accidental features of its historical subject. And the objects of cognition, as actuality, are in the flux of time. Last, Evans ignores Climacus's statement in *Johannes Climacus* that, "In immediacy there is no relation, for as soon as there is relation, immediacy is cancelled. *Immediately, therefore, everything is true*".²³ Kierkegaard is not saying that every experiential proposition (e.g., "I see a tree in the quad") is true—he in fact goes on in the same sentence to say the opposite—but he is pointing to the nature of consciousness in relation to cognition, perception, judgements, and immediacy. Immediacy signifies the pre-conceptual mode of perceptual experience. Consciousness (as full-consciousness), by its very nature, annuls immediacy by becoming aware of its cognition. In this awareness judgements are formed and the act of cognition receives propositional content. In *A Realist Conception of Truth* William Alston explains the logic of the position we are attributing to Kierkegaard:

To *recognize* a cardinal is to form a belief that it is a cardinal, and, like all beliefs, this involves using concepts. But this does *not* show that to be visually aware of a cardinal one must employ that concept. Indeed, it is obvious that one need not employ the concept of a cardinal in order to see a cardinal. I can see a cardinal (i.e., it can be a that what I see is a cardinal) even though I do not recognize it as such, and even though I totally lack any such concept. . . . *the mere visual cardinal cannot be mistaken; it is not the sort of thing that can be correct or incorrect. It is the belief or judgment that what I see is a robin that is susceptible to mistake.*²⁴

²¹ C. Stephen Evans, "Does Kierkegaard Think that Beliefs Can be Directly Willed?" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 26: (1989) 176.

²² Popkins also makes this same mistake Evans does when he says that for Kierkegaard propositions reporting immediate sensations "are indubitable but not a priori". Popkins, "Hume and Kierkegaard", 277.

²³ *KW VII 167/Pap. IV B 1 146*; his italics.

²⁴ Alston, *A Realist Conception of Truth*, 91.

When he insists that in immediacy sensation and cognition “cannot deceive”, Climacus is emphasising that the state of immediacy is a pre-linguistic and pre-conceptual state and therefore the categories of truth and falsity do not apply. The question of being deceived cannot arise. For example, one does not refer to a thermometer that is inaccurate in its reading as being deceived, but broken. The thermometer cannot be in a state of being self-deceived by its faulty information because it has no awareness of its perceptual states or their objects, and therefore has no propositional states regarding its perceptual states (or their objects). There is a sense in which it is perfectly right to say that the thermometer has a kind of “consciousness” of its environment in so far as it responds to and reflects any adjustments in the temperature. However, the thermometer, in its analogous state of “immediacy”, is not forming any propositional content regarding the temperature (i.e., it does not have full-consciousness of it) and therefore cannot itself be deceived. True, it may deceive others, but only those who are no longer in a state of immediacy, but are aware of perceiving the reading as what it is (falsely) presenting—and therefore have propositional awareness as part of their cognition of the thermometer in the form, “The thermometer indicates that the temperature is \emptyset ”. Or, to be more precise, those who read the thermometer are in the state: S is self-consciously aware that X is \emptyset . In the same passage Kierkegaard notes that it is precisely this fact which makes the propositions we believe through perception objectively “dubious”. The objects of perception come to our awareness and are therefore no longer objective certainties: “It is just as if reflection removed the [object of perception] from [our] senses”.²⁵ Kierkegaard’s category of the paradox surfaces again.

Kierkegaard’s position on the nature of cognition, concepts and perceptual consciousness may roughly be abbreviated and summarised as follows. There are different modes or aspects of consciousness. These range from pre-conceptual modes, in which X is presented as \emptyset to some subject S but S is not self-consciously

²⁵ KW VII 81/SV VI 74

aware of perceiving X as \emptyset , to a thoroughly conceptual full-consciousness—i.e., a self-conscious act of subject S taking her perceptual experience of X as \emptyset to be that of X as \emptyset . The term, full-consciousness is used for Kierkegaard's concept of consciousness because the Danish term for consciousness, *Bevisted*, is a direct corollary of the German word for consciousness, *Bewusstsein*. The dictionary Kierkegaard used, *The Dansk Ordbog* of Christian Molbech, defines *Bevisted* as: "The characteristic of being aware of one's own existence".²⁶ Both the German and the Danish words have a self-reflexive character that refers back to the conscious subject. Thus, the ordinary German and Danish words for consciousness carry with them the idea of being fully aware, which is not necessarily implied in the English word consciousness. For Kierkegaard, then, the ordinary usage of the term consciousness would denote a kind of self-awareness we will call full-consciousness, in order to distinguish it from a perceptual presentation to consciousness.

In *Johannes Climacus* Kierkegaard describes consciousness as a "duplexity" of "reality" and "ideality". He further defines these terms saying that, on the one hand, "Immediacy is reality", and on the other hand, "language is ideality".²⁷ Reality, then, is unmediated (it *is*), and ideality is mediated by language. Kierkegaard describes consciousness as the mental state of a human person in which immediacy and language are brought alongside, but not absorbed into, each other. Consciousness *qua* full-consciousness, then, has two elements or poles: (1) a pre-conceptual element of direct perceptual presentation (immediacy); and (2) a conceptual, linguistic element (ideality). For this reason, Kierkegaard is able to question whether consciousness can *remain* in immediacy, which would entail that a kind of perceptual immediacy inheres in consciousness. And yet he also criticises Hegel's use of the terms *sinnliches Bewusstsein* [sense-consciousness], and *wahrnehmendes Bewusstsein* [perceiving-consciousness], arguing that these should

²⁶ John W. Elrod, "The Self in Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 4 (Winter 1973), 230.

²⁷ KW VII 168/Pap. IV B 1 147.

instead be rendered “sense-perception” and “experience”.²⁸ In this comment Kierkegaard clearly wants to distinguish, in any act of sense-perception, the event of perceiving that takes place in the perceiver—what we could call the perceptual presentation or “immediacy”, from the perceiver’s awareness (consciousness) of the event of perception—the experience. Kierkegaard’s criticism of Hegel’s use of *Bewusstsein* in this context concerns the fact that in the concept of “consciousness [*Bevisted*] there is more [than just perceptual immediacy]”.²⁹ Therefore Kierkegaard charges Hegel with misusing the concept *Bewusstsein* by using it to designate the event of perceiving as an act of *consciousness*. Thus, we may conclude that *Bevisted*, for Kierkegaard, denotes *full-consciousness*, and is more than just simply Hegelian *sinnliches Bewusstsein*, or perceptual immediacy. Kierkegaard understands there to be a pre-conceptual mode of human consciousness. Thus we may speak of a pre-linguistic *element* of perception—of which one necessarily can have no full-consciousness, for that entails a linguistic framework—in Kierkegaard’s thought. Taken as a whole, there is no pre-linguistic *full-consciousness* (as *Bevisted*) of perceptual experience because full-consciousness includes awareness—and that negates immediacy. On Kierkegaard’s view, the pre-linguistic pole of perception (perceptual immediacy) is ontologically different and logically separable from my being aware of experiencing the event in question as that event, even though it occurs simultaneously—perhaps necessarily—with it.

There are two intuitions preserved in this analysis. The first is that that events happen to things, whether conscious or unconscious, and as such inanimate, non-sentient objects have “experiences”. In other words, events, or the exchanging of “properties”, may involve either persons or objects. For example, a stone may be hurled through a car window, or (God forbid) a human person may be hurled through a car window. Both the stone and the person have had an “experience” of the same sort, in the sense that each experienced a relevantly similar exchange of properties. The difference is that the person may be aware of this experience,

²⁸ *KW* VII 167, 169n/*Pap.* IV B 1 146, 148.

whereas the stone may not. As soon as one becomes fully conscious of having had an experience, there necessarily is a linguistic-conceptual component present. The second intuition preserved in this analysis is that there is something about our actually perceiving objects that is very different from our merely thinking about them, even though in each instance (sense perception and thoughts about the objects of sense perception) we may employ exactly all the same *concepts*.³⁰ This means that perception can never be collapsed into conception.

The poverty of mental representation is further vented in Kierkegaard's distinction between "factual being" and "ideal being".³¹ Any attempt to propositionally or conceptually demonstrate actual existence must fail by definition. What is demonstrated in such attempts is "ideal being". Factual being refers to that which exists (*være til*) as actual and there are no degrees of this type of being: "With regard to factual being, to speak of more or less being is meaningless. A fly, when it is, has just as much being as the god".³² When we attempt to prove that "X exists" by arguing from the proposition, "Y exists", what we succeed in showing is the rather banal conclusion that either X and Y are tautologous, or that Y includes the concept X.³³ This yields the ideal being of X, "*But as soon as I speak ideally about being, I am no longer speaking about being but about essence*".³⁴ Ideal being, or essence, can be explored for coherence and to see what logical relations it involves, but essence is *conceptual* and not in a necessary relationship with factual being qua

²⁹ KW VII 167, 169n/Pap. IV B 1 146, 148.

³⁰ William Alston has elaborated on this view, calling it the Theory of Appearing in his unpublished paper, "Back to the Theory of Appearing". He also briefly discusses this in his books, *A Realist Conception of Truth* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), and *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

³¹ KW VII 40n-41/SV VI 41.

³² KW VII 40n. /SV VI 41. Kierkegaard is very careful here to avoid Anselm's error of identifying existence as a property of a thing, which Kant so cogently rebutted. In *Journals and Papers* he writes, "Kant is right in saying, 'Existence brings no new predicate to a concept.' Obviously Kant honestly thinks of existence as not being absorbed into the concept, empirical existence . . . Nothing is added to a concept whether it has existence or not; it is a matter of indifference; it indeed has existence, i.e., concept-existence, ideal existence"; JP I 1057/Pap. X² A 328.

³³ Popkin, "Hume and Kierkegaard", 276.

³⁴ KW VII 42n./SV VI 42; his emphasis.

actuality.³⁵ In a way that resonates with some of the current postmodernist criticisms of the “metaphysics of presence”,³⁶ Kierkegaard argues that what concepts signify are never wholly and simply present in experience.

The failure of concepts to represent existence as it actually is (as it is in the process of being what it is) leads to a necessary distinction between facts and judgements.³⁷ Kierkegaard notes that the totalising impulse in human reason, the impulse to contain reality and present it as a coherent unity to the human subject, and therefore the ideas or judgements we form on the basis of experience, are in a reciprocal relationship of informing and being formed by a larger set of beliefs. This larger set of beliefs, belonging to the realm of ideal being mentioned above, must be categorised and sorted into “facts”. In *The Concept of Anxiety* Haufniensis says,

To be able to use one’s category is a *conditio sine qua non* [indispensable condition] of observation if in a deeper sense it is to have any significance. When the phenomenon is present to a certain degree, most people become aware of it but are unable to explain it because they lack the category [in this case, the “demonic”], and if they had it, they would have a key that opens up whatever trace of the phenomenon there is, for the phenomena within the category obey it as the spirits obey the ring.³⁸

Here Kierkegaard clearly identifies that our making judgements is part and parcel of our practice of forming beliefs in the process of experiencing reality. He identifies that there is a third “something” inserted in the gap our experience of reality and the ideas that we form in respect to them; namely, reflection. In his journal Kierkegaard writes that, “As soon as I frame a law from experience, I insert

³⁵ Kierkegaard also asserts the gap between idea and experience in *KW XII.1 109-125/SV IX 93-106*, where he argues that a logical system is possible but an existential one is not; the distinction is also made in *KW XII.1 149-50/SV IX 123-24*. As Paul Tillich notes, Kierkegaard’s distinction between essence (as possible being) and existence (as actual, factual being) is really an extension of the scholastic distinction between *essentia* and *existentia*, in which “‘essence’ signifies the What, the *τι εστιν* or *quid est* of a thing; ‘existence’ signifies the That, the *οτι εστιν* or *quod est*. *Essentia* thus designates [in scholasticism] what a thing is known to be, the non-temporal object of knowledge in a temporal and changing thing, the *ουσια* of that thing which makes it possible. But whether a thing is real or not is not implied in its essence: we do not know whether there is such a thing by knowing its ‘essence’ alone. This must be decided by an existential proposition”. In Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 80-81; see also 85.

³⁶ Westphal uses this term of Kierkegaard and makes this point in *Becoming A Self* (West Lafayette, Indiana: 1996), 107.

³⁷ David Law makes this point as the basis of his discussion of what he terms Kierkegaard’s “anthropological scepticism,” in David R. Law, *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 73-74. The following discussion closely parallels his and it has already noted how his reading of Kierkegaard’s epistemology differs from ours.

³⁸ *KW VII 127n/SV VI 209*.

something more into it than there is in experience”.³⁹ He makes a similar point another place when he writes, “It depends then, not only on what a man sees, but what a man sees depends on how he sees it”.⁴⁰ Law comments that, “in using our reflection to organise our sense data, we are imposing an alien framework upon them, a framework which is not contained in or posited by the sense data but is provided by the knower”.⁴¹ For Kierkegaard then, cognition of one’s perceptual environment involves: (1) the perceptual experience (immediacy); (2) reflection on or judgements about the experience which places it into a larger framework of ideas or concepts; and (3) the beliefs we take away from the experience and hold in our conscious awareness as we existentially orient ourselves to these judgements/reflections in such a way that they are able to be expressed by our *propositional attitudes*.⁴² Thus, there is, for Kierkegaard, an important difference between the mental states of a human subject in a perceptual event, and the propositional attitudes used to describe the event.

Two important points need to be emphasised. First, Kierkegaard’s basic position is that the facts we countenance about the material universe are features of our consciousness, which in turn is constituted by concepts. Facts are not simply given to us ready-made, nor are they part of the accoutrements of universe which, perhaps in a Lockean sense, actively impress themselves on our passive awareness. Facts only come to our awareness as propositional features of the “real world” when we impose a conceptual framework on what is perceptually given to us in experience.

This is important because it leads us to the second point, which involves the nature of concepts. Concepts themselves are, for Kierkegaard, “ideality”,⁴³ and express the conceptual essences of things as possibilities for reflection. Their

³⁹ JP I 1072/Pap. IV C 75.

⁴⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Edifying Discourses*, translated by D.F. and L.M. Swensen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1943), 67.

⁴¹ Law, *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian*, 74. “Sense data” is Law’s term. I have already noted my objection to an attempt to ascribe a sense-data theory of perception to Kierkegaard above.

⁴² For now, we will define propositional attitudes as the mental states of person expressed in propositional form, but this definition will be improved upon in Chapter Seven. There will also be in Chapter Seven a further discussion of mental states and their relationship to beliefs.

ontological and representational tie to empirical reality is not necessary (logically)—although they are inherently intentional entities rooted in empirical reality. Concepts are simply the basic units of thought and express “universals” and as such are governed by the laws of logic. These “universals” do not exist as hidden metaphysical entities but exist (as ‘thought-existence’) in their concretions, their being used and functioning in our lives.⁴⁴ Thus it does not matter if a *concept* has a particular instantiation as long as it already has a way of being used.⁴⁵ In this way, a concept is that feature of our mental life (as a non-Cartesian way to our thoughts, feelings, attitudes, emotions, references, etc.) whereby it is organised into a realised capacity. Using these mental capacities (i.e., concepts), human persons are able then to use to create a “meaning-complex”,⁴⁶ expressible through language as the means by which humans judge, evaluate, compare, distinguish, and perform all sorts of other “mental” tasks. While having concepts of a specific type will entail a vocabulary commensurate with them, the possession of these concepts is not reducible to the having of this new vocabulary. Rather, possessing a concept facilitates a new way of speaking, acting, judging, “seeing”, etc.⁴⁷ This naturalistic explanation of concepts is what oddly enough connects them to actuality—they are a product of our existing and find their actuality derivatively in ours. Concepts are the form in which reality (actuality) gives itself to be transposed into human thought

⁴³ *JP I 1057/Pap. X² A 328*. In this journal entry Kierkegaard also refers to the “eternity of ‘concepts’”; *Ibid*.

⁴⁴ Kierkegaard writes, “Abstract concepts are invisible like a straight line—visible only in their concretions”; *JP I 2/Pap. II A 496*.

⁴⁵ This effectively responds to the dilemma (often posed by ardent substance dualists) of the status of alleged universal properties like colours (e.g., red) were all the particular instances removed, erased, from the world. Does the colour then go out of existence? A Kierkegaardian may respond yes and no. It does have concept existence still; i.e., we can still use the expression “red” meaningfully—which is the intuition the substance dualist wants to preserve. “Red” continues to have a way of being used and therefore still retains its concept or thought-existence. “Red” does not, however have any actual existence. See *JP I 1057/Pap. X X² 328*. Cf. *JP II 1590/Pap. II A 37*.

⁴⁶ Paul L. Holmer, *The Grammar of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 120, 140-42.

⁴⁷ In *The Book On Adler*, Kierkegaard argues that concepts occasion and qualify our ways of being in the world, saying, “emotion that is Christian is controlled by conceptual definitions, and when deep emotion is transformed into or expressed in words in order to be communicated, this transformation must continually take place within the conceptual definitions”; *KW XXIV 113/Pap. VII² B 235:200*.

(possibility).⁴⁸ Kierkegaard writes that, “[t]o conceptualize is to dissolve actuality into *possibility*”, but that “[i]t is not as if ‘actuality’ were void of concepts, not at all; no, the concept which is found by conceptually dissolving into possibility is also in actuality, but there is still something more—that it is actuality”.⁴⁹ This grounding of concepts in a metaphysically given reality that exists independently of any perceiver’s mind is what separates Kierkegaard from metaphysical idealism and from epistemological idealism/subjectivism. In *Journal and Papers* Kierkegaard states: “There is a kind of reflection in which the object is lost completely, and then one behaves like the raven when it lost its object (the piece of cheese) because of its eloquence. In this respect it is a picture of idealism, which when everything was lost had only itself left”.⁵⁰ Not only is Kierkegaard saying that he understands reality to be mind-independent, but, *contra* the epistemological idealisms of Kant and Hegel, he also refuses to absorb the referent of our concepts into the features of our mental activity.

Because of the inter-dependent relationship of our conscious experience of actuality and the essence of concepts, Kierkegaard finds it to be an incorrigible feature of human existence that we form concepts as a product of our being in the world and consciously existing in it. Humans possess dispositions⁵¹ that, as expressions of human subjectivity,⁵² are the “determinant of immediacy”.⁵³ That is, human mental dispositions shape the way we experience reality. Kierkegaard is not making the metaphysical claim that humans are hard-wired in a certain manner to produce specific kinds of beliefs whenever they are appeared to in particular ways. Instead it is postulated that, as an inherent feature of human doxastic phenomena,

⁴⁸ *JP* I 1059/ *Pap.* X² A 414.

⁴⁹ *JP* I 1059/ *Pap.* X² A 414; his italics.

⁵⁰ *JP* III, 3257/ *Pap.* II A 198.

⁵¹ For example, Kierkegaard’s pseudonym Climacus refers to a specific organ which produces historical beliefs, *KW* VII 81/SV VI 74; and the pseudonymous Vigilius also refers to faith as “the organ for issues of dogma”; *KW* VIII 18n/SV VI 116. These references demonstrate that Kierkegaard saw beliefs as the product of natural dispositions which arise from our being in the world.

⁵² Kierkegaard states that, “disposition is the unity of feeling and self-consciousness”; *KW* VIII 148-49/SV VI 228.

⁵³ *KW* VIII 148-49/SV VI 228.

beliefs are formed when a subject is presented with objects—that this is must be due to a pre-reflective, non-inferential disposition which lays outside the purview of prescriptive reason.

Speculation operates in the “indicative mood”, and speculation as to the metaphysical nature of our mental dispositions is something Kierkegaard eschews. Kierkegaard instead embarks on a grammatical inquiry that is self-consciously in the “subjunctive mood”—that is, without making any claims to metaphysical ultimacy. Kierkegaard writes,

The grammar of the indicative and the subjunctive contains basically the most aesthetic concepts . . . and of the hackneyed proposition *cogito ergo sum* holds true: it is the subjunctive’s life principle (therefore one could represent the whole of modern philosophy in a theory about the indicative and the subjunctive; it is indeed purely subjunctive).⁵⁴

The trouble for modern philosophy is that they unwittingly speak in the subjunctive mood but use an indicative syntax. Kierkegaard regards this a great confusion. Mental dispositions, while not identical to the “categories” referred to above in the quote from *Anxiety*, are obviously quite closely linked to and perhaps partially comprised of them as constitutive features of full-consciousness—which is linguistic and conceptually constructed. For conscious persons in the world, concepts are an inescapable and indispensable feature of existence. Concepts allow us to have beliefs in such a way that we can linguistically express our beliefs, and they furthermore expedite our distinct dispositions, virtues, emotions, and passions.⁵⁵ Thus, faith or belief is really the expression of these dispositions as they are ratified by the implementation of concepts. Therefore, as a disposition to belief, Kierkegaard speaks with perfect coherence of, “The *a priori* character of faith” that “can be interpreted in part *from the side of the knower* since that which heaven has overcome is every doubt”,⁵⁶ and “the *a priori* in faith which hovers over all the *a posteriori* of works”.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ JP III, 2313/Pap. II A 159. For more on this distinction, see also JP III 2309/Pap. II A 155; JP III 2310/Pap. II A 156; JP III 2314/Pap. II A 160; JP III 2315/Pap. II A 161; JP III 2799/Pap. I A 300.

⁵⁵ Paul Holmer, *The Grammar of Faith*, 145.

⁵⁶ JP II 1099/Pap. III A 36 (his emphasis).

⁵⁷ JP III 1097/Pap. II A 190; his emphasis).

So then, for Kierkegaard, while the sphere of actual existence (corresponding to Kant's noumenal world of the *an sich*) is real enough, it is only "known", or consciously reflected upon, through the concepts we employ. It now begins to be more clear why Kierkegaard applies the metaphor of grammar to theory or philosophy and we are now in a better position to see how it is that Kierkegaard is naturalising philosophy in a manner similar to Wittgenstein. In light of the above analysis of concepts and their pre-eminence, Kierkegaard speaks of his task as being that of rescuing concepts and clarifying them.⁵⁸

Kierkegaard explains his situation thus:

When it so happens that generation after generation everyone takes over the concepts [s/]he got from the previous generation—and devotes [her/]his days and [her/]his ideas and [her/]his time to enjoying this life, works for finite goals, etc.—it all too easily happens that the concepts are gradually distorted, become entirely different, come to be like counterfeit money. . . . Yet no one wants the business of auditing the concepts. . . . Nevertheless auditing is needed, and more and more with each decade.⁵⁹

Kierkegaard saw himself as an "auditor"; as one fighting a battle to clarify concepts and save terminology from becoming (in his words) "muddled", and "confusing", and "twaddle",⁶⁰ as they had become in the Hegelian attempt to subsume all the academic disciplines under the hospices of metaphysical logic.⁶¹ Anthony Rudd reasons that Kierkegaard's use of the pseudonyms was precipitated by the fact that, "Conceptual clarification was essential for those intellectuals who had been bewitched by Hegelian or other muddled thinking: they needed to clear their minds

⁵⁸ KW XII.1 206n/SV IX 171; OAR, 254. Cf. KW VIII 14; KW XXIV 89-90, 114, 173, 321/Pap. VIII² B &:11 32, VII² B 235:202; VIII² B 9:16 51; X¹ A 94:72. OAR, 251-3, 255, 262; JP III 2989/Pap. XI² A 92.

⁵⁹ JP VI 6921/Pap. XI² A 36.

⁶⁰ See for example Climacus's statement in *Postscript*, ". . . in our day terminology and the like are so muddled that it is almost impossible to safeguard against confusion"; KW XII.1 206n/SV IX 171.

⁶¹ Niels Thulstrup argues this in *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 351-55. See also Lee Barrett's excellent essay on Kierkegaard's doctrine of original sin, "Kierkegaard's 'Anxiety' and the Augustinian Doctrine of Original Sin", in *International Kierkegaard Commentary, Volume 8: The Concept of Anxiety*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1985), 39-41.

before they could come to understand ethics and religion as the existential challenges they are”.⁶²

Kierkegaard makes a clear argument for a “grammatical” method in the introduction of *The Concept of Anxiety*.⁶³ The pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis notes that each discipline of inquiry, whether it be science, or poetry, or dogmatics (theology), has its own mode of inquiry, entailing different passions and interpretative concepts—an idea closely resembling “language-games”. He later declares that, “Every concept must be dealt with by the science to which it belongs”.⁶⁴ Throughout *Anxiety*, Vigilius persistently counsels of the dangerous effects of conflating logical concepts such as “immediacy” and “the negative”, with their related theological ones of “faith” and “evil”.⁶⁵ Legitimate conceptual inquiry demands sufficient attentiveness to the intrinsic “modulation” appropriate to each form of inquiry which involves a recognition of the game being played and its intrinsic mood. This prevents, on one hand, our confusing the results of a certain kind of inquiry for something it cannot represent (as in the case of Hegel’s metaphysical approach Christianity); and on the other hand, that we do not jumble our nomenclature, calling an activity by one name when, by virtue of the manner in which it is undertaken, it is necessarily something else.⁶⁶ Each mode of inquiry (or language game) has its own proper “mood”. Even “science, just as much as poetry and art, presupposes a mood in the creator (or author) as well as in the observer (or reader), and that an error in the modulation is just as disturbing as an error in the development of thought”.⁶⁷ The meaning of a particular concept is thus a matter of attunement to the passional context of the language game in which it is used, and

⁶² Anthony J. Rudd, “‘Believing All Things’: Kierkegaard on Knowledge, Doubt, and Love”, in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Volume 16: Works of Love*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 131.

⁶³ *KW VIII 9-13/SV VI 109-12*.

⁶⁴ *KW VIII 35/SV VI 130*.

⁶⁵ Barrett, “Kierkegaard’s Anxiety and the Augustinian Doctrine of Original Sin”, 39.

⁶⁶ Cf. Wittgenstein’s comments: “Our mistake is to look for an explanation . . . where we ought to have said: *this language-game is being played*”, *Philosophical Investigations*, 654-6, his emphasis; and also, “Tell me ‘how’ you seek and I will tell you ‘what’ you are seeking”; *Philosophical Grammar*, ed. R. Rhees, trans. Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 370.

understanding a concept requires (and simply amounts to) employing it with the appropriate pathos. As Gouwens observes, Kierkegaard is pointedly criticising “the tendency of speculative philosophy and theology [i.e. the Hegelian metaphysical-epistemological approach] to obscure linguistically the distinctions between fields of study by interpreting particular concepts into such an all-embracing meta-logical or speculative field”.⁶⁸

There are two significant parallels, then, between Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein pertaining to the naturalisation of belief.⁶⁹ The first is the blatant rejection of the hegemony of the metaphysical-epistemological approach to philosophy by both of them, on the basis that it is a category error for human reason to inquire into the *in-itself-nature* of things. We are already familiar with Kierkegaard’s category of the paradox. With this category in place, Kierkegaard asserts two things. He accepts idea that human cognition does not have available to it the pristine vantage point of an atemporal, ahistorical and presuppositionless beginning, but remains sullied in the mire of temporal finitude. He also believes that reason is limited and cannot penetrate to the sphere of existence as actuality. Whatever validity a “scientific” or speculative metaphysics may have, it cannot reveal the mysteries of existence. Wittgenstein was also concerned to remove philosophical inquiry from the patronage of a speculative or pseudo-scientific metaphysical bias. He likewise presents metaphysics “as a confusion between two language-games—just the sort of confusion that results in nonsense or absurdity”.⁷⁰ In remarkably Kierkegaardian style, Wittgenstein remarks that, “The essential thing about metaphysics [is] that the

⁶⁷ KW VIII 14n/SV VI 113n.

⁶⁸ David J. Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 62.

⁶⁹ There is a growing amount of studies in the literature comparing Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard. The contrast lends itself easily because of the high praise that Wittgenstein had for Kierkegaard. See Charles L. Creegan, *Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard: Religion, Individuality, and Philosophical Method*, (London: Routledge, 1989), for a good, full length introduction, as well as a book of essays, *Grammar of the Heart: Thinking with Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein. New Essays in Moral Philosophy and Theology*, ed. Richard H. Bell (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988). For partial treatments see Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker, passim*; and Norman L. Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?, passim*.

⁷⁰ Newton Garver, “Philosophy as Grammar”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, eds. Hans Sluga and David G. Stern, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 158.

difference between a factual and conceptual investigation is not clear to it. A metaphysical question is always in appearance a factual one, although the problem is a conceptual one”;⁷¹ and elsewhere writes: “A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not *command a clear view* of the use of our words. Our grammar is lacking that sort of perspicuity”.⁷²

The way to solve philosophical problems, then, is in a grammar of concepts—where concepts are ideal expressions of the essences of actual objects—which clarifies and brings out the conditions under which these concepts are properly employed (in reference to their function in ordinary forms of life). This is the second parallel between Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein. Both see philosophy’s task as the grammatical elucidation of concepts because the only cognitive access (philosophy’s realm of inquiry) we have to reality is its conceptual essences.

Wittgenstein’s above comment about the essence of metaphysical questions recalls Kierkegaard’s distinction between factual and ideal being. In the development of that point, Kierkegaard says that, “*as soon as I speak ideally about being, I am no longer speaking about being but about essence*”.⁷³ In response he takes leave of the resources of metaphysics to inquire into existence and defaults to a naturalistic, grammatical approach—one that begins to reason from the situation in which we are found and seeks to clarify those concepts already in place. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein too shifts from metaphysics to a naturalistic ontology. He tells us that, “*Essence is expressed by grammar*”,⁷⁴ and that, “Grammar [not metaphysics] tells us what kind of object anything is”.⁷⁵ Admittedly, Kierkegaard is not employing his linguistic analysis and conceptual grammar with the same level and kind of self-awareness that Wittgenstein is. Kierkegaard is neither as focussed nor dedicated to pure logical analysis as Wittgenstein. There remains significant and important differences between the two—not the least of which is their very different

⁷¹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophy of Psychology*, vol. 1, 949.

⁷² Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 122; his emphasis.

⁷³ KW VII 42n/SV VI 41.

⁷⁴ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigation*, 370.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 373.

religious commitments. Nevertheless, the two thinkers have a continuing and deep agreement about the nature of, and approach to philosophical problems—one that eschews a modernist, metaphysical approach, that is predicated upon a radically autonomous (Cartesian) subject, but also resists a solipsistic nihilism.

Subjectivity and the Limits of Philosophy

There is also a second point of similarity we noted between Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard regarding the nature of the philosophical task. For Kierkegaard, as for Wittgenstein, the situation of human reason, the situatedness of all human thinking, is in language. In the *Journals and Papers* Kierkegaard argues that language is the medium in which all human thinking is done (including Hegel, *et al.*), and yet is “a medium that [speculative philosophy] did not choose”.⁷⁶ Kierkegaard’s philosophical opponent is Hegel—or more properly said, the Hegelian System—and a major weakness Kierkegaard finds in Hegel’s philosophy is Hegel’s attempt to construct a metaphysical system in terms of a pure, metaphysical language. The attempt at a metaphysical system, the attempt to construct a language that expresses reality as it *really* is (in distinction to how we normally speak about it), ignores the fact that there is no point human speculation can reach that is outside of an already given language. A speculative metaphysics also carries the implicit assumption that ordinary language somehow is not appropriate.

This sort of oversight leads to all kinds of errors, Kierkegaard thinks. He explains that, “There is much talk nowadays about flesh and blood being man’s enemy, but I am more inclined to look upon language”.⁷⁷ Kierkegaard further remarks that when one fails to recognize that language is the natural, historical, “given” in which all human thinking takes place, and then attempts (like Hegel) to replace ordinary language with an artificial language, “it usually ends in silence [i.e., solipsism], or in the personal isolation of jargonish nonsense”.⁷⁸ Elsewhere

⁷⁶ JP III 3281/Pap. III A 11.

⁷⁷ JP III 2334/Pap. XI² A 128.

⁷⁸ JP III 3281/Pap. III A 11.

Kierkegaard states that it is, “no doubt simply because all instruction takes place directly through language [that humanity] is so easily led astray. . . . how easily a person is led into the conceit that he really knows something for which he has the word. It is the concrete intuition which is so easily lost here”.⁷⁹

These statements of Kierkegaard lead Hermann Cloeren to argue that, along with Wittgenstein, Kierkegaard believes “on the one hand the view that errors and pseudo-problems in philosophy occur due to philosophers being misled, being seduced, being charmed by language, [and] on the other hand that such pseudo-problems are due to the active misuse of language by philosophers”.⁸⁰ As a kind of therapy for this metaphysical malaise, Kierkegaard sets Climacus to the task of performing linguistic analysis on Hegel. Climacus indicates this anti-systemic methodology by naming his first work *Philosophiske Smuler* or *Philosophical Fragments*—or *Philosophical Scraps*, as Walter Lowrie translated it. This method is not just limited to the pseudonym Johannes Climacus but includes all of Kierkegaard’s works. This is especially the case in his works *Concept of Irony* [*Begrebet Ironi*] and *Concept of Anxiety* [*Begrebet Angest*], in which the basic mode of analysis is to examine the logic of specific concepts and how they function, without any explicit attempt to formulate a grand system of philosophy. This extends even to Kierkegaard’s more theological discourse.⁸¹ Climacus actually describes the absent mindedness of speculative philosophy (Hegel) as an objective lunacy,⁸² and prescribes the kind of cure he has in mind: “Presumably . . . it takes a devil of a fellow in speculative thought to free himself from Hegelianism. Far from

⁷⁹ JP III 2324/Pap. X² A 235.

⁸⁰ Hermann Cloeren, “The Linguistic Turn in Kierkegaard’s Attack On Hegel” *International Studies in Philosophy* 17/3 (1986): 2. Cloeren’s article is very good and my argument in this paragraph is drawn chiefly from him.

⁸¹ A good example of this occurs in, *Practice in Christianity*. Anti-Climacus place the heading on Part 2: “Blessed is He Who Is Not Offended At Me’: A Biblical Exposition and Christian Definition [of Concepts], By Anti-Climacus”; KW XX 71-144/SV 16 77-142. The Hong’s translation of the title of this section is not as accurate as Lowrie’s, who includes the words “of Concepts” which is placed in brackets above. The Danish word used in this instance is *Begrebsbestemmelse* which is a compounding of the two words *Begrebet* or “concept”, and *bestemmelse* which means “to make definite”. It seems quite clear that Anti-Climacus is meaning to indicate something like a grammar of concepts, in which the concept indicated is “made definite”.

it; only sound common sense is needed, a pithy sense of the comic, a little Greek *ataraxia* [inner peace]”.⁸³ However, for Kierkegaard linguistic analysis is, as we shall see below, at least, only one of the necessary elements in Climacus’s prescribed therapy to Hegelian thought. The other, more important ingredient, is becoming subjective.⁸⁴

In the *Postscript* Climacus sets about revealing the “chimeric” and “fantastical” achievements of Hegel by simply examining his language to see if it makes sense, and if Hegel has correctly employed ordinary language concepts.⁸⁵ Climacus writes that in both *Postscript* and *Fragments* he is struggling against the fact that (and we can assume he sees this is as a result of the Hegelian influence) “in our day terminologies and the like are so muddled that it is almost impossible to safeguard oneself against confusion”.⁸⁶ As Cloeren notes, Climacus frequently combines linguistic analysis with an ironical humour to demonstrate that Hegel’s claim to absolute knowledge and systematic completeness is meaningless and even laughable.⁸⁷ The goal of for Climacus is to reveal the ironic conflict between Hegel’s claim to possess *the System*, *the* metaphysical explanation of the world-historical process, and its state of incompleteness—“if the system is not finished, there is not any system”.⁸⁸ The results of Climacus’s linguistic analyses reveal, Kierkegaard thinks, that Hegel’s vantageless metaphysical language ignored the relative nature of linguistic expressions and thus “became fantastical”.⁸⁹ Hegel has crossed the boundaries of philosophical sense and utters sheer nonsense.

⁸² KW XII.1 194-5/SV IX 162.

⁸³ KW XII.1 33n/SV IX 32n.

⁸⁴ See KW XII.1 129-188/SV IX 107-157.

⁸⁵ We could point to our previous discussions of Climacus for examples of this kind of analysis—e.g., his critique of Aristotle’s views on possibility. For another example, see Climacus’s critique of Hegel’s views on the logical principle of contradiction, KW VII 108-09/SV VI 97; KW XI.1 304-06/SV X 12-13.

⁸⁶ KW XII.1 206/SV IX 171.

⁸⁷ Cloeren, “Linguistic Turn”, 4.

⁸⁸ KW XII.1 107/SV IX 92. For Climacus’s statements regarding the incompleteness of Hegelian system see KW XII.1 13, 86-109, 118-124, 145/SV IX 15, 91-94, 101-05, 120.

⁸⁹ Ibid. Here Climacus also states regarding Hegel’s metaphysical language that, “In the situation of dialogue, the whole fantasticality involving pure thinking will make a poor showing”. See also Cloeren, “Linguistic Turn”, 6.

In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein proposes a view of language and philosophy that agrees in many details with the above Kierkegaardian perspective. Wittgenstein made a variety of remarks along these lines. He tells us, for example, that, “Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by language”; he also states that, “language is itself the vehicle of thought”, and that “The philosopher’s treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness”.⁹⁰ Wittgenstein clearly saw language, as did Kierkegaard, as something for which metaphysics cannot account. For Wittgenstein, the activity of philosophy is a contingent enterprise consisting of the explication of concepts we are already familiar with, and use every day, so that what is being overlooked is made plain. On this account, in their philosophising both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein are attempting to “lead words back from their metaphysical use to their correct use in language”.⁹¹ Both these thinkers, then, saw philosophy as limited by its nature to a conceptual grammar, which must be engaged in when metaphysical confusion abounds and concepts are being misapplied.

Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein similarly prescribe the limits of philosophical thinking within the conceptual sphere and think that human thought and language can never get beyond itself to speak of things as they really are (being *qua* being). Wittgenstein argues that “the cardinal problem of philosophy” is the question of the nature and limits of language, that there are things that “cannot be *said* by propositions, but only *shown*”.⁹² Jamie Ferreira draws attention to the similarities between Wittgenstein’s contention that, “the sense of the world must”, because of the limits of philosophy and language (i.e., human thought), “lie outside the world”,⁹³ with Kierkegaard’s category of paradox (the absurd), which he describes

⁹⁰ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 109; 329; 255.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁹² Wittgenstein, *Letters to Russell, Keynes and Moore*, eds. G.H. von Wright and B.F. McGuinness (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), 71; my emphasis. See also David G. Stern, *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 69-70.

⁹³ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness, (London: Routledge, 1974), 6.41.

as a “point outside the world”.⁹⁴ This does not mean that either of Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein believe that there are things that cannot be talked *about*—the point instead is that speaking about certain things cannot explicate (or reveal, or capture) what those things *are*. Both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein share the idea that philosophy is simply a kind of therapy all of us need from time to time when our thinking (use of concepts) becomes confused and our vision of reality is thereby distorted—i.e., we encounter a philosophical quandry. Going beyond the limits of language and logic in this way, the making sense by *showing*, “will simply be nonsense”⁹⁵—so there is a sense in which all philosophy itself is “nonsense” in that it attempts through propositions to *show* us something that cannot (strictly) be said. Philosophy is not an end in itself, but is a tool to point beyond itself—to that which cannot be said and cannot be circumscribed by the logical standards that apply to propositions. So it is that on the one hand Wittgenstein says, “My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: whoever understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them - as steps - to climb up beyond them”⁹⁶, and on the other hand Climacus says, “A person relinquishes the understanding in order to believe—but then he achieves a higher understanding”.⁹⁷

There is a debate in the literature over whether there are two kinds of nonsense, “plain nonsense” and cognitively meaningful nonsense or “deep nonsense”, in Wittgenstein (and *a fortiori* Kierkegaard). James Conant and Cora Diamond reject the notion that there is a kind of nonsense that is cognitively meaningful and helps us to grasp the ineffable.⁹⁸ Our claim above is not that (for Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein) there are certain ineffable *propositions* (as possibilities) that are then

⁹⁴ JP III 2803/Pap. X² A 519. See M. Jaimie Ferreira, “The Point Outside the World: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Nonsense, Paradox and Religion” *Religious Studies* 30 (1994): 29-44.

⁹⁵ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, p. 3.

⁹⁶ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.54.

⁹⁷ KW XII.1 564/SV X 234.

⁹⁸ Cora Diamond, “Throwing Away the Ladder” *Philosophy* 63 (1988), 5-27; and James Conant, “Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense”, in *Pursuits of Reason: Essays in Honor of Stanley Cavell*, eds. Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer, and Hilary Putnam, (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University

grasped only by other “nonsensical” propositions. Rather the point is that the *telos* of explanatory propositions (philosophy) is subjectivity (actuality) and that these can at best serve to give us a better vision of actuality. So the goal of philosophy, in so far as that involves truth, is ultimately outside itself as the re-positioning of ourselves as subjects in the world. This is also to say that (strictly speaking) philosophy is “nonsense” of some sort because it inherently undermines its own efforts—it uses words to say that words are not enough. A nonsense of this sort is compatible with a view (such as Conant’s, Diamond’s, and Ferreira’s) that rejects the intelligibility of the concept of *deep* nonsense, because what is grasped on our account is a *way of being*, not some cognitively meaningful but logically nonsensical proposition. Thus, all propositions that claim to elucidate this actuality are, as possibilities, nonsensical. But within this sphere of possibility there still can be a distinction made regarding kinds of nonsense. That is, not every piece of jibberish is equal to appropriately used philosophy. It is important to note that, in at least Kierkegaard’s case, the paradox or the absurd is not that which can be dissolved into a logical contradiction: “The *absurd*, the *paradox*, is composed in such a way that reason has no power at all to dissolve it in nonsense and prove that it is nonsense; no, it is . . . a compounded riddle about which reason must say: I cannot solve it, it cannot be understood, but it does not follow that it is nonsense”.⁹⁹

The significant thing here, is that both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein view philosophical efforts, which intrinsically undermine themselves, as nonetheless serving as “elucidations”, and as achieving “a higher understanding”. That is, philosophical ruminations contribute to an overall vision of how things *are*. Wittgenstein believed philosophy could not account for the ethical, “that centre of

Press, 1993), 195-224. See also Jaimie Ferreira’s discussion of this issue in, “The Point Outside the World”, *passim*.

⁹⁹ *JP* I 7/*Pap.* X² A 354. Climacus also states in *Postscript*: “Therefore [the Christian] cannot believe *nonsense* against the understanding . . . because the understanding will penetratingly perceive that it is nonsense *and hinder him from believing it*, but he uses the understanding so much that *through it he becomes aware of the incomprehensible*, and now, believing, he relates himself to it against the understanding” *KW* XII.1 568/*SV* X 235; my emphasis. Cf. *KW* VII 108-09/*SV* VI 97; and *KW* XII.1 421/*SV* X 110-11.

the world, which we call the I, and which is the bearer of ethics”.¹⁰⁰ For Kierkegaard, that which language and philosophy cannot encapsulate is *actuality*—the sphere of paradox, which is also the realm of ethics and the self. Haufniensis tells us in *Concept of Anxiety* that in dealing with actuality, “the whole interest of subjectivity steps forth, and now metaphysics runs aground”.¹⁰¹ In Chapter Two we discovered that this is precisely why Descartes’s *cogito* is so mistaken. In order for the self to operate as the rational foundation of epistemology it must be a pure, rational entity. In order for Descartes’s epistemological program to succeed the self must be collapsed into thought and thereby part of the propositional scheme. Kierkegaard rejects this picture. For Kierkegaard, as pure actuality, subjectivity draws the limit for the world of reflection. Ethics, *the ethical*, is what gives philosophy its “world” for contemplation, it is the point outside the world and thus is not a part of the world of reflection but stands underneath it as its presupposition.¹⁰²

Philosophy or philosophical activity, especially metaphysics, cannot become a surrogate subjectivity. Propositions and thinking cannot reveal (or be) the self that is actual. “The continued striving”, writes Climacus, “is the expression of the existing subjects’ ethical life-view. The continued striving must therefore not be understood metaphysically, but neither is there any individual who exists metaphysically”.¹⁰³ It is almost as if Kierkegaard, and not Wittgenstein, wrote in *Tractatus* that, “What

¹⁰⁰ Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-1916*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, eds. G.H. von Wright and G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961), 80. See Paul L. Holmer, “Wittgenstein and the Self”, in *Essays on Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein: On Understanding the Self*, eds. Richard H. Bell and Ronald E. Hustwit (Wooster, OH: The College of Wooster Press, 1978), 10-31, for an excellent discussion of this theme in Wittgenstein.

¹⁰¹ KW VIII 18n/SV VI 116n.

¹⁰² Recall the passage quoted from Climacus in Chapter Two regarding the Cartesian *cogito*: “The indifference is forgotten in the Cartesian *cogito—ergo sum* . . . I think, ergo I think; whether I am or its (in the sense of actuality, where *I* means a single existing human being and *it* means a single definite something) is infinitely unimportant [for Descartes]. That what I am *is* in the sense of thinking does not, of course, need any demonstration, not does it need to be demonstrated by any conclusion, since it is indeed demonstrated. But *as soon as I want to make my thinking teleological in relation to something else, interest enters the game. As soon as it is there, the ethical is present and exempts me from further trouble with demonstrating my existence, and since it obliges me to exist, it prevents me from making an ethically deceptive and metaphysically unclear flourish of a conclusion*” KW XII.1 318-19/SV X 65-6; my italics, his bold.

¹⁰³ KW XII.1 121-22/SV IX 104.

brings the self into philosophy is the fact that ‘the world is my world’. The philosophical self [i.e., the Cartesian self] is the limit of the world—not part of it”.¹⁰⁴ Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard agree that the concept “I” has no logical or philosophical status—it is more an existential concern that escapes the bounds of reason.

To this end Frater Taciturnus argues in *Stages On Life’s Way* that, “The metaphysical is abstraction, and there is no human being who exists metaphysically. The metaphysical . . . does not exist [as such], for when it exists it does so in the esthetic, in the ethical, in the religious”.¹⁰⁵ Instead, the esthetic, ethical, and religious are cross-sections of actuality and cannot be thought; they are lived. Paul Holmer comments that these sorts of limits on philosophy may seem to place “ethics, transcendental matters generally, the foundations of logic, the meaning of life, and much else of first importance into a kind of limbo . . . such that if we cannot have these things as propositions we cannot seemingly have them at all”.¹⁰⁶ However, Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein both assume that we do have first-hand access to subjectivity (and all these other things), only not *via* propositions or thought (philosophy). The point is (for Kierkegaard at least) that human thinking cannot fashion for itself a metaphysical world immanent within itself, and achieve what Calvin Schrag terms a “transcendence-within-immanence”.¹⁰⁷ When this is attempted the whole interest of subjectivity steps forward and metaphysics runs aground. Subjectivity is *transcendent*; its situation in language outstrips speculative thought and its being or *actuality* is constituted in its historical action as the κίνησις or flux of its temporal existence [*Tilværelse*]—that which cannot be thought. For Kierkegaard, Adi Shmüelli notes, “One does not see transcendent existence one believes in it. . . . Transcendent existence is hidden behind every phenomenon, which

¹⁰⁴ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 5.641.

¹⁰⁵ KW XI 476/SV VIII 266

¹⁰⁶ Holmer, “Wittgenstein and the Self”, 12.

¹⁰⁷ Calvin O. Schrag, *The Self After Postmodernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 110ff.

is its veil”.¹⁰⁸ Therefore attempts to circumscribe it within the bounds of theoretical reason alone constitutes a type of philosophical and spiritual illness. The philosophical therapy Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein both recommend and perform is designed to show us that these things are available to us all and to help get a clearer picture of ourselves—i.e., *our* world. This is for Kierkegaard, of course, only the first stage of a thorough remedy, a sort of clearing ground for proper *pathos*.

Climacus and Grammar?

C. Stephen Evans objects to an anti-metaphysical reading of Climacus. He argues that Climacus’s philosophical discussions in *Fragments* often have a “robustly metaphysical character”, which causes, “Some commentators . . . [who] have tried to interpret Climacus as giving us bits of linguistic analysis . . . providing us with ‘grammatical reminders’ about the use of our concepts . . . [to be] somewhat embarrassed”.¹⁰⁹ On the contrary, Evans finds there to be an obvious metaphysics at work in *Fragments*, as in, for example, when Climacus claims: “All coming into existence occurs through freedom, not by way of necessity. Nothing coming into existence comes into existence by virtue of ground, but everything by a cause. Every cause ends in a freely acting cause”.¹¹⁰ Evans is specifically targeting H.A. Nielsen who argues that despite the “fact-like” appearance of Climacus’s statements regarding possibility and necessity, this guise is “unfortunately obscuring” Climacus’s real objective of simply providing a grammar for our discourse about these things.¹¹¹ According to Nielsen, these deceptive “fact-like” statements need to be “decompressed” so that their grammatical function may be clearly seen.¹¹²

In rebuttal to Nielsen, Evans argues that it is, “a mistake to think that these points simply reflect the way we talk, as if they would no longer hold if we talked

¹⁰⁸ Adi Shmüelli, *Kierkegaard and Consciousness*, trans. Naomi Handelmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 56.

¹⁰⁹ Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 121.

¹¹⁰ KW VII 75/SV VI 69; and Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 122-3.

¹¹¹ H.A. Nielsen, *Where the Passion Is: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (Tallahassee: Florida State University, 1983), 129-133; Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 121.

¹¹² Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 121.

some other way”.¹¹³ Climacus’s apparent metaphysical talk just is straightforwardly that—statements that indicate how things really are. Climacus is not, Evans contends, simply trying to talk about (in this case) possibility and necessity as features of our language. The substance of Evans’s argument is that, “Climacus is focusing on what logicians call *de re* necessity, the necessity of things themselves, rather than *de dicto* necessity, the necessity of propositions or statements. The nature of things is reflected in our statements; our statements do not dictate how things must be”.¹¹⁴ At the end of the day, for Evans Climacus is “closer in sensibility to a Greek or medieval philosopher here than to contemporary Wittgensteinians”.¹¹⁵

Regardless of their relevance for Nielsen’s understanding of conceptual grammar and arguments concerning Climacus’s position, Evans’s remarks betray that he has not considered all that someone (Wittgensteinian or Kierkegaardian) might mean when they say that philosophy is grammatical. We must be careful not to overextend the Wittgenstein-Kierkegaard connection, but the two thinkers seem to have some deep connections. By his last comment Evans clearly means to be addressing all Wittgensteinian readers of Kierkegaard, yet he has not apparently considered the kind of Wittgensteinian-Kierkegaardian reading envisioned here.

To begin with, Evans does not seem to grasp the relevance of depth grammar and how it is that forms of life function as the ground for our language and concepts. The kind of grammatical inquiry of which Wittgenstein spoke, and with which I am linking with Kierkegaard, is not, it will be recalled, a *surface* grammar that examines only the lexical-syntactical rules governing the role and function of the linguistic expressions which shape our discourse. This appears to be the understanding Evans has of philosophical grammar. However, Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard (on our reading) are concerned with *depth* grammar, a grammar of concepts. This sort of grammar acquires its depth because of the rich notion of concepts it rings with it. Concepts are the (only) way reality gives itself to us cognitively. A conceptual

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

grammar in our sense, then, forms the rules of conceptual and linguistic engagement with reality as they are elicited from the “facts of nature” within the forms of life specific to some language-game. The point of saying that philosophy is grammar is not (just) to prescribe a method, but more importantly to describe what is in fact going on in all of our philosophical analyses.

Thus Evans’s truism regarding our speech reflecting the nature of things, and not the converse, completely misses the point. Depth grammar is concerned with clarifying our use of the concepts (and language) given to us from our praxial engagements with “reality”. Evans correctly attributes to this position a denial that our statements straight-forwardly reflect the nature of things. However, instead of the belief that our statements dictate how things must be, it is more appropriate to say that on the depth grammar view if we were engaged in different ways with things, we would speak differently about them. The realist assumption, in so far as that means taking there to be a mind-independent reality to which our words refer, has already been granted—only Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard will emphasize that there is no place outside of language we can find from which to compare our relationship to the world expressed by our language.¹¹⁶ For Climacus (and Kierkegaard), then, language, while never communicating reality *qua* actuality, nevertheless contains metaphysical commitments—that we cannot (and need not) completely rationally justify. Frater Taciturnus explains that, “The metaphysical, the ontological, is [*er*] but does not exist [*er ikke til*] . . . and when it is, it is the abstraction from, the *prius* [something prior] to [existence]”.¹¹⁷ Kierkegaard believes that our language and attending truth-claims reveal our “metaphysical competences” because of the implicit involvement of our language with “our common sense practices” and the general way we live.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ This is not naive or direct realism. See Fergus Kerr’s extremely good discussion of this subject in Wittgenstein’s thought, in “Assurances of Realism”, *Theology After Wittgenstein*, 121-141.

¹¹⁷ *KW XI 476/SV VIII 266*.

¹¹⁸ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Trials of Truth: Mission, Martyrdom, and the Epistemology of the Cross” (in press).

Secondly, Evans also seems oblivious to the critique of reason and metaphysics that we have described as motivating both Kierkegaard's and the Wittgensteinian grammatical approach to philosophy. Earlier we quoted Wittgenstein saying that, "The essential thing about metaphysics is that the difference between a factual and a conceptual investigation is not clear to it. A metaphysical question is always in appearance a factual one, although the problem is conceptual".¹¹⁹ Taken together with his statements regarding the situatedness of reason within language, Kierkegaard makes an almost identical point when he declares: "A remarkable transition occurs when one begins to study the grammar of the indicative and the subjunctive, because here for the first time one becomes conscious that everything depends upon how something is thought, consequently how thinking in its absoluteness supercedes an apparent reality [*Realitet*]"¹²⁰ He also declares that, "of the hackneyed proposition *cogito ergo sum* [one thing] holds true: it is the subjunctive's life principle (therefore one could represent the whole of modern philosophy in a theory about the indicative and the subjunctive; it is indeed purely subjunctive)".¹²¹ In these statements Kierkegaard is pointing to a critical forgetfulness that plagues metaphysical philosophy: it keeps thinking it has spoken about being *qua* being (in the indicative mood), when in fact it has only spoken about being *qua* thought, an "apparent reality" (in the subjunctive mood). Indeed, Climacus frames his entire "thought-project" of *Fragments* by preceding it with Latin term "*Propositio*" which means "proposal" or "hyposthesis".¹²² When one reads this in conjunction with Climacus's statements in *Fragments* regarding metaphysics and being noted earlier (e.g., "What is lacking here is a distinction between *factual* being [being *qua* being] and *ideal* being [being *qua* thought] . . . as soon as I speak ideally about being, I am no longer speaking about essence"), it is difficult to understand Climacus to be attempting what he has previously defined as

¹¹⁹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophy of Psychology*, vol. 1, 949.

¹²⁰ *JP* III 2309/*Pap.* II A 155. This journal entry date is in 1837, seven years before Kierkegaard wrote *Fragments* in 1844.

¹²¹ *JP* III, 2313/*Pap.* II A 159.

impossible. Kierkegaard appears to be very sceptical about the ability of philosophy to speak in the indicative, to articulate a metaphysics telling us about how things *really* are.

Unfortunately Evans does not take the time to coordinate his metaphysical reading of Climacus's discussion of possibility and necessity in *Fragments* with the critique of metaphysics occurring earlier in the book. However, if we take the time to examine Climacus's argument with Aristotle over the account of possibility and necessity it appears to be an example of the kind of philosophical grammar we have attributed to Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein. No doubt there are metaphysical commitments involved in Climacus's argument, but his primary issue with Aristotle concerns the logic of concepts (as Evans's ensuing discussion bears testimony). Climacus wants to argue that it is a mis-application of the concept of necessity to say (as Aristotle wanted) that what has come into existence (the historical) *must* exist; that once something exists it *necessarily* exists. Instead, Climacus argues, "Necessity stands all by itself. Nothing whatever comes into existence by way of necessity, no more than necessity comes into existence or anything coming into existence becomes the necessary. . . . The actual is no more necessary than the possible, for the necessary is absolutely different from both. . . . Aristotle's . . . mistake is to begin with the thesis that everything necessary is possible".¹²³

There is nothing embarrassing for a Wittgensteinian (or a Kierkegaardian) here. Climacus is saying that Aristotle has violated the logic of the concept of "necessary" and that this has led to a metaphysical confusion. When we say that something exists *necessarily*, Climacus points out, logically we must mean that it cannot *not*-exist, and therefore this thing can admit no changes in its state.¹²⁴ Climacus then goes on to clarify how the concepts of necessity and possibility must be used in relation to existence—what he calls "coming into being". In short, Climacus argues that to speak of something as necessary is to admit that we cannot

¹²² Hongs's editorial note claims that the heading "*Propositio*" indicates the " 'if/then' form of the entire work", *KW* VII 276 n.1.

¹²³ *KW* VII 74-75/*SV* VI 69.

also predicate of that thing that it is possible (has come into being)—that would be contradictory (“the necessary *is*”) and a conflation of the concept of necessity into that of possibility. It is simple logic—the kind with which Wittgenstein’s notebooks are rife. The factual nature of the language is entirely in keeping with Climacus’s goal of telling us how speak about things that exist—“metaphysical questions are always in appearance factual ones”. Climacus is addressing the same issues as metaphysics but he never mistakes his most poignant “metaphysical” insights to speak of being *qua* being.

¹²⁴ See our discussion of Climacus’s logic on this point in Chapter Two.

Conclusion to Chapter Three

Chapter Two articulated Kierkegaard's subjectivity principle against the backdrop of its response to Hegel and the metaphysical-epistemological project of modern philosophy. This chapter began with Kierkegaard's call for a radical shift in how epistemological (and metaphysical) issues are approached. Kierkegaard's insistence that, "First theory, then life", and that, "All philosophising is a reflection on what is already given in consciousness", signifies a profound departure from the metaphysical-epistemological approach to belief, epistemology, and subjectivity. In a move that anticipates (but is not reducible to) Wittgenstein's linguistic analysis Kierkegaard demonstrates that the modern (Hegelian) attempt at a "pure and contextless theory"¹²⁵ was the root source of conceptual impotence and confusion. Kierkegaard "naturalises" our philosophical reflection and recommends a grammar of concepts in the "subjunctive mood" rather than a metaphysical inquiry in an illusory "indicative mood".

Chapter Three, then, marked a shift away from the language of metaphysics. For Kierkegaard, life is constantly *in Fluss*, and subsequently life (or any of its constituent parts) cannot be metaphysically picked, dried, and shrink-wrapped into theoretically manageable bite-sized pieces. Philosophy trades in the realm concepts or conceptual essences. Its sphere of operations is limited to the sphere of ideality and therefore philosophies most penetrating insights cannot yield metaphysical certainty. The appropriate way of employing philosophical thinking is thus in a conceptual grammar that focuses on the nature of our concepts and how they are to be consistently employed. This post-metaphysical method of analysis, as we have seen, produces a very different picture of the nature of belief and subjectivity from the rest of modernity. In Chapter Four, the next chapter, we turn to the subjectivity principle itself and examine how Climacus develops his concept of subjectivity in relation to the concept of truth.

¹²⁵ Schrag, *The Resources of Rationality*, 58.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE TRUTH OF SUBJECTIVITY

The truth is a snare: you cannot get it without being caught yourself; you cannot get the truth by catching it yourself but only by its catching you.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*

In Chapter Three we established that Kierkegaard approaches philosophical questions naturalistically and grammatically and not in the *a priori* (Cartesian) manner of speculative metaphysics. We argued that Kierkegaard recommends that investigations into metaphysical matters, into what *is*, should be approached as a conceptual grammar. As we saw in Chapter Two, this involves a rejection of the Hegelian-Enlightenment project and its attempt to ground beliefs in an ahistorical, translucently self-apprehending subject. In spite of his naturalistic method Kierkegaard does not want to eradicate human subjectivity from issues of doxastic formation and regulation. Instead Kierkegaard wants to reassess human subjectivity and affirm its essential role in human doxastic affairs—only in its proper place. This requires that the human subject who thinks and believes must be decentered from its rational Cartesian throne as the duly (self)centered ground of all (infallibly) known, true belief.

In this context Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus comes to argue that subjectivity is truth and fashions the subjectivity principle. In Climacus's detailed statement of this principle in *Postscript* we can see the themes of human subjectivity (subjectivity/objectivity, inwardness), anti-Cartesianism (objective uncertainty, risk), and epistemology (truth, *Tro*) at work:

When subjectivity is truth, the definition of truth must also contain the expression of the antithesis of objectivity . . . and this expression will at the same time indicate the resilience of inwardness. Here is such a definition of truth: *An objective uncertainty, held fast through an appropriation with the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth there is for an existing person.* . . . the definition of truth stated above is a paraphrasing of faith [*Tro*]. Without risk, no faith. Faith is the contradiction between the infinite passion of inwardness and objective uncertainty.¹

¹ KW XII.1 203-04/SV IX 169; his emphasis.

As noted in Chapter One, Kierkegaard indicates in his *Journals and Papers* that this “subjectivity principle” is meant as an epistemologically normative principle:

In all the usual talk that Johannes Climacus is mere subjectivity, etc. [i.e., an epistemological sceptic and relativist], it has been completely overlooked that in addition to all his other concretions he points out in one of the last sections [of *Postscript*] the remarkable thing is that *there is a How with the characteristic that when scrupulously rendered the What is also given*, that this is the How of “faith”. *Right here, at its very maximum, inwardness is shown to be objectivity*. And this, then, is a turning of the *subjectivity-principle*, which, as far as I know has never been carried through or accomplished in this way.²

It is obvious that Kierkegaard understood Climacus to erase the Cartesian and modern dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity that posits an epistemological chasm between the thinking self and the objects of its thoughts. Kierkegaard reconceives belief in such a way that it resolved epistemological tensions.

This chapter contends that the subjectivity principle, the thesis that “truth is subjectivity”, provides us with a critical principle which serves as the normative basis for a Kierkegaardian epistemology. In Chapter Two we also argued that Kierkegaard’s stress on subjectivity came as a response to the objectifying metaphysical tendencies of modern philosophy, and in Chapter Three we saw how this response involved a completely new anti-metaphysical approach to philosophy. In Chapter Four we will show that Climacus, in a direct frontal attack on modern epistemology, formulates his subjectivity principle in two stages and demonstrates the poverty of the Enlightenment approach to the epistemic issue of truth. The critique of epistemology begins in *Fragments*, where Climacus configures an existential approach to epistemology while considering the fundamental issue of the Plato’s Socratic dialogues, *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Meno*, and *Euthydemus*: “Can the truth be learned?”³ The possibility of learning truth is put forward as the seminal issue of the Climacean thought-project carried out in *Fragments* and entails that epistemic issues be conceived in theological terms. In *Postscript* Climacus’s second move in establishing the subjectivity principle is concerned with stipulating the

² *JP IV 4550/Pap. X² A 301*; my emphasis.

³ *KW VII 9/SV VI 15*.

subjectivity as the formal condition for the attainment of the existential *conditio sine qua non* of epistemology addressed in *Fragments* as *Salighed*, or eternal happiness. The result is a discussion of truth and subjectivity which outlines a normative principle.

Truth in Fragments

Our contention is that the ironical-comical thought experiment of *Fragments* is written by Johannes Climacus as Kierkegaard's attempt to parody Hegelian epistemology and shift the orientation to epistemological issues away from the Hegelian-Enlightenment emphasis on sheer objectivity, infallibility, systematic completeness, etc. To be sure, *Fragments* is specifically interested in the truth of *Christianity* and whether *its* truth may be known or realized in/as history; but our point is that for Climacus this too is an epistemic issue (in addition to its theological import). It further serves to illustrate the errors of Hegelian-Enlightenment epistemology, as well as to illuminate the nature of doxastic regulation in general.

Evans notes that it is clear from the title *Fragments* that with it Kierkegaard intends to lampoon Hegel.⁴ In the original Danish the title reads: *Philosophiske Smuler eller En Smuler Philosophi*, and is commonly rendered in English as *Philosophical Fragments*, or *A Fragment of Philosophy*. The anti-Hegelian ring to the title emanates from the use of *Smuler* which pokes fun at systematic philosophy, claiming to be only a little "bit", or a "scrap", of philosophy. The very opening line of the Preface continues the fun at Hegel's expense when Climacus states that, "What is offered here is only a *pamphlet* . . . without any claim to being a part of the scientific-scholarly endeavor in which one acquires legitimacy".⁵ Hegelian satire continues as the main theme of the Preface and Climacus concludes it by saying that,

⁴ C. Stephen Evans, *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (Bloomington: University of Indianapolis Press, 1992), 18-19.

⁵ KW VII 5/SV VI 9; my emphasis.

unlike those who value objectivity as the highest philosophical virtue, every time he gives his opinion on a philosophical quandary he stakes his entire life.⁶

Climacus's intention to forge an existential corrective to Enlightenment epistemology is also evident from the outset of *Fragments*, and is present in the epigraph to *Fragments* which asks, "Can a historical point of departure be given for an eternal consciousness; how can such a point of departure be of more than historical interest; can an eternal happiness be built on historical knowledge?"⁷ There are not three separate questions here; rather, these three questions weave together to perform one interrogative. The careful phrasing of this question indicates that in this work Kierkegaard is attempting to have his pseudonym resituate the "world-historical" epistemological program of Hegel's "system", that claimed to speak from the presuppositionless vantage point of absolute objectivity and thereby account for "world-history" (including Christianity) and eternal consciousness—or what in more Hegelian terms would be called the movement of Absolute Spirit (*Geist*). Climacus is redressing the Hegelian-Enlightenment depiction of the individual's relation to Christianity as one that is purely cognitive and objective (a matter of propositional knowledge). The rhetorical force of the epigraph serves to confront the reader with what is for Climacus the essential epistemological issue: one's individual subjectivity and its relation to the truth (Christianity). With this epigraphic question Climacus reveals that there is one thing left out of Hegelian systematic metaphysical-epistemology—the individual person's interests, and *a fortiori* the individual person her/himself.⁸ Thus Climacus demonstrates early in *Fragments* that he means to recommend an alternative to the epistemic issues broached in the epigraph.

Beyond Recollection

⁶ KW VII 7-8/SV VI 11.

⁷ KW VII 1/SV VI 7.

⁸ Cf. Climacus's repeated claim in *Postscript* that in all his systematising Hegel has forgotten to include himself. See, for example, KW XII.1 109-125/SV IX 93-106.

Climacus centers his entire thought-project of *Fragments* around the issue of the possibility of learning the truth: “Can the truth be learned? With this question we shall begin”.⁹ It is granted by Climacus that if human existence is not temporally structured there is neither need nor possibility of learning. The possibility of learning arises for humans only within the flux of time and, Climacus notes, this presents a stubborn set of difficulties. The complications of human temporal existence (as coming-into-being, *Tilblivelse*) are a factor in our pedagogical development because of the misrelation between the nature of human cognisance as temporally situated and the truth as “eternal”—in the sense that it does not change from one context to another. This is something that the Platonic Socrates¹⁰ realised which led him to the central problem of *Meno*, between virtue (“defined as insight”)¹¹ and knowledge. Climacus sets the difficulty this way:

Insofar as the truth is to be learned, it of course must be assumed not to be—consequently, because it is to be learned, it is to be sought. . . . [however] a person cannot possibly seek what he knows, and, just as impossibly, he cannot seek what he does not know, for what he knows he cannot seek, since he knows it, and what he does not know he cannot seek, because, after all, he does not even know what he is supposed to seek.¹²

The problem is obvious. Humans need not seek for a truth if they are already in possession of it, but it is equally difficult for humans if they do not possess this truth. If we lack *any* truth (or true beliefs) regarding a certain thing *x*, we are without the condition for the possibility of recognising our noetic paucity with respect to *x*—it is precisely this thing (true beliefs with respect to *x*) we must have to know we are without it. To understand this argument, assume that Susy possesses no true beliefs at all about the universe—including her beliefs about the truth and falsity of her beliefs about the universe. In this case it is impossible for Susy to discover that

⁹ *KW VII 9/SV VI 15*.

¹⁰ Climacus does not address the issue of whether the Socrates in *Meno* (or the other Platonic dialogues) is the “historical” Socrates, or simply a pseudonym for Plato. He does seem to assume that there is a unified point of view expressed by Socrates throughout Plato’s dialogues and that it is possible to discern Socrates “real” voice, but it is not his primary concern to sort this out from Plato’s personal views. The issue of whose voice is speaking in the Platonic Socrates is largely irrelevant to our task and we will not attempt to answer this question.

¹¹ *KW VII 9/SV VI 15*.

¹² *KW VII 9/SV VI 11*.

she lacks these mundane truths, or even that she should investigate them, as she has no conception of her doxastic situation with respect to the universe.

There are two parts to the corresponding dilemma Plato constructs in *Meno*. First, the learner's temporal quandary must be resolved. That is, the logical difficulty of coming to know something in time-space must be reconciled with the unchanging (eternal) nature of truth. This is the explicit problem of Socrates in *Meno*: seeking for truth implies its lack, and therefore its contingent relationship to the knower; but possessing truth, because it is "eternal", implies its necessary existence within the knower. What is needed to solve this part of the problem is a reconciliation of the temporal existence of humans with human cognition of an eternal truth. But the first predicament carries with it the second, implicit, problem as well, regarding the nature or ontological position of the learner (i.e., humans). The implication of the first problem is that humans are ontologically situated so that the first dilemma arises. That is, before we can resolve the first tension we must reconcile (or assume a position with respect to) the nature of human persons so that the tension of their being (ontologically) in a position in which they can be without the truth is compatible with the possibility (ontologically) of their coming to know the truth—or admitting a change in their state of being. The epistemological quandary of *Meno* speaks not only of the *logical* problem of time and cognition, but also the *ontological* problem of human beings who inhabit time-space, yet know unchanging (eternal) truth.

Socrates introduces the Platonic doctrine of *anamnesis*, or recollection, as a way of resolving the tensions in *Meno*. Climacus explains: "Socrates thinks through the difficulty by means [of the principle] that all learning and seeking are but recollecting. Thus the ignorant person merely needs to be reminded in order, *by himself*, to call to mind what he knows. The truth was not introduced to him but was in him".¹³ Ultimately the Socratic or Platonic answer, then, is to deny the reality of

¹³ KW VII 9/SV VI 15-16; my emphasis. Regarding the acquisition of truth, Socrates argument in 79 d - 80 b of *Meno* runs as follows:

the perceived state of human ignorance (although it remains “real” enough for us to have to need “teachers” like Socrates). That is, human ignorance is not an essential ontological feature of human nature, it is an accidental feature; ignorance is more like forgetfulness. The real problem for Socrates is that we don’t realise, or “remember”, the truths we already possess. The Socratic answer to the first part of the dilemma, then, is to circumvent the problem of the temporal cognition of eternal truths by arguing that humans acquired these truths in a prior, eternal state of existence. Thus, there is no need to explain how it is that we apprehend eternal truths in time because strictly speaking we do not do so. Instead, in our apprehension of truths we are actually doing so from an eternal state.

But with his answer to the temporal, logical problem Socrates has assumed a position regarding the second dimension of the problem as well. As Climacus keenly notes, the concept of recollection “becomes”, for Socrates, “a demonstration for the immortality of the soul—retrogressively, please note—or a demonstration of the pre-existence of the soul”.¹⁴ Socrates assumes then, that humans are ontologically situated so that eternal truths are available to them and are, in fact, already in their possession: the ignorant person remembers these truths “by himself”. Socrates’ postulates that humans are eternal, immortal beings and possess within themselves, as a constituent feature of their beings, the condition for the

“S: Must he not either have at some time acquired the knowledge he now possesses, or else always possessed it? —Yes.

S: If he always had it, he would have always known. If he acquired it, he cannot have done so in his present life. Or has someone taught him . . . ?

M: But I know that no one has taught him.

S: Yet he has the right opinions doesn’t he?

M: That seems indisputable, Socrates.

S: If he has not acquired them in his present life, is it not clear that he had them, and had learned them at some other time?—it seems so.

S: Then that was the time when he was not a human being?—Yes.

S: If then, during the time he exists and is not a human being he will have true opinions which, when stirred by questioning, become knowledge, will not his soul have learned during that time? For it is clear that during all the time he exists, either as man or as not.—So it seems.

S: Then if the truth about reality is always in our soul, the soul would be immortal so that you should always confidently try to seek out and recollect what you do not know at present—that is, what you do not recollect?

M: Somehow, Socrates, what you say is right”. See Plato, “Meno”, in *Classics of Western Philosophy*, ed. Steven M. Cahn (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1977), 17.

¹⁴ KW VII 10/SV VI 16.

possibility of knowing the truth. Humans, who do in fact know some truths, can do so because they are fashioned in accordance to the very nature of truth itself. For Socrates humans are ontologically structured so that they are *in* the truth, in the sense that humans intrinsically possess (all other things being equal) the ability to know the truth. Plato, Socrates, and Climacus all recognise that the epistemological issue of learning truth has an ontological dimension pertaining to the nature of the cognising human relative to the noema of her/his cognition.¹⁵

Climacus acknowledges the merits of Socrates' position but quickly moves on to discuss why recollection will not do as an answer to the question, "Can the truth be learned?" Climacus notes that "the profundity of Socratic thinking" is his "thoroughgoing humanity" that treats all persons, regardless of position or intellect, equally as worthy of his attention and maieutic art.¹⁶ Climacus, however, immediately tempers his praise, arguing that,

even though this enthusiasm is beautiful [i.e., the Socratic desire to be a maieuticist—an occasion for recollection], even though I wish for myself and for everyone this *ευχαταφορια εις παθος* [disposition to passion] . . . *this enthusiasm . . . is still but an illusion, indeed, a muddiness of mind in which earthly distinction ferments . . .* Neither can the fact that the teaching of Socrates or of Prodicus was this or that can have anything but historical interest for me, because the truth in which I rest was in me and emerged from me. . . . *My relationship to Socrates and Prodicus cannot concern me with regard to my eternal happiness, because this is given to me retrogressively in the possession of the truth that I had from the beginning without knowing it. . . . The temporal point of departure is a nothing*, because in the same moment I discover that I have known the truth from eternity without knowing it, in the same instant that moment is hidden in the eternal, assimilated into to it in such a way that I, so to speak, still cannot find it because there is no Here and no There, but only an *ubique et nusquam* [everywhere and nowhere].¹⁷

In this passage Climacus summarises his reasons for dismissing the Socratic option of recollection. The bottom line is that the Socratic alternative cannot answer the question, "Can the truth be learned?" in the form Climacus has phrased it. Climacus has given the question of Plato's *Meno* a further existential, religious twist so that it cannot become simply a matter of objective disinterest to the individual

¹⁵ In other words, Socrates, Plato, and Climacus recognise the truth of Alvin Plantinga's observation that, "the nose of the ontological camel pokes into the epistemological tent; for what you take to be . . . [directly accessible to human cognition] will depend, in part, upon what sort of creatures you think humans are". Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 183n.9.

¹⁶ *KW VII 12/SV VI 16-17.*

¹⁷ *KW VII 12/SV VI 17.*

questioner, as the Socratic question had become for Plato, and Cartesian philosophy with its modern progeny. Climacus's version logically extends the question so that its fundamental concern with the individual's ontological state, one's *Salighed*, is kept in the forefront.

Our reading is at odds with C. Stephen Evans's claim that Climacus is not really concerned with demonstrating the truth of his position, or with trying to demonstrate why his position is superior to that of Socrates.¹⁸ Climacus is simply interested in constructing an alternative to the Socratic position. Evans seems to believe that Climacus is a little more cavalier in his dismissal of the Socratic view than our portrait of him allows. Evans is surely correct that Climacus spends little time elaborating on his reasons for moving beyond Socrates. And once he does state his reason for rejecting the Socratic position it is true that Climacus repeatedly takes it for granted that the need to move beyond Socrates is self-evident, and justifies his innovations on or criticisms of a given view simply on the basis of it being either beyond the Socratic or merely Socratic. However, this is only because Climacus believes that the necessary self-interest, *Salighed*, that inheres in the question, "Can truth be learned", has not been accounted for properly by remaining with Socrates. Furthermore, Climacus has an interest in the truth in the form of *Salighed*. For Climacus to argue that his concept of eternal blessedness does and cannot obtain on a particular view is for him to argue that that view is not true, and *vice versa*.

Both the Platonic and the Climacean form of the question link one's being able to learn the truth with one's ability to *be in* the truth. Socrates perceives the crux of the issue of learning the truth to be whether humans possess the condition to know truth; that is, whether existing humans are ontologically conditioned so as to capacitate andprehend eternal truth. In order to facilitate this demand Socrates posits

¹⁸ Evans states: "[Climacus] sets himself the philosophical task of trying to construct an alternative to the Socratic view. . . . He does not (with a few notable exceptions . . .) concern himself with the truth of this alternative, but merely attempts to see if there *is* any such alternative. . . . [his] underlying procedure is simply to ask, 'Is this view genuinely different from the Socratic view?' Thus, Climacus will often reject a possibility by arguing that accepting such a view would 'return us to Socrates,' and just as frequently, he will add a wrinkle to his 'thought-

that there is no new knowledge being acquired in a given instance of “learning”, and that there is no qualitative change in the learner taking place. The putative “acquisition” of knowledge is merely a matter of recollecting truths already in the learner’s possession. Learning is thus a matter of acquiring the truth by drawing on one’s own inner resources. In this sense, the learner has “eternal” truth within her/him and is already *in truth*. Socrates’ one creed, therefore, is “Know Thyself”, and his posture as a “teacher” is maieutic and one of ignorance.¹⁹ Kierkegaard argues in his dissertation that, “for Socrates this self-knowledge was not so copious; it actually contained nothing more than the separating, the singling out what later [in speculative philosophy] became the object of knowledge”.²⁰

Kierkegaard interprets the Socratic exhortation to self-knowledge as an injunction to, “separate yourself from the other”, which in turn is an entirely “negative result”.²¹ Climacus operates with the same understanding of Socrates on this point. Thus, the Socratic “know yourself” is “entirely congruous with the ignorance previously prescribed. The reason he could continue to insist upon this negative point is . . . because his life task and interest were to affirm it—not speculatively, for then he would have had to go further, but to affirm it practically”.²² So for Socrates, the question of learning the truth is equivalent to the existential question of *being* in the truth—it has both *ontological* and *ethical* dimensions.

Taken in its most broad and basic way, the subject matter of ethics is, for Kierkegaard, subjectivity—the sphere in which humans *are*, or exist, and act and can be held accountable for those actions. That is, the subject matter of ethics is the same as that of ontology—the *actual* or actuality itself—only its goal is not to describe what actuality is, but to prescribe how it should be. For this reason Kierkegaard

project’ by merely claiming that the wrinkle makes his constructed view genuinely different from the Socratic perspective”. Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 14.

¹⁹ Plato, “Phaedrus”, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 230 a.

²⁰ KW II 177/SV I 207.

²¹ KW II 177/SV I 207.

²² KW II 178/SV I 207.

accuses Hegel of having no ethics. Hegel (so Kierkegaard inveighs) constructed his system *sub specie aeternis* and conceived of the human subject as an abstract (and therefore a non-actual, *possible*) point. The ethical, as pertaining to the actual, the existence of humans as their historical (time-space) actions or movements as a coming-to-be (*Tilblivelse*), cannot arise for any person who is an abstract Hegelian subject, because this subject is “pure thinking” and does not act *sensu eminenti* [in the strict sense].²³ In its essence, then, ethics is the subjective sphere of *interest*, and relates to the free movement or transition of human agents (concrete, subjective *I*'s) who effect and are effected in possibles becoming actual. Ethics is not (in this most basic way) about the *science* of morality, and may even be said to be overlapping with theological concerns. Climacus says, “But as soon as I begin to want to make my thinking teleological in relation to something else, interest enters the game. As soon as it is there, the ethical is present”.²⁴ In *Repetition* Constantin Constantius links the historical (time-space) transition of possibility to actuality and interest to ethics, arguing that,

Repetition [as a self-conscious movement of freedom from possibility to actuality] is the new category that will be discovered. . . . repetition properly is what has mistakenly been called mediation. . . . There is no explanation for how mediation takes place . . . [however] when one says that life is a repetition, one says: actuality, which has been, now comes into existence. . . . repetition is the *interest* [*Interesse*] of metaphysics, and also the interest on which metaphysics comes to grief; repetition is the watchword [*Løsnet*] in every ethical view”.²⁵

Following Kierkegaard, Paul Ricoeur states: “I will therefore call ethics this movement of actualization, this odyssey of freedom across the world of works, this proof-texting of the being-able-to-do-something (*pouvoir-faire*) in effective actions which bear witness to it. Ethics is the movement between naked and blind belief in a primordial ‘I can,’ and the real history where I attest to this ‘I can’”.²⁶ Kierkegaard’s understanding of ethics, then, is virtually identical to Paul Ricoeur’s

²³ See *KW* XI 231/SV VII 50; *KW* XII.1 119, 296n-97, 310-11, 503n/SV IX 102, 248n, X 17, 180n. See also Chapter Six for more discussion of the concept of “the ethical” in Kierkegaard.

²⁴ *KW* XII.1 319/SV X 24 (his emphasis).

²⁵ *KW* VI 149/SV V 130 (his emphasis). See also *Concept of Anxiety* (*KW* VIII 18n/SV VI 116n) where Vigilius Haufniensis declares that when, “[i]n actuality, the whole interest of subjectivity steps forth, and now metaphysics runs aground”, ethics takes over from metaphysics.

and Kevin Vanhoozer's comments apply equally to Kierkegaard's view of ethics when he explains that, "Ethics for Ricoeur is the movement from bondage to freedom's actualization whereby we fulfill our desire to be. . . . Ricoeur understands ethics in a more fundamental sense, as referring to our most basic desire to be and our effort to exist. Philosophy 'after Kierkegaard'²⁷ is about that desire . . . for Ricoeur, 'ethics' is not the science of morality but rather the process of our desire and effort to be".²⁸

The domains of ethics and religion are both dealing with essentially the same supra-rational sphere of human existence or subjectivity, albeit from differing perspectives. For this reason Kierkegaard often speaks of the "ethical-religious".²⁹ This is not to completely collapse the two spheres, for Kierkegaard vigorously holds the ethical and the religious apart. However, as is clear from volume two of *Either/Or*, existing in the ethical or the religious requires that one embrace the categories of good and evil and choose to interpret one's life and determine one's course of action according to them.³⁰ Therefore, the commensurability of the ethical and religious modes of being lies in the fact that each entails a volitional, responsible human agent; from there they go on to treat the human agent differently.

The Socratic emphasis on self-knowledge was an emphasis on what Kierkegaard calls existence, and is thus caught up in ethical-religious (existential) issues. "The great merit of the Socratic", Climacus declares in *Postscript*, "was precisely to emphasize that the knower is an existing person and to exist is the essential".³¹ Ultimately though, Socrates remains bound to immanence and only imagines human existing-in-truth as a transcendence-within-immanence. He has no revelation beyond the limits of reason to guide him (the Delphic god only prescribes the limits of

²⁶ Ricoeur, "The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy", *Philosophy Today* 22 (1978), 177.

²⁷ See Ricoeur, "Philosophy After Kierkegaard", in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, eds. Jonathan Reé and Jane Chamberlain (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 9-25.

²⁸ Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: A Study in Hermeneutics and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 41, 126, 272 n.128.

²⁹ As in, for example, *KW* XIX 45-6, 94/SV XV 101, 146.

³⁰ *KW* IV 169/SV III 159.

³¹ *KW* XII.1 207/SV IX 173.

reason and does not transgress them), and thus does not envision an eternal blessedness in time, or a possession of the truth as a historical feature of human existence. Therefore the Platonic-Socratic injunction is for one to engage in the activity of rational introspection because the source of truth lies within us and is ready to hand.

We have noted that Climacus thinks that Socrates has done quite well for himself, but in the end finds recollection a poor answer to Meno's dilemma. The issue for Climacus lies precisely in the existential thrust of the Socratic understanding of learning the truth and here Climacus finds Socrates' answer to be inadequate. To frame the question so his point becomes obvious, Climacus brings into the discussion the very thing that Socrates, as we have seen, ruled out from the start³²—a temporal point of departure for an eternal consciousness or knowledge of the truth. The logic of Climacus's position seems to be as following:

1. If I am to come to "know" the truth, then it must be within time, for that is where I am situated; or to say it differently, human "salvation" must occur within time for that is where humans are.
2. If I am an historical being, then for me to know the truth essentially requires a *moment* of time in which I acquire it.
3. But, in the theory of recollection, "The temporal is a nothing", with no moment, and ultimately "there is no Here and no There, but only an *ubique et nusquam*"; that is, for Socrates (or Plato) there is no temporal world, no learning, no salvation, and ultimately no self.
4. Therefore, either (a) with Socrates we deny premise one, and reject human temporality and agency and consequently the need or possibility of *Salighed* itself; or (b) we deny that the truth is inherently in our possession, and accept that we need the truth to come from outside of us.³³

Climacus opts for the second half of the disjunction, 4(b). At this point Climacus does not have a strict argument except the implication that to accept 4(a) is to accept that there is a negative answer to his rephrasing of the Socratic question, "Can the

³² In Plato, "Meno" 81 d, p. 13, the only justification Socrates can offer for his rejection of the Sophistical conclusion that one cannot learn what one does not presently know is that "it would make us idle, and fainthearted men like to hear it, whereas my argument makes them energetic and keen on the search".

³³ Climacus reviews this disjunction of *Fragments* in *KW* XII.1 95/SV IX 81: "Christianity enters and posits the disjunction: either an eternal happiness or an eternal unhappiness, and a decision in time".

truth be learned?” in the epigraph. Climacus reveals that Socrates had not yet understood all the implications of the issue in *Meno*. The epigraph of *Fragments* demonstrates that the issue of learning the truth, *being in truth*, is ultimately salvific; it is a matter of one’s eternal consciousness having a temporal point of departure and having eternal happiness as a historical feature of human existence. Socrates’ conclusion entails that strictly speaking there is no self who acts, and chooses, because there is no actual temporal point, no moment at which s/he does so (premise 3).³⁴ If there is no *moment*, there is no coming to be in the truth, no salvation—for we are already in a state of eternal blessedness: “As eternal the individual is above time and therefore always has [her/]his eternal happiness behind [her/]him”.³⁵ Climacus thus takes it to be self-evident that the Socratic position is untenable because of its lack of reference to, and capacity for, *Salighed*. Therefore, any alternative situation in which eternal blessedness is attainable is preferable. And this is also how Climacus intends to expose the indigence of modern epistemology.

Climacus’s strategy in *Fragments* is to provide an alternative to the Socratic view of truth, and to demonstrate a way (which as we will see is Christianity) of “going beyond” it, one that accounts for our *Salighed*. But Climacus also intends this to be a critique of modern philosophy in two ways. First, Climacus thinks that Hegel and the Enlightenment share with the Socratic and Platonic understanding of truth (as recollection) the notion that truth is immanently available to human cognition. While modern philosophy may not agree with the whole of Platonic epistemology, it at least agrees with Plato’s thesis that human reason is sufficient to gain access to truth. In fact the Cartesian view of the radically autonomous subject is an attempt to establish just such a conclusion. Thus, modern philosophy also commits the corresponding error of failing to account for the crucial *being in truth*

³⁴ Kierkegaard’s argument regarding the category of “the moment” as it is used in the theory of recollection in *Concept of Anxiety*, bolsters Climacus’s argument. There Haufniensis argues that Plato’s treatment of “the moment” confusingly begs the question by identifying it as the category in which temporal transitions occur, but then treating it as “a silent atomistic abstraction”. See *KW VIII 82n-84/SV VI 171n-73*. I also refer the reader back to our discussion of the moment in Chapter Two, in which this passage is noted.

³⁵ *KW XII.1 95/SV IX 81*.

of existing humans, in so far as they too assume that the learner is ontologically in the position to acquire truth within her/his own noetic resources.

But there is a second lesson here for modern philosophy. Similarly to Socrates, modern philosophy sees truth as something immanently available to human thought and therefore takes self-knowledge to be the foundational epistemic activity (hence the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*). However, unlike Socrates, speculative philosophy takes the self to be the object of knowledge in an objective sense, and claims more than Socrates in his ignorance claimed. The trouble is that speculative philosophy has no more resources than Socrates did. It operates with the same immanent categories as Socrates and refuses to acknowledge a supernatural revelation. Modern philosophy, therefore, cannot claim any significance for the moment as an historical departure for a human's eternal blessedness. Climacus's "moral" at the end of *Fragments* is poignantly aimed at the systematic epistemology of Hegel (*et al.*) and states: "But to go beyond Socrates when one nevertheless says essentially the same thing as he, only not nearly so well—that, at least, is not Socratic".³⁶ In *Postscript* Climacus affirms this position where he argues that in *Fragments*,

I carried the Socratic back to the thesis that all knowing is recollecting. . . . The thesis that all knowing is recollecting belongs to speculative thought, and recollecting is immanence, and from the point of view of speculation and the eternal there is no paradox. The difficulty, however, is that no human being is speculation, but the speculating person is an existing human being, subject to the claims of human existence. To forget this is no merit, but to hold this fast is indeed a merit, and that is precisely what Socrates did. . . . Basically Socrates is beyond all speculation, because he does not have a fantastical beginning.³⁷

What Climacus presents in *Fragments* as going beyond the Socratic has certainly been Christianity, but he is able to do this only by using Christian categories like faith, sin, the moment, and the Absolute Paradox. The problem of modern philosophy is that it claims to be Christian and to "go beyond" Socrates while using essentially Socratic categories, which is neither Socratic nor Christian—"It is simply muddled".³⁸

³⁶ KW VII 111/SV VI 99.

³⁷ KW XII.1 206n/SV IX 173n.

Truth Incarnate

Climacus finds the Socratic doctrine of recollection to be an inadequate, though not completely misguided, answer to the question, “Can the truth be learned?” The seminal issue in this epistemological question, for both Socrates and Climacus, is one of moral and religious import.³⁹ Learning involves possessing the fundamental condition, both cognitive and spiritual, of human persons to know truth. The assumption is that for humans to apprehend truth they must themselves *be* in accordance to the nature of truth. Truth is approached as a salvific issue because both Socrates and Climacus see the foundational issue of epistemology as relating eternal truth to the *existence* of the human knower (as a coming-to-be, a *Tilblivelse*, in time). Neither thinker disarticulates moral and religious truth from “ordinary” truth. Learning the truth, then, involves overcoming the epistemic obstacles inherent in the human existential situation. For Socrates this obstacle was ignorance as state of forgetfulness of the truth, and for Climacus (as we shall see) it is sin as a position of being in untruth. Neither thinker is sceptical about the possibility of knowledge or the reality of the world, but neither do they think that in their present condition humans have the luxury of side-stepping or disregarding the obstacle of human existence.⁴⁰

On Climacus’s understanding then, Socrates and he are each ascribing a general epistemology within an overtly “theological”⁴¹ epistemology.⁴² It will not do, as

³⁸ Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 30.

³⁹ Cf. Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 27: “It is fair to say that in Plato’s own thought, knowledge of truth takes on a religious significance. Plato assumes that our highest human task is to gain true knowledge, and, as Climacus notes, even bases his argument for the immortality of the soul on the ability of the soul to grasp eternal truths”.

⁴⁰ Therefore Climacus comes to argue in *Postscript* that, “it will be important to distinguish between Socrates and Plato on this point. The thesis [of recollection] certainly belongs to both of them, but Socrates continually parts with it because he wants to exist. By holding Socrates to the thesis that all knowing is recollecting, one turns him into a speculative philosopher instead of what he was, an existing thinker who understood existing as the essential”; *KW XII.1 206n/SV IX 173n*. The revelation of this discrepancy between the Socratic doctrine of recollection and Socrates’ actual practice as an ethical philosopher—his insistence on proceeding from his ignorance and thus always keeping his epistemic limits in the foreground of all he said and did—was what Climacus achieved in *Fragments*.

⁴¹ “Theological” is used to denote the reliance on a framework that deliberately appeals to a ground for human beings and discourse (*logos*) that exceeds human contingency and temporality as the *telos* of human being-ness. It does not necessarily refer to revelation, Christianity, or even to a

some commentators attempt, to explain the discussion of truth in *Fragments* as a discussion of simply “religious” or “moral” truth—as if *Fragments* was isolated from any general epistemological ramifications.⁴³ It is true that Plato’s discussion of learning “the truth” is in the context of virtue and Climacus’s in the context of the Christian concept of salvation, but both make it abundantly clear that the issue of knowing truths depends upon one’s *being in truth*. If one completely rules out the general epistemic ramifications of *Fragments*, one must ignore the fact that the human capacity to know truth (the virtuous or religious side of truth), for both Socrates and Climacus, is a crucial link to the truths human know. Socrates and Climacus self-consciously intermix their discussions of religious or moral truth with ordinary truths. A very important example of this is the demonstration of the theory of recollection in *Meno* is a “recollection” of truths about *geometry*, not moral truths. In *Fragments*, Climacus likewise discusses the existence of Napoleon alongside his discussions of the existence of God and repeatedly moves between religious and more mundane truths with little or no transition between them throughout the entire book.⁴⁴ Climacus furthermore speaks of truth as “*index sui et falsi* [the criterion of the false]” along side the paradox as “*index and iudex falsi* [the criterion of itself and of the false]”,⁴⁵ and he discusses “*faith [Tro]*” alongside “historical facts” and “historical eyewitnesses”.⁴⁶ Climacus also engages in an in-depth analysis of the nature of historical knowledge in the “Interlude”, in which he further distinguishes “faith in the ordinary sense” from “faith in the eminent

metaphysics of presence, Instead “theological” here refers to that which is common to all religious frameworks and could be properly called the ethical-religious. Thus Socrates, while remaining completely within immanent, philosophical categories, is nonetheless “theological”.

⁴² This argument is continued below in the next section under the heading, “The Nature of Truth”.

⁴³ Stephen Evans, for example, argues that, “*Fragments is not really a book about how we gain various kinds of truths . . . The Truth here is closer to what religions have termed salvation . . . the question with which it begins is of course a central Platonic question. In Plato’s thought it is fair to say that the question of truth takes on religious significance. Plato assumes that our highest human task is to gain true knowledge, and . . . even bases his argument for the immortality of the soul on the ability of the soul to grasp eternal truth. Hence Climacus’ use of ‘the Truth’ is in part simply a conjugation and extension of the sense ‘truth’ takes in Plato.*” Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 27; my emphasis.

⁴⁴ See *KW VII 15-19/SV VI 19-22*.

⁴⁵ *KW VII 50-1/SV VI 49*.

⁴⁶ *KW VII 59/SV VI 55-6*.

sense”, and then proceeds to discuss them alongside each other.⁴⁷ What is more, in *Postscript Climacus* explicitly describes his project in *Fragments* as intermixing general and theological epistemology, saying that there he was simultaneously discussing a general epistemological paradox (the Socratic) and the Absolute Paradox of the god-man. At the same time Climacus distinguishes between Socratic faith (defined as having close parallels to Plato’s *pistis*) from faith *sensu eminentiori* (Christian faith). However, Climacus admits that he was not completely explicit about this in *Fragments* because,

“I [Climacus] was afraid to make complications by promptly using what seem to be the same designations, at least the same words, about different things when the imaginary construction was to be presented as different from these. Now, I think there would be no objection to speaking of the paradox in connection with Socrates and faith, since it is correct to do so, provided that it is understood correctly.”⁴⁸

It is to be concluded, then, that Socrates and Climacus alike are discussing the condition for the possibility of knowing truth, which for both of them is inevitably a religious and moral matter. Climacus is most certainly discussing religious, Christian truth specifically in terms of salvation, but the notion that this entails a strict dichotomy between the two is mistaken.

The possibility of human learning depends, for Socrates and Climacus both, on the immortality and eternity of humans as well as the ability of the human self to transcend its present state of existence (in which it does not appear to know truth). Merold Westphal observes that in *Fragments*, “The immediate purpose of this experiment is to discover whether there is a cogent alternative to the Socratic theory of knowledge as recollection”.⁴⁹ Westphal continues and notes that, “In keeping with the fundamental intentions of Socrates, Kierkegaard [Climacus] takes the issue not to be the truth of everyday facts such as the time of day or of sophisticated scientific theories . . . but the ethical-religious Truth—a Janus-faced truth that looks both toward the nature of ultimate reality, the Eternal, and toward the personal

⁴⁷ KW VII 72-88/SV VI 67-80.

⁴⁸ KW XII.1 206n-07/SV IX 173n-4.

⁴⁹ Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard’s Critique of Reason and Society* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 109.

question of how I should live my life”.⁵⁰ Socrates and Climacus each believe humans do in fact know general truths but see our access to these as the product of the nature of human subjectivity—which transcends the limits of human reason. A focus on general epistemology only takes us away from subjectivity and therefore both the ground and organising point for general truths.

Climacus and Socrates both ultimately take leave of speculative and transcendental philosophy and recognize that *being in truth* cannot be arrived at in that way. A transcendental epistemology does not explain *human* truth—similarly to Haufniensis who comments that his program to delineate a “new ethics” does not proceed transcendently, but “sets ideality as a task, not by a movement from above downward but from below upward”.⁵¹ Our theories can only proceed from where we are. Socrates and Climacus are each concerned first to account for the *being* in truth of humans for this is what is essential to human’s who exist in history. We do not have access to “the things themselves” except as they are for us. In a sense Climacus and Socrates are interested in the same question as Descartes who looked to the human subject as the ground of human noetic activity. The difference (which makes all the difference) is that Climacus and Socrates situate the subject in time and space, including the self-knowing of the subject. Ethics (or the ethical-religious), broadly construed as the sphere of inquiry pertaining to the being of human existence, therefore becomes First Philosophy and the very basis of epistemology—only for Climacus ethics becomes theology.⁵²

In place of a concept of truth as a “result”, or a purely objective view of truth such as one finds in speculative philosophy, Climacus takes from Socrates the idea

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹ KW VIII 20/SV VI 118.

⁵² In *Concept of Anxiety*, Vigilius Haufniensis states: “It is common knowledge that Aristotle used the term *πρωτον φιλοσοφια* [first philosophy] primarily to designate metaphysics, though he included within it a part that according to our perception belongs to theology. In paganism it is quite in order for theology to be treated there. It is related to the same lack of an infinite penetrating reflection that endowed the theater in paganism with reality as a kind of divine worship. If we abstract from this ambiguity, we could retain the designation *πρωτον φιλοσοφια* understanding that the totality of science which we might call ‘ethnical,’ whose essence is immanence and is expressed in Greek thought by ‘recollection,’ and by *secunda philosophia* [second philosophy]

of a *suffering truth*; a truth that perdures through time as the result of striving and a passionate engagement with our world in the actuality of existence. “All coming into existence [*Tilblivelse*] is a *suffering* [*Liden*]”, argues Climacus, and this “change of coming into existence is actuality”.⁵³ Therefore, observes Marilyn Piety, “the consciousness of change is itself characterised by change, thus the suffering of change associated, by Kierkegaard [Climacus], with change becomes associated with consciousness itself to the extent that the object of consciousness is change”.⁵⁴ Climacus later in *Postscript* argues that, “All existence-issues are passionate, because existence, if one becomes conscious of it, involves passion”.⁵⁵ The suffering of truths about existence and the suffering of *being in truth*, is not an accidental feature of human existence as that which is brought about by some misfortune. Instead, suffering is an essential feature of things in temporal perdurance, in which humans must participate if they are to possess truth with respect to those things. Socrates’ self-knowledge, Climacus understands, consists in maintaining his existential position of ignorance in every situation as an ethical-religious mode of being that requires constant vigilance, or passionate interest and attention. That is, Socrates underwent a constant self-inflicted suffering as he strove to maintain his existential orientation while his surrounding temporal environment underwent perpetual change. It is this view of a *victorious truth*—a truth that is won through our subjective, passionate and ethical entanglements—that Climacus retains and finds indispensable in Socrates. In the end, it is also this concept of existential, subjective truth which Climacus uses as the basis for his critique of Socrates, as we saw above, as Climacus pushes this Socratic concept of truth to its logical, salvific end.

The pivotal point in Climacus’s divergence from Socratic recollection and its immanent categories lies in their opposite understandings of the state of humans

understand that totality of science whose essence is transcendence or repetition”. *KW* VIII 21/SV VI 118.

⁵³ *KW* VII 74-5/SV VI 68-9.

⁵⁴ Marilyn Gaye Piety, “Kierkegaard On Knowledge” (Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 1994), 48.

⁵⁵ *KW* XII.1 350-1/SV X 51.

prior to their learning the truth. Socrates describes the learner's state prior to learning truth as a type of ignorance that is more like a state of amnesia; that is, a type of forgetfulness not caused through any fault of the learner. The teacher's role, then, is maieutic and s/he functions not to lead people to the truth which hitherto was external to them, but to act as a midwife to people's own true, eternal ideas. Thus Climacus views Socrates as operating with a legitimate (but inadequate), immanent type of faith/belief [*Tro*] that allowed him to have a "direct and ordinary . . . relationship with the historical", but could not relate the historical and the eternal to his own temporal, historical existence (as coming-into-being, *Tilblivelse*).⁵⁶ David Gouwens comments that, "For Socratic faith, the follower moves from ignorance to self-knowledge, but there is an essential *continuity* within the self in the sense that one develops one's own inner subjectivity in 'recollection'".⁵⁷ Socrates could therefore proclaim that virtue is knowledge and that no one ever knowingly performed an evil action, because the Socratic construal of truth remained completely within immanent categories.

Climacus, on the other hand, describes the learner's state as *sin*. If there is to be an alternative to the Socratic, Climacus contends that it must be one in which "the seeker up until that moment must not have possessed the truth, not even in the form of ignorance".⁵⁸ The opportunity for a genuine coming-to-truth (salvation) demands a *moment* of truth-acquisition (redemption) in time and rather than the learner being qualitatively in the truth; for salvation to be possible (required) the learner must first *be* qualitatively untruth (note: this is a grammatical comment). Furthermore, Climacus argues, this condition of untruth must be due to the fault of the individual human or else "[s/]he would have possessed the condition only accidentally, which is a contradiction, because the for the truth is an essential condition".⁵⁹ This changes everything for the teacher as well since the teacher must possess the truth as

⁵⁶ KW VII 87-88/SV VI 79-80.

⁵⁷ David Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 124-5; his emphasis.

⁵⁸ KW VII 13/SV VI 17.

an ontological feature of her/his existence. Rather than the teacher simply being an occasion to midwife the eternal truth within an individual, the teacher must bestow upon the individual the condition for knowing the truth. Thus the teacher cannot be another human in untruth, but must be one who is ontologically identical with eternal truth. “The teacher, then, is the god himself, who, acting as the occasion, prompts the learner to be reminded that he is untruth and is that through his own fault. But this state—to be untruth and to be that through one’s own fault—what can we call it? Let us call it *sin*”.⁶⁰

By positing the ontological untruthfulness of the human condition, Climacus has radically changed the situation pertaining to human truth acquisition.⁶¹ He must now use essentially different categories to explain how humans learn truth that extend beyond the immanent categories of Socrates (philosophical categories)⁶² to a genuine transcendence beyond philosophical purveyance and in which there is space for human subjectivity and *a fortiori* an accurate account of doxastic regulation. The Socratic account of faith/belief [*Tro*] cannot be seen to be adequate. Climacus therefore posits faith “in the eminent sense”, which is Christian faith, and is obtained only by receiving the condition for truth from the teacher on whom the learner is in constant dependence. Such a teacher is a “god” who, Climacus observes, is more appropriately called “savior”, “deliverer”, and “reconciler”.⁶³ The bestowal of the condition to receive truth by the “god” cannot happen as a result of human effort but can only happen as the individual is transformed into a

⁵⁹ *KW VII 15/SV VI 19*. Climacus’s argument here seems to be based on the hidden premise that freedom is an essential feature of human beings. Cf. *JP II 1251/Pap. VII¹ A 181*.

⁶⁰ *KW VII 15/SV VI 19*.

⁶¹ This does not necessarily commit Climacus to the strong view that unbelievers (non-Christian “pagans”) possess no knowledge whatsoever and have no access to general truths because of their unregenerate condition (as being in untruth). What it does commit him to (at minimum) is a grace-filled picture of all human noetic activity. This position would fall under the theological category of common grace.

⁶² Climacus tells us that in *Fragments* Socrates’ position represented “what was supposed to be the philosophical, the pagan philosophical position”; *KW XII.1 206n/SV IX 173n*.

⁶³ *KW VII 17/SV VI 21*. See also Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*, 123-127, who gives an excellent account of Climacus’s discussion of, “The ‘What’ and the ‘How’”, as it features in Climacus’s understanding of Christian faith.

“new person” by the god through a change Climacus describes as “conversion”.⁶⁴ Conversion, Climacus suggests, comes from a sorrow, or “repentance”, over our condition of untruth that has been revealed to us in our encounter with the god-in-time, in which one repents of one’s former state and makes the transition from untruth to truth called “rebirth”.⁶⁵

The main concern of Socrates and Climacus is not to unearth objective facts about the universe whether they be metaphysical, epistemological, etc., but rather to discover the way of *being* as a human person (existing) in time and space, here and now, so that truth is available to one. The How takes precedence over the What so that our ontological positions are deeply interwoven with the truths we know, and *vice versa*. Socrates’ professed ignorance and subsequent emphasis on subjectivity represents, for Climacus, the highest that philosophy can achieve and the Socratic doctrine of recollection answers the question, “Can the truth be learned?”, according to the logic of immanence. In the end Climacus finds the Socratic “How” never to account for *being in truth* of human persons, what Climacus refers to as *Salighed*, and he therefore wants to go beyond Socrates. The way forward thus entails a break with immanence, and can only come through an incursion of the eternal, “the god”, in time.

Subjectivity and Truth

Climacus does not end his epistemological reforms with his shift in *Fragments* from immanent to a transcendent, theological epistemology that operates with the categories of revelation. In *Postscript* he further refines his epistemological position and forms what we are calling (with Kierkegaard) the “subjectivity principle”. With the subjectivity principle Climacus hopes to capture and articulate the correct orientation to epistemic issues that in *Fragments* he found in the Socratic emphasis on subjectivity. Climacus’s discussions in *Postscript* extend the arguments of *Fragments* and explore in far more detail the concept of subjectivity as a formal

⁶⁴ KW VII 18/SV VI 22.

principle for the *being in truth* of human individuals. As Climacus himself notes in the “Introduction”, the first part of *Postscript* is a proper sequel to *Fragments* because it treats, as a kind of polemic, the “objective issue” of the historical truth of Christianity and therefore extends the argument in *Fragments* as it promised.⁶⁶ However, “the second part is a renewed attempt in the same vein as the pamphlet, a new approach to the issue of *Fragments*”.⁶⁷

As he fleshes out his analyses in *Postscript* Climacus identifies two kinds of truth: *objective* or *accidental* truth and *subjective* or *essential* truth.⁶⁸ We shall argue that these two types of truth operate on a continuum so that one kind of truth cannot be strictly separated from the other. Both sorts of truth indicate two different and opposite ways of pursuing the question of truth. The superiority of one of these approaches will be established if, by seeking truth in that manner, one may possess the other type of truth as well. As a method of determining truth, Climacus rejects the objective way as inferior, as its express point is to disregard subjectivity.⁶⁹ One may also pursue truth subjectively to the neglect of objective truth, so that “the individual is in [subjective] truth, even if in this way [s/]he were to relate [her/]himself to [objective] untruth”.⁷⁰ However, Climacus thinks that if one earnestly pursues truth as subjectivity; that is, actually seeks truth with the all the passion of subjectivity (the How), then one *becomes* truth and attains objective truth as well (the What).⁷¹ In so doing one achieves the *being in truth* sought in *Fragments*, which acts as the basis for general doxastic regulation. That is, in subjectivity one comes to know oneself and is thereby correctly oriented to, or positioned in, reality and the world around them. This is, in fact, the subjectivity principle. *Subjectivity*, then, takes on a dual meaning so that, on the one hand, it

⁶⁵ KW VII 19/SV VI 22.

⁶⁶ In *Fragments*, Climacus states: “in the next section of this pamphlet, if I ever do write it, I intend to call the matter by its proper name and clothe the issue in its historical costume”; KW VII 109/SV VI 97.

⁶⁷ KW XII.1 17/SV IX 19.

⁶⁸ See for example, KW XII.1 192, 196-97, 199, 202, 205/SV IX 159-60, 163, 167, 168, 170.

⁶⁹ KW XII.1 192, 196-97/SV IX 159-60, 163.

⁷⁰ KW XII.1 199/SV IX 167.

⁷¹ KW XII.1 613n-614/SV X 274.

refers to the subject as constituted in temporal, historical, and existential concreteness through “passion”, or “inward deepening”. On the other hand subjectivity can also mean the existential *activity* or *process* of becoming concrete (actual)—so that when Climacus or Kierkegaard refer to “subjectivity” they are often also referring to the activity of “inwardness”, “passion”, or what is sometimes called “subjective thinking”, itself.

Postscript may be read as a grammar of the concept of truth. The basic concept of *truth* signifies, Climacus thinks, a relation between thinking and being, between the thoughts (as possibilities) a person has and the *actuality* of that thing. The name Climacus gives to this relation is *Fordoblelse*, the exact equivalent of the English word “redoubling”, and consequently Climacus stipulates that, “truth is a redoubling [*Fordoblelse*]”.⁷² Anti-Climacus, who shares Climacus’s definition of truth as redoubling, argues that “Truth is not”, therefore, “something simple but in an entirely abstract sense [is] a redoubling, which is nevertheless canceled out at the very same moment”.⁷³ The truth-relation of redoubling is an identity-relation in which the mode of reflection matches the object of reflection so that what is reflected upon is “reduplicated” for the human person. Truth, therefore, exists in reflection and as a reflective property, for “Reflection is”, Climacus states, “the *possibility of the relation* . . . reflection’s categories are always dichotomous”.⁷⁴ For Climacus (and Kierkegaard) reflection is a broad term which includes cognition and critical thinking but more accurately refers to the *activity* of consciousness itself (“consciousness is *the relation*” itself).⁷⁵ This concept of reflection includes, Gouwens observes, “any capacity to ‘negate immediacy’”, and simply designates

⁷² KW XII.1 190/SV IX 158. In *Practice in Christianity* Anti-Climacus also expresses the nature of truth as this same relation of “redoubling”; KW XX 205/SV XVI 192. It is fair to say that this is how Kierkegaard himself views truth.

⁷³ KW XX 205/SV XVI 192.

⁷⁴ KW VII 169/*Pap.* IV B 1 147; his emphasis.

⁷⁵ KW VII 169/*Pap.* IV B 1 147; his emphasis.

the capacity of humans to abstract concepts from experiences and linguistically express these.⁷⁶ The truth-relation then, exists as a redoubling in reflection.

The redoubling truth-relation may be either a subjective or an objective relation and may thus refer to truth or truths, “essential truth” or “accidental truth”. Kierkegaard’s *Anti-Climacus* notes that, “There is a difference between truth and truths, and this difference is recognizable in the term ‘to be’ [*at være*] or is recognizable in the distinction made between *way* and final decision, which is related at the end, *the result*”.⁷⁷ Climacus explains the difference this way:

When the question about truth is asked *objectively*, truth is reflected *objectively* as an *object* to which the knower relates [her/]himself. What is reflected upon is not the relation but that what [s/]he relates [her/]himself to is the truth, the true. If only that to which [s/]he relates [her/]himself is the truth the true, then the subject is in the truth. *When the question about truth is asked subjectively, the individual’s relation is reflected upon subjectively.* If only the how of this relation is in truth, the individual is in truth, *even if in this way [s/]he were to relate [her/]himself to what is untruth.* . . . What is being discussed here is essential truth or the truth about existence.⁷⁸

The identity-relation between being and thought in the redoubling of truth occurs in reflection and is either *objective*, in which case the focal point of reflection is outside the subjectivity of the thinker on an external object, or *subjective*, in which case the focal point of reflection is within the subjectivity of the person and on the nature of the redoubling relation (between the person and the object) itself. The implication is, though it is not explicitly drawn, that falsehood is the failure of a redoubling relationship to obtain actually so that the relation in reflection is one of *mis*-relation or non-identity. Note that it is still possible for Climacus to identify the possibility of (objective) untruth in the subjective truth-relation, so that one can be said to be subjectively and essentially in the truth even if this person “were to relate [her/]himself to what is *untruth*”.⁷⁹ The subjective mode of reflection and the objective mode constitute, then, the two poles of any truth-relation that can possibly obtain for human persons.

⁷⁶ Cf. David Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*, 30; and Michael Strawser, “Kierkegaardian Meditations on First Philosophy: A Reading of *Johannes Climacus*”, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 32,4 (October 1994): 640.

⁷⁷ KW XX 206/SV XVI 194; his emphasis.

⁷⁸ KW XII.1 199/SV IX 167; my emphasis.

⁷⁹ See above block quote in text.

In his shift away from the objective method of seeking truth, Climacus does not ever deny either possibility of attaining objective truth or its epistemic validity. He begins the discussion of truth in *Postscript* by saying that, “objectively understood, truth can signify: (1) historical truth, (2) philosophical truth”.⁸⁰ Climacus defines the latter “philosophical truth” as being “a doctrine, historically given and verified” as “eternal truth”.⁸¹ He therefore retains the intuition of *Fragments* that the concept of truth essentially denotes something universal and unchanging and is in this sense “eternal”. In the former case, Climacus tells us that if it is to be had, “historical truth must be established by a critical examination of the various reports, etc”.⁸²

We have already seen from *Fragments* that for Climacus, because it pertains to contingent, coming-into-existence (*Tilblivelse*), “the historical” has a double illusiveness for human thought and therefore cannot be the basis of an “eternal happiness” or of an “eternal consciousness”. Therefore in *Postscript* it is claimed that, “with respect to the historical the greatest certainty is only an *approximation*, and an approximation is too little to build [one’s] happiness on and is so unlike an eternal happiness that no result can ensue”.⁸³ However, this does not mean that such “truths” are epistemically illegitimate. The obtaining of an objective truth-relation does function, as Anti-Climacus affirms, to safe-guard against improper and false ways of thinking about reality and also “guarantees validity to thinking” so “that what is thought is—that is, has validity”.⁸⁴ So when Climacus claims that objective truths are approximation he means that these truths are contingent and not necessary and that they will not constitute the kinds of clarity and distinctness (objective self-knowledge) that the Cartesian *cogito* claimed for itself. In other words, the truths of “the historical” are not self grounding.

Climacus also investigates philosophical truth as a possibly for yielding epistemic certainty for human knowledge and the point of departure for the eternal

⁸⁰ KW XII.1 21/SV IX 23.

⁸¹ KW XII.1 21/SV IX 23.

⁸² KW XII.1 21/SV IX 23.

⁸³ KW XII.1 23/SV IX 23; his emphasis.

⁸⁴ KW XX 205/SV XVI 192.

consciousness and eternal happiness of temporally qualified, existing humans. Philosophical truth is concerned with the possession of eternal, unchanging truth(s). Climacus analyses philosophical truth in terms of the empirical and rationalist theories of how the truth-relation exists for humans and rephrases these two theories according to his basic concept of truth as an identity-relationship.⁸⁵ The empirical definition of the truth-relation he defines as “the agreement of thinking with being”, and the rationalist understanding of the relation he states as “the agreement of being with thinking”.⁸⁶ Climacus’s critique of these two truth theories centers around “what is understood by being” in these definitions. He continues to insist that our theories of truth must be attainable by temporally situated humans lest “the knowing spirit . . . be lured out into the indefinite and fantastically become something such as no *existing* human being has ever been or ever can be”.⁸⁷ The ensuing examination of empiricism and rationalism on these terms reveals that neither can present an adequate account of truth.

The empirical and rationalist renderings of the truth-relation are each attempts to see this relation *objectively*—in terms of a person’s relation to the object of reflection—and because of this they both encounter difficulties when implemented as theories of temporal cognition. Kierkegaard has no trouble accepting an objective definition of truth as an identity between thought and being for mathematical and even ontological truths (remember that for Kierkegaard ontology is a logic of conceptual essences). Kierkegaard notes that, “The certainty of these is absolute—here thought and being are one, but by the same token these sciences are

⁸⁵ Climacus appears to believe that rationalism and empiricism exhaust the logical possibilities for truth theories, and taken crudely this is likely to be correct. These two theories were in any case the only epistemological options of Kierkegaard’s day. In this case Climacus takes empiricism broadly to be the rejection of *a priori* ideas and categories in the mind and to hold that the only way we obtain ideas is through sense experience; therefore he takes the central issue in an empirical definition of truth to be the accurate representation of these ideas obtained through sense experience to the world from which they were gleaned. Rationalism, for Climacus, is understood as the general thesis that prior to any sense experience the human mind contains *a priori* ideas and/or categories and thus can know things apart from experience. Climacus therefore takes the critical element in a rationalist definition of truth to be the correspondence of the world (or being) to the ideas of the world (or being) and the categories that structure the mind’s thoughts of it.

⁸⁶ KW XII.1 189/SV IX 157.

⁸⁷ KW XII.1 189/SV IX 157; his emphasis.

hypothetical.”⁸⁸ Note that Kierkegaard uses the term “certainty” here in such a way that it is compatible with “hypothetical”. Mathematics, ontology, logic, etc., yield a sort of deductive certainty, given the presupposition of the truth of their foundational axioms. These certainties cannot be transposed to other sorts of knowledge that we have of the real world (actuality) because the truths we have in mathematics (etc.) exist as possibility (conceptual essences), and not actuality (as concrete historical temporality). In the same journal entry noted above, Kierkegaard contrasts ontology (the science of conceptual essences) and mathematics with *Existentiel-Videnskab*, or what is literally in English “existential science” or “existential scholarship”. We may have absolute certainty regarding mathematical (etc.) truths because these proceed from (hypothetical) axioms whose truth are presupposed, but these “certainties” have no necessary content from the real, actual world in them. As Kierkegaard elsewhere argues:

A conviction [*Overbeviisning*] is called a conviction because it is *over* and *above* proof [*Beviisning*]. Proof is given for mathematical propositions in such a way that no disproof is conceivable. For that reason there can be no conviction with respect to mathematics. But as far as every existential [*existentiel*] proposition is concerned, for every proof there is some disproof, there are a *pro* and a *contra*.⁸⁹

Kierkegaard is arguing that if one accepts the foundation axioms of mathematics, then (note the subjunctive mood!) a proof is theoretically possible on the basis of those axioms. He is not holding out mathematics as the paradigm of human knowledge, and in one sense is arguing for the existential irrelevance of mathematical knowledge.

Climacus outlines two options the empiricist or the rationalist has with respect to how being [*Væren*] is understood in their respective truth formulas. Either the being of the truth-relation is an “empirical being” that exists in time as a coming-to-be, or by being is meant “the pure *I-I*”, the “objective subject” of abstraction, the self as it exists for itself in reflection. Climacus argues that the former understanding of being is not an option for philosophical conceptions of truth because such a relation transforms truth, by definition, into a “*desideratum* [something to be desired]”

⁸⁸ JP I 197/Pap. IV C 100.

because “the empirical object is not finished”.⁹⁰ By bringing truth into relation with being-as-becoming the philosophical understanding of truth is abandoned because truth conceived this way can only be an approximation. There is no place in which the object fully stands so that it can be grasped (thought) in one cognising act. Instead the rationalist or empiricist intend an objective definition of truth, which, precisely because it is objective, completely ignores the temporal existence of the thinking subject and must conjure up “the pure *I-I*” as the foundation of the truth-relation in which being and thought (regardless on which half of the conjunct the emphasis is placed) find themselves in agreement.

There are two problems Climacus finds with the objective understanding of being in relation to truth. First, he notes that the objective formulae cannot explain the intentional structure of truth because “the [truth] formula is a tautology; that is, thinking and being signify one and the same”.⁹¹ The truth-relation is therefore no longer possible in the objective way for now it is simply a relation of thought with other thoughts, not thought with the object of thought (being). Secondly, the truth relation in which thinking and being are in agreement does not apply to human truth because the agreement achieved is on the basis of their shared atemporal properties but humans inescapably exist in time and space. “A system of existence [*Tilværelsens System*]”, Climacus argues, and “cannot be given. . . . Existence itself is a system—for God, but it cannot be for any existing spirit”.⁹² There are two options Climacus foresees for the existing person: “either [s/]he can do everything to forget that [s/]he is existing [i.e., abstract from one’s existence] and thereby

⁸⁹ *JP* II 2296/*Pap.* VII¹ A 215.

⁹⁰ *KW* XII.1 189/*SV* IX 157.

⁹¹ *KW* XII.1 190/*SV* IX 158.

⁹² *KW* XII.1 118/*SV* IX 101. Existence cannot become a system even for the historian because, “when an existence is a thing of the past, it is indeed finished, it is indeed concluded, and so to that extent is turned over to the systematic view. Quite so—but for whom? Whoever is himself existing cannot gain this conclusiveness outside existence, a conclusiveness that corresponds to the eternity into which the past has entered. . . . an individual existing now undeniably comes afterward in relation to six thousand years that preceded, the curiously ironic consequence would emerge—if we assumed that he came to understand them systematically—that he would not come to understand himself as an existing being, because he himself would acquire no existence, because he himself would have nothing that came afterward. It follows that such a thinker must be either the good Lord or a fantastical *quodlibet* [anything]”; *KW* XII.1 118-19/*SV* IX 101-02.

manage to become comic . . . or [s/]he can direct all [her/]his attention to [her/]his existing".⁹³ For his part, Climacus remarks, "I would rather remain what I am, a poor existing individual human being".⁹⁴ The conclusion that Climacus reaches (again) is that all objective truth is only *approximate* truth and cannot be viewed as ultimate truth or as providing anything like indubitable epistemic foundations. All forms of objective truth, then, are accidental, approximate truth and thus cannot be the basis of the truth-relation of eternal truth to an existing human person: "The eternal, essential truth, that is, the truth that is related essentially to the existing person by pertaining to what it means to exist (viewed Socratically, all other knowledge is accidental, its degree and scope is different), is a paradox".⁹⁵

Subjectivity, however, is the truth, *essential* truth. To possess truth in subjectivity is precisely to have an absolute relation of oneself to existence, to have "the inwardness of infinity",⁹⁶ so that at every moment one is in the proper existential mode as one engages her/his world. Climacus explains his logic:

At its highest, inwardness in an existing subject is passion; truth as a paradox corresponds to passion, and that truth becomes a paradox is grounded precisely in its relation to an existing subject. In this way the one corresponds to the other. In forgetting that one is an existing subject, one loses passion, and in return, truth does not become a paradox; but the knowing subject shifts from being human to being a fantastical something and truth becomes a fantastical object for its knowing.⁹⁷

Subjectivity, as the continuous state in which a temporally qualified human person *is* subject (versus object), is an *inwardness* (versus an external relation) that is present within the person as *passion*. Climacus notes that, phenomenologically, "passion is only momentary",⁹⁸ and, as we learned in Chapter Two, the paradox is the "unknown" realm of existing (the temporal flux) that is outside of human thought and beyond reason. Passion therefore corresponds to the paradox as it too is a temporal feature and essentially supra-rational. Climacus's argument is that truth is subjectivity because, as the medium of human existence, subjectivity is the mode in

⁹³ KW XII.1 120/SV IX 102-03.

⁹⁴ KW XII.1 190/SV IX 158.

⁹⁵ KW XII.1 205/SV IX 170.

⁹⁶ KW XII.1 194n/SV IX 162n.

⁹⁷ KW XII.1 199/SV IX 165.

⁹⁸ KW XII.1 199/SV IX 165.

which truth must present itself to humans if it is to be truth-for-humans. As Haufniensis notes, “truth is for the individual only as he produces it for himself in action”.⁹⁹ Climacus has, in effect, reversed the Socratic-Platonic formula and, rather than fashioning humans in the likeness of truth, has delineated a grammar of truth to suit its embodiment in human existence. Subjectivity is the truth because its existential mode as a striving, suffering truth is suited to the temporal nature of human existence so that, as we have already seen in *Fragments*, the existing human may increasingly come to know eternal truth. So, for Climacus, becoming truth in subjectivity is the way for one to *be in truth*, and therefore “subjectivity”, “inwardness”, and “passion” are the means to self-knowledge and serve as necessary, foundational epistemic activities.

To support his distinction between objective, accidental truth and essential, subjective truth Climacus also discusses in considerable detail the modes of reflection corresponding to the two kinds (or ways) of truth. Suited to objective truth, the way of objectivity, is “objective reflection”, and subjective truth is the product of “subjective reflection”.

When for the existing spirit *qua* existing there is a question about truth, that abstract reduplication of truth recurs; but existence itself, in the questioner holds the two factors apart . . . and reflection shows two relations. To *objective reflection*, truth becomes something objective, an object; and the point is to disregard the subject. To *subjective reflection*, truth becomes appropriation, inwardness, subjectivity, and the point is to immerse oneself, existing, in subjectivity.¹⁰⁰

Climacus goes on to note that, because objective reflection is preoccupied with objects and therefore has its redoubling truth-relation outside the subject and when sustained it “turns the subjective individual into something accidental and thereby turns existence into an indifferent, vanishing something”.¹⁰¹ Objective reflection is thus characteristic of all abstract thinking such as logic, “mathematics”, “historical knowledge”, etc. It treats the subjectivity of human knowers as accidental to truth, and likewise the obtaining of truth—i.e., the truth-*relation* itself—as an indifferent matter, a relation between two *relata*, rather than between a *subject* and an object.

⁹⁹ KW VIII 139/SV VI 218.

¹⁰⁰ KW XII.1 192/SV IX 159-60; my emphasis.

David Law defines Kierkegaard's notion of objective reflection as simply the ability "to abstract from concrete reality in order to provide the human being with the concepts which make things possible".¹⁰² Objective reflection is not necessarily illegitimate (ethically or epistemically) but cannot yield essential truth or ground itself.

Subjective reflection is referred to by Climacus as "inwardness" and "subjectivity" and is itself a process of "appropriation". What is appropriated in subjective reflection are the concepts one has gleaned in objective reflection. The difference, however, lays in the manner in which the subjective thinker relates to the concepts s/he employs. Climacus elaborates: "the reflection of inwardness is the subjective thinkers *double-reflection*. In thinking, [s/]he thinks the universal, but, as existing in [her/]his thinking . . . [s/]he becomes more subjectively isolated".¹⁰³ Because the "universal" concepts, or abstract possibilities, of objective thinking are themselves mere "approximations", and because the objective reflection is situated in human subjectivity and a product of passion, subjective thinking produces *essential* truth. Subjective thinking constantly relates the propositions and thoughts of the person to every dimension of the thinking person's existence (as a coming-to-be, *Tilblivelse*). This activity Kierkegaard (throughout his writings) calls *inwardness*.¹⁰⁴

The concept of inwardness, as the key component in subjective thinking, is a kind of existential reflection in which one integrates a given proposition and thought-possibility with her/his dispositions and actions and thereby attains a unity of thought and action so that a self-knowledge and self-understanding emerges. In

¹⁰¹ KW XII.1 193/SV IX 161.

¹⁰² David Law, *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 82.

¹⁰³ KW XII.1 73/SV IX 63; my emphasis.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. C. Stephen Evans's concise definition of Kierkegaard's inwardness as "an examination of the larger patterns of action in a person's life", in *Søren Kierkegaard's Christian Psychology: Insights for Pastoral Care* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 37. Cf. Robert C. Roberts's discussion of inwardness in his, "Existence, Emotion, and Virtue: Classical Themes in Kierkegaard", in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, eds. Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 178, where he defines inwardness, in distinction to subjectivity, in Kierkegaard's literature as specifically denoting a contrast with

fact, Climacus makes the astounding claim that inwardness is “transparency of thought in existence”.¹⁰⁵ David Gouwens rightly observes that, “Inwardness and subjectivity therefore have as much to do with the external actions and publicly observable dispositions of a person as with the alleged ‘contents’ of private consciousness”.¹⁰⁶ Existential thinking (inwardness) involves propositions, or “postulates”, and genuine metaphysical commitments, but not in the sense of Kant’s practical postulates, much less the metaphysical languages of Hegel, Descartes, *et al.* For the existential, subjective thinker, one’s propositions of reality are such that they are integrated into one’s life so that they occupy an integral role in the way one views one’s life and world.¹⁰⁷ These thoughts and propositions arise from the exigencies of existence and comprise an integral component in one’s ethical-religious entanglements with the world. Indeed, they derive from a (subjective) reflection that self-consciously arises from and pertains to the actuality of the thinker’s existence, and in this sense the subjective thinker stakes her/his entire life with them. The double reflection of inwardness is, then, a genuflection of

“externalities” of social position, reputation, and the “results” of actions to interiority, inner motivations and one’s relationship to God, ethical standards, and oneself.

¹⁰⁵ *KW XII.1 255/SV IX 213*. Transparency is an important concept for Kierkegaard’s subjectivity, and we shall treat it more comprehensively in Part Two. For now it is sufficient to note that subjectivity, or inwardness, is seen by Kierkegaard to ground thinking in a kind of clarity or “transparency”. This transparency is, however, radically different from its Cartesian predecessor for it is an existential (ethical) transparency of a sullied and situated consciousness—it is not the self-transparency of a pure, rational consciousness. Kierkegaard writes that, “No . . . person, even the purest, has sheer, purified subjectivity or pure transparency”; instead there is always “a residue still not wholly penetrated, a remote portion of [her]his original subjectivity still uncaptured, perhaps as not yet even really discovered in the depths of [her]his soul—out of this come the reactions”. *JP IV 4384/Pap. XI² A 132*.

¹⁰⁶ Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*, 57.

¹⁰⁷ Climacus makes this point in his two examples of subjective thinking, knowing the existence of God and the Socratic proof of immortality, in *Postscript*; *KW XII.1 199-201/SV IX 165-167*; cf. *JP I 73/Pap. X² A 406*. See especially the note on *KW XII.1 200/SV IX 166*, where Climacus, in reference to knowing the existence of God, states that, “God is indeed a postulate [for the subjective thinker], but not in the loose sense in which it is ordinarily taken. Instead, it becomes clear that . . . the dialectical contradiction brings passion to despair and assists him in grasping God with ‘the category of despair’ (faith), so that the postulate, far from being the arbitrary, is in fact *necessary* defense, self-defense; in this way God is not a postulate, but the existing person’s postulating God is—a necessity”. Climacus also states in *KW XII.1 201/SV IX 166*: “But Socrates! He poses the question objectively, problematically: is there an immortality. So, compared with one of the modern [purely objective] thinkers with the three demonstrations, was he a doubter? Not at all. He stakes his whole life on this ‘if’; he dares to die, and with the passion of the infinite he has so ordered his whole life that it might be acceptable—if there is an immortality”.

ideas *qua* ideas back on themselves through the lens of one's own life-experience. In this action the subjective thinker has both a realisation of the situatedness of all "objective truth" and "objective reflection" in passionate subjectivity, and also thinks these abstractions back across (and through) the horizon of one's existential possibilities and concrete historicity—keeping one's own subjectivity constantly in the foreground.¹⁰⁸ These, "Concerned reflections *on* reflections [i.e., reflexive subjectivity]", Edward Mooney argues, the reflections we perform "on our ideals, and emerging identities, locates subjectivity—the space where selves develop and reside".¹⁰⁹

There is no objective truth for Kierkegaard without subjectivity, and objective truths *qua* human objectivity are always permeated with and conditioned by human subjectivity—which is why they are always approximate and objectively uncertain. As Johannes De Silentio claims, "Just to make the celebrated Socratic distinction between what one understands and does not understand requires passion".¹¹⁰ De Silentio's observation takes place in the context of a discussion of Hegel's philosophical method, "mediation", as a method that does not (and cannot) explain *how* it is that movement, or transitions, happen. De Silentio makes the simple observation that every movement "is carried out passion, and no reflection can produce a movement".¹¹¹ His conclusion is that passion cannot be ignored in philosophical methodology, and that "mediation is a chimera, which in Hegel is supposed to explain everything and which is also the only thing he never has tried to

¹⁰⁸ As David Gouwens claims, with his ideas of inwardness and subjective thinking Climacus is outlining a method of reflection which preserves one's subjectivity as a central concern. See Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*, 43. Gouwens also is correct when he claims that "despite all his talk about 'inwardness,' Kierkegaard does not give evidence of a view that we *identify* our emotions by a process of introspection. Introspection is used not to identify something, but to reflect on one's life". Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*, 78. Cf. Climacus's claim that, "the subjective thinker is an existing person, and yet [s/]he is a thinking person. [S/]He does not abstract from existence and from the contradiction, but [s/]he is in them . . . In all this thinking, then, [s/]he has to include the thought that [s/]he [her/]himself is an existing person. But then in turn [s/]he will always have enough to think about"; *KW XII.1 351/SV X 51-2*.

¹⁰⁹ Edward F. Mooney, *Selves in Discord and Resolve: Kierkegaard's Moral-Religious Psychology in Either/Or and Sickness Unto Death* (London: Routledge, 1996), 68.

¹¹⁰ *KW VI 42n/SV V 40n*.

¹¹¹ *KW VI 42n/SV V 40n*.

explain”.¹¹² The point (of De Silentio, Climacus, and Kierkegaard) is not that passion must be acknowledged in philosophy because it is something foreign to, and therefore not present in, objective reflection. The claim is rather that passion is already present but ignored and overlooked so that it is finally distorted. In other words, this is again a grammatical comment. The Kierkegaardian call is to recognize that passion is a constituent part of human existing—including objective reflection—and that this must be recognised, and if recognised will provide an insight into how we must reflect on things.

Thus Climacus’s two kinds of truths cannot be discussed in isolation from each other. They constitute a truth-continuum and together form the completed redoubling relation of truth. To possess one kind of truth to the exclusion of the other is to have an incomplete or partial truth—and therefore not to have truth.¹¹³ Climacus’s point is that there is no knowledge, no learning of truth, apart from subjectivity. A purely objective relation to something (another person, an object, a proposition, etc.) is to be falsely in relation to that thing. Objective truth is only *for subjects*, and this only as “approximation”. Objective truths cannot find a human home outside of human subjectivity, and within subjectivity these truths remain in an accidental, partial relationship to the human thinker’s actuality (subjectivity). Therefore, if one advances objectively to know truth one finds that subjectivity vanishes, and with it any absolute truth. Conversely, if one approaches truth with

¹¹² KW VI 42n/SV V 40n.

¹¹³ On the one hand Climacus demonstrates that, “The objective truth as such does not at all decide that the one stating it is sensible; on the contrary, it can even betray that the man is lunatic, even though what he says is entirely true and especially objective”; KW XII.1 194/SV IX 162. Climacus then goes on to relate a tale of an escaped patient from a lunatic asylum who attempts to demonstrate his sanity by tying a “skittle ball” on the tail of his coat and each time it knocks him on the backside exclaiming, “Boom! The earth is round”; KW XII.1 195/SV IX 162. The trouble is not that what the patient exclaims is objectively false but that this objectively true fact was not subjectively integrated into a unified expression of the patient’s existence. On the other hand, Climacus makes it clear that a genuine possessing of truth in subjectivity includes what is abstractly referred to as objective truth. But also, he notes, it is possible to have a *pseudo*-inwardness in which one becomes fixated on an “objective something” and then attempts to “embrace it with passion”, as for example with Don Quixote. This actually turns the objective truth into a falsehood. See KW XII.1 194-6/SV IX 162-3. This objectively false position, Climacus notes, is not a product of a genuine subjectivity but a pseudo-subjectivity. The cure, therefore, is not a return to objectivity but an appropriate subjective relation to actuality that is infused with “the inwardness of infinity”.

subjectivity, objectivity becomes less and less of an issue as it increasingly becomes that which is incorporated into subjectivity.¹¹⁴ If we are to ask on which side of the truth-continuum is *the* truth, the subjective or the objective, Climacus notes that it is correct to say that on neither side is the whole truth because absolute (eternal) truth consists in objective truths being conjoined to an existing human subject. However, an existing person cannot attempt to approach truth as a unity of objectivity and subjectivity because humans do not have the luxury of existing eternally and cannot integrate the subjective and the objective: “An existing person”, argues Climacus, “cannot be in two places at the same time, cannot be subject-object”.¹¹⁵ The human task is to mediate the two poles of truth in time and space, and this attempt requires passion, “the highest pitch of subjectivity”.¹¹⁶

Truth *qua* human truth, then, must begin in subjectivity, and, Climacus repeats, the truth of subjectivity is that subjectivity is untruth.¹¹⁷ Socratic ignorance is “the truth in the highest sense within paganism”, but Climacus reiterates his argument of *Fragments* that new theological categories are needed to achieve the existential, ethical-religious truth for which Socrates strove, and in which an individual, through self-knowledge, is appropriately conditioned to receive the truth. Following Socrates, human subjectivity encounters an *aporia* in which it is recognised that human activity cannot be the ground of eternal truth. “Every qualification of that which actually goes beyond the Socratic must essentially have a mark of standing in relation to the god’s having come into existence”,¹¹⁸ and this, Climacus argues, is found in Christianity.¹¹⁹

In *Postscript*, consequently, Climacus presents the subjectivity principle of *Fragments* as a formal principle and performs a grammar of truth in which subjectivity is truth: “Here is such a definition of truth: *An objective uncertainty, held fast through an appropriation with the most passionate inwardness is the*

¹¹⁴ KW XII.1 196/SV IX 163.

¹¹⁵ KW XII.1 199/SV IX 166.

¹¹⁶ KW XII.1 199/SV IX 166.

¹¹⁷ KW XII.1 207/SV IX 173.

¹¹⁸ KW XII.1 210/SV IX 175.

truth, the highest truth there is for an *existing* person”.¹²⁰ Climacus, like Socrates before him, is discussing the condition for the possibility of humans knowing the truth and is seeking to establish the foundations for an epistemology, or normative doxastic regulation. He is therefore talking about absolute, or ethical-religious truth, but with the view that this *being in truth* is directly related to the possession of truths. As Anti-Climacus explains, “[t]here is a difference between truth and truths”, and “knowing the truth is something that accompanies being the truth, not the other way around”.¹²¹ The Climacean epistemic project¹²² is partly descriptive and partly prescriptive. That is to say that Climacus is performing a grammar which combines a phenomenological, conceptual component (observation and description) with a logical component that tells us how these concepts work together so that we can better understand them (prescription). Climacus descriptively approaches belief and truth and tells us how truth *is* for humans, and then he prescribes how epistemic issues must be approached and understood so that humans may truly *be in truth*.

Subjectivity as a Critical Principle

In the final section of this chapter we shall see that the Kierkegaardian notion of truth as subjectivity is an attempt to articulate a theory of truth as a suffering and victorious human truth that may serve as a normative basis for human doxastic practice. The normativity that Kierkegaard sketches (primarily through his pseudonym Johannes Climacus) is fundamentally theological because it proscribes the limits of human reason, restricting the access of unaided human reason to truth, while situating the locus of truth (for humans) in a transcendent, eternal Truth that does not change. Through Climacus’s writings Kierkegaard outlines the dialectic or

¹¹⁹ KW XII.1 230/SV IX 191.

¹²⁰ KW XII.1 203-04/SV IX 169; his emphasis.

¹²¹ KW XX 206, 205/SV XVI 193, 192. Climacus similarly argues that, “subjective thinking invests everything in the process of becoming and omits *the result*, partly because this *belongs to [her/]him*, since *[s/]he possesses the way*, partly because *[s/]he as existing is continually in the process of becoming . . .*”; KW XII.1 73/SV IX 62, my emphasis.

¹²² Climacus’s project is distinguished from Kierkegaard’s total epistemological effort only as a part-to-whole relationship. In other words, in *Fragments* and *Postscript* Climacus accomplishes

grammar of subjectivity as a critical principle that stands as the normative basis for human belief and action. Kierkegaardian subjectivity also stands over and against the rational critiques of Hegel and Kant (and the rest of modern philosophy), while at the same time providing a critique of tradition and religion—the sources of pre-modern authority and social control—that does not collapse into nihilism or relativism. Subjectivity is, for Kierkegaard, the means to transparency and being-in-truth. Kierkegaard’s concept of subjectivity performs this task by re-asserting Socratic ignorance and establishing sin as an epistemological category. Kierkegaardian subjectivity is thereby able to perform a critical and regulatory role in our personal rational processes, our communal practices and policies of justification, and ultimately subjectivity undermines all anthropocentric theoretical postures and rational, socio-political embodiments. Following from his critique of reason and metaphysics, human reflection, for Kierkegaard, is always *embodied* reflection and not the activity of a metaphysically interior, private, mental event of some invisible Cartesian substance. All human reflection is always *interested* reflection and eternal blessedness (*Salighed*) emerges, therefore, as the central, basal normative concept in the subjectivity principle.

one particular aspect of Kierkegaard’s epistemological reforms (which turns out to be central to Kierkegaard’s overall project).

The Task of Subjectivity

In Chapter Three we underscored the fact that Kierkegaard saw philosophy as part of a therapy which ultimately pointed beyond itself to subjectivity as the ground and goal of the human search for truth. In this sense then, philosophy is the antidote to diseases of human reflection¹²³ and is an attempt to shift one's cognitive orientation to the world so that one's use of concepts is not confused. But all this is nothing but "shadowboxing" and ineffectual if one's subjectivity is not appropriately engaged in our pursuit of these philosophical truths.¹²⁴ The second and more substantial stage of Kierkegaard's therapy is, therefore, "becoming subjective", as Climacus puts it in *Postscript*.

In the Kierkegaardian literature, especially in *Postscript*, becoming subjective is the regarded as "the highest task of a human being".¹²⁵ This is because human existence is, to repeat, a becoming in time [*Tilværelse*—a contingent, *possible* (non-necessary) existence—and therefore a human person is always in a process that in the end may fail to actualise fully. On Kierkegaard's view, human persons are not born subjects, rather it is something we must work to become. A necessary part of becoming subjective, or becoming human subjects, is that humans engage in subjective reflection and begin to think existentially, as persons of flesh and blood who exist in and through our embodiments in a temporally qualified reality. This activity Kierkegaard calls "subjectivity", which requires "inwardness" and "passion".

¹²³ This is David Gouwens' term and he identifies two diseases of reflection in Kierkegaard's thought: (1) "failure to live within the concepts on which one reflects", and (2) "self-forgetfulness", in which one ceases to include in one's reflection that one is an existing person. See David Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*, 34, 37. From our study thus far, particularly Chapter Three, we may add another Kierkegaardian disease of reflection, in which, (3) one employs one's concepts confusingly.

¹²⁴ Cf. Kierkegaard's statement in *Works of Love*: "It is one thing to let ideas compare with ideas, and it is one thing to argue and win a dispute; it is something else to be victorious over one's own mind when one battles in the actuality of life. However hard one contending idea presses upon another, however hard one contender presses upon another in a dispute, all this contending is still at a distance and is like shadowboxing"; *KW XVI 78/SV XII 80*.

It is important, therefore, to distinguish two senses in which Kierkegaard means the word “subjectivity”.¹²⁶ First, there is what may be called *constitutional subjectivity*. This is the way the term subjectivity is perhaps most commonly used by philosophers and refers to a particular state of an entity which may be described—it is something humans *are* (or can be in the process of becoming), and refers to beings insofar as they are subjects, or have a self and are agents who possess an “I”. Subjectivity *qua* subject is to be *spirit*, and as such humans are only derived and potential subjects.¹²⁷ Climacus uses the term subjectivity in the constitutional sense on occasion in his discussions of the subjectivity principle, as for example, when he refers to God as a “subject” who, as subjectivity, can consequently only be known in subjectivity;¹²⁸ or when he refers to becoming a Christian as “truly becoming a subject”.¹²⁹ But Kierkegaard notes that in Climacus’s subjectivity principle, what is meant “by subjectivity is not what is called a subject as such but to become subjective or the developed subjectivity”.¹³⁰ Kierkegaard’s second connotation of subjectivity, which we will call *reflexive subjectivity*, refers to the general subject-forming activities that comprise the process of becoming subjective. In this sense, subjectivity is something humans must *do*; Climacus (and Kierkegaard) call us to become subjective, to exercise inwardness, to be passionate—all of which he refers to under the hospice of “subjectivity”. The concept of reflexive subjectivity trades on the coming-to-be nature of human temporal existence and, as a kind of activity, is therefore virtually synonymous with inwardness as its primary expression. For Kierkegaard, then, the term “subjectivity” in the subjectivity principle refers to the process of becoming a fully

¹²⁵ KW XII.1 129/SV IX 107. See also KW XII.1 130-144, 158-59, 163-65, 167-70, 176, 349-60/SV IX 107-119, 131-32, 136-37, 138-141, 146, X 50-59; KW XIX 13-14, 35/SV XV 73, 92; KW XX 159/SV XVI 154.

¹²⁶ This distinction is also found in Myron B. Penner, “The Normative Resources of Kierkegaard’s Subjectivity Principle”, *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 1 (1998): 75-6.

¹²⁷ Kierkegaard produces his most detailed discussion of the self as spirit in *The Sickness Unto Death* (KW XIX/SV XV 66-179), which takes as its task the grammar of Christian subjectivity. See also *Concept of Anxiety* (KW VIII/SV VI 102-240).

¹²⁸ KW XII.1 200/SV IX 166.

¹²⁹ KW XII.1 131/SV IX 108.

¹³⁰ A note from a draft copy of *Postscript*; KW XII.2 54-5/Pap. IV B 40:32.

developed subjectivity and has as its primary constituent a reflective component (inwardness).

Critical Subjectivity

The reflexive nature of the Kierkegaardian concept of subjectivity provides its normative thrust and critical capacity. In the end, Kierkegaard's concept of subjectivity (in its reflexive sense) is a new kind of objectivity that is not merely subjectivism, but yet not the objectivism of the Enlightenment.

There are two ways in which reflexive subjectivity functions as a critique of human thought and action. First, as we have seen above, subjective thinking or inwardness, goes beyond objective thinking, which merely entertains an idea. What Kierkegaard does with the subjectivity principle is, in effect, to create a new kind of objectivity—an objectivity achieved *via* a stringent process of inwardness (subjectivity). Kierkegaard argues, in fact, that proper subjectivity is “pure transparency, infinite control”, while “an objectivity [traditionally conceived] is opaque”.¹³¹ Subjectivity in this first, Socratic sense has as its task “precisely to be objective toward oneself and subjective toward all others”.¹³² The inter-related Kierkegaardian concepts of subjective thinking, subjective reflection, passion, and inwardness all function as a critique of the illusory pure objectivity of modernity, but also mean that the subjects own thoughts, interests, and passions are placed under critical scrutiny. So, while subjectivity features as a general critique of reason (as we saw in Chapter Two) and the social structures of legitimisation, it also functions as a critique of the subject and her/his own rational processes. Subjectivity, as a self-conscious process of coming-to-be, is not an unreflective, criterionless embracing of any subjective whim, but on the contrary “means to be up for examination; to believe, to will to believe, means to change one's life, to be up for examination”.¹³³ In fact it is the only means of attaining a critical distance, or objectivity, that is available to human persons. Kierkegaard holds out Socrates as an prototype of this subjectivity-as-objectivity:

¹³¹ *JP IV 4564/Pap. X⁴ A 346.*

¹³² *JP IV 4542/Pap. VIII¹ A 165.*

¹³³ *JP I 73/Pap. X² A 406.*

Take Socrates . . . in danger he relates objectively to his own person . . . He is subjectivity raised to the second power . . . with this objectivity he relates to his own subjectivity. This is no mean achievement. Generally we get one of two things—either an objective something, an objective piece of furniture that is supposed to be a human being, or we get a jumble of accidental occurrences and arbitrariness. But the task [of subjectivity] is to relate objectively to one's own subjectivity. . . . [God] relates objectively to his subjectivity . . . in his being subjective there is no imperfection at all that should be taken away, nor is there anything lacking that should be added, as is the case with human subjectivity and which explains why being related objectively to one's own subjectivity is also a corrective.¹³⁴

With the concept of reflexive subjectivity, Kierkegaard clearly means to present a principle that serves as “a corrective” to, and a middle way between, a false objectivity which ends in falseness (approximate truth) and the loss of humanity, and a (pseudo) subjectiveness characterised by an absentminded “arbitrariness” in which all truth is relativised. Kierkegaard urges us to eschew the (false) dichotomy of modernity between objectivity and subjectivity and instead points toward an objectivity that comes from within subjectivity and is achieved through an equilateral balance of objectivity and subjectivity. In fact, Kierkegaard tells us, this subjective-objective imbalance is uniquely human and would not arise were we not in an imperfect state (which for Socrates is ignorance, and for Climacus is sin). God, as the paradigmatic knower, is the one subject who has attained pure objectivity precisely because God is the only being who is pure subjectivity.

Subjective reflection, as an expression of one's entire being in its embodied and temporal situatedness, is a passionate concern about the actualisation of one's interests. It is a re-thinking of concepts in terms of one's life as a whole through all its sundry expressions so that one can proactively engage oneself in one's environment and shape the comprehensive direction of one's life. Thus, as with the Socratic refutation of the sophists, reflexive subjectivity simply takes the real world for granted because it is essentially *interested*; it is situated in time and space (*Interesse*) and has as its interest and passion its own being-in-truth. Reflexive subjectivity cannot afford the philosophical luxury of being epistemically sceptical for we must *be*—but for the same reason it also can ill afford to ignore conceptual rigor. The re-thinking process of subjectivity is, then, not simply another abstract process in which

¹³⁴ JP IV 4571/Pap. XI² A 97.

actions are thought about, but it is a thinking through acting, of “understanding the abstract concretely”.¹³⁵ It is thus a bridging of the gap between *theoria* and *praxis* in which the theoretical stance one takes is necessarily commingled with the means of expressing one’s theoretical judgments.¹³⁶ This process of inward deepening is inherently self-reflexive and thereby self-limiting and normative. The passion born of interest (*Interesse*) prevents one from living arbitrarily and commits one to pursuing and actualising the truth in the way one lives. This passionate, inward process of appropriation, this thinking in and through one’s embodied and temporal existence, provides the individual with a self-transparency that operates as a sort of foundation for one’s belief and action. But note that this is not a Cartesian self-presence. Haufniensis argues,

*The most concrete content that consciousness can have is consciousness itself, of the individual himself—not the pure self-consciousness, but the self-consciousness that is so concrete that no author . . . has ever been able to describe a single such self-consciousness, although every single human being is such a one. This self-consciousness is not contemplation, for he who believes this has not understood himself, because he sees that meanwhile he himself is in the process of becoming and consequently cannot be something completed for contemplation. This self-consciousness, therefore is action, and this action in turn is inwardness.*¹³⁷

In the end, the exercise of Kierkegaardian inwardness results in a practical capacity for critical awareness that prepares us for “sincere participation in discourses of legitimation”.¹³⁸

Kierkegaard’s concept of reflexive subjectivity does not, however, as Patricia Huntington observes out, commit the “category mistake” in which “the boundary between an existential mode of action (the *how*) and the *substantive* choice one makes in action (*what* one enacts)” is slurred.¹³⁹ The subjectivity principle does not collapse into a form of *decisionism* in which any action or decision that is

¹³⁵ KW XII.1 352/SV X 52. See also Judge William’s assertion that, “the ethical person knows himself, but his knowing is not simply contemplation . . . It is a collecting of oneself, which itself is an action, and this is why I have often used the expression ‘to choose yourself’ instead of ‘to know yourself.’” KW IV 258/SV III 238.

¹³⁶ J. Heywood Thomas, “Kierkegaard’s Alternative Metaphysical Theology”. *History of European Ideas* 12, No.1 (1990), 59-60. Cf. KW XII.1 73-80/SV IX 62-68.

¹³⁷ KW VIII 143/SV VI 224; my emphasis.

¹³⁸ Patricia J. Huntington, “Heidegger’s Reading of Kierkegaard Revisited: From Ontological Abstraction to Ethical Concretion”, in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, eds. Martin J. Matustik and Merold Westphal (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995), 56.

passionately made constitutes both the means and end of that choice and thereby provides itself with a normative basis for determining a course of action.¹⁴⁰ For Kierkegaard, the object of faith or belief (*Tro*) is not *constituted* in the resolve to believe, or the act of believing or having faith—it is rather *accessed* in this act. A failure to understand this has led some interpreters to view his subjectivity principle as metaphysically irrealist and epistemologically subjectivist, but this is plainly not the case. Reflexive subjectivity or inwardness does not manufacture (or justify) the ideational content of a given belief by virtue of its passionate appropriation, but is instead the formal condition for the appropriate cognitive posture with respect to a given phenomena. The argument presented here is not that the How *is* the What, but that the How carries with it, or determines, the kind of What we get. The How, in other words, is a modal qualification that characterises the manner in which one engages in or relates to theoretical and practical activities.¹⁴¹ The establishment of this formal condition for doxastic practice acts to check doxastic errors as it positions one appropriately as subjects in the world.

To engage in reflexive subjectivity is to place oneself in a dialectical relationship with one's entire world (including self, world and others) so that one's cognitive orientation to the world proceeds from an ethical-religious point of departure that realises the paucity of one's own cognitive resources. The ethical-religious orientation, in turn, extends to the human philosophical endeavour. With the subjectivity principle, Evans notes, "Kierkegaard has . . . rejected what Gadamer has called the Enlightenment 'prejudice against prejudice.'"¹⁴² The subjectivity principle is a critique of all human, modernist tendencies to conduct our theoretical inquiries from a purely (pseudo) objective stance. Because of this critique of objective reason, the domain ethics is privileged over that of epistemology or

¹³⁹ Ibid.; her emphasis.

¹⁴⁰ Therefore Kierkegaard states that, "The *absurd*, the *paradox* [the object of *tro*] is composed in such a way that reason has no power at all to dissolve it in nonsense and prove that it is nonsense; no it is a symbol, a riddle, a compounded riddle about which reason must say: I cannot solve it, it cannot be understood, but it does not follow that it is nonsense". *JP I 7/Pap. X² A 354*.

¹⁴¹ Huntington, "Heidegger's Reading of Kierkegaard", 57.

¹⁴² Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 180.

metaphysics as the ground of human truth.¹⁴³ Reflexive subjectivity rejects any ahistorical (transcendental) view of human reason and emphasizes the historical embeddedness of reason as an inherently social enterprise. Vigilius Haufniensis, for example, argues that, “Every individual is essentially interested in the history of all other individuals, and just as essentially as in his own. . . . No individual is indifferent to the history of the race anymore than the race is indifferent to the history of the individual. . . . the individual begins constantly anew, because he is both himself and the race, and by this, in turn, the history of the race”.¹⁴⁴ Human persons naturally find themselves in an interdependent relationship with their community and environment in which they are born that ultimately extends to their global society and historical ancestry. We may say with Calvin Schrag, therefore, that for Kierkegaard, “Reflection . . . is always from bottom up social, always situated within the density of world-engagements”.¹⁴⁵ We can defer neither to the incontrovertibility of our own human rational powers, nor to the schemes of justification sanctioned by our cultural and social institutions, but instead it is our task to win the truth for ourselves and be alethically victorious in existence.

Kierkegaard, then, has three different senses of objectivity. First, objectivity in Kierkegaard’s literature most often refers to the God’s-eye point of view, an attempt to reason from a presuppositionless starting point in order to build absolute epistemic foundations. Kierkegaard often refers to objectivity in this sense as “pure objectivity” and can be a method of reasoning in which one attempt to forsake subjectivity in order to attain a completely neutral cognitive position, or it can refer to a purely objective thing which is not subject. This type of objectivity is available only to God, and this only because He is able to relate all existing and possible things to his own subjectivity with absolute objectivity; that is, God is pure subjectivity. Pure

¹⁴³ See the note earlier in this chapter in which Kierkegaard’s concept of ethics is defined.

¹⁴⁴ *KW VIII 29/SV VI 124*. The editorial note in *JP I* p. 597 explains that, “As an individual one stands in a relationship of thoroughgoing dependence on the race and environment. . . . The individual must work [her/]his way out of [her/]his dependence in order to win self-dependence”.

¹⁴⁵ Calvin O. Schrag, *The Resources of Rationality: A Response to the Postmodern Challenge* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 177. Schrag is not specifically referring to Kierkegaard in this passage.

objectivity is neither a live option for temporal-spatial, finite (and sinful) human knowers; nor is it appropriate for humans to employ its method. Second, objectivity in Kierkegaard's literature also means a quasi-objectivity that exists as approximation. This is the sense in which human truth may exist as objective. Objectivity here simply refers to the fact that the concepts employed in our acts of cognition, as well as the logical relations between conceptual essences in our cognitive acts, obtain independent of any person's recognition of them. These are abstractions that may be considered independently of their relation to the human subjects which recognise them. These abstract considerations are, then, objective—but only derivatively—and yet are approximate because they only truly exist in their relations with subjects. Mathematics, ontology (as a logic of conceptual essences), logic, etc. would be said to possess this type of objectivity because they proceed from assumed axioms and also because these pursuits are merely abstractions and only exist in their concretions. Such objective relations are the kinds of things we refer to as "facts". This second type of objectivity is completely appropriate for and available to humans but is in itself utterly useless to human persons. Lastly, Kierkegaard fashions for himself a new kind of objectivity—which he rarely refers to under that term—that is the objectivity attained in a passionate and inward subjective relation to oneself and the world in which one lives. This type is both the means to the second type of objectivity and the ground of Kierkegaard's critical philosophy.

The second form of critique in reflexive subjectivity arises from Climacus's theological subjectivity that is qualified by "sin consciousness", made possible by the incarnation of "the god" into time. The theological form of the critique of subjectivity completes the critique of reason nascent in Socratic subjectivity by combining human finitude with and the noetic effects of human sin so that, as Merold Westphal notes, it "becomes a critique of ideology".¹⁴⁶ The Socratic

¹⁴⁶ Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society*, 22. Westphal's very good chapter in this book called, "Inwardness and Ideology Critique in Kierkegaard's *Fragments and Postscript*", treats this same issue in more detail and with a different agenda than our discussion. Cf. KW IV

critique still remains a transcendence-within-immanence and conceives the *telos* of human interest (human being in truth) within the horizon of human imagination. The imperfection of humans is their ignorance and their failure to live up to their inherent potential. With the introduction of sin as a fundamental epistemic category, Kierkegaard wrecks all attempts to valorise human reason and invest it with even the powers of producing from within its own resources the appropriate postulates. As has been shown from *Fragments*, the interest of subjectivity as the being-in-truth of the human person is a concern with *Salighed*—eternal blessedness—and is something that cannot be attained through immanent categories. What is absolutely required is a revelation—an encounter with “the god” in time. “Genuine transaction in *Salighed* entails at the least an exercise of one’s passional capacity”, and, notes Abraham Kahn, “the acknowledgment of complete human inefficacy with respect to Providential concerns, and one’s reliance on God’s grace”.¹⁴⁷ Thus, with the theological dimensions of reflexive subjective, not only is the self decentered, but the entire human enterprise of self-transcendence.

Human attempts at systems of knowledge and ideological constructs will always be mired in human sin—power struggles, oppression, injustice, marginalisation, etc. Therefore *all* propositional expressions of truth are approximate and lack objective, foundational certainties on which to base action or belief, and thus are fundamentally at risk and ultimately rely on either secular (Socratic) or religious faith.¹⁴⁸ Objective uncertainty (i.e., the lack of infallible epistemic foundations) and the corruptness of human thinking extends not only to secular theory or doctrine (whether it be political, philosophical, scientific, etc.), but also to religious doctrine. Westphal argues that Kierkegaard’s subjectivity principle is also a critique of orthodox Christianity: “For truth in the ethicoreligious sense is inseparable from the inward

258/SV III 237-38; KW VII 169/Pap. IV B 1 147-48. See also David Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*, 30-1; Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard’s Critique of Reason and Society*, 22-3; C. Stephen Evans, “Kierkegaard’s View of the Unconscious”, in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, 76-97; and Mooney, *Selves in Discord and Resolve*, 66-70.

¹⁴⁷ Abraham H. Kahn, “Happiness in Kierkegaard’s Edifying Discourses”, *Kierkegaardiana* 12: (1982), 72.

¹⁴⁸ Mooney, *Selves in Discord and Resolve*, 66.

transformation of the self; and this cannot be identified either with mental assent to propositions or with having had a rite performed on one in the helplessness of infancy [e.g. baptism]”.¹⁴⁹ The ground and goal of all human truth, *essential* truth, is *being-in-truth* and not, as Westphal noted, doctrinal correctness (*per sé*) or ritual performances. Propositional and doctrinal formulations are natural (and in one sense necessary) expressions of being in truth, but they are *accidental* to one’s being in truth. Thus, Kierkegaard’s reflexive subjectivity, which, as we shall see in Chapter Six culminates in “Religiousness B”, operates as a “principle of protest” against all “idolatric tendencies and social evils”, perpetuated by the wielding of truth *qua* objective truths as instruments of ultimacy, power, and absoluteness.¹⁵⁰ This in turn establishes the human person in a transparently in which one is “contemporaneous with oneself” and provides one with the basis on which to proceed in a discourse of legitimation.

Conclusion to Chapter Four

In Chapter Four we have seen that Johannes Climacus’ claim that “truth is subjectivity” emerges from his grammar of truth in *Postscript*, which completes Kierkegaard’s critique of epistemology begun in *Fragments*. On our reading, *Fragments* essentially is a grammatical inquiry into the issue of learning the truth. Climacus introduces Christian categories to critique the Socratic-Platonic doctrine of *anamnesis* and its contention that eternal truth is immanent to human persons as a constitutive feature of human ontology. *Fragments* performs its critique of recollection by focussing on the failure of the Socratic version of being-in-truth to account for the salvation (*Salighed*) of human persons in time-space. When he introduces *Salighed* as the logical extension of Socrates’ discussion of truth, Climacus thereby demonstrates that Socrates’ default acceptance of recollection as the explanation of the relationship between humans and (eternal) truth involves some

¹⁴⁹ Westphal, *Kierkegaard’s Critique of Reason and Society*, 123.

¹⁵⁰ Calvin O. Schrag, “The Kierkegaard Effect in the Shaping of the Contours of Modernity”, in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, 16n-17.

deep incoherences with his (correct) methodological ignorance. The belief of Socrates and Plato that truth is immanent within humans, expressed in modern philosophy as an autonomous subject, ultimately erases the historical subjectivity of individual persons, as well as doing away with the possibility of a victorious truth (learning the truth) in time. Socrates has exhausted immanent categories, so Climacus goes beyond him and proposes the Christian theological categories of the incarnation, sin, repentance, and atonement as necessary epistemological categories.

Kierkegaard's second move of his epistemological critique comes in *Postscript*. In *Postscript* Kierkegaard broaches the same issue as *Fragments*, this time in the form of a grammar of the concept of truth. As Kierkegaard parses the concept of truth he distinguishes *accidental truth* as truths that are not essential to a thing's conceptual essence, from *essential truth* as truth that fundamentally pertains to human existing. He also identifies that there are two kinds or poles of truth, objective truth and subjective truth. Climacus argues that "becoming subjective" is the way of human truth and that for humans "truth is subjectivity" because human access to truth is always from within subjectivity. Objective truths cannot be grounded in any way other than through subjectivity because: (1) they are themselves approximation; and (2) the objective means of gaining truth demands an atemporal, nonexistent, and non-human subjectivity. However, the truth of subjectivity is ultimately revealed, by the god's entrance into time, to be that subjectivity is untruth. Once more Climacus asserts that a general epistemology must be inscribed within a theological epistemology and that any other account of human truth fails to adequately explain human truth acquisition.

Kierkegaard does not think that objective statements of truth are wholly illegitimate or epistemically inappropriate, only that these cannot be the ground or goal of human belief (*Tro*). Kierkegaard does not think that the *telos* of human cognitive powers (*Salighed*, or eternal happiness) lies in the attainment of a collection of the maximal number of true propositions available in the universe. That would be, to use Kierkegaard's term, a purely esthetical existence (as possibility),

lacking the inwardness of a self (subjectivity) as a “unifying point”. Rather, Kierkegaard thinks that “objective”, propositional truths, and the human cognitive capacity to possess them, are: (1) valuable only as part of the whole person—i.e., the ethical-religious being-in-truth of the person and as part of the attainment of a unified, deep subjectivity that functions to ground these propositions in truth; and (2) in turn conditioned by the manner in which we involve ourselves in reality—i.e., propositional truths are features of and dependent upon our subjectivity so that ultimately the kind of self or subjectivity we develop proportionately determines the quantity and quality of the propositional truths we possess. Kierkegaard thinks, therefore, that human subjectivity is intrinsically characterised by a need for truth, and that all human endeavours toward truth exhibit a teleological structure that is reducible to the search for eternal blessedness.

When Climacus says that truth is subjectivity, the concept of subjectivity denotes Kierkegaard’s use of subjectivity both as subject *qua* human subject, or constitutional subjectivity, and reflexive subjectivity as the subject forming activities that constitute the process of becoming a subject, such as inwardness and passion. Subjectivity as reflexive subjectivity involves a deliberate engagement in subjective double-reflection (versus objective reflection) in which the thinker deliberately applies her/his conceptual understanding across her/his entire embodied existence. In the end, Kierkegaard’s subjectivity principle operates as a critical principle which, much like modern philosophy, places the human subject at the center of our epistemic activity. However, Kierkegaard’s subject is duly decentered and the establishment of a concrete, actual historical subject replaces Descartes’ thinking substance. The normative function of constitutional subjectivity, the fully developed human self, functions as the ground of human truth. Kierkegaard’s temporally and spatially conditioned self of belief also opens the door to a communitarian view of selfhood and implies that for Kierkegaard a full account of belief must be located within the social and communal dynamics of our praxial engagements with the world. Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous statement that “truth is subjectivity”, then,

means: (1) that humans truths exist only in and for subjectivity so that the way of approaching truth is through subjective appropriation or passionate inwardness; and (2) that the ground of human truth is the establishment of a full, or deep subjectivity, which is described throughout the Kierkegaardian literature as self-transparency.

What is needed now is a grammar of this subject, which is the topics of Chapter Five and Chapter Six, and which in turn provides a normative basis by which we can evaluate our praxis or ways being in the world. It is the task of Chapter Seven, then, to explore Kierkegaard's account of the human self as a grammar of the self in its believing dimensions.

PART TWO

SUBJECTIVITY AND THE GRAMMAR OF BELIEF

CHAPTER FIVE
GRAMMAR OF SUBJECTIVITY 1:
THE CONTOURS OF THE SELF

To be spirit is to be *I*.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*

The majority of men are truncated *I*'s; what was structured as the possibility of being sharpened to an *I* is quickly truncated to a third person. *In margin*: Like Münchhausen's dog, a greyhound that wore down its legs and became a daschund.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*

Part One concluded with the determination that Kierkegaard's subjectivity principle functions as a critical principle that provides norms for human belief and action. It was noted that there are two uses of the term subjectivity in the Kierkegaardian literature, and that there is an attending normativity with each sense. Reflexive subjectivity, characterised by *subjective reflection* and a passionate *inwardness* in and through one's subjective engagements with reality, is actually a new concept of *objectivity* which serves as the substance or mode of human truth-acquisition. Reflexive subjectivity is the *means* of human truth and it is through the inward deepening of subjective reflection that humans achieve self-transparency as the ground of truth. Constitutional subjectivity refers to fully developed, self-transparent (deep) human subjects and provides the normative standard by which human practices of justification are judged. Part Two of this dissertation seeks to establish this claim more fully.

The focus of Chapter Five once more is Kierkegaard's concept of subjectivity, only now our analysis turns to subjectivity *qua* human subject, or what we designated earlier as constitutional subjectivity. In the Kierkegaardian literature we have two different analyses which, taken together, provide us with a comprehensive grammar of human subjectivity. Kierkegaard comments that,

Even though I achieve nothing else, I nevertheless hope to leave very accurate and experientially based observations concerning the conditions of existence [*Tilvarelsens*]. I am convinced above all that these conditions are always essentially the same. . . . Using my diagram, a young person should be able to see very accurately beforehand, just as on a price list: if you venture this far out, then the conditions are thus and so, this to win and this to lose; and if you venture out this far, these are the conditions, etc.¹

The account of Kierkegaard's grammar of human subjectivity given here is heavily indebted to Calvin Schrag's work and his Kierkegaardian notion that human subjectivity inhabits in the interstices of human communicative praxis. Schrag moves from this concept of subjectivity into the concept of a "praxial critique".² The broad approach to Kierkegaardian subjectivity detailed here is heavily informed by, and is on many points synchronous with, Schrag's work, but there are a variety of differences. Most significant is the germinal role belief plays in the establishment of human subjectivity on our reading. In turn, the role that the logic of subjectivity plays in regulating belief is also very different on our view. For example, Schrag argues that, "[b]odily presence . . . announces its presence *in person*. This presence of the body-subject *in person* is posited neither as a metaphysical nor as an epistemological self-identical foundation".³ He later expresses a deep suspicion of beliefs saying: "It is this heavy accent on the role of beliefs and theories that occasions for us certain concerns".⁴ In the end, Kierkegaard's concept of belief as presented here is very different from Schrag's and therefore the role it plays in the grounding of subjectivity means, in opposition to Schrag's contentions, that epistemological concerns—in so far as this means concerns over beliefs and their regulation—maintain a significant role. Ultimately the kind of subjectivity Schrag offers is very different from the kind Kierkegaard is found to envision in our study.

¹ *JP I 1046/Pap. VIII*¹ A 127. In this regard Kierkegaard also wrote: "Through my writings I hope to achieve the following: to leave behind me so accurate a characterization of Christianity and its relationships in the world that an enthusiastic, noble-minded young person will be able to find in it a map of relations as accurate as any topographical map from the famous institutes. I have not had the help of such an author. The old Church Fathers lacked one aspect, they did not know the world"; *JP V 6284/Pap. IX* A 448.

² See Calvin O. Schrag, *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1986); Schrag, *The Resources of Rationality: A Response to the Postmodern Challenge* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1992); and Schrag, *The Self After Postmodernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

³ Schrag, *Communicative Praxis*, 154-55; his italics.

⁴ Schrag, *The Resources of Rationality*, 178.

In *Postscript* Johannes Climacus provides one axis of Kierkegaard's grammar in terms of the four conceptual spheres of human existence: the esthetical, the ethical, and religiousnesses A and B. With a broad brush, Climacus traces the movements and existential possibilities of a fully developed subjectivity. Through Anti-Climacus's *The Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard offers a different, but complementary, analysis of human subjectivity that is not as expansive as Climacus's grammar of the existence spheres. Instead, Anti-Climacus provides a detailed examination of a deep subjectivity in contrast to a thin subjectivity, and scrutinises the dysfunctions that afflict the movements of human subjectivity. Here Kierkegaard specifically examines the concept of human personhood and the ontological determinants of a fully established self. Chapter Five will focus on this portrait of the self in *Sickness Unto Death* as a self-relating relation. In Anti-Climacus's analysis a *thin* self is given to us as a task in order to develop a *deep subjectivity*, in which the self is grounded "transparently in the power that establishes it".⁵ Chapter Six takes up the theme of the Kierkegaardian grammar of the range of possible existential modes of human existence articulated in his theory of the "stages" of existence or "existence-spheres". The theory of stages is examined as a logic of the teleological development of a deep subjectivity that develops a unified self-narrative with multi-dimensionality and achieves "transparency". And in Chapter Seven we look at the role that belief plays in the establishment of a deep subjectivity and how the theory of existence-spheres illuminates belief acquisition and doxastic regulation. The final chapter of Part Two investigates how Kierkegaard's grammar of the human subject functions to provide the means of doxastic regulation and may serve as the basis for a praxially oriented critical principle for beliefs.

Kierkegaard's Situated Self

⁵ KW XIX 14/SV XV 73.

Chapter Two detailed Climacus's rejection of the Cartesian *cogito* as the basis for a presuppositionless starting point and indubitable foundation in epistemology along with its postulation of an epistemological subject that has unique and pure access to the contents (beliefs) of consciousness. Climacus rather points to an ethical and situated self-presence as the starting point in any investigation of our beliefs, for we do not have ourselves in contemplation but only in our intentional actions (which oblige us to exist).⁶ In *Sickness Unto Death* Anti-Climacus, in agreement with Climacus before him, criticises both the Greek conception of the knowing, believing self, and the *cogito* of modern philosophy, as erasing the ethical significance of the human self. He argues that,

In pure ideality, where the actual individual is not involved . . . there is no difficulty at all connected with the transition from understanding to doing. This is the Greek mind (but not the Socratic, for Socrates was far too ethically minded for that). And the secret of modern philosophy is essentially the very same for it is this: *cogito ergo sum* [I think therefore I am], to think is to be (Christianly however, it [the formula for self-knowledge] reads: according to your faith, be it unto you, or, as you believe, so are you, to believe is to be). Thus it is evident that modern philosophy is neither more nor less than paganism.⁷

Here in *Sickness Unto Death*, the most extensive and mature treatment of human ontology⁸ in the Kierkegaardian literature, we find a version of Climacus's ethical-religious ego in which Kierkegaard's peculiar concept of belief functions as a critique of modernist philosophy. In the above passage Anti-Climacus makes clear once again that the kind of self-knowledge available to humans is not that of a Cartesian self-presence who, in abstraction, ideally sees itself from an eternal, ahistorical vantage point of pure self-presence. Kierkegaard's pseudonym is interested in the concerned, historically concrete, actual self that is temporally and spatially embodied in a matrix of social relations, and who therefore thinks, understands, or *believes*, about itself and other things, from within that historically

⁶ Refer to Kierkegaard's critique of the *cogito* in Chapter Two and our discussion of inwardness and subjective reflection in Chapter Four.

⁷ KW XIX 93/SV XV 145; his italics.

⁸ Recall that Kierkegaard thinks of ontology as a science of conceptual essences. Whereas metaphysics speaks of being *qua* substance (i.e., it speaks of the nature of a thing's "thatness"), ontology speaks of being *qua* essence, or in terms of what makes a thing *this* thing and not *that* thing (i.e., it speaks of a thing's "thisness"). It is therefore completely coherent for Kierkegaard to denigrate metaphysics and yet speak of ontology—provided this is in the subjunctive mood and not the indicative mood of metaphysics.

and socially limited framework. Human subjectivity, for Kierkegaard, is simply not the purely rational agency envisioned by modernity, but instead is “the point outside the world”, existing in the supra-rational realm of “paradox”, and “the absurd”, and in relation to others. This is a distinctly ethical-religious⁹ and Christian view of our self-presence that is epistemically fallible and perceives itself through its concretions—a self which ultimately requires, as we will see, a *repetition* for it to be truth.

Thin Subjectivity

In Kierkegaard’s writings we have delineated two categories of human subjectivity: first, what may be called a *thin* subjectivity or self, and secondly, a *deep* subjectivity.¹⁰ Once again, because of his non-dualist and anti-metaphysical tendencies, Kierkegaard does not see these categories of subjectivity as separate, distinct entities, but rather views them as two ends of a continuum. It is not strictly a question of an individual being (in actuality) wholly one or the other. There is no strict disjunction between a thin and deep subjectivity and it is rather an issue of being more of one or the other.¹¹ There is a sense in which humans *qua* members of the human race simply *are* (or become) subjects in Kierkegaard’s thin sense. The natural ability a human has to relate to oneself is “[hu/]man’s superiority over the animal”.¹² Thin subjectivity is given to us in the awareness of self that we achieve

⁹ Recall that for Kierkegaard ethics is not the science of morality but rather the intentional, supra-rational sphere of human subjectivity characterised by passion, concern, and the striving of existence (coming-to-be). It is concerned with human self-transcendence and therefore includes a religious dimension as well.

¹⁰ Although he does not use the exact terms “thin” and “deep” selves or subjectivities, Kierkegaard clearly operates with these concepts, as when in his upbuilding discourse, “To Need God is a Human Being’s Highest Perfection”, Kierkegaard refers to the “first self” and the “deeper self”; *KW V 297-326/SV IV 170-194*.

¹¹ There is a critical threshold between the two, however, that, once crossed, qualifies one under the other category. The point here is merely to indicate that the difference between a thin and a deep subjectivity is not metaphysical, but phenomenological and ontological/conceptual.

¹² *KW XIX 15/SV 15 74*. In context Anti-Climacus actually refers to the possibility of despair as humanity’s superiority over animals. However, despair is defined by Anti-Climacus as the possibility of misrelation of oneself to oneself; see *KW XIX 14/SV XV 72*. The possibility of despair, therefore, is a direct reference to the self-relation previously described by Anti-Climacus as “the relation that relates itself to itself”. In other words, what makes despair possible for

through our actions in and interactions with our world. Thin subjectivity, however, is merely an incipient, nascent self, and is not what it means to be fully developed human person. It is more like the basic condition for personhood. Therefore, in an important sense, humans, although possessing thin subjectivity, may still fail to achieve deep subjectivity and thus fall short of becoming completely “human”, with a fully developed personhood.

Despite their different perspectives and emphases there is a fundamental agreement between Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms in their view of the thin subject. John Glenn aptly summarises Kierkegaard’s overall view of the incipient self when he notes that for Kierkegaard, “Human existence is a kind of paradox. A human being is neither a god nor a beast—yet is somehow like both”.¹³ The aesthete in *Either/Or* asserts that, “The basic concept of [hu/]man is spirit, and one should not be confused by the fact that [s/]he is also able to walk on two feet”.¹⁴ In the opening line of *Sickness Unto Death* Anti-Climacus affirms A’s analysis stating, “Human being is spirit”, and elaborates saying that spirit is “the self”. Anti-Climacus further qualifies spirit/self saying that the self is “a relation that relates itself to itself”, and that, “a human being is a synthesis of the infinite and finite, of the temporal and eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short a synthesis”.¹⁵ A synthesis, Anti-Climacus explains, is “a relation between the two”, and he is adamant that a human being thought of this way “*is still not a self*”. This self is a “negative unity” that refers only to the fact that a human being, “under the qualification of the psychical and the physical is a relation”.¹⁶ This idea that human beings are a bodily-soulish synthesis is pervasive throughout all of Kierkegaard’s

Kierkegaard is the fact that the self substantially *is* a self-relation; *KW XIX 13/SV XV 73*. See the following discussion of this definition of the human self.

¹³ John D. Glenn, Jr., “The Definition of the Self and the Structure of Kierkegaard’s Work”, in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Sickness Unto Death, Volume 19*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987), 6.

¹⁴ *KW III 65/SV II 62*.

¹⁵ *KW XIX 13/SV XV 73*. See also Haufniensis’s definition: “[A human being] is a synthesis of the psychical and the physical; but this synthesis is unthinkable if it is not united in a third. This third is spirit”; *KW XIX 43/SV VI 137*.

pseudonyms,¹⁷ and Vigilius Haufniensis remarks that in this state “man is not merely animal” but that “spirit [selfhood] is present, but as immediate, as dreaming”.¹⁸ Selfhood in its dream-state is what we are calling a thin subjectivity. *Thin subjectivity* is, then, more like a *capacity* for self-unity in time and space than it is properly a *self*, and it is the tension between this capacity and the propensity of human experience to be attenuated and diffused through time from which deep subjectivity or genuine selfhood emerges.¹⁹

The description of the human person as a complex set of relations must be understood within its general context. Recall from Chapter Two that Climacus in *Postscript* describes the human person as a “duplexity” and noted that this was because humans exist in a temporal-eternal tension so that human existence is a juxtaposition of contraries. In Chapter Two we also noted Merold Westphal’s admonition that Kierkegaard is never simply anti-Hegelian, but had a very high esteem for Hegel’s thought. In many significant ways Kierkegaard’s thinking was shaped by Hegel and utilised an intrinsic Hegelian structure.²⁰ In his descriptions of the “self” or “spirit”, Kierkegaard adopts much of Hegel’s vocabulary and dialectic—which Kierkegaard apparently finds satisfactory—but uses them to quite different ends. The self that Kierkegaard describes is not constituted by the kind of clarity derived from the rational “standpoint of Science”²¹ as with Hegel, but is instead a self whose only hope for self-transparency is that won through a

¹⁶ KW XIX 43/SV VI 137; my italics. The terms Anti-Climacus uses for “the psychical” and “the physical” are respectively the Danish terms “*Sjel*” and “*Legeme*”, which may be translated respectively as “soul” and “body”.

¹⁷ On the concept of human beings as a synthesis see, for example, KW VIII 43, 48-9, 52, 58, 61, 64-65, 68-9, 71-2, 81, 85, 88, 90-1, 117, 122, 142, 155/SV VI 137, 141, 145, 149, 152, 155-56, 159, 161, 170, 173, 176, 178, 201, 205, 223, 234; KW XI 39, 170/SV VII 39, 151-52; KW XII.1 56, 579/SV IX 51, X 245; JP I 55, 86/Pap. VI A 102, JP V 5792/Pap. VI B 18.

¹⁸ KW VIII 43/SV VI 137.

¹⁹ John Glenn, “the Definition of the Self”, 9.

²⁰ This last point is the substantive argument of Stephen Dunning’s work. See especially his, *Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of Inwardness: A Structural Analysis of the Theory of the Stages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), *passim*.

²¹ See Georg W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), *passim*.

redemptive striving in existence.²² What Kierkegaard preserves in Hegel's vocabulary of spirit is the concept of synthesis, which carries with it the concept of relation, or of two things being in relation. This synthetic being-in-relation is, for Kierkegaard, the phenomenological hallmark of distinctly human existence.

Synthesis, for Kierkegaard, refers to the tension in which (or relation between) two opposite things (or "contraries") are held together so that on the one hand, the two entities are inseparably conjoined, but on the other hand, neither one subsumes the other in the relation. A simple, or pure synthesis, as the human person incipiently is, is a "negative unity" because each component of the relation is only related to the other by virtue of its being placed in a relation to the other.²³ In other words, a simple synthesis is an "immediate" unity that lacks a self-reflexive context in which the two relata are brought together (mediated) as two parts of one term. In a negative unity there is no further relation in which the initial synthetic relation is itself established, and is subsequently an accidental unity—not a fully concrete, self-aware (essential) unity.

Once more Kierkegaard borrows the concepts of negativity and positivity from Hegel and uses them frequently throughout his literature.²⁴ Kierkegaard uses the Hegelian concept of synthesis to describe the dialectic, or grammar, of the human self to establish the quite un-Hegelian conclusion that the human person is always and in its very essence *situated*. Furthermore, Kierkegaard emphasises that it is not

²² In the "Preface" to *Sickness Unto Death* Anti-Climacus argues that, "it is Christian heroism—a rarity, to be sure—to venture wholly to become oneself, this specific individual human being", but "it is not Christian heroism to be taken in by the idea of [hu]man in the abstract or to play the wonder game with world history"; KW XIX 5/SV XV 67. This is undoubtedly another Parthian shot at Hegel and in *Sickness Unto Death* Anti-Climacus may be understood to use Hegel's dialectical method and technical vocabulary against themselves so that Hegel's conclusions are undermined.

²³ KW XIX 13/SV XV 73. See also Elizabeth A. Morelli, "The Existence of the Self Before God in Kierkegaard's *Sickness Unto Death*", *Heythrop Journal* 36: (1995), 19. Stephen Crites, in "The *Sickness Unto Death* : A Social Interpretation", in *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community: Religion, Ethics, and Politics in Kierkegaard*, eds. George B. Connell and C. Stephen Evans (London: Humanities Press, 1992), 149, explains very lucidly that, for Kierkegaard, "The self is not merely a soul, an immaterial thing related to a body-thing (for that would make the relation . . . a mere negative unity, like two elements in a solution). The relating activity is a 'positive third' that constitutes whatever is related by it. It constantly materializes, is in that sense physical through and through, although it is never a fixed, self-identical, material thing".

just that the human self is situated *in* relation to other things—although it is that—but it is *itself* a relating of various synthetic relations. Generally speaking, the concepts of negativity and positivity relate respectively to non-being or a lack of presence, and being or presence. For Kierkegaard, *positivity* essentially denotes an affinity with the concepts of immutability, eternal, infinitude, absolute certainty, spirit, and complete presence or historical concretion. Aligned with *negativity* are the concepts of transition, finitude, coming to be in time, uncertainty, irony, sensate, physical substance, and incompleteness or lacking historical presence. A simple synthesis of two factors or opposing elements, therefore, is a “*negative* unity” in that it is simply qualified as an existing thing, coming-to-be in time, and does not have the “positivity” of complete, historical and self-conscious presence. In *Postscript*, for example, Climacus argues that all earthly existence, and especially human existence, is characterised by negativity because it is unceasingly in the process of coming-to-be.²⁵

Thus for Kierkegaard the human person as a thin subjectivity is radically situated. In its givenness, human (thin) subjectivity is defined largely by its total situation in the world. But this is not the complete self. Kierkegaard claims that “Spirit [*Aand*]”, however, “is the power a person’s understanding exercises over [her/]his life;”²⁶ and that to be spirit is to have a first-person perspective on oneself and the world.²⁷ *Aand* is a corollary of the German word *Geist* and similarly can be translated into English as mind or spirit.²⁸ In its initial, primitive form, human subjectivity is identified by Kierkegaard as self-consciousness—or an awareness of

²⁴ See Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (New York: Humanities Press, 1969), 84-5, 103-07, 835.

²⁵ *KW* XII.1 80-86/*SV* IX 69-74. On Kierkegaard’s use of the concept of negativity, see also *KW* II 53, 135, 144-5, 159-60, 312, 322, 351, 378/*SV* I 106-07, 173, 180-81, 194, 317, 324-25, *Pap.* III C 27; *KW* III 285/*SV* II 263; *KW* VIII 21n, 78n-9, 81-2, 134, 139, 145, 181, 187 /*SV* VI 293n, 167n-68, 170-71, 215-16, 220, 226, *Pap.* V B 49:6, *Pap.* 59:18; *KW* XI 61, 443-44/*SV* VII 57-8, 238-39; *KW* XII.1 76, 89-91, 524-25/*SV* IX 65-6, 77-8, X 198-9; *KW* XXII 83/*SV* XVIII 130; *JP* I 639, III 3284, V 5795/*Pap.* VI B 11, III A 107, VI B 35:19.

²⁶ *JP* IV 4340/*Pap.* X³ A 736.

²⁷ As noted in the epigraphs to this chapter, Kierkegaard states: “To be spirit is to be I”. *JP* IV 4350/*Pap.* XI¹ A 487. See also *JP* I 71, 72/*Pap.* X² A 78; *JP* II 1144/*Pap.* X⁴ A 422; *JP* II 2075/*Pap.* XI¹ A 533; *JP* II 2077/*Pap.* XI 587; *JP* III 3219/*Pap.* XI¹ A 51; *JP* IV 4911/*Pap.* XI¹ A 516; *JP* VI 6440/*Pap.* X¹ A 531.

one's temporal, situated emodiment in the world in which one "has [her/]himself for [her/]himself".²⁹ The linking of spirit [*Aand*] to "the power a person's understanding exercises over [her/]his life", indicates that Kierkegaard is not referring to the self or consciousness as a non-material substance (*viz-a-vis* Descartes) that mysteriously clings to or associates with human bodies.³⁰ Kierkegaard's *Journals and Papers* include some revealing statements regarding how Kierkegaard understood the concept of spirit. He states: "Spirit is this: to live as if dead (to die to the world)";³¹ also "The presence of spirit means that the more a man contemplates life, the harder and more strenuous it becomes for him";³² and "Spirit is restlessness".³³ Kierkegaard is clearly operating with an notion of "spirit" that eschews a metaphysical and substance dualist definition. Throughout his various comments on the nature of spirit Kierkegaard maintains that humans are not born as fully established spirits. What is more, Johannes Climacus claims that, "Development of spirit is self-activity; the spiritually developed individual takes his spiritual development along with him in death;" and that, "The most inferior person can relate[her/]himself absolutely in the qualification of spirit fully as well as the gifted person because endowments, proficiency, and knowledge are a 'what,' but *the absoluteness of the relation of spirit is a 'how' with regard to what one is, be it much or little*".³⁴

²⁸ *Aand* also bears comparison with the Greek concept of *nous*.

²⁹ Anti-Climacus states that, "Every human being is primitively intended to be a self, destined to become [her/]himself, and as such ever self certainly is angular, but that only means that it is to be ground into shape, not that it is to be ground down smooth, not that it is utterly to abandon being itself out of fear of men, or even simply out of fear of men not to dare to be itself in its more essential contingency (which definitely is not to be ground down smooth), in which a person is still [her/]himself for [her/]himself". *KW XIX 33/SV XV 90*. Furthermore, recall from Chapter Three that the Danish word for consciousness is *Bevisted*, which, unlike the English term denotes self-awareness or full-consciousness. In *Johannes Climacus*, Kierkegaard tautologically links consciousness with the concept of the self, or spirit/mind, when he states that "Consciousness [*Bevisted*] is mind [or spirit—*Aand*]". *KW VII 169/Pap. IV B 1 148*.

³⁰ For the most sustained discussion of spirit in the Kierkegaardian literature see Vigilius Haufniensis's *The Concept of Anxiety*; *KW VIII/SV VI 101-240*.

³¹ *JP IV 4360/Pap. XI² A 279*.

³² *JP IV 4359/Pap. XI² A 246*.

³³ *JP IV 4361, 4362/Pap. XI² A 317, 353*.

³⁴ *KW XII.1 345, 540/SV X 47, 211*; my emphasis.

We conclude, then, that Kierkegaard's analysis is a "naturalistic", phenomenological definition of the self which resists both a metaphysical rendering of the self as a bit of immaterial stuff, and a reductionistic, physicalist view of the self as an illusion that is reducible to one's brain chemistry. The self, the *I*, is that which emerges from the exercise of intentional consciousness in existential transactions with reality so that one attains a unific, first-person point of view. This subjectivity is for Kierkegaard the subjective condition for the possibility of a person seeing the world of things or "objects" in distinction to oneself; it is that which makes its possible for one to have a perspective on the world as one's own and is therefore what (essentially) separates humans from the animal kingdom. This first person perspective, however, is more of a personal competence than an entity. Understood this way, "The I has not been reduced to nothing, but it also does not have the status of an object in the world, of a[n objective] something".³⁵

In particular, we want to note three ways in which human subjectivity, as a *thin subjectivity*, is not a pure, atemporal, conscious substance in Kierkegaard's writings, but how this subjectivity is *given* to us by virtue of our innate humanity finds itself already situated in and qualified by its world.

The first way in which the Kierkegaardian self is situated is in its material, embodied presence and physical, time-space location in the world. Humans are, as we have just seen, a psycho-somatic *synthesis* of body-soul, finite-infinite, which entails a further synthesis of time-eternity—as a continuous becoming in time-space that has the ability to abstract away from that and perceive itself and other things/ideas "timelessly".³⁶ The human self is not *only* the physical aspect of a human person—we "should not be confused by the fact that [a human] is able also

³⁵ Hans Sluga makes this statement of Wittgenstein's concept of self but it equally applies to our reading of Kierkegaard's self. Sluga also draws a parallel between this understanding of the self and Wittgenstein's comment in *Philosophical Investigations*, 304, that the sensation of pain is "not a *something* but it is not a *nothing* either". See Hans Sluga, "'Whose House is That?' Wittgenstein on the Self", in *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, eds. Hans Sluga and David G. Stern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 329.

³⁶ See John Glenn's definition of Anti-Climacus's use of eternal in reference to the self, in "The Definition of the Self", 9, as, "the sense of transcending the temporal dispersion, without becoming merely abstract or stultifying".

to walk on two feet”³⁷—but the self or spirit that relates to itself finds that a significant feature of the synthesis to which it relates is an embodied physical, psychological, and social being. That is, the original (primitive) synthesis of the human person is a lived body, subject to the constraints of time and space and the concrete situations in which human existence finds its home. John Glenn provides some helpful commentary.

the “infinite” of the self does not primarily mean the possession of an immortal soul, but the capacity to transcend one’s own finite situation, *either* in such a way that this finite situation is somehow neglected *or* that an expanded, ideal form of the self is envisioned and movement toward its actualization is possible. . . . the “finitude” of the self does not mean [just] its bodily character *per se*, but its involvement in actual situations, particularly as this entails a tendency to be involved in social roles.³⁸

Kierkegaard’s understanding of the self, then, is opposed to Plato’s view, and more like Aristotle’s conception of human nature. Kierkegaard believes the human self always to be a finite one that is limited by its temporal and spatial material presence and already-present relations. The affirmation of the self as having a finite dimension is what John Elrod refers to as an acknowledgement of the self’s “facticity”, and includes the self’s given “sex, race, personal appearance, psychological characteristics, talents, interests, and abilities as well as its more general, yet concrete natural environment and social, political, and cultural milieu”.³⁹ Elizabeth Morelli contends that for Kierkegaard, “the self cannot exist without limitation, definition, temporality, necessity (in short without a body)”.⁴⁰ Although we may be able to envision an incorporeal existence for human selves, in which they exist as body-independent entities, Kierkegaard insists that this is not in fact the case (empirically) for humans. The human self that comes to understand and relate to itself finds that it is already in the world, has a body, a history, and a whole array of in/competences, etc. Thus Judge William argues in *Either/Or* that “the I chooses itself or, more correctly, receives itself. . . . Now [s/]he discovers that the self [s/]he chooses has a boundless multiplicity within itself inasmuch as it has a history, a

³⁷ KW III 65/SV II 62.

³⁸ John Glenn, “The Definition of the Self”, 8.

³⁹ John W. Elrod, “The Self in Kierkegaard’s Pseudonyms”, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 4 (Winter 1973), 225.

history in which [s/]he acknowledges identity with [her/]himself".⁴¹ Judge William is adamant that the human self cannot possibly exist as an atemporal, unchanging substance, or "algebraic symbol", that remains numerically self-identical through change.⁴² Instead the judge believes the self to be something we find already in existence as we ethically assume responsibility for it in an act of choosing our self.

Kierkegaard thinks, secondly, that the self is qualified by language by virtue of its connection to consciousness. The Hegelian concept of an unconditioned, presuppositionless, and pure consciousness hinges upon a culpable naiveté regarding the nature of consciousness and language. The first-person perspective, the incipient *I* of a thin subjectivity, is located within a person's *Bevisted*, or full-consciousness. Chapter Three argued that consciousness for Kierkegaard is comprised of a relation between reality (the immediate perceptual presentation of reality) and ideality (language and concepts). There are, then, in consciousness, two poles—linguistic and perceptual—that are unified in a (third) single point—the self. Thus, Climacus declares that "the categories of consciousness are . . . *trichotomous*".⁴³ In so far as being a self or having spirit entails self-consciousness, this consciousness is mediated by the language and concepts we have prior to this self-awareness. The pseudonymous A writes in volume one of *Either/Or* that there is an essential link between spirit/selfhood and language, such that it is only through the appropriation of language by spirit (a self) that language is "installed in its rights;" and yet language functions at the same time as "the authentic medium" for expressing spirit/self.⁴⁴ Thus Ronald Hall observes that, for

⁴⁰ Morelli, "The Existence of the Self", 20.

⁴¹ *KW* IV 177, 216/*SV* III 165, 201.

⁴² Judge William argues that, "The reason, however, it may seem to an individual as if [s/]he could be changed continually and yet remain the same, as if [her/]his innermost being were an algebraic symbol that could signify anything whatever it is assumed to be, is that [s/]he is in a wrong position, that [s/]he has not chosen [her/]himself, does not have a concept of it"; *KW* IV 215/*SV* III 199.

⁴³ *KW* VII 169/*Pap.* IV B 147-8.

⁴⁴ *KW* III 67/*SV* II 64. Ronald L. Hall, in *Word & Spirit: A Kierkegaardian Critique of the Modern Age* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993), makes (too) much of this passage in *Either/Or*, and argues that here it is demonstrated that for Kierkegaard it is *only* in the felicitous speech-act, defined as the act by which we "own our words and own up to our words" (*Word and Spirit*, 51), that the human self achieves the necessary historical continuity it needs to

Kierkegaard, “Our first-person speech-acts *intend* a dialectical self/world relation. Or to put this differently, the self that we are called to be, the self as spirit, the self that is constituted in relation, is *given* within the first-person speech-act”.⁴⁵ In so far as we are self-conscious human subjects, our subjectivity must emerge in and through the medium of language—a medium we did not choose for ourselves and that plays an essential role in forming the shape of the subjectivity with which we find ourselves in our praxial, existential engagements.

Kierkegaard explains his position more fully in one of the most profound statements of the situatedness of the self in the Kierkegaardian literature. Although we have already referred to this passage in Chapter Two, because of its importance we will quote the full journal entry:

If it were the case that philosophers are presuppositionless, an account would still have to be made of language and its entire importance and relation to speculation, for here speculation does indeed have a medium which it has not provided for itself, and *what the eternal secret of consciousness is for speculation as a union of a qualification of nature and a qualification of freedom, so also language is partly an original given and partly something freely developing. And just as the individual, no matter how freely he develops, can never reach the point of becoming absolutely independent, since true [human] freedom consists in appropriating the given and consequently in becoming absolutely dependent through freedom, so it is with language, although we do find at times the ill-conceived tendency of not wanting to accept language as the freely appropriated given but rather to produce it for oneself, whether it appears in the highest regions where it usually ends in silence or in the personal isolation of jargonish nonsense. Perhaps the story of the Babylonian confusion of tongues may be explained this way, that it was an attempt to construct an arbitrarily formed common language, which, since it lacked full integrative commonality, necessarily broke up into the disparate differences, for here it is a matter of *totum est parte sua prius*, which was not understood.*⁴⁶

In this passage Kierkegaard brings further insight into the meaning of A’s statements regarding language and spirit in *Either/Or*. There are four things from this selection to note in particular regarding the situation of human subjectivity within language. First, there is an interdependence between language and human selfhood so that, on the one hand, language exists prior to the individual and is a necessary medium for the establishment of selfhood, and yet it is also the case that language develops freely and finds its life by being used by individuals (“language

emerge through the flux of temporal existence and attain existential concretion. For a critique of Hall’s position see, Myron B. Penner, “Intending To Speak: A Critique of Ronald Hall’s *Word and Spirit*”, *European Journal of Theology* 8: (1999), 78-94.

⁴⁵ Hall, *Word & Spirit*, 10; his emphasis.

is partly an original given and partly something freely developing”). Note that the argument here is that our ability to possess and use language is a necessary formal condition for the establishment and constitution of human subjectivity. The point is not, as Ronald Hall in *Word and Spirit* appears to claim, that using language constitutes the necessary *and sufficient* condition for human selfhood.⁴⁷ Human subjectivity, as an incipient feature of human existence, is always inscribed *within* language, and just how we engage language and appropriate it plays a crucial role in the nature of the subjectivity we develop. Second, because of the relationship between human subjectivity and language, human subjects do not have *liberium arbitrium*, or absolute, unqualified freedom. This is once more a criticism of the Enlightenment idea of the autonomous human subject. Kierkegaard argues that we are always in the situation of having to appropriate what we find given to us in our language, cultural and religious practices, biology, etc. (“true freedom consists in freely appropriating the given”). Human persons do not have a transcendental, extra-linguistic vantage point immanently available to them on which they can ground their subjectivity, and from which they may develop as subjects. Thus our freedom to develop as subjects is constrained by the linguistic categories through which we conceive and express ourselves. We learn, thirdly, that language is an intrinsically communal enterprise and that it is not appropriable by human subjects apart from their inter-subjective relations. Human language requires, Kierkegaard argues, a “full integrative commonality” if it is to be successful. It cannot be produced in “personal isolation”, nor can it be appropriated except from within a given linguistic community—lest it end in “silence” or “jargonish nonsense”.

⁴⁶ JP III 3281/Pap. III A 11; my emphasis.

⁴⁷ See Penner, “Intending to Speak”, 91. Hall’s argument in “Language and Freedom: Kierkegaard’s Analysis of the Demonic in *The Concept of Anxiety*”, in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Anxiety, Volume 6*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1985), 153-166, is preferable to that of *Word and Spirit* because the argument in “Language and Freedom” is less ambitious and carries a more modest conclusion: “one can thus conclude that . . . [Kierkegaard insists] on the essential role that language has in the concrete actualization of freedom, and hence its essential role in the life of faith” (166). This is different than insisting that the use of language *is* the self, and *is* the life of faith.

With the claim that language and self-hood are fundamentally communal in nature, we have, as Hermann J. Cloeren argues, a pre-Wittgenstein private language argument.⁴⁸ Wittgenstein never actually uses the term “private language argument”, but this label refers to a widely-held interpretation of certain passages in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, and other various comments Wittgenstein makes about the communal nature of language and following rules in other writings. Saul Kripke’s book, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, championed this view among philosophers.⁴⁹ Kripke is mistaken to believe that Wittgenstein’s discussions of private language to commit him to the sceptical thesis that there is never any determinate meaning to a speaker’s words.⁵⁰ On our reading, both Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard are getting at the same thing regarding private language. For example, compare Kierkegaard’s comments on language above to those of Wittgenstein:

[A]ny kind of explanation of a language presupposes a language already. And in a certain sense, the use of language is something that cannot be taught, i.e., I cannot use language to teach it in the way in which language can be used to teach someone to play the piano.—And that of course is just another way of saying: I cannot use language to get outside of language.⁵¹

Stern’s analysis of Wittgenstein, in *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language*, applies equally to Kierkegaard:

[The] point here is not that we could not go on to use a private definition consistently, but is much more elementary: that nothing one could actually do would ever amount to setting one [i.e., a private language] up, for the role of training and practice in language prevent a ‘private linguist’ from using a sign to mean anything at all, even once. This is not the epistemological problem that one would have no reliable test, or no test at all, as to whether one was using language correctly, but rather a logical problem: the stage-setting necessary for one to be able to say anything at all would not be in place.⁵²

Finally, in the journal entry above it is affirmed that Kierkegaard views thinking and reasoning as linguistically structured. In language, Kierkegaard affirms,

⁴⁸ See Cloeren, “The Linguistic Turn in Kierkegaard’s Attack on Hegel”, *International Studies in Philosophy* 17/3: (1986), 3

⁴⁹ Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

⁵⁰ For a very thorough reading of Wittgenstein on private language that shares this view, see David G. Stern, *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 175-186.

⁵¹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Remarks*, R. Rhees, trans. R. Hargraves and R. White (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975), §6.

⁵² Stern, *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language*, 182-83.

“speculation does indeed have a medium which it has not provided for itself”. Furthermore, because of the communal nature of language, reason is also *a fortiori* communally structured as well. The consequence of this seminal passage on language and subjectivity is that the primitive, thin subjectivity humans find themselves with through their existential praxis is an amalgam of physical embodiment, speech, and action. Kierkegaard appears to be saying, quite literally, that the self discovers and develops its first-person voice as it “lives in and through a maze of speech acts and a plethora of language games”.⁵³

The self, the first-person voice that is both discovered and created by us in our embodiments and discourse, finds itself, then, located within a given community. This is the third way in which Kierkegaard’s thin subjectivity is situated in a pre-established given. Human persons, as comprised of both a bodily presence in the world and a linguistically structured self-consciousness, are established as selves in and through their interactions with a community of other human persons. The self that discovers itself through self-choice already has a history with ethical entanglements, and what is appropriated as “given” in language is a “full integrative commonality”. Kierkegaard’s emphasis on the *concreteness* of human subjectivity as a lived actuality, over and against the pure abstraction of Cartesian and Hegelian subjectivity, implies that “as concrete selves we are necessarily embedded in a concrete context of social relations”.⁵⁴

In Anti-Climacus’s formula in *Sickness Unto Death* a human being *is* a self (intrinsically), and the self is a fundamental relating activity of self to a synthetic relation.⁵⁵ In other words, Kierkegaard qualifies the human person at every level as a relation. Essential to the self-relating activity of the self is its indebtedness to others because the human self, Anti-Climacus asserts, is a “derived relation” that in its self-relating depends upon its relationship to “another”.⁵⁶ Thus Stephen Crites

⁵³ Calvin Schrag, *Self After Postmodernity*, 19.

⁵⁴ M. Jamie Ferreira, *Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 4.

⁵⁵ *KW* XIX 13/*SV* XV 73.

⁵⁶ *KW* XIX 13-14/*SV* XV 73-4.

maintains that, “Strictly defined, the self”, for Kierkegaard, “is intersubjective, social, and an individual can be a self-relation only because he or she can be related to others”.⁵⁷ The self-awareness of this subjectivity, as that which differentiates humans from animals, comes from the human ability to abstract from oneself and encounter an *other*. Without this encounter there could be no self-awareness, and subsequently we find that all our concepts of self and others are social products. Adi Shmüelli aptly concludes: “The individualism expressed in Kierkegaard’s philosophy has often been misunderstood. It has not been realized that this individualism can only develop in society. . . . the birth and evolution of subjectivity in [humans] depends on the maieutic communication by which one [hu]man educates another”.⁵⁸

Therefore, despite his heavy emphasis on individuality, this is never presented nor conceived by Kierkegaard as operating outside of community. It is in fact, for Kierkegaard, an inescapable feature of human existence that we *are* (exist) in community. The question is simply whether we will have a community of *individuals*, who are each “essentially and passionately related to an idea and together are essentially related to the same idea” and yet maintain “the individual separation of inwardness”, or whether we will have a “crowd” or “herd” in which “we have a tumultuous self-relating of the mass to an idea”.⁵⁹ The issue is, in other words, *what kind* of relation our subjectivities will have in our communities, and not *whether* humans *qua* subjects will have any relation at all to a community. All human subjectivities are primordially situated, then, and find themselves limited by their particular situation in world that is determined by all the factors which comprise their environment—including their genetic structure, physical appearance, parents, race, language, political system, community, etc.

⁵⁷ Stephen Crites, “*The Sickness Unto Death : A Social Interpretation*”, 150.

⁵⁸ Adi Shmüelli, *Kierkegaard and Consciousness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 171-72.

⁵⁹ KW XIV 62-3/SV XIV 57. We will have more to say about this passage in relation to community in Chapter Seven.

Deep Subjectivity

The self we have defined as situated in its physical compartments, language, and community, is a thin subjectivity; it is simply that first-person perspective which separates humans ontologically from animals. If we return to Anti-Climacus's grammar of subjectivity in *Sickness Unto Death*, the various synthetic relations of the human self—the pre-established syntheses of infinite and finite, temporal and eternal, freedom and necessity—comprise the “immediacy” or givenness of the self prior to our discovery and acceptance of our responsibility for a first-person perspective in the world. Our interpretation of *Sickness Unto Death* sees its two parts as working together to provide the grammar of deep subjectivity. In Part A of Part One, titled “Despair is the Sickness Unto Death”, Anti-Climacus outlines the contents of the book, beginning with the barest notion of what it means to be a human subject—“The human self is . . . a derived, established relation, a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another”—and ends with this self as teleologically developing into a deep subjectivity that “in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it”.⁶⁰ Thus, this first, seminal passage of *Sickness Unto Death* presents a précis or abstract for the argument of the entire book.⁶¹ In Part One Anti-Climacus defines the contours of human subjectivity as multi-relational and developmental, and Part Two details the relation of the thin self to God as the power that establishes it and defines the “transparency” or *telos* of the self as consciously bringing the first-person perspective directly before God. In Part Two Anti-Climacus comments that,

the previously considered gradation in the consciousness of the self [in Part One] is within the category of the human self, or the self whose criterion is [hu]man [i.e., our thin subjectivity]. But this self takes on new quality and qualification by being a self directly before God. The self is no longer merely the human self but is what I, hoping not to be misinterpreted, would call the theological self, the self directly before God.⁶²

⁶⁰ KW XIX 13-14/SV XV 73-4.

⁶¹ See Anti-Climacus's comments in the last paragraph of *Sickness Unto Death*, KW XIX 131/SV XV 179, where he states that the central thesis that “has been advanced throughout this entire book”, was “at the outset introduced in Part One, A, A [the opening section of the book]”.

⁶² KW XIX 79/SV XV 132.

Anti-Climacus's point is that human subjectivity is inherently teleological. He continues in the same passage to argue that "The criterion for the self is always: that directly before which it is a self, but this in turn is the definition of 'criterion.' . . . everything is qualitatively that by which it is measured. . . . the criterion and the goal are what define something, what it is".⁶³ Human subjectivity, because it is temporal, is a constant coming-to-be. It is therefore qualified by the criterion by which one measures oneself and is defined according to its self-appropriated *telos*.⁶⁴ Alastair Hannay explains that, "The crucial thing", in defining one's *telos*, "is that for Kierkegaard one does not choose the goal. As with Hegel, there is an ideal of true selfhood, specified in terms of 'spirit,' that one renounces in vain. Not because, due to the unfolding of some inner dialectic, renouncing it will inevitably, or in the long run, be transformed into acceptance [as with Hegel]; but because to try to renounce the ideal is to try to not be the programme one inevitably is".⁶⁵ Kierkegaard's comments are yet again grammatical and he is emphasising that selfhood is the attainment of a deep subjectivity; or, in other words, the *telos* of the self is to become itself. To have a self that is not multi-dimensional and deep is precisely to lack a self to the degree that one lacks depth.

As the self attains its first-person perspective and accepts responsibility for it, the self becomes increasing aware of itself and its ethical responsibility; that it has an "eternal" element not exhausted in its performances or reflections. Anti-Climacus argues, therefore, that the thin self described in Part One cannot be the goal of the self, for it defines the human person "within the category of human self, or the self whose criterion is [hu/]man". The self of Part One cannot be a full or deep subjectivity, but is instead a thin self. All attempts to define the self according to an immanent, purely human *telos* encounters an *aporia* of self—"the sickness unto death"—which Anti-Climacus calls both *despair* (in Part One) and *sin* (in Part

⁶³ KW XIX 79/SV XV 132.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Morelli explains this very well in, "The Existence of the Self", 26.

⁶⁵ Alastair Hannay, "Solitary Souls and Infinite Help: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein", *History of European Ideas* 12, No.1: (1990), 48. In context Hannay is speaking directly of Judge William's

Two). Immanently considered, the self is either compared with (or measured) against the animal kingdom—in which case it becomes the hairless ape of the natural sciences; or it is measured against other men and becomes an ethical agent with free agency—a rational, socio-political animal.⁶⁶ In either case, human subjectivity is universalised and the “eternal self” (or the “infinite” element in the human synthetic relation) threatens to erase individual subjectivity.⁶⁷ The result of this *aporia* of self is a misrelation of self to itself because the self regards itself as self-constituted and is either ignorant of or denies its groundedness in “the power that establishes it”.

In Part Two Anti-Climacus carries human subjectivity deeper into a grammar of the self conscious of itself *before God*. In this consciousness the self attains the transparency alluded to in the opening section of Part One. *Sickness Unto Death* states:

if the self does not become itself it is in despair, whether it knows it or not. Yet every moment that a self exists, it is in a process of becoming, for the self *κατα δυναμιν* [in potentiality] does not actually exist, is simply that which ought to come into existence. In so far, then, as the self does not become itself, it is not itself; but not to be itself is precisely despair. . . . Infinitude’s despair, therefore, is the fantastic, the unlimited, for the self is healthy and free from despair only when, precisely by having despaired, it rests transparently in God.⁶⁸

injunction to choose oneself, but this self-choice is the exactly the same concept employed by Anti-Climacus and Hanny’s analysis equally applies to Anti-Climacus.

⁶⁶ Morelli, “The Existence of the Self”, 26.

⁶⁷ See *KW XIX 79/SV XV 132*. This *aporia* of self happens because the self is regarded as a universal expression of human capabilities, or as something fulfilled in temporal terms or as something to be denied. Anti-Climacus explains: “Every human existence that is not conscious of itself as spirit or conscious of itself before God as spirit, ever human spirit that does not rest transparently in God but vaguely rests in and merges in some abstract universality (state nation, etc.) or, in the powers to produce without becoming aware of their source, regards [her/]his self, if it is to have intrinsic meaning, as an indefinable something—every such existence, whatever it achieves, be it most amazing, whatever it explains, be it the whole of existence, however intensively it enjoys life esthetically—every such existence is nevertheless despair”; *KW XIX 46/SV XV 92*. And then, regarding the second way: “When the self with a certain degree of reflection in itself wills to be responsible for the self, it may come up against some difficulty or other in the structure of the self, in the self’s necessity. For just as no human body is perfect, so no self is perfect. This difficulty, whatever it is, makes [her/]him recoil. Or something happens to [her/]him that breaks with the immediacy in [her/]him . . . So [s/]he despairs . . . [S/]He thinks [s/]he is despairing over something earthly . . . and yet [s/]he is despairing of the eternal, for the fact that [s/]he attributes to something earthly such great worth . . . is in fact to despair of the eternal. . . . this despair is classified under the form: in despair not to will to be oneself;” *KW XIX 54, 61, 62/SV XV 109-10, 116, 117*.

⁶⁸ *KW XIX 30/SV XV 87-8*.

For Anti-Climacus sin and despair occlude and attenuate human subjectivity so that it cannot attain transparency.⁶⁹ Thin subjectivity is therefore a temporal connatus that must be constantly re-established and, with its inherent dependence upon its environment and others, has as its task to develop into a fully complete, multi-dimensional (deep) human subject.⁷⁰ Climacus contends that, “[t]he transparency of thought in existence is inwardness”,⁷¹ and we are reminded once more of Haufniensis’s point that “[t]he most concrete content that consciousness can have is consciousness of itself, of the individual [her/]himself—not the pure self-consciousness . . . This self-consciousness, therefore, is action, and this action is in turn inwardness”.⁷² The self is grounded, then, in its on-going, dependent, relationship with God, as the power that establishes its own ability for self-relation—and this whether it is recognised by the human person or not. The *telos* of the human self is realised in reflexive subjectivity as the only process by which the self can become itself. The process of bringing our dependency on God to our constant consciousness in and through our thought and actions constitutes the grounds of our self-knowledge.

Thin subjectivity, as a continuous act of self-relation must, if it is to be maintained and deepened, recognise and accept its dependence and thereby achieve *transparency* as a perpetually strived for state in which one is “contemporary with oneself”. Kierkegaard explains that, “to be contemporary with oneself (therefore neither in the future of fear or of expectation nor in the past) is transparency in repose, and this is possible only in the God-relationship”.⁷³ There is no inherently pure or unmediated human self-consciousness for Kierkegaard and one cannot

⁶⁹ In *KW XIX 48/SV XV 103*, Anti-Climacus uses the metaphors of “darkness” and “ignorance” to describe the self who lacks transparency and is sinful and in despair.

⁷⁰ Anti-Climacus argues that, “In the life of spirit there is no standing still [*Stilstand*] (really no state [*Tilstand*], either; everything is actuation)”; *KW XIX 94/SV XV 145*. To this end Stephen Crites insists that for Kierkegaard, “It is not, in scholastic fashion, that the self is *caused* by God and resembles its first cause. The life of spirit is a constellation of motions and commingling, like the fiery wheels within wheels of Ezekiel’s vision. The self is a relating activity that exists in freedom as a part of that relational constellation founded on the pure activity of divine spirit”; Crites, “*The Sickness Unto Death: A Social Interpretation*”, 153.

⁷¹ *KW XII.1 255/SV IX 212*.

⁷² *KW VIII 143/SV VI 224*.

know by simple introspection the contents of one's consciousness. This is not to say, of course, that one cannot know what one is thinking at a particular point in time, but rather that the inner motives, passions, etc. (i.e., my *self*), cannot be penetrated and one cannot know oneself as oneself through purely abstract self-contemplation. Kierkegaard argues that, instead of genuine transparency of the sort he outlines, "we [humans] would rather deal with something objective, for an objective something is opaque, and all kinds of lunacy can go on behind its back".⁷⁴ In fact, transparency is described by Kierkegaard as "subjectivity" itself and as "depth".⁷⁵ Anti-Climacus explains that "[e]very human that is not conscious of itself before God as spirit or conscious of itself before God as spirit, every human existence that does not rest transparently in God but vaguely rests in and merges in some abstract universality (state, nation, etc.) . . . every such existence is nevertheless despair"⁷⁶—that is, such a self is not a fulfilled self or deep subjectivity. Transparency for human persons occurs, then, when one allows God to permeate one's consciousness so that one is infinitely reflected in the relation to the power that establishes it.⁷⁷ The self is thereby decentered from its Cartesian foundations and dependency on God permeates all of the expressions of one's being (thoughts and actions). Elizabeth Morelli explains that, "The self, in light of this imagery, is reflected infinitely in God in so far as the self is always standing before God. The self rests transparently before God, in so far as there is no opaqueness, no barrier, behind which or from within which God is absent".⁷⁸

Kierkegaard's concept of transparency stands as the *conditio sine qua non* for a deep subjectivity, and quite obviously has epistemological import as the

⁷³ JP I 1050/Pap. VIII¹ A 320.

⁷⁴ JP IV 4564/Pap. X⁴ A 346.

⁷⁵ JP IV 4434/Pap. VII¹ B 192. For references to transparency, see also KW IV 179, 254/SV III 162, 233-34; KW XII.1 255/SV IX 212; KW XVI 361/SV XII 342; KW XIX 14, 30, 42, 46, 49, 82, 101, 124, 131/SV XV 73, 88, 98, 101, 103, 135, 152, 172, 179; JP I 1050/Pap. VIII¹ A 320; JP II 2119/Pap. VIII¹ A 5111; JP III 3105/Pap. X³ A 542; JP III 3224/Pap. XI² A 107; JP III 3228/Pap. XI² A 432; JP IV 3955/Pap. X³ A 777; JP IV 4373/Pap. X¹ A 452; JP IV 4384/Pap. XI² A 132.

⁷⁶ KW XIX 46/SV XV 101.

⁷⁷ KW XIX 14/SV XV 73.

⁷⁸ Morelli, "The Self Before God", 25.

Kierkegaardian counterpart to the Cartesian *cogito*.⁷⁹ Transparency is, for Kierkegaard, the understanding one achieves of the immediacy in which one finds oneself—that is, transparency is a move or transition beyond the simple self-relation of a thin subjectivity. To put it differently, in the transparency of a deep subjectivity in which through all the sundry expressions of our being is conscious of one’s God-relationship, one achieves an existential clarity that serves as the ground for one’s doxastic practice. In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard explains that when one “think[s] in such a way that one’s attention is continually only outward, in the direction of the object that is something external”, this results in “unclear thinking” in which the “thinker explains something else by [her/]his thinking and, behold, [s/]he does not understand [her/]himself. . . . when the object of a person’s thinking is extensive in the external sense, or when [s/]he transforms what [s/]he is thinking into a learned object, or when [s/]he leaps from one object to another, then, [s/]he does not discover this last discrepancy: that at the bottom of all the clarity lies an unclarity, but true clarity comes only in transparency”.⁸⁰ The self-clarity achieved in transparency is not, then, the Cartesian clarity and distinctness of ideas held before oneself in the private theater of the mind, rather it is an understanding of self through one’s concretions, one’s actions. Transparency is an understanding of self by *being* oneself, and in which “the individual sees this, [her/]his actual concretion as task, as goal, as objective”.⁸¹ One’s self-understanding of this sort has as its content the *telos* of itself, the task of being itself and becoming itself, and not its thoughts as such; the task of the self is to realise its *telos* (i.e., itself) throughout all its various modes of being.

In *Either/Or* self-transparency is explicitly linked to the choice of oneself in and through one’s ethical (in the Kierkegaardian sense) entanglements, and furthermore self-repentance is a crucial component to the action of self-choice for, “to choose

⁷⁹ See *KW* XIX 93/*SV* XV 145, quoted earlier.

⁸⁰ *KW* XVI 361/*SV* XII 343.

⁸¹ *KW* IV 251/*SV* III 231. See also the entire discussion in *KW* IV 251-54/*SV* III 231-35.

onself is to repent oneself”.⁸² Anti-Climacus also maintains that “The condition for healing is always this repenting *of*”.⁸³ Repentance is a *theological* (i.e., ethical-religious) category that refers to the *concrete* act of an individual in which s/he realises (i.e., makes *actual*) through all the sundry expressions of her/his being (cognitive and embodied) her/his inherent limitedness and dependence upon God, and accepts responsibility for this situation.⁸⁴ Genuinely salvific, self-ratifying repentance cannot be accomplished *via* philosophical categories—that is, it cannot be merely an “esthetical” or “metaphysical” realisation of self and a purely hypothetical projection of possibilities for this abstract conception of self. Instead, the self repented of is the *actual*, lived self, and repentance takes the form of realising possibilities as existential, lived actual, concretions. Judge William explains that,

The reason that [esthetical and metaphysical attempts at self-repentance] do not succeed [in achieving self-transparency] is that the individual has chosen [her/]himself in [her/]his isolation or has chosen [her/]himself abstractly. To say it in other words, the individual has not chosen [her/]himself ethically. [S/]He therefore has no connection with actuality But the person who ethically chooses [her/]himself concretely as this specific individual, and [s/]he achieves this concretion because this choice is identical with the repentance which ratifies the choice. The individual, then, becomes conscious as this specific individual with these capacities, these inclinations, these drives, these passions, influenced by this social milieu, as this specific product of a specific environment. But as [s/]he becomes aware of all this, [s/]he takes responsibility for it all. . . . In the moment of choice, [s/]he is in complete isolation, for [s/]he withdraws from [her/]his social milieu, and yet at the same moment [s/]he is in absolute continuity, for [s/]he chooses [her/]himself as a product. And this choice is freedom’s choice in such a way that in choosing [her/]himself as product [s/]he can just as well be said to produce [her/]himself. . . . in the choice [s/]he makes [her/]himself elastic, transforms everything exterior into interiority. [S/]He has [her/]his place in the world; in freedom [s/]he [her/]himself chooses [her/]his place—that is, [s/]he chooses this place.⁸⁵

⁸² KW IV 248/SV III 228. Judge William also comments that in the self-choice he refers to, the individual “chooses [her/]himself and struggles for this possession as for [her/]his salvation, and it is [her/]his salvation. . . . for this acquiring is—repentance. [S/]He repents [her/]himself back into [her/]himself, back into the family, back into the race, until [s/]he finds [her/]himself in God. Only on this condition can [s/]he choose [her/]himself”. KW IV 216/SV III 201.

⁸³ KW XIX 61n/SV XV 116n. See also Frater Taciturnus’s very important discussion of repentance in KW XI 475-79/SV VIII 264-68.

⁸⁴ In KW XI 476-77/SV VIII 266, Frater Taciturnus asserts: “it is a matter of persevering in the dialectical with deliberation as the antecedent and with repentance as the consequent. Only the person who in deliberation has exhausted the dialectical, only [s/]he acts, and only the person who in repentance exhausts the dialectical, only [s/]he repents. . . . the ethical sphere is a passageway repentance is its expression repentance goes backward, continually presupposing the object of its investigation. In repentance there is the impulse of motion, and therefore everything is reversed”.

⁸⁵ KW IV 250-51/SV III 231.

This passage reveals that the essential ingredient in knowing oneself is action—in repentance—and this action is the means of existential concretion. There is no abstract way to repent for genuine repentance must place “the individual in the most intimate relation with an outside world”⁸⁶ so that one “repents” oneself not only out of the world, but back into it, accepting and embracing it as one’s own.⁸⁷ The repentance to which the judge refers is the essential matter around which the entire issue of transparency and the issue of deep subjectivity revolves.⁸⁸ Repentance is a specific mode of being in the world, one that “ratifies the choice” of self by living through the consciousness of one’s finitude and dependency, and then accepting these as the place in which one must be and become, ultimately (as Anti-Climacus adds) in and through one’s relation to God. For Kierkegaard, the transparency or self-understanding achieved in self-repentant action is precisely what it means to *know oneself*.⁸⁹

Conclusion to Chapter Five

Chapter Five began our look at Kierkegaard’s grammar of human subjectivity with Anti-Climacus’s understanding of constitutional subjectivity in *Sickness Unto Death*. The self is defined in the opening of *Sickness Unto Death* as a self-relating relation. It is apparent in Anti-Climacus’s analysis that human selves are both situated—in time-space, language, and community—and we are dynamic. Anti-Climacus argues that human subjectivity cannot be thought of as a purely rational

⁸⁶ KW IV 241/SV III 223.

⁸⁷ Judge William writes: “The true concrete choice is the one by which I choose myself back into the world the very same moment I choose myself out the world. That is, when repenting I choose myself, I collect myself in all my finite concretion, and when I have chosen myself out of the finite in this way, I am in the most continuity with it”. KW IV 249/SV III 229. Cf. Johannes De Silentio’s “knight of faith” who, after resigning all receives the world back again, in KW VI 48-51/SV V 45-48.

⁸⁸ Judge William claims that, “to choose oneself is to repent oneself, however simple it is in and by itself, I cannot return frequently enough. In other words, everything revolves around this”; KW III 248/SV III 229.

⁸⁹ Judge William also states that the person who has chosen her/himself “knows [her/]himself, but [her/]his knowing is not simply contemplation, for then the individual comes to be defined according to [her/]his necessity. It is a collecting of oneself, which itself is an action, and this is why I have with aforethought used the expression ‘to choose oneself’ instead of ‘to know oneself’”; KW IV 258/SV III 238.

self-relating entity with abstract self-knowledge, and that we may fail to know ourselves and may even fail to *be* a self, in the fullest sense. The language of thin and deep subjectivity was then appropriated to explain this conception of the self. Humans are “given” a thin self as the incipient ability to speak in the first-person, and it is then our task to develop this into a fully unified, multi-dimensional “deep” self that knows itself transparently. Through the activity of repentance a deep subjectivity achieves transparency as an on-going activity in which a constant self-relation to God is perpetually sustained.

At this point it not clear how constitutional subjectivity functions in any kind of normative manner except, perhaps, that we now understand that we must assume a self-relation that includes a relation to God. What is lacking from Anti-Climacus’s analysis is an account of the movements of thin subjectivity to transparency. In Chapter Six we examine Climacus’s grammar of the movement of thin subjectivity towards the activity of the self as it becomes a more complex and deeper relational field. This analysis completes Kierkegaard’s grammar of subjectivity and provides us with the resources to articulate the normative nature of subjectivity.

CHAPTER SIX
GRAMMAR OF SUBJECTIVITY 2:
SELF, TIME, AND OTHERS

The states of a [hu]man's soul ought to be as the letters are in dictionaries—some are very strongly and copiously developed, other have but few words listed under them—but the soul ought to have a full and complete alphabet.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*

Spirit is: to live as if dead (to die to the world).

Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*

Chapter Five concluded that Kierkegaard intended to leave behind in his writings a grammar—a map or topography—of human existence and the conditions for the attainment of full and deep subjectivity—or, in the language of *Fragments*, “eternal consciousness” or “salvation”. In *Sickness Unto Death* Anti-Climacus contrasts a completed or fully attained self and a nascent, incipient self, in his careful diagnosis of the malaise that causes a human person to become a fully unified, complex, multi-dimensional, relational field. Chapter Six continues Kierkegaard's grammar of subjectivity by looking at Climacus's development of the theory of “existence-spheres” or “stages”. The terms “stage” and “existence-sphere” are used alternately in Kierkegaard's writings to denote his concept of modes of existence. However, the term that occurs most often is “sphere”, especially in the more mature writing of Johannes Climacus's *Postscript*. The language of “existence-spheres” is therefore preferable to “stages” because, in Calvin Schrag's words, the term existence-spheres “avoids the imagery of a succession of levels of development that attaches to the grammar of stages. Also, it signals the peculiar qualification of aesthetics, ethics and religion as manners or modes of existing”.¹

¹ Calvin Schrag, “The Kierkegaard Effect in the Shaping of the Contours of Modernity”, in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, eds. Martin J. Matustik and Merold Westphal (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995), 4. See also “Historical Introduction”, x-xi, in *KW XI*; and *Stages on Life's Way*, trans. and ed. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), 335n-36.

Anti-Climacus's clinical analysis of thin and deep subjectivity does not address the question of how humans acquire depth and *become* deep subjectivities *in time*. A grammar of this movement, shown in the preceding section to be *repentance*, is what Kierkegaard accomplishes through his other pseudonyms, culminating in the second part of Climacus's *Postscript*. Kierkegaard maps the topography of self-ratifying repentance through three (or four) existence-spheres—the esthetic, ethical, and religiousnesses A and B—that serve to demarcate the cross-sections of a self, capable of unifying its own temporal-spatial, historical existence (past, present, and future) into a cohesive, coherent, first-person perspective.

Chapter Six begins by establishing that the central concept of Kierkegaard's self is a unity in time best construed as a narrative unity. The unification of a self is plotted by Climacus through the esthetic, ethical, and religious existence-spheres. The language of existence-spheres is employed by Kierkegaard to provide the conceptual co-ordinates that exhaustively supply the basic frame of reference for understanding a human life. These existential co-ordinates do not erase the individual characteristics of a human person, but they form the conceptual grid of logical possibilities by which a human life may be conceptually grasped. As such, they also frame the possibilities and limits of self-knowledge.

The movements of a subject through its existence-spheres are explained by Climacus by examining Kierkegaard's other pseudonymous literature. Climacus puts the pseudonyms to work by using them to embody his existential grammar of human subjectivity. The key Kierkegaardian texts in this grammar of subjectivity are: *Either/Or, Volumes One and Two*,² *Fear and Trembling*,³ *Postscript*,⁴ and *Works of Love*.⁵ According to Climacus's grammar of subjectivity, the self expands and develops itself through the existence-spheres by encountering frustrations and an impotence to realise its goal of self-unity. The inability of a self to ratify itself within a given existence-sphere is referred to as an "*aporia* of self". Ultimately,

² Published by "S. Kierkegaard", but "edited" under the pseudonym "Victor Eremita".

³ Published under the pseudonym, "Johannes De Silentio".

⁴ Published under the pseudonym, "Johannes Climacus".

Climacus's grammar of the self requires a movement beyond the Socratic, immanent vision of human subjectivity. Selfhood and Self-knowledge can only be accomplished through a crucifixion of the self—or, a self-renunciation. In self-sacrifice the self attains itself in Religiousness B, where it also achieves transparency and lives a life of transcendence through the works of love.

Existence-Spheres and Narrative Subjectivity

The Kierkegaardian self is a *narrative* self, and although Kierkegaard does not specifically use this terminology,⁶ the degree to which one is successful in attaining a self depends, for Kierkegaard, upon the success one has in “collecting” one’s temporal-spatial emodiments (actions and cognitions) into a unified, lived, point of view. That is, becoming fully human requires the emplotment of the activities and events of one’s life into a *narrative* that renders them intelligible to oneself and allows one to see these activities and events as those initiated by and belonging to oneself.⁷ Edward Mooney discusses Kierkegaard’s notion of the self as a “narrative center of gravity” alongside the metaphor of the self as an harmonious ensemble of musical tones.⁸ The essential concept in the metaphors of narrative and musical harmony is unity among disparate elements—that lack any *necessary* element of cohesion between them—through temporal duration. The narrative model is preferable to describe Kierkegaard’s view of the self, over the concept of musical harmony, because narrative more readily implies the presence of loose-ends that need to be tied. Narratives are *constructed*, and this suggests that the emplotment of self occurs at the expense of not being able to explain some events or features of

⁵ Published under Kierkegaard’s own name, “S. Kierkegaard”.

⁶ Kierkegaard instead employs the analogous term “life-view”, which we will discuss more in Chapter Six.

⁷ Calvin Schrag develops superbly a view of the self under the category of narrative in his *Self After Postmodernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), while linking his position to a grammatical reading of Kierkegaard’s existence-spheres. C. Stephen Evans, in *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard’s Philosophical Fragments* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 126, also makes reference to Climacus’ view of human persons in terms of “narrative” fulfillment.

⁸ Mooney, *Sevles in Discord and Resolve: Kierkegaard’s Moral-Religious Psychology from Either/Or to Sickness Unto Death* (London: Routledge, 1996), 99-100.

one's life—as in the emplotment of a literary narrative from a set of events (historical or fictional). Musical harmony, on the other hand, implies perfection or a finished or attained state. Harmony is achieved all at once and in an instant that admits of no disharmony. Emplotting a narrative involves the shaping and configuring of a whole from a set of divergent entities, and is therefore an active, not passive, event for the observer (as the one for whom the narrative exists). In narration something is *done* to the events or entities so that they make *narrative sense* to the observer. Shaping a narrative is thus an arranging of time, actions, and events into a cohesive story—it is the taking of a given set of actions and events to have happened in a certain order and to *mean* thus-and-so. Narrative making, therefore, always means fashioning something more from what is simply present in the phenomena. For Kierkegaard the self is never finished and always short of perfection.⁹ The result is that, for Kierkegaard, the self, as an embodied self that is communally situated in language, is a self that emerges as a first-person voice out of and from within its speech and the self-narration performed through its various speech-acts. Kierkegaard's analysis of existence-spheres is, then, a grammar for the narrative fulfilment of self.

The Concept of Existence-Spheres

We now turn to Kierkegaard's topography of human subjectivity. Kierkegaard's attempt to articulate a non-metaphysical grammar of existence and the category of paradox leads him to formulate his rather familiar theory of the "stages on life's way", or "existence-spheres". Our concern in this chapter is not to elucidate a comprehensive understanding of Kierkegaard's existence-spheres as a total interpretation of his thought, as this carries us beyond the parameters of our study. The task undertaken here is instead to outline an approach to the grammar of

⁹ The concept of narrative also works well with Kierkegaard's understanding of the nature and scope/limitations of human reason. While narrative may connote an all-encompassing meta-narrative, tantamount to a perfect or complete explanation, making narrative sense is entirely intelligible as a matter of personal and communal (local) narratives. In this language, Kierkegaard

existence performed the Kierkegaardian spheres of existence, and relate these to the Climacean subjectivity principle.

A basic outline of the movements of subjectivity may be gained by examining four Kierkegaardian texts. First, *Either/Or* (both volumes) articulates the parameters and logic of the esthetic and ethical spheres through the correspondence between Judge William (the ethicist) and A (the estheticist). Next, in *Fear and Trembling* Johannes De Silentio demarcates the boundary of the ethical by making a clear distinction between ethical and religious modes of being. The writings of Johannes Climacus present a dialectical (or philosophical) account of the logic of the existence-spheres. *Postscript* represents a more mature perspective on the other pseudonymous writings and it is here that the formal “theory” of existence-spheres introduced in *Stages On Life’s Way* is rendered in its most advanced form. In *Postscript* the category of the religious is subdivided into a generic Religiousness A and a Christian Religiousness B. Finally, we have in *Works of Love* a study in the grammar of Christian religiousness.

The chapter of *Postscript* in which Climacus introduces his subjectivity principle, “Subjective Truth, Inwardness; Truth is Subjectivity”, concludes with Climacus resolving to “start from the bottom” and “*to have the existence relation between the esthetical and the ethical come into existence in an existing individuality*”.¹⁰ However, Climacus observes that this project has already been accomplished by *Either/Or*. Climacus therefore launches an appendix to this chapter in order to cast “A Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature” and pursue this notion further.¹¹ Climacus “discovers” that the concept of existence-spheres developed through the rest of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous authorship, performs for him (although the pseudonyms themselves, he claims, are unaware of their complicity) the task of embodying the subjectivity principle at work as a

finds that a legitimate meta-narrative exists only for God, while local narratives are the only sort available to humans—*ergo* the “objective uncertainty” of human reason.

¹⁰ KW XII.1 251/SV IX 209; his italics.

¹¹ See KW XII.1 251-300/SV IX 209-251.

grammar of the spheres/modes of existence.¹² Climacus, in fact, explicitly links the prior pseudonymous accomplishments as establishing his thesis that “truth is inwardness”.¹³

Although the actual concept of “existence spheres” must wait for *Stages On Life's Way* to be formally articulated, Climacus understands there to be evident already in the sharp disjunction between the ethical and esthetic asserted in *Either/Or* a rough concept of the different existence-spheres. Climacus reads the issue in *Either/Or* to concern essentially three stages, but understands the book to have somewhat confusingly presented this as only two: the esthetic and the ethical-religious.¹⁴ However, Climacus points out that *Either/Or* does not “didacticize” and its merit consists in the fact that “it does not provide any conclusion but in inwardness transforms everything . . . with the quiet incorruptible, and yet infinite passion of resolution, of the ethical's modest task, built up thereby, open before God and men”.¹⁵ The trouble Climacus finds with *Either/Or* is that it stops with the ethical-religious and does not proceed on to religiousness proper.¹⁶

For Climacus, then, there are three basic spheres of existence, and he clearly states this: “There are three existence-spheres: the esthetic, the ethical, the

¹² Cf. Climacus's comment at the close of the appendix in which he states: “My thesis was that subjectivity, inwardness, is truth. For me this was crucial with regard to the issue of Christianity, and out of the same regard I thought I ought to pursue a certain endeavor in the pseudonymous writings, which to the very last have honestly refrained from didacticizing [i.e., explicitly recommending, as does Climacus, a particular mode of existence as truth], and I thought that I ought to pay special attention to the latest one [i.e., *Stages*], because it came out after my *Fragments* and, freely reproducing other themes, calls to mind the earlier books and by means of humor as a *confinium* [border territory] defines the religious stage”; *KW XII.1 300/SV IX 251*.

¹³ *KW XII.1 254/SV IX 212*.

¹⁴ One finds in the language of B, Judge William, the ethicist, many references to God and religion as if religiousness included in the ethical. In fact, Victor Eremita, the pseudonymous “editor” of *Either/Or*, concludes the book with a sermon. The further development of the religious sphere in *Stages On Life's Way* beyond the esthetic and ethical spheres of *Either/Or* is, for Climacus, entirely appropriate, but “despite this tripartation, the book [*Stages*] is nevertheless an either/or. That is, the ethical and the religious stages have an essential relation to each other”. *KW XII.1 294/SV IX 246*. In other words, as we maintained in Chapter Four, Climacus understands ethics and religion to be deeply connected so that ethics is fundamentally theological and properly expressible as the “ethical-religious”.

¹⁵ *KW XII.1 254/SV IX 212*.

¹⁶ Climacus claims that, “The ethicist in *Either/Or* had saved himself by despairing . . . but in my opinion there was a discrepancy here. . . . If it were to be pointed out clearly in *Either/Or* where the discrepancy lies, the book would have to a religious instead of an ethical orientation”. *KW XII.1 257-58/SV IX 214-15*.

religious”.¹⁷ Frater Taciturnus’ has already explicitly developed these stages in the pseudonymous literature prior to Climacus’ writing of *Postscript*:

There are *three existence-spheres: the esthetic, the ethical, the religious*. The metaphysical is abstraction, and there is no person who exists metaphysically. The metaphysical, the ontological, is [*er*], but does not exist [*er ikke til*], for when it exists it is always in the esthetic, in the ethical, in the religious, and when it is, it is the abstraction from or a *prius* [something prior] to the esthetic, the ethical, the religious.¹⁸

We find here a couple of things we should note by way of introduction to our reading of Kierkegaard’s existence-spheres. First, this passage emphasises the points made in chapters Two and Three—namely that the substance of metaphysics, as that which really *is*, is not directly accessible to the human mind. Kierkegaard’s existential categories of the esthetical, ethical, and religious, are an attempt to, on one hand, formulate a non-metaphysical conceptual map of human existence, while maintaining the “realist assumption” that there is presumed to be a mind-independent reality, or a metaphysical givenness, encountered in and through human existence which serves as the *prius* for human existence. The emphasis in this passage is once more that of Kierkegaard’s overall emphasis on the temporality, the *becoming* aspect, of human existence: “no person exists metaphysically”.

The existence-spheres are not to be conceived as linear “stages” of a life, in which one progresses through and beyond to the next, leaving behind the former stage forever, because the stages are most basically about the various relational spheres of a human person. Instead the existence-spheres are *cross-sections* of a human life and are more like existential dimensions that are inhabited by the self. Schrag phrases it well when he explains that “these manners or modes of existing are more like cross-sections of possible lifestyles within the concrete history of the self than like developmental stages that progressively succeed each other”.¹⁹ In this regard, Judge William notes of the transition from the esthetic to the ethical sphere that, “[the ethical] does not want to destroy the esthetic but to transfigure it”.²⁰ In

¹⁷ KW XII.1 501/SV X 179. Climacus later splits the religious into two: Religiousness A and Religiousness B.

¹⁸ KW XI 476/SV VIII 266; my italics. Climacus also affirms this analysis:

¹⁹ Schrag, “Kierkegaard Effect”, 4.

²⁰ KW IV 253/SV III 233.

fact, the judge asserts, the ethical takes the accidental elements that comprise the esthetic dimension and uses these as “the material with which it is to build and that which it is to build”.²¹

The transition to, or addition of, a new existential dimension or mode of being is thus both hierarchical and complementary. The acquisition of a new existence-sphere is therefore best modelled as a progression through concentric circles, where the circle one leaves is not abandoned but “caught up” (*Aufheben*) in the next.²² In this sense the spheres are hierarchical, in that there is a definite order to their acquisition—so that the lower or outer spheres serve as pre-requisites for the higher or deeper ones (e.g., one cannot attain the ethical without the esthetic, and so on). Yet the existence-spheres also co-exist in complementarity so that they constitute the depth and multiple dimensionality of a human self.²³ The central issue in defining human subjectivity according to this schematic concerns the particular sphere in whose terms one primarily understands the existence of oneself and one’s world.

Our proposal in this section is that Kierkegaard’s theory of stages or existence-spheres supplies for us a grammar of the movements from thin to deep subjectivity in human persons. There are two very important features of our prior analysis upon which we must now draw. When we combine the definition of self that Kierkegaard through Anti-Climacus presents in *Sickness Unto Death* as that which has itself as its goal and criterion, with the notion of truth as intimately connected to *Salighed* that Climacus develops in *Fragments*, it becomes clear that *Salighed* is to be closely

²¹ KW IV 253/SV III 233.

²² This is another instance in which Kierkegaard appropriates an Hegelian concept to suit Kierkegaard’s own ends. See Chapter Two for a brief discussion of Kierkegaard’s use of the Hegelian concept of *aufhebung*.

²³ Cf. Calvin Schrag’s statement, in *Self After Postmodernity*, 144, that, “the advance from the aesthetical to the ethical and from the ethical to the religious is not a serial progression in which the former is somehow left behind. The aesthetical, the ethical, and the religious are constitutive and complementary cross-sections of the self in its historical becoming”. And C. Stephen Evans’ comment, in *Kierkegaard’s “Fragments and “Postscript”: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1983), 49: “The answer, then, to the question as to whether the spheres are mutually exclusive is as follows: they are mutually exclusive if the distinctive content of each sphere is absolutized. But if what is absolute is allowed to be absolute, the relative can be retained as relative”.

identified with the primary force behind the deepening of one's subjectivity.²⁴ To be a self is simply to have eternal blessedness as one's goal.²⁵ Ultimately, then, to lack any concept of eternal blessedness is to lack a self; and therefore to lack a subjectivity qualified across the spectrum of existence-spheres is to lack eternal blessedness.

The potential of the theory of the existence-spheres to act as a critical principle emerges when a sphere encounters an inherent *aporia* of self—as a lack of eternal blessedness—that is resolved in the next “stage” through acquisition of a new dimension to one's subjectivity.²⁶ The term “*aporia* of self” is used to indicate the existential and conceptual limitations of a given sphere of existence to consolidate a self in a complete unity. These *aporias* of self are experienced by a person when, in Anthony Rudd's terms, she meets with “a sense of something lacking in her life, a need for meaning that is unmet within her current way of life”.²⁷ In other words, when one encounters an *aporia* of self, one meets with a situation that produces the frustration and inability of one's present life-view, defined within a particular sphere of being, to account for and make sense of one's life in its various relations. What becomes obvious to one with a conception of self (i.e., a first-person perspective) in

²⁴ See, for example, Climacus' identification of eternal blessedness as the absolute *telos* and highest good for human persons in *KW* XII.1 385-92/*SV* X 79-86. Recall Alastair Hannay's earlier quote, from “Solitary Souls and Infinite Help”, 48, in which he insists that for Kierkegaard the self is tautologically teleological: “The choice [of self] in other words, is to be the self one presently is but in a way that reflects the traditional philosophical goal of completeness or perfection. . . . The crucial thing is that for Kierkegaard one does not choose the goal. As with Hegel, there is an ideal of true selfhood, specified in terms of ‘spirit,’ that one renounces in vain. Not because, due to the unfolding of some inner dialectic, renouncing it will inevitably, or in the long run, be transformed into acceptance [as with Hegel]; but because to try to renounce the ideal is to try to not be the programme one inevitably is”.

²⁵ See “The Expectancy of Eternal Salvation”, in *KW* V 256-61/*SV* IV 228-33.

²⁶ Cf. David Gouwens' claim, in *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 85, that “another way to view the stages is to see them as strategies for happiness. . . . Ethical and religious (including Christian) existence can then be seen as strategies for resolving the dilemmas brought about by the failure of the previous stage to obtain that happiness”. Note that the ability of one sphere to act critically over and against another “lower” sphere exists only potentially, and not necessarily. There is no transcendent logic being appealed to (by, for instance, Judge William in *Either/Or*) and the ability to be challenged depends for its force upon one's choice of self. One may always, as does A in *Either/Or*, remain recalcitrant and entrenched in one's present view of reality

²⁷ Anthony J. Rudd, “Kierkegaard and the Sceptics”, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 6: (1998), 87. Rudd similarly sees these experiences as, “What drives—or may drive—the existentially concerned individual from the aesthetic to the ethical, and on to the religious”, *ibid.*

the encounter of the existential and conceptual limits of a particular existence-sphere is that a change is needed and that one's existence must be qualified differently so that what is problematic will disappear.²⁸ These *aporias* of self are evidenced, for Kierkegaard, through the dual relationships to time and others that are available to one within the particular sphere in question.

Fundamental to the reading of Kierkegaardian subjectivity developed thus far has been the concepts of temporality and self-relation as the media for and possibility of a concrete, historical human subjectivity. For Kierkegaard it is through a human being's identification of and relation to others in one's temporal-spatial nexus that a self emerges and is established in time and space and the nature of these relations is a crucial feature that qualifies our individual existence. The process of becoming a self involves interaction with those who are "other" (including oneself as an "other") through the act of distancing of self from self by which the self distinguishes itself from others. We shall follow Calvin Schrag and interpret the theory of existence-spheres "as displaying different experiences of temporality and alterity", so that they are seen to be distinguishing the possibilities that may (and do) obtain for humans in their relations to time and to others.²⁹ There are three relational axes of a human person that must be drawn onto one baseline (to change metaphors) for the self to become a full, deep unity: time, self, and others. This can be expressed, albeit with less precision, in terms of the narrative formula we have already employed. Rendered in narrative terms, a deep subjectivity must emplot a narrative unity in its relation to time, to others, and to itself. As Climacus works through the immanent (finite) movements of subjectivity and disassembles the metaphysical approach to the transcendent-immanent relationship of human subjectivity, the grammar of dialectics opens up into the grammar of paradox so that Climacus' theory of existence-spheres in *Postscript* combines with his discussion

²⁸ Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 27: "The way to solve the problem you see in life is to live in a way that makes what is problematic disappear".

²⁹ Schrag, "Kierkegaard Effect", 5.

of truth in *Fragments* to form a grammar of transcendence (the infinite as paradox).³⁰

Kierkegaard's grammar of the existence-spheres does not attempt to provide the *content* of existence for his readers, but the conceptual categories to *understand* existence. The essential content of the existence-spheres is embodied instead in the pseudonymous communication of them. The pseudonyms *display* the content of the existence-spheres—because in a real sense it cannot be directly told. The content of existence is *actual* and lived and thus not (strictly) able to be rendered in the medium of possibility. This does not entail that there cannot be a *theory* or *grammar* of existence-spheres. Rather it follows that the theory or grammar of existence-spheres cannot be the existence-spheres themselves—i.e., the *living* of them. It is once more a matter of talking *about* versus *being* a thing. C. Stephen Evans provides some needed clarification:

Kierkegaard does not give his readers results. He rather attempts in the pseudonymous literature to embody these existential view points or 'spheres.' Readers are not simply given information, they are imaginatively presented with existential possibilities which they must reflect on and interact with. The pseudonymous characters do not merely tell us about the existence-spheres: they live out those spheres, within the realm of imagination, naturally, not as actual fact.³¹

Climacus certainly understands (along with Taciturnus) that human existence is lived in the conceptual categories of the esthetic, the ethical, and the religious. Climacus is also committed, at the same time, to the proposition that the conceptualisation of human existence in terms of these three spheres is itself an esthetic entity or event. Presumably this is why Climacus comes along *after* the other pseudonyms have demonstrated existentially his thesis and then he "didacticizes" and explains it all in conceptual terms—all the while rightly denying that he exhibits truth as subjectivity or that his thesis is itself the truth of subjectivity.

The Self in Esthetic Existence

³⁰ Cf. Calvin Schrag, *Self After Postmodernity*, 135.

³¹ Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript*, 14.

Frater Taciturnis in *Stages On Life's Way* provides a rough preliminary description of the existence-spheres, which functions as a *précis* of the grammar of self in each of the existence-spheres:

The *esthetic* sphere is the sphere of immediacy, the *ethical* the sphere of requirement (and this requirement is so infinite that the individual always goes bankrupt), the *religious* the sphere of fulfilment, but, please note, not a fulfillment such as when one fills an alms box or a sack with gold, for repentance has specifically created a boundless space.³²

Judge William provides a further description of the nature of esthetic existence in *Either/Or*, volume one:

But what is it to live esthetically, and what does it mean to live ethically? What is the esthetic in a person and what is the ethical? To that I would respond: the esthetic in a person is that by which [s/]he simultaneously and immediately is what [s/]he is; the ethical is that by which [s/]he becomes what [s/]he becomes. The person who lives in and by and from and for the esthetic that is in [her/]him, that person lives esthetically.³³

The esthetic sphere is, then, the sphere of *immediacy*, and for Kierkegaard denotes a way of viewing life (and reality) from the perspective of immediacy: “The person who lives in and by and from the esthetic that is in [her/]him, that person lives esthetically”. The definitive feature of the concept of immediacy is for Kierkegaard *a lack of relation*, and he even uses immediacy in this sense as descriptive of reality [*Realitet*] itself.³⁴ In other words, immediacy refers to things as they are apart from their coming into relation with a human mind. “The esthetic” is the category Kierkegaard uses to delineate a particular perspective taken towards reality; or yet, it is descriptive of a specific mode of being-in-the-world and being-towards-the-world. The primary standpoint of the esthetical mode of being is, as Stephen Crites notes, one of “objective apprehension”.³⁵ Crites builds his understanding of Kierkegaard’s category of the esthetical upon the etymological derivation from the Greek *aesthonomai*—which means literally “perceive”, “apprehend by the senses”, “learn”, “understand”, and “observe”.³⁶ With this category Kierkegaard means to describe logically the parameters of human existence

³² KW XI 476/SV VIII 266; my italics.

³³ KW IV 178/SV III 167.

³⁴ KW VII 167-68/Pap. B 1 145-47. See also our discussion of this in Chapter Three.

³⁵ Stephen Crites, “Introduction”, in Søren Kierkegaard, *Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, trans. Stephen Crites (London: Collins, 1967), 21.

when qualified only in terms of immediacy—both perceptual and reflective. “The esthetic” is therefore a category that every human person adopts in so far as s/he is a knower or a perceiver.³⁷ A person whose life is qualified only in terms of the esthetical standpoint is essentially an observer of events, not a participant in them, and views reality as a stage on which s/he is the central subject around whom events revolve. In short, for the esthetician, reality is perceived as consisting of objects to be experienced in abstraction from any existential considerations. We may therefore characterise Kierkegaard’s grammar of esthetic immediacy as the grammar of the conceptual co-ordinates of presence and distanciation.

The esthetic sphere is imaginatively captured in volume one of *Either/Or* by A, the esthete.³⁸ The character of A’s self-relation (as representative of that of the esthetic sphere) is tellingly portrayed in the section “Diapsalmata”, which is a compilation of lyrical and aphoristic witticisms that read like a random collection of stream of consciousness literature. Each aphorism has its own sense and poetic beauty, but on the whole lacks any unilateral organisational content. It is not that the esthete is unreflective—in fact Climacus claims that “as as a thinker, A is advanced”, and that “as a dialectician, he [A] is far superior to B [the ethicist]”.³⁹ What is characteristic of A, as an embodiment of the esthetic, is an allegiance to “sensuous” categories by which he attempts to interpret all of his life-experience. The term sensuous connotes a reference to the etymological roots of the English term “esthetic” which is in the Greek word *aestheisa*, designating “sensation”, rather than the popular usage.⁴⁰ Therefore Climacus explains that the esthetic sphere

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid. Crites provides a very helpful discussion of the nature of the esthetical in Kierkegaard, on which the remainder of the remainder of this paragraph is modelled. See Crites, “Introduction”, 19-28.

³⁸ See Climacus observation in *Postscript*, KW XII.1 253/SV X 211.

³⁹ KW XII.1 253/SV X 212. Recall from Chapter Three that for Kierkegaard reflection is simply two ideas brought together, without any relation to each other: “Reflection is *the possibility of relation*; consciousness is *the relation*. . . reflection’s categories are always *dichotomous*”. KW VII 169/Pap. B 1 145.

⁴⁰ Evans, *Kierkegaard’s Fragments and Postscript*, 34.

is concretely qualified by the categories of “pleasure-perdition”,⁴¹ and these prescribe the parameters of the esthete’s conscious experience of reality. A attempts to live his life as a work of art and he therefore uses all his powers of reflection and imagination to remain in a conscious state of immediacy in order that pleasure may be maximised and misfortune minimised. As Evans remarks, “The really skilled aesthete learns to enjoy her own imaginative creations. The real world becomes a set of ‘occasions’ for the exercise of her creative fancy. The end result is . . . not limited to pleasure in any ordinary sense of that word. The aesthete learns, for example that, sorrow can be as aesthetically satisfying as joy”.⁴²

Let us return to our analysis of the esthete’s experience of temporality and alterity. There are some important observations to be made regarding Kierkegaard’s category of the esthetic as the grammar of immediacy. The esthetic, Crites observes, is not qualified in relation to temporal duration since the esthetic is by definition a process of objectification whose “goal . . . is the transmuting of reality into a system of internally related ideal forms”.⁴³ “Reality” is experienced by the esthete as comprised of moments of pleasure, to be either physically or cognitively enjoyed—in either case—in abstraction from any concrete, existential historicity of either subject or object. The objects of pleasure are simply “given” in the esthete’s consciousness and directly transposed into conceptual awareness. These are considered to be objective, and independently real objects that possess validity in their own right, but only as existing in abstract relation to other internally consistent conceptualisations.

Three things follow from this analysis. First, time is accidental for the esthete, and accordingly, the existence-sphere of the esthetic refers to an atemporal

⁴¹ KW XII.1 294/SV IX 256. Evans notes, in *Kierkegaard’s Fragments and Postscript*, 53, that the Danish terms used here are *lykke-ulykke*, which is the standard expression used in Danish for “best wishes”, or when congratulating someone, and even for “happy birthday”.

⁴² Evans, *Kierkegaard’s Fragments and Postscript*, 35. This leads Anthony J. Rudd, in *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 70, to assert that there are two kinds of esthetes in *Either/Or*: (1) the “immediate esthete” who “just acts on impulse”; and (2) “the reflective esthete” who “either fails to act at all because [s/]he reflects too much, or [s/]he reflects until [s/]he is sick of reflection; and then just acts on impulse anyway”.

⁴³ Crites, “Introduction”, 22.

dimension of human experience. Time is experienced by the esthete as external and objective. History, as such, does not properly exist for the esthete as time is reduced to a successive series of “nows”.⁴⁴ The standpoint of the observer is essentially timeless, and the self-involving nature of perceptual experience, the fact that the subject of experience also participates in the contingencies and limitations of existence, is precisely that which the esthetic relation seeks to negate.⁴⁵ But not, however, in a manner that re-establishes a connection with a concrete historicity. The esthete seeks to avoid existential concretion by remaining in the present-tense, floating in an infinite sea of possibilities that always remain open to her/him.⁴⁶ This leads us to our second point, that existence itself is accidental for the esthete. Taken purely in terms of immediacy, the esthetic sphere is the sphere of possibility. The esthete attempts to squeeze all of reality into an erotic, instantaneous, moment of time.⁴⁷ But, an erotic “instant” is fleeting and so the esthete can (or will) never ground her/himself in a temporal horizon of past leading to the future. Consequently, genuine existentially concrete existence, of either oneself or of an external reality, is of interest to the esthete only in so far as it provides the backdrop for sensual experience.⁴⁸ Lastly, the “other” is also accidental for the esthete. The existence of an “other” is reduced to an object of the esthete’s pleasure—as either an object for thought or sensual involvement. There is a recognition of the other, but it is as the “*other-for-me*”; the other is, as it were, an “objectified and faceless other” who is “[a]lways a means to an end, but never an end in itself”.⁴⁹ Within the existence-sphere of the esthetic there is a complete lack of the conceptual resources

⁴⁴ Schrag, “The Kierkegaard Effect”, 5.

⁴⁵ Crites, “Introduction”, 21.

⁴⁶ For example, note A’s comments in the “Diapsalmata”: “If I were to wish for something, I would wish not for wealth or power but for the passion of possibility, for the eye, eternally young, eternally ardent, that sees possibility everywhere. Pleasure disappoints; possibility does not. And what wine is so sparkling, so fragrant so intoxicating!” *KW* III41/*SV* II 42.

⁴⁷ Schrag, “The Kierkegaard Effect”, 5-6. This is why the young lover in the “The Seducer’s Diary”, who woos a girl and then cruelly manuevers her to break her engagement with him and loathe herself, is portrayed, along with literary and musical characters of Don Giovanni, Faust, and Don Juan, as the perfect embodiment of the esthetic. See *KW* III 301-445 and *passim/ SV* II 281-410 and *passim*.

⁴⁸ Crites, “Introduction”, 22.

⁴⁹ Schrag, “The Kierkegaard Effect”, 6.

necessary to identify and respond to other persons as subjects with ethical dimensions (i.e., with genuine actuality). “For the aesthete”, Stephen Dunning concludes, “the other is an object to be manipulated. Aesthetic internalization never accepts the other as other; it is only a strategy for dominating the other”.⁵⁰

The esthetic sphere is that dimension of human existence capable of experiencing the immediate, sensuous, and often erotic pleasure of, on one hand, the satisfaction of purely physical drives, and on the other, the pleasure of imaginative, fantastical self-creations.⁵¹ (But on a very mundane level, the esthetic also refers most basically to that dimension of our existence in which we know and perceive.) The perspective on reality adopted by the esthete lacks the dimension of temporal reference, and instead struggles to view all phenomena in relation to the present moment. This effort, however, is in vain, and reveals A’s deep-seated self-contradiction that results in an *aporia* of self. The esthete’s life-experience is devoid of any organisational or normative structure whatsoever and thus it expresses a complete lack of unity.

John Glenn’s analysis of the esthetic dimension of selfhood in Kierkegaard is helpful in illuminating the *aporia* of self encountered in the esthetic sphere.⁵² Glenn brings the dialectic of thin and deep subjectivity of Anti-Climacus in *Sickness Unto Death* alongside the portraits of subjectivity provided by Judge William and the esthete in *Either/Or*. Subsequently, Glenn reads the esthetic dimension of the self in reference to the set of conceptual poles of the self given in the formula of *Sickness Unto Death*: “A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and finite, of the

⁵⁰ Stephen N. Dunning, *Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of Inwardness: A Structural Analysis of the Theory of Stages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 179-180.

⁵¹ Cf. Ibid. Ronald Hall provides an extensive analysis of the various senses of immediacy in Kierkegaard’s thought in *Word and Spirit*, 6-7. Hall identifies three kinds of immediacy for Kierkegaard: sensuous, reflective, and existential: “What is immediately present to the senses is sensuous immediacy; what is immediately present to thought is reflective immediacy; what is immediately present within reflection and within the historical continuity of past and future, actuality and possibility, is existential immediacy. To complicate matters there are two senses of sensuous and reflective immediacy, but only one sense of existential immediacy. Sensuous and reflective immediacy can be either psychological [pertaining to the Greek notion of *psyche*, or soul] or pneumatic [pertaining to the Christian notion of spirit]; existential immediacy can only be pneumatic”. In our analysis, the esthetic is comprised of only sensuous and reflective immediacy.

⁵² Glenn, “The Definition of the Self”, 6-11.

temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short a synthesis”.⁵³ When brought into conversation with Anti-Climacus’s analysis, the dialectic of immediacy embodied in the esthete’s “Diapsalmata” reveals that the esthetic dimension of the self lacks any positive self-relation—“[A] is committed above all to *non*-commitment and so his self-relation does not take the form of explicit will, but rather only of (often ironic) self-observation”.⁵⁴ As a result, the esthetic dimension of the self cannot resolve the tension between *infinitude*—as the ability to transcend one’s finite situatedness—and *finitude*—as a human person’s overall situation in actuality. Glenn points to A’s remarks in the “Diapsalmata”:

[My] desires concern sometimes the most trivial things, sometimes the most exalted, but they are equally imbued with the soul’s momentary passion. At this moment I wish a for a bowl of buckwheat porridge. . . . I would give more than my birthright for it!⁵⁵

Glenn’s analysis also reveals that A cannot resolve the tensions of possibility and necessity, or of eternity and temporality, in the self-relation. Recall that the esthete attempts to remain in the sphere of possibility as an ideal, uninvolved observer for whom the world is an occasion for self-gratification. Yet in his abstractions from existence, A finds that his lack of existential concern (or involvement) leaves him at the mercy of necessity and a deterministic fatalism! A despairs: “So I am not the one who is the lord of my life; I am one of the threads to be spun into the calico of life”!⁵⁶ Similarly, A fails to integrate the eternal aspects of his self-relation with its temporal entanglements. He proudly acknowledges that his esthetic efforts are an attempt to live “*aeterno modo* [in the mode of eternity]”,⁵⁷ but A then complains that in his timeless esthetic abstractions he cannot reconcile himself with time and master it: “Time passes, life is a stream, etc., so people say. That is not what I find: time stands still, and so do I. All the plans I project fly straight back at me; when I want to spit, I spit in my own face”.⁵⁸

⁵³ KW XIX 13/SV XV 73.

⁵⁴ Glenn, “The Definition of the Self”, 9-10.

⁵⁵ KW III 26/SV II 29.

⁵⁶ KW III 31/SV II 33.

⁵⁷ KW III 39/SV II 40.

⁵⁸ KW III 26/SV II 28.

Glenn's analysis gives content to the esthete's self-contradiction and the *aporia* of self encountered in the esthetic existence-sphere. The point is that the esthetic dimension of life cannot support itself on its own terms; that is, the esthetic perspective deconstructs itself. This is not an outside critique of the esthetic, but one which points out that the esthetic vantage point cannot have reality as it requires, because its view of reality undermines the possibility of completing its program of self-indulgence. The gist of this argument is that A's method of self-fulfilment requires that he not have a self-relation. A lack of self-relation however, precludes the possibility of self-fulfilment. To place this in the language of Chapter Five, A struggles with his incipient first-person perspective. He finds that he does in fact have this self-relation, and that it is required for esthetic experience. Yet, at the same time, this self-relation threatens to actualise A in an existentially concrete history, which would jeopardise A's esthetic objectivity. A must continuously strive to undermine his first-person perspective in order to remain in esthetic immediacy.

This is essentially Climacus's point when he argues that the esthete cannot account for misfortune, because:

Misfortune is like a narrow pass on the way; now the immediate individual is in it, but his view of life must essentially always tell him that the difficulty will soon cease to hinder, because it is a foreign element. If it does not cease, he despairs, by which his immediacy ceases to function, and the transition to another understanding of existence is rendered possible.⁵⁹

The esthete, Climacus contends, cannot maintain her/his immediacy—i.e., a personal distance—when confronted with circumstances that require her/his actual self-involvement; such as, disappointment, or the frustration of one's desires. It is precisely this inherent feature of human sensual experience, Climacus goes on to affirm, that subverts the ultimacy of the esthetic sphere and opens up an *aporia*, a window of opportunity, whereby life may be viewed under different categories than the esthetic. As Glenn has shown, A cannot quite sustain this struggle with

⁵⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. D. F. Swenson and W. Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 388. Our point is better made from the Swenson/Lowrie translation instead of the Hongs *Kierkegaard Writings*. Cf. *KW* XII.1 434/SV X 122.

immediacy and he founders on a complete lack of self-relation. Within the esthetic existence-sphere, then, one encounters an inability to have a self-relation and to the degree that one is an esthete, to that degree one also suffers from a lack of selfhood. This opens up the existential possibility for an existence that is ethically qualified.

The Self in Ethical Existence

We began our analysis of the esthetic existence-sphere with Frater Taciturnis's description of the esthetic as the sphere of immediacy. We may look to Frater Taciturnis for help again as we begin our analysis of Kierkegaard's grammar of the ethical sphere of existence. "The *ethical*", Taciturnis tells us, is "the sphere of requirement (and this requirement is so infinite that the individual always goes bankrupt)".⁶⁰ In the shift from the esthetic to the ethical, then, the grammar of presence and distancing used to articulate the existence-possibilities within the esthetic sphere of immediacy, is replaced by "the grammar of norm and law", as the language of requirement.⁶¹ The ethical view of life does not see humans merely as the subjects of experience, but understands humans as proactive agents who *act* in the world, and initiate those actions through responsible choices.

Let us look at the grammar of norm and law that emerges in Judge William's Volume Two of *Either/Or*. Kierkegaard uses the judge to embody the ethical through a series of letters to the esthete urging him to the ethical perspective.⁶² The judge urges the esthete:

I only want to bring you to the point where this choice truly has meaning for you . . . rather than designating the choice between good and evil, my either/or designates the choice by which one chooses good and evil or rules them out. Here the question is under what qualifications one will view all existence and personally live. . . . Therefore, it is not so much a matter of choosing between willing good or willing evil as of *choosing to will* . . .⁶³

⁶⁰ KW XI 476/SV VIII 266.

⁶¹ Cf. Schrag, *The Self After Postmodernity*, 143, where he describes the grammar of the ethical and Religiousness A as a "grammar of norm and law".

⁶² It is important and interesting to note that volume 2 of *Either/Or* does not present a philosophical treatise on ethics in the form of transcendental arguments that appeal to universal (and abstract) rational principles. Instead, what we find are personal letters of advice from one friend to another. See Anthony Rudd, *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical*, 68-9.

In Judge William's mouth, the ethical is, as was the esthetic, descriptive of a position one takes in the reality. The ethical sphere is, in other words, a mode of being-in-the-world and being-toward-the-world. "The ethical" describes, "the qualifications [under which] one will view all existence and personally live". Judge William clearly understands the ethical as an existential mode that refigures and transforms the objectivisation and depersonalisation of reality that generates the esthetic *aporia* of self. Instead of an abstract self-relation that is divorced from its existential engagements, the ethical self chooses itself in its social and physical embodiments and relations. Judge William continues:

The person who has ethically chosen and found himself possesses [her/]himself defined in its entire concretion. [S/]He then possesses [her/]himself as an individual who has these capacities, these passions, these inclinations, these habits, who is subject to these external influences . . . Here the objective for [her/]his activity is [her/]himself, but nevertheless not arbitrarily determined, for he possesses [her/]himself as a task that has been assigned to [her/]him, even though it became [her/]his by [her/]his own choosing. . . . [this self] is not an abstract self that fits everywhere and therefore nowhere but is a concrete self in living interaction with these specific surroundings, these life conditions, this order of things. . . . [this self] is not only a personal self but a social, a civic self.⁶⁴

Where the esthetical self had a detached relation to time and others, the ethical existence-sphere transforms these relationships through a fundamental choice of oneself.⁶⁵ The judge asserts that, "On the whole, to choose is an intrinsic and stringent term for the ethical".⁶⁶ Note that it is the act of "choosing to will" as the "choice by which one chooses", and not any specific choice as such, that inaugurates the breach with the detached disengagement of the esthetic, and qualifies existence in the ethical.⁶⁷ In his commentary, Anthony Rudd helpfully interprets this fundamental choice to exercise one's will as a willingness "to make some serious and long-term commitment, such as marriage, [or] starting a career".⁶⁸ An act of commitment of this sort transforms the self-relation by configuring a completely new set of relationships with self, time, and others. The esthete was free from ethical

⁶³ KW IV 168-69/SV III 158-59; my italics.

⁶⁴ KW IV 262/SV III 241; my italics.

⁶⁵ Schrag, "Kierkegaard Effect", 6.

⁶⁶ KW IV 166/SV III 157.

⁶⁷ KW IV 169/SV III 159. See also Judge William's comments: "But what is it, then, that I choose—is it this or that? No, for I choose absolutely, and I choose absolutely precisely by having chosen not to choose this or that", KW IV 214/SV III 198.

considerations precisely because his lack of commitment to anything or anyone (including himself) and this by definition excluded the categories of good and evil from ever arising.⁶⁹ By committing oneself to a project it becomes possible to have oneself in such a way that self-evaluation is possible. In the commitment of oneself to a project, an individual “has consciously taken [one]self into a sphere of life where [one] must apply to [one]self the predicates of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ where [one] must judge [one]self in moral terms, according to commonly accepted criteria”.⁷⁰

The ethical self is defined by the category of *choice*. And it is in this foundational act of *choosing* that the possibility of genuine selfhood emerges—not, as we have seen, a disengaged Cartesian self, but one “concrete” and “in living interaction” with its surroundings. Furthermore, the esthete’s relation to time is transformed in choosing, for now there is a “moment” of time that stands as a reference point for all the relations of self—whether to oneself or others. The self is now baptised into temporal relations and can no longer hover above them in atemporal abstraction. The ethical self is now committed to *this* self, *these* projects, *these* social roles and relationships, etc., all of which *exist* within the constraints of the temporal dimensions of past, present, and future. The ethical self is first, then, *self*-responsible, whose task it is to overcome the fragmented, disembodied self of the esthetic sphere, and to achieve a genuine first-person unity; that is, actual existence.

But another type of responsibility emerges out of this new time-alterity relation. The task of the self is not only to achieve itself, but now as part of that first task it recognises its ethical requirements to others. Calvin Schrag observes that, “The ethically chosen self finds that it has not only duties for and to itself but also for and to others as it is shaped by concrete reciprocal relations with its natural and social surroundings”.⁷¹ It is in the acceptance of the claims of other selves that the self is able to *be* a self. It is this conception of a “civic self”, and the attending normative,

⁶⁸ Rudd, *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical*, 74.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

civic structures, that reveals Kierkegaard's category of the ethical to share much more affinity with Hegel's ethics of *Sittlichkeit*, as the "laws, customs, practices, and institutions of a people",⁷² than with Kant's deontological view in which the ethical (or morality) is the universal condition of action for any maximally rational agent.⁷³ It is at this point that the grammar of norm and law asserts itself. Anthony Rudd points out that committing oneself to social roles and relationships not only involves recognising the other as an ethical subject, but also means accepting the standards of evaluation that go with them.⁷⁴ The ethicist recognises that being a self entails duties and obligations, to oneself and to others, and the ethical self is therefore defined precisely within those parameters. The grammar of the ethical is a grammar of "requirement".

Judge William explains that these requirements entail that, "[t]he ethical is the universal", and "[t]hus the ethical takes the form of the law".⁷⁵ Ethical duties to the other are expressed as "laws". But how are these moral decrees to be understood as law-like and "universal" for Kierkegaard? He has rejected Kantian rationalist ethics and does not want to ground morality in the "universal" dictates of human reason.

Ethical laws, for Kierkegaard, are universal in two distinct ways. First, ethical requirements are universal because they are a feature of *existence*. Because the ethical self is always in the process of becoming itself in time, there is no finishing point in time. Both the other and myself *exist* in the ethical, and there is therefore no discharging of my responsibility to maintain my self-relation and to regard the other.

⁷¹ Schrag, "Kierkegaard Effect", 7.

⁷² Merold Westphal, *Becoming A Self: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1996), 24.

⁷³ See Rudd, *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical*, 71-2, 134-37, for a good argument for this conclusion. See also the discussion of the relationship of "the ethical" in Kierkegaard to the Hegelian notion of *Sittlichkeit* in Merold Westphal's recent work, especially Westphal, *Becoming A Self*, 24, 26, 102-03, and *passim*; also Westphal, "Kierkegaard and Hegel", in *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. A. Hannay and G. Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 105-07, 109-10; Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 75-78; and Westphal, *Hegel, Freedom, and Modernity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), *passim*.

⁷⁴ Rudd, *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical*, 72.

⁷⁵ KW IV 255/SV III 235. See also the judges remarks: "Duty is the universal; it is required of me, Consequently, if I am not the universal, I cannot discharge my duty either", KW IV 263/SV III 242.

But ethical requirements are universal also because, secondly, the duty to others generated by the ethical is inexhaustible. Ethical duties include responsibility to, and for, the entire human race—past, present, and future; that is, they pertain to the “universally human”. Judge William explains:

Now he discovers that the self he chooses has a boundless multiplicity within itself inasmuch as it has a history, a history in which he acknowledges identity with [her/]himself. . . . in this history [s/]he stands in relation to other individuals in the race and to the whole race . . . and yet [s/]he is the person [s/]he is only through this history.⁷⁶

The judge later adds that “every human being is the universally human”.⁷⁷ Judge William’s point is that we cannot escape our duty in the ethical because those to whom we are bound to regard ethically include the entire human race. What is more, the duty of the ethical itself, the judge contends, is to *become* and embody in ourselves the highest principle of humanity—that is, we are to become the “universally human”.⁷⁸ Elaborating on the choice which defines the ethical, Judge William digresses:

But I go back to my category—I am not a logician and so I have only one category, but I assure you that it is . . . my salvation—I go back to the significance of choosing. When I choose absolutely . . . I myself am the absolute; I posit the absolute, and I myself am the absolute . . . and what is the absolute? It is myself in my eternal validity.⁷⁹

These comments of the judge lead directly into the above passage on the identity of the ethical self with the history of the human race. Judge William’s logic is that the act of choosing in the ethical sense places absolute demands on the self that cannot be shirked because the transition out of the esthetic sphere is made by virtue of a commitment to an absolute *telos* of the self—to be itself. In the act of this commitment, the absolute *telos* of the self is organically linked to the human race in its entirety as supplying its content. Thus, the requirements of the ethical cannot be exhausted because they come from within (i.e., are an intrinsic feature of) the ethical self, and involve the entire human race, historically—the present through the future.

⁷⁶ KW IV 216/SV III 199.

⁷⁷ KW IV 332/SV III 304.

⁷⁸ The judge is quite clear about this and states: “In other words, the universal in itself is nowhere to be found, and it is up to me, to my enterprising consciousness, whether I will see the universal in the particular, or only see the particular”, KW IV 329/SV III 301.

⁷⁹ KW IV 215-16/SV III 199.

But how are we to understand Taciturnis's statement that under the requirements of the ethical "the individual always goes bankrupt"? We find a clue to this question in the concluding section of *Either/Or*, Volume Two, called "*Ultimatum* [A Final Word]". The book ends with Judge William sending to the esthete, apparently sometime after his original set of letters, a copy of a sermon titled, "The Upbuilding That Lies in the Thought That in Relation to God We Are Always in the Wrong", by a pastor-friend of the judge from Jylland.⁸⁰ The gist of the sermon is that we can only be in proper relation with ourselves and others when we relate to God in such a way that we actively acknowledge that in relation to Him we are always in the wrong. The concluding sentence of the sermon ends with the phrase that "only the truth that builds up is truth for you".⁸¹ Judge William lacks the resources within the ethical sphere to complete his program of self-unity. The reason for this is that the power from which the ethical operates lies within the self (recall Judge William's remark that, "I posit the absolute, and I myself am the absolute"). Unlike the esthete, the judge has recognised that the means of achieving a self amounts to accepting responsibility for one's relations—both with oneself and others. The demands of the ethical are, however, absolute and ultimately the self lacks the power to fund these demands on its own. This analysis is suggested first by Climacus in *Postscript* :

The discrepancy [in *Either/Or*] is that the ethical self is supposed to be found immanently in despair, that by enduring the despair the individual would win [her/]himself. . . . But that does not help. In despairing, I use myself to despair, and therefore I can indeed despair of everything by myself, but if I do this I cannot come back to myself. It is in this moment that the individual needs divine assistance . . .⁸²

Climacus in this section, and Victor Eremitas in his inclusion of the sermon, are each referring to the *aporia* of self in the ethical. In working out the internal logic of the ethical it is apparent that the ethical cannot ground the self to which it is now committed. The ethical self discovers that it cannot meet the demands of the ethical and formulate a unified, first-person perspective on the world. This is the case for

⁸⁰ KW IV 335-354/SV III 313-324.

⁸¹ KW IV 354/SV III 324.

⁸² KW XII.1 258/SV IX 215.

two reasons. First, Climacus's argument highlights the self-contradiction of an individualistic ethics. Climacus observes that the ethicist is in a similar position to the esthete who lost her/himself. To move beyond the no-self relation of the esthete requires the establishment of laws, obligations to others, that in effect negate, or abrogate, the self and assert the primacy of the welfare of others over the desires of self (what Climacus calls "despairing" over self). In this condition, Climacus contends, the ethical self cannot recover itself and fulfil its own *telos*. Its available resources to do so remain within itself—and this is just what is annulled by the ethical self.

Secondly, Anthony Rudd cogently argues that framed only within the means of the ethical, ethics cannot stave off the threat of a plurality of demands (or requirements, or systems of law), and this also threatens the unity of the self. "The rationale for making ethical commitments in the first place", Rudd explains, "was that only in this way could selfhood be achieved, could the multiplicity in the individual's soul be resolved into a unity. But a non-religious ethics remains pluralistic".⁸³ The question now becomes: Whose law do I follow? How do I fulfil all my obligations in the face of so many different and complex claims on my person?

The problem that the ethicist encounters now is that it cannot ground the ethical outside itself in the law either. This jeopardises both the self-relation, as we have seen, and the relation of self to others, for not only is the self-relation consumed by the universal constraints of the law, but the basis of the relation to the other is also correspondingly subverted. "The ethical type seeks harmony with the other", concludes Stephen Dunning, "but also fails to appreciate adequately the extent to which the other is really other and not merely an instrument for ethical self-realization".⁸⁴ There is therefore a radical contradiction in the grammar of law and norm as it is expressed in the ethical sphere, for ethics returns to its point of departure from the esthetic—*using* the other as a means of self-advancement (which

⁸³ Rudd, *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical*, 134; see 131-140 for the full argument.

is unethical), and not treating them as ends. The ethical self thereby loses its basis for both a genuine self-hood and sincere ethical action.⁸⁵ As Climacus has already observed, and Judge William implies, the way forward is not back to esthetical, but on to the religious existence-sphere.

The Self in Religious Existence

The ethical life-view is to be replaced with the religious sphere—the sphere of “fulfilment” as Frater Taciturnis put it. From the ethical existence-sphere, the grammar of norm and law shifts from its location in the ethical acceptance of the requirements of a self to a new ground within the consciousness of a law-giver; the ethical self is transformed by the consciousness of “the power that established it”.⁸⁶ In short, the ethical self finds it must be qualified under religious categories. The ethicist finds it useful to refer to “God”, but her/his program remains one of self-realisation and under ethical constraints and thus references to God are invoked only as a heuristic device to accomplish self-unification.⁸⁷ In *Fear and Trembling*, speaking on behalf of the ethical Johannes De Silentio explains that, “The ethical is the universal, and as such it is also the divine”.⁸⁸ Ethical requirements persist as essentially human products and thus Mark C. Taylor concludes that, “In ethical obligation, one remains within the human realm”, and precisely therein lies the difficulty for the ethical self.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Dunning, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness*, 180.

⁸⁵ In *Concept of Anxiety* Vigilius Haufniensis describes the situation resulting from the ethical *aporia*: “Ethics points to ideality as a task and assumes that every [hu]man possesses the requisite conditions. Thus, ethics develops a contradiction inasmuch as it makes clear both the difficulty and the impossibility. . . . Ethics will have nothing to do with bargaining; nor can one in this reach actuality. To reach actuality the whole movement must be reversed. This ideal characteristic of ethics is what tempts one to use first metaphysical, then esthetic, and then psychological categories in the treatment of it. But ethics, more than any other science, must resist these temptations”, *KW VII 16-17/SV VI 114-15*.

⁸⁶ *KW XIX 13/SV XV 73*.

⁸⁷ Mark C. Taylor, *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and the Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 237.

⁸⁸ *KW VI 68/SV V 63*.

⁸⁹ Taylor, *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship*, 238. De Silentio explains the ethical conception of “God”: “Thus it is proper to say that every duty is essentially duty to God, but if no more can be said than this, then it is also said that I have no duty to God. The duty becomes duty by being traced back to God, but in the duty itself I do not enter into relation to God. . . . If in this

The collision of the ethical sphere of existence with the religious, with “the power that establishes it”, is artfully (if somewhat laboriously) portrayed by De Silentio as the “teleological suspension of the ethical” in *Fear and Trembling*.⁹⁰ Echoing our above discussion of the *aporia* faced by the ethical self, De Silentio states that, “Every time the single individual, after having entered the universal, feels an impulse to assert [her/]himself as the single individual, [s/]he is in a spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*], from which [s/]he can work [her/]himself only by repentantly surrendering as the single individual in the universal”.⁹¹ That is, the *telos* of the ethical, as the establishment of a self with a unified first-person perspective, reveals itself to be such that it is only fulfilled only in spiritual or religious categories, such as temptation, sin, repentance, guilt, salvation, and God. De Silentio continues to explain that, “[i]f this is the highest that can be said of [a person] and [her/]his existence, then the ethical is of the same nature as a person’s eternal salvation, which is the $\tau\epsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ forevermore and all times”, and a “teleological suspension of the ethical” is required.⁹² De Silentio’s fabled example of this is the Old Testament story of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac. The situation with Abraham is such that “[b]y his act he transgressed the ethical altogether and had a higher $\tau\epsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ outside it, in relation to which he suspended it”.⁹³ Abraham has heard the voice of God and he is acting in obedience to a “higher power” who commands Abraham to perform what the ethical, the *Sittlichkeit* as the “universally human”, cannot allow. De Silentio argues:

The ethical in the sense of the moral was present, it was cryptically in Isaac . . . and must cry out with Isaac’s mouth: Do not do this, you are destroying everything. . . . Why then does Abraham do it? For God’s sake and—the two are wholly identical—his own sake. . . . The unity of the two is altogether correctly expressed in the word already used to describe this relationship. It is an ordeal, a temptation. . . . As a rule, what tempts a person is something that will hold [her/]him back from doing his duty, but here the temptation is

connection I then say that it is my duty to love God, I am actually pronouncing a tautology, inasmuch as ‘God’ in a totally abstract sense in here understood as the divine—that is, the universal, that is, the duty”, *KW VI 68/SV V 63*.

⁹⁰ For an excellent treatment of this concept in *Fear and Trembling* see Calvin O. Schrag, “Note on Kierkegaard’s Teleological Suspension of the Ethical”, *Ethics* 70: (1959), 66-68.

⁹¹ *KW VI 54/SV V 51*.

⁹² *KW VI 54/SV V 51*.

⁹³ *KW VI 59/SV V 55*.

the ethical itself, which would hold him back from doing God's will. But what is duty? Duty is simply the expression for God's will.⁹⁴

The situation of Abraham and Isaac described above perfectly illustrates the *aporia* encountered by the ethical self. Isaac is an "other" who represents the "universally human" and whose very presence appeals to Abraham on behalf of the ethical. However, Abraham finds himself also in the presence of the Law-Giver, and recognises that his self-relation to himself and all others is eclipsed by the presence and demands of this Other. Abraham in fact perceives that his fortune is necessarily linked to God—"the two are wholly identical". In the presence of God the ethical cannot ground the self. The ethical, as the codification of the self's attempts to achieve itself, represents *sin* as self-assertion over and against the will of God—and the ethical is therefore a "temptation".

Religiousness A

The narrative of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac played out in *Fear and Trembling* is the embodiment of what Climacus discusses under the locution of "*Religiousness A*". This is essentially the "collision" of the ethical with the religious.⁹⁵ In *Postscript* Climacus carefully distinguishes a mundane, generic sort of religiousness that maintains a congruity with moral consciousness and its requirement of choosing of the ethical, from a more radical Christian religiousness that is designated "*Religiousness B*". "*Religiousness A*", Climacus claims, "is the dialectic of inward deepening", and subsequently is not "paradoxically dialectical", but is instead "the relation to an eternal happiness that is not conditioned by a something but is the dialectical inward deepening of the relation, consequently conditioned only

⁹⁴ KW VI 59-60/SV V 55.

⁹⁵ Climacus comments regarding *Fear and Trembling* that, "To represent this existence-collision [between the ethical and religious] in an existing individual was impossible, since the difficulty of the collision, although *lyrically* it extorts the utmost passion, *dialectically* holds back the expression in absolute silence", KW XII.1 262/SV IX 219. Note that De Silentio and Climacus have two different purposes in their works. De Silentio seeks to describe the existential collision of the ethical individual with the ethical, while Climacus seeks to describe the conditions under which a Christian existence is qualified. Thus, while Climacus distinguishes between two types of religiousness, *Fear and Trembling* makes no such distinction and refers only to "the religious".

by the inward deepening”.⁹⁶ In other words, Religiousness A is basically contiguous with the ethical and remains the “religion of immanence”; i.e., it is the logical extension of “ethical-religious”. Calvin Schrag outlines the affinities between Religiousness A and the ethical, explaining that, “[Religiousness] A still proceeds hand in glove with the project of the ethically existing subject in the process of ‘becoming subjective’ . . . [and] there is already a God-relationship, but as Climacus points out this is within the dialectic of an inward appropriation”.⁹⁷

Climacus summarises the grammar of subjectivity traced thus far:

*Immediacy, the esthetic, finds no contradiction in existing; to exist is one thing, contradiction is something else that comes from without. The ethical finds contradiction but within self-assertion. Religiousness A comprehends contradiction as suffering in self-annihilation, yet within immanence; but ethically accentuating existing, it hinders the existing person in abstractly remaining in immanence or in becoming abstract by wanting to remain in immanence.*⁹⁸

The “contradiction” lacking in the esthetic sphere is the absence of an awareness of the *aporia* of (non)self-relation which characterises the esthetic mode of being. The esthete of *Either/Or* does not perceive that there is a fundamental contradiction between his goals and his perspective on the world. The ethicist, on the other hand, is aware of the contradiction facing the esthetic sphere and chooses to assert himself. In so doing, however, the ethical discovers its *aporia*—that in choosing oneself in this manner, one also “annihilates” oneself. Religiousness A, then, transforms the ethical and offers the self a transcendence-within-immanence. The basic grammar of the ethical, as that of norm and law, is still in force only the locus of this grammar is shifted away from the universally human by the presence of God. The self now has the resources it needs for fulfillment.

Again we see that the qualification of a new existence-sphere just *is* a mode of being-in-and-toward-the-world. The new categories of Religiousness A, such as “guilt-consciousness” and “the eternal”, position the self so that it has a view of reality that includes, and indeed *requires*, a self-relation beyond itself in time. Climacus explains that one whose life is defined by the dimension of Religiousness

⁹⁶ KW XII.1 556/SV X 225.

⁹⁷ Schrag, “Kierkegaard Effect”, 8.

A relates oneself to the eternal and “collects [her/]himself” in this relation.⁹⁹ In Religiousness A, then, the self obtains an “eternal” vantage-point so that it may achieve self-transcendence and acquire itself. The transcendence of Religiousness A is nonetheless within immanence and is understood within the categories of immanence so that “eternity” remains congruent with and intelligible from within temporal existence.¹⁰⁰

When we combine Climacus’s insights with De Silentio’s working out of the suspension of the ethical in the story of Abraham and Isaac in *Fear and Trembling*, several things become apparent regarding the existence-sphere of Religiousness A in contrast to the ethical. First, the grammar of norm and law, rooted now in the consciousness of God, produces the existential determinant of guilt-consciousness.¹⁰¹ The possibility of guilt does not exist in the ethical as one is ultimately beholden only to oneself (as the “universally human”). Therefore the fact of sin and the awareness of one’s guilt cannot arise in the ethical sphere of life. Sin is “the crucial point of departure for religious existence”,¹⁰² for it entails transgression against an Other beyond my control or manipulation. It is true, Climacus admits, that, “[i]n *Fear and Trembling* sin was used occasionally in order to throw light on Abraham’s ethical suspension, but no more than that”.¹⁰³ The ethical is characterised positively by the requirement on the self established through the act of choosing and it is precisely the collision of the ethical self with its own inability to contend with these demands that propels the self to the limits of the ethical. The phenomena of “guilt-consciousness” thus signifies that the self measures itself against something other than itself as the “universally human”.

⁹⁸ KW XII.1 572-73/SV X 239.

⁹⁹ KW XII.1 570/SV X 237.

¹⁰⁰ “*Religiousness A* accentuates existing as actuality, and eternity, which in the underlying immanence still sustains that while, vanishes in such a way that the positive becomes distinguishable the negative. . . . for Religiousness A, only the actuality of existence is, and yet the eternal is continually hidden by it and in hiddenness is present. . . . In Religiousness A, the eternal is *ubique et nuquam* [everywhere and nowhere] but hidden by the actuality of existence”, KW XII.1 570/SV X 237-38; his italics.

¹⁰¹ KW XII.1 569-70/SV X 228-29.

¹⁰² KW XII.1 268/SV IX 224.

¹⁰³ KW XII.1 268/SV IX 224.

Second the *telos* of the ethical is taken up (*aufheben*) into the sphere of religion. That is to say, the ethical is *teleologically* suspended and therefore its basic program of self-realisation is recontextualised and continued on in the religious mode of being. The duties or requirements of the ethical are absolute and universal in that they are intimately concerned with the actualisation of the self in time. Another way to understand the *aporia* of the ethical self is the realisation that the object(s) of its commitment, its projects (e.g., institutional roles like marriage), are relative while its requirements *qua* means of self-realisation are absolute. So there is an incommensurability between the *telos* of the ethical and the means available to the ethical to achieve that end: “But do not forget that marriage is not the absolute $\tau\epsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ ”, Climacus reminds us.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, in Religiousness A the absolute *telos* is brought into relation with an absolute object—God. Abraham discovers that doing his duty *for his sake* is coincidental with obeying God’s commands *for God’s sake*. Thus Climacus formulates the axiom: “the maximum of the task is to be able simultaneously to relate oneself absolutely to the absolute $\tau\epsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ and relatively to the relative ends, or at all time to have the absolute $\tau\epsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ with oneself”.¹⁰⁵ The exercise of the absolute relation in Religiousness A remains within immanent categories and is therefore defined in terms of its “cultural predicates”—religious institutions and their attending beliefs, practices, and institutional roles.¹⁰⁶ Calvin Schrag’s conclusion is that Religiousness A “is an inmixing not only of the ethical sphere but also with the aesthetic sphere”, so that it “is able to express itself in a variety of religious forms, be they Christian, buddhist or Islamic, Jewish or Hindu”.¹⁰⁷

Third, in Religiousness A we have the self-relations of self-to-self and self-to-other eclipsed by the intrusion of the self-to-God relation. Climacus describes this feature of

¹⁰⁴ KW XII.1 412/SV X 104.

¹⁰⁵ KW XII.1 414/SV X 105.

¹⁰⁶ Schrag, “Kierkegaard Effect”, 9.

Religiousness A as “the self-annihilation that finds the relationship with God within itself”.¹⁰⁸ The ethical in Isaac, as one who constitutes part of the *Sittlichkeit*, tempts Abraham and cries out that he is destroying everything. And indeed, Abraham is destroying everything, for he is placing his God-relation above all else—self, other, and world.

Religiousness A is the first movement of religiousness¹⁰⁹ and configures the absolute *telos* of the self under the aegis of the eternal. This is the fourth element of Religiousness A. Temporal relations are now construed in light of their relation to the eternal. The combination of the eternal and a Law-Giver transform the grammar of norm and law so that one’s relations to self and others must be reconfigured according to the laws sanctioned and decreed by God. This produces an awareness of the individual’s guilt, or failure, to uphold these duties and to be in relation to God. In Religiousness A an individual is positioned within the world so that, as with Abraham, “God’s sake” and the individual’s sake are wholly identical. One’s duty was formerly defined in the ethical by the “universally human” and in terms of societal norms, whereas now one’s allegiance in Religiousness A is now to the norms of a religious tradition or institution, defined by one’s duty to an absolute *telos*.

Religiousness A is the “dialectic of inwardness”—it is part of the process of self-realisation, and within this process it is discovered that the self’s infinite and eternal dimension point to a transcendent “power that establishes” the self. God, then, functions in Religiousness A something like Kant’s postulation of God,¹¹⁰ and this initial religious sphere recalls the basic structure of Kant’s moral construal of

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 8. Cf. Climacus comment that, “Religiousness A can be present in paganism, and in Christianity it can be the religiousness of everyone who is not decisively Christian, whether baptized or not”, *KW XII.1 557/SV X 226*.

¹⁰⁸ *KW XII.1 560/SV X 229*.

¹⁰⁹ Climacus writes, “Religiousness A must first be present in the individual before there can be any consideration of becoming aware of the dialectical B”, *KW XII.1 556/SV X 226*.

¹¹⁰ See Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: MacMillan, 1950), 644, where Kant argues that we postulate the existence of God “in order that through such agency effect may be given” to the laws of morality. For discussion of God’s existence in Kant see Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary On Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), 171-178.

religion as understood “within the bounds of reason alone”.¹¹¹ The eternal (God) is found through human initiative and effort and is closely linked with the rational and existential demands of moral responsibility.¹¹² In this respect, Religiousness A is coincidental with the Socratic as the highest expression of subjectivity within immanent categories. The truth, the *being in truth* of the individual (as *Salighed*), is presumed in Religiousness A to be a feature of human existence that is attainable through the exercise of human rational capacities. Climacus states that, “Viewed Socratically, the eternal essential truth is not at all paradoxical in itself, but only by being related to an existing person”.¹¹³ The Socratic relation of the individual to the eternal generates the *aporia* of self in Religiousness A, which we have already seen worked out by Climacus in *Fragments*.¹¹⁴ In the spirit of his remarks in *Fragments*, Climacus notes in *Postscript* that bringing the human person in relation to the eternal produces “another Socratic thesis: that all knowing is a recollecting”.¹¹⁵

Religiousness A is thus faced with the challenge of accounting for the being-in-truth of the individual in time that presented itself to Greek philosophy. One can either be a Socrates (or Abraham) and continue paradoxically to emphasise existing, or one can flee existence and take refuge in speculation, as did Plato (and Descartes, Hegel, and “modern philosophy”). Chapter Four explained that Socrates and Plato both postulate that humans are able to know the truth because they are eternal beings who possess the truth from eternity. Eternity is therefore viewed in relation to the individual as laying *behind* and *within* human existence. Human knowing is a recollecting back to what one acquired in a prior, eternal state, that remains incipiently present to the individual. The basis for self-relation, the eternal, is therefore *within* a person and the self actually lives itself *backwards* towards its past fulfillment. There is, in other words, no future fulfillment of self. Climacus critiques

¹¹¹ See Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. T.M. Greene and H.H. Hudson (London: Open Court Publishing, 1934). For a superb exposition of the relation between Kant’s critique of religion and Religiousness A, see Schrag, “Kierkegaard Effect”, especially 9-10.

¹¹² Schrag, “Kierkegaard Effect”, 10.

¹¹³ KW XII.1 204/SV IX 171.

¹¹⁴ See Chapter Four for this discussion.

¹¹⁵ KW XII.1 204/SV IX 171.

Socratic/Platonic Recollection because it ignores the temporal dimension of human existence and ultimately entails that, strictly speaking, there is no self who acts and who has as a feature of its historical existence an eternal happiness. Recall Climacus's point in *Fragments* in which he argues that in the Socratic schemata,

[particular historical relations] cannot concern me with regard to my eternal happiness, because this is given to me retrogressively in the possession of truth that I had from the beginning without knowing it . . . the temporal point of departure is a nothing, because in the same moment that I discover I have known the truth from eternity without knowing it, in the same instant that moment is hidden in the eternal, assimilated into it in such a way that I, so to speak, still cannot find it because there is no Here and no There, but only an *ubique et nusquam* [everywhere and nowhere].¹¹⁶

There is, in other words, no “moment” for the self, no genuine historical concretion in which the self is able to collect itself. The theory of recollection is a Socratic confusion—one which Socrates himself contradicts existentially in his faith in an “unknown God” for whom he willingly surrenders his life. The untenability of Socratic Recollection has dire consequences for the absolute *telos* of the self in Religiousness A. One who is in the sphere of Religiousness A must choose if s/he wishes to follow Socrates in the continuing development of her/his subjectivity, and achieve her/his existence as an historical feature of reality; but then s/he must also face the ironic incoherence of Socrates's life/death—that s/he cannot actually bring one's subjectivity into relation with the truth and ultimately must cast one's fortunes upon “the god”. Or one may opt to follow the route of speculation, in which case one must maintain an untenable atemporal view of the self that becomes an “objective fiction”, disconnected from historical, existential concretion. Either way, *via* the Socratic or *via* Speculation, the self is trapped in a contradiction that it cannot of itself resolve. (And we are once more reminded of Climacus's caution in *Fragments* that to claim to go beyond Socrates when one nevertheless says essentially the same thing as he, is a fundamental confusion.)¹¹⁷ The self has exhausted its conceptual resources and can proceed no further on its *telos* by way of immanent categories. The transcendence-within-immanence of Religiousness A is

¹¹⁶ KW VII 12/SV VI 17.

¹¹⁷ KW VII 111/SV VI 99.

impoverished to provide the self with a genuine transcendence—or “eternal happiness”.

Religiousness B

The only possibility for a fully integrated, unified self must come, then, from outside the resources of the self and must involve a break with immanence. The type of religiousness which accepts this proposition Climacus calls “paradoxical-religiousness” or *Religiousness B*.¹¹⁸ The guilt-consciousness of Religiousness A becomes “sin-consciousness”¹¹⁹ in Religiousness B, as the self recognises its mis-relationship to God and the hopelessness of its moral striving.¹²⁰ It is precisely this type of religiousness that has been worked out by Climacus in *Fragments*.¹²¹ There we saw, that a move beyond the Socratic required a complete rupture of immanent categories—what is required is the eternal-in-time, and a revelation *of* God (not just *from* God) in which the condition for the possibility of being-in-truth is bestowed upon the individual within time. In *Postscript* Climacus expounds on this:

In Religiousness B, the upbuilding is something outside the individual; the individual does not find the upbuilding by finding the relationship with God within [her/]himself but relates [her/]himself to something outside [her/]himself in order to find the upbuilding. . . . The paradoxical upbuilding therefore corresponds to the category of God in time as an individual human being, because, it is the case that the individual relates [her/]himself to something outside [her/]himself. That this cannot be thought is precisely the paradox.¹²²

Where the Socratic thesis of Religiousness A began with the principle that subjectivity was truth, it ended with the realisation that subjectivity was in fact *untruth*. Now in a second movement of subjectivity, this time initiated by God, Religiousness B restores subjectivity to the truth. Religiousness B is circumscribed by the Christian narrative of the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. No longer are the requirements on the self able to be construed according to the grammar of norm and duty, nor can they be sustained as rational principles of

¹¹⁸ *KW* XII.1 556/*SV* X 225.

¹¹⁹ *KW* XII.1 583/*SV* X 249.

¹²⁰ Schrag, “Kierkegaard Effect”, 11.

¹²¹ In discussing the difference between Religiousnesses A and B in *Postscript* Climacus states: “Please compare this with *Fragments*, Chapters IV and V, where the distinctive dialectic of the paradoxical-historical is emphasized”, *KW* XII.1 579/*SV* X 245.

thought meant to organise our world and self-relations. In Religiousness B the self is drawn out through a “grammar of grace and gift” that is articulated through the “dynamics of in the paradox of gift-giving and gift-receiving, which is at once transcendent and immanent, operative within the economies of human endeavour but living off resources that are supervenient”.¹²³

Religiousness B functions as a critique of both teleological *and* deontological construals of ethical-religious duties facing the self.¹²⁴ In this new sphere of Christian religiousness, the unity of the self is *received*, not conjured, and is realised (paradoxically) in and through its giving away of itself, not in the execution of a canonised and codified set of prescriptions and procedures. The shift to the grammar of grace and gift does not entail a jettisoning of the grammar of norm and law, but rather a *fulfilling* of it. There is a recontextualising of the law so that the ethical-religious requirements (laws) of Religiousness A are *transvalued* (to co-opt a term from Nietzsche) in Religiousness B.¹²⁵ It is not that the standards for ethical-religious being of Religiousness A are now seen as *wrong* or *false* or no longer applicable. Instead, it is the case that in Religiousness B these are no longer required as the basis for achieving one’s absolute *telos* or eternal happiness. In other words, the law is not abolished but preserved—only with a different function. The eternal God who comes to be known by us in time, to graciously bestow on us the possibility of appropriate self-relation, has initiated a mode of self-relation through his loving, participation in the suffering of the coming-to-be of existence. Religiousness B maintains the *dialectical* tension between law and grace, affirming the ethical-religious pathos of Religiousness A, while at the same time making this dependent upon an historical encounter with God that effects an historical transformation of a person’s life.¹²⁶

¹²² KW XII.1 561/SV X 229.

¹²³ Schrag, *The Self After Postmodernity*, 143, 141.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹²⁵ Calvin Schrag uses the term “transvalued morality” in relation to Kierkegaard’s grammar of Religiousness B in “Kierkegaard Effect”, 11.

¹²⁶ Climacus contends that the defining characteristic is that it maintains a position that preserves a dialectical tension so that it properly called “paradoxical religiousness . . . or the religiousness that

The grammar of grace and gift is spelled out clearly in the veronymous *Works of Love* in which Kierkegaard affirms that in the Christian narrative love is commanded of us by God. In the command to love we find the coincidence of the perfect law and love. This command, however, cannot be understood simply through the grammar of norm and law. Thus, *Works of Love* is properly understood as working out the grammar of grace and gift of Religiousness B.¹²⁷ It is on this point that issue must be taken with Merold Westphal's reading of the relationship Religiousness B and *Works of Love*.¹²⁸ Westphal argues that Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* demarcates another religious sphere that represents Kierkegaard's vision of the truly Christian way of being-in-the-world. *Works of Love* thereby completes the theory of existence-spheres. In *Works of Love*, Westphal argues, we have Christ as the Pattern to be imitated, and not merely the Absolute Paradox to be believed, as in Climacus's Religiousness B.¹²⁹ Therefore, *Works of Love* offers a new distinctively Christian religiousness—a *Religiousness C*—as opposed to the quasi-Christian religiousness of Climacus's Religiousness B. Westphal's analysis is a major contribution to the literature on Kierkegaard's stages, but there remains a marked difference between the treatments of Christianity by Climacus and S. Kierkegaard in *Works of Love*. Kierkegaard does not articulate a sphere distinct from that delineated in Climacus's Religiousness B. For both Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms belief is a mode of being in the world of time-space.¹³⁰ Consequently, belief in the Absolute Paradox means imitating Christ the Pattern. Because its author (Johannes Climacus)

has the dialectical in the second place", *KW* XII.1 556/SV X 225; see the full discussion of this in *KW* XII.1 555-578/SV X 224-244. Later Climacus makes it clear that the dialectical nature of Religiousness B is directly related to its preserving Religiousness A: "Religiousness B is isolating, separating, is polemical. . . . Every Christian has pathos as in Religiousness A, and then this pathos of separation", *KW* XII.1 582/SV X 248.

¹²⁷ For this claim see Calvin Schrag who argues: "Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* and his *Either/Or* need to be read against the backdrop of his *Works of Love*", Schrag, *The Self After Postmodernity*, 143.

¹²⁸ See Westphal, *Becoming A Self*, 194-196; see also Westphal's argument in, "Kierkegaard's Teleological Suspension of Religiousness B", in *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community: Religion, Ethics, and Politics in Kierkegaard*, eds. George B. Connell and C. Stephen Evans (London: Humanities Press, 1992), pp. 110-129.

¹²⁹ Westphal, *Becoming a Self*, 198; and Westphal, "Kierkegaard's Teleological Suspension of Religiousness B", 117 ff.

¹³⁰ This will be treated in detail in Chapter Seven.

ostensibly is not a Christian and does not believe in Christ (that is, he does not have faith), *Postscript* discusses the *dialectic* of Religiousness B (i.e., Christianity) *esthetically* from outside of it as a thought-possibility. *Works of Love*, however, speaks *from within* Religiousness B and is an *example* of it.

In this way, *Works of Love* completes the pseudonymous authorship and the theory of stages, but not in the manner Westphal outlines. Climacus in *Postscript* communicates the theoretical and dialectical dynamics of Christianity (as possibility) while *Works of Love* communicates actual Christianity—that is, it *is* Christianity, the book itself is a work of love. To this end, Kierkegaard argues in Chapter X of the Second Series in *Works of Love* that *praising love* is itself a *work of love*. Kierkegaard argues that praising love is not a poetic art, which primarily requires talent, but is instead something that is a work, fundamentally requiring personal effort. Therefore praising love transforms the laudatory one into a loving person. Praising love, “is a work, and of course a work of love, because it can be done only in love or, more accurately defined, in the love of truth”.¹³¹ Having carefully argued that “worldly” erotic love is actually love of oneself and that Christian love is self-denial,¹³² Kierkegaard contends that, “in order to be able to praise love, self-denial is required *inwardly* and self-sacrificing unselfishness *outwardly*”.¹³³ In so doing one is actually *being* Christianity in actuality by allowing the God-relationship, through Christ, to transform and shape one’s subjectivity, and thus embody Christ’s narrative in a repetition.

Works of Love is thereby able to give us a picture, or a grammar, of the self in transcendence. The First Series (of the book’s two) focuses on expositing the biblical command: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”. The command to love maintains the paradoxical feature of Religiousness B in that, Kierkegaard observes, it “contains an apparent contradiction: [that] to love is a duty”.¹³⁴ Making love into a duty that one has towards each neighbour one transgresses the esthetic

¹³¹ KW XVI 360/SV XII 342.

¹³² KW XVI 55-6/SV XII 60.

¹³³ KW XVI 374/SV XII 356.

dimension of love by destroying love's sensual immediacy. Yet, framed within the grammar of grace and gift, the Christian command to love the neighbour as oneself also subverts an ethical-religious construal of love in two ways. First, as Kierkegaard notes in the preface, the love described in *Works of Love* does not concern the concept of love from an abstracted, eternal point of view, "as if hereby all its works were now added up and described".¹³⁵ This type of approach is not possible from within Religiousness A—as perhaps in a Platonic project of grasping of the eternal forms, or a Kantian project of projecting the basis for rational moral action—and entails a radical break with immanence. Instead, the deliberations in *Works of Love* are "about *works of love*" which "in its total richness is *essentially* inexhaustible" and "in its smallest work *essentially* indescribable just because essentially it is totally present everywhere and *essentially* cannot be described".¹³⁶ The love required in Religiousness B cannot be recollected (in the Socratic sense) but only revealed by God in time.¹³⁷

Secondly, the command to love the neighbour outstrips Religiousness A because the possibility of giving love (i.e., obeying the command) does not come from within the natural resources of human subjectivity but is predicated upon first receiving the love of God, which is then freely given to the neighbour. Kierkegaard elaborates on this point:

Just as the quiet lake originates deep down in hidden springs no eye has seen, so also does a person's love originate even more deeply in God's love. If there were no gushing spring at the bottom, if God were not love, then there would be neither the little lake nor a human being's love. Just as the quiet lake originates darkly in the deep spring, so a human being's love originates mysteriously in God's love.¹³⁸

The very thing commanded of humans by God is that which we cannot do without his aid. It is also that which he graciously gives. The *command* to love, as belonging to the grammar of norm and law, is undercut by its placement within the context of God's economy of grace and gift. The self who performs the works of love by

¹³⁴ KW XVI 24/SV XII 28.

¹³⁵ KW XVI 3/SV XII 9.

¹³⁶ KW XVI 3/SV XII 9; his italics.

¹³⁷ KW XVI 27/SV XII 31.

¹³⁸ KW XVI 9-10/SV XII 14-15.

loving the neighbour, by receiving the gift of love and in obedience reciprocating that love, is a self in transcendence. Kierkegaard's prefatory prayer to *Works of Love* makes this clear by situating the source of all earthly love with God in heaven.¹³⁹ Yet the opening prayer also affirms that this self is still a human self in historical concretion by scripting the self within the redemptive narrative of Christ's incarnational "love-sacrifice".¹⁴⁰ The stunning result is that Kierkegaard succeeds in "showing how the love of one's neighbor is quite commensurate with a proper regard for oneself. In the love relationship both self and other are enriched, against the backdrop of God's unconditional love for both".¹⁴¹ The self of Religiousness B is therefore a *fulfilled* self—a multi-dimensional self with a fully unified first-person perspective on the world. In Religiousness B, the self is granted the resources to achieve itself from outside of itself and thereby gains a genuine transcendence as an historically concrete, existing person. The self in Religiousness B attains *Salighed*—or more precisely, in Religiousness B the self receives the condition for the possibility of *Salighed*.

There is therefore a radically different perspective gained on reality within the sphere of Religiousness B that effects a complete transformation of one's relations to self, time, and others. First, in Religiousness B the self gains, to revert to the language of Anti-Climacus employed in Chapter Five, "transparency". The self attains a unity in all its sundry expressions of a type that is very different from the abstracted unifying point of Cartesian subjectivity. In Kierkegaard's Religiousness B the self is decentered from its Cartesian throne. However, as a product of its relation to God as the power that establishes it, the self achieves a unity across its existential concretions that is best described in what Schrag calls a *transversal* unity.¹⁴² The concept of transversality denotes most basically a line extending across

¹³⁹ KW XVI 3-4/SV XII 9-10.

¹⁴⁰ KW XVI 3/SV XII 10.

¹⁴¹ Schrag, "Kierkegaard Effect", 16 n13.

¹⁴² Schrag, *The Self After Postmodernity*, 128ff. See also Schrag's Chapter Six, "Transversal Rationality", in *The Resources of Rationality: A Response to the Postmodern Challenge* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 148-179, for a discussion of transversality applied in a slightly different context than in relation to a Kierkegaardian notion of subjectivity. In

a field of diverse, self-contained domains. Thinking of Kierkegaard's transparency as a transversal unity displays a sensitivity to temporal and spatial constraints as a basic framework of the self, and acknowledges various modes or modules within that framework. The unity that is achieved transversally from among many varied expressions is one of "convergence without coincidence, conjuncture without concordance, overlapping without assimilation, and union without absorption".¹⁴³ To say further that the unity expressed by Kierkegaard's transparent subjectivity is a transversal unity is to say that it is never (for the existing subject in time) a finalised result that is enjoyed from an eternal, totalised (presuppositionless) vantage point—it is always being worked out with "fear and trembling". The transversal unity of the Kierkegaardian subject is a unity that has as its condition a transcendent point outside itself—as its future hope. This unity is worked out by a person in a perpetual unifying process of collecting in the God-relation one's various modes and expressions of being together in and through time-space so that the eternal vantage point is made historically concrete. This account converges with Anti-Climacus's notion of the transparency of a deep subjectivity. For Anti-Climacus transparency is never conceived in Kierkegaard's writings as an atemporal self-cognition, but is the achieving of an existential clarity in which one knows oneself in and through one's actions.¹⁴⁴ The expression and content of the transversally unified self is a self who is and does the works of love.

Second, in relation to time, the self in transcendence inhabits time in relation to a present reality that holds within it a future (not past) hope of eternal blessedness (*Salighed*). Time now is imbued with the possible "moment" of attaining the truth (as being-in-truth). The self is situated within *kairotic* time; an opportune time that is

both instances Schrag does not use the concept of transversality in direct correlation to Kierkegaardian subjectivity or the concept of transparency, and in the end he puts the concept of transversal unity to different purposes than that for which it is used here.

¹⁴³ Schrag, *The Self After Postmodernity*, 128.

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, *KW* XIX 94/SV XV 145; and *JP* I 1050/*Pap.* VIII¹ B 192.

bursting with promise and the hope of fulfilled possibilities.¹⁴⁵ This transformation of the self-time relation also, thirdly, reconfigures the relation of self to others. We inhabit time and space that is also shared by others. These others are now understood as the *neighbour* who is no longer preferentially defined (as in Religiousness A) as the one who is closest to me and to whom I must discharge a duty in the name of self-fulfilment. Instead, in Religiousness B the neighbour is a fellow sinner to whom grace has been given, as one co-implicated with me in the suffering of coming into existence, sharing my human sinfulness, but also to whom God has graciously extended his redemption and forgiveness.¹⁴⁶ The question regarding to whom my duties apply cannot arise within the economy of Religiousness B. Kierkegaard defines the neighbour by expounding Jesus's story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, and notes the response of Jesus to the Pharisee's question of him, "Who is my neighbour"?

If someone . . . asks, "Who is my neighbor?" then that reply of Christ to the Pharisee will contain answer only in a singular way, because in the answer the question is actually first turned around, whereby the meaning is: how is a person to ask the question. . . . The Pharisee's answer [that the neighbor is the one who showed mercy to the Samaritan] is contained in Christ's question, which by its form compelled the Pharisee to answer in that way. The one to whom I have a duty is my neighbor, and *when I fulfill my duty I show that I am a neighbor*. Christ does not speak about knowing the neighbor but about becoming a neighbor oneself, about showing oneself to be a neighbor . . .¹⁴⁷

Religiousness B inverts the objectification of the neighbour that is part of Religiousness A. Jesus defines the neighbour subjectively and thereby frustrates the Pharisaical desire to discover objectively the scope of one's responsibility so one's duty may be dispensed. The question "Who is my neighbour?" becomes in Religiousness B, "To whom am I being a neighbour?", or yet, "Are those I encounter each day being encountered by me as neighbours?"

The point is that the encounter of others in the kairotic time of Religiousness B takes place within the redemptive narrative of the life of Jesus Christ. In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard explains that Christian love—as the sort of love that is

¹⁴⁵ This is the thesis of Chapter III of the Second Series in *Works of Love*, "Love Hopes All Things - and Yet Is Never Put To Shame". See KW XVI 246-263/SV XII 237-253. See also Schrag, "Kierkegaard Effect", 11.

¹⁴⁶ Schrag, "Kierkegaard Effect", 11.

commanded of us—is the fulfilling of the ethical-religious law, and as such, it is “sheer action”.¹⁴⁸ The action of love, which is also the very substance of love, is embodied in the life of Christ who is the “*end of the Law*”¹⁴⁹ in two ways: (1) Christ is the fulfillment of the law as its intended goal, and (2) Christ brings the law to completion and renders it obsolete. As Kierkegaard explains, the life of transcendence (as the life of love) is therefore to be understood *through* and *by means of* the narrative of Christ’s life:

Christ was the fulfilling of the Law. How this is to be understood we are to learn from him, because he was *the explanation*, and only when the explanation *is* what it explains, when the explainer *is* what is explained, when the explanation [*Forklaring*] is the transfiguration [*Forflarelse*], only then is the relation the right one.¹⁵⁰

Christ’s life is both the explanation and the *explanans*; the narrative of Christ’s life is both the explanation and the criterion for the life of Religiousness B. Living the life of love means living in terms of and through the very power of the life of Christ. One who wishes to participate in the hope of eternity and the transparency of *Salighed* must therefore look to Christ as “the Way”.¹⁵¹ The first movement of the narrative of Christ’s life is his “debasement”, his voluntary *kenosis* as a self-renunciation and participation in the suffering of coming-to-be in the temporal and spatial order that lead ultimately to crucifixion.¹⁵² There is no getting to Christ’s exaltation without going through his humiliation. Religiousness B therefore entails what Kierkegaard describes in *Works of Love* as an “annihilation before God”¹⁵³ in “self-denial and sacrifice”.¹⁵⁴ At the center of Religiousness B stands the cross of a suffering, crucified God, who provides the occasion that transfigures our experience of time and others. Thus, before the cross all persons are equal as

¹⁴⁷ KW XVI 22/SV XII 27; my italics.

¹⁴⁸ KW XVI 98-100/SV XII 99-100.

¹⁴⁹ Kierkegaard quotes the apostle Paul from Romans 10:4: “Christ was the end of the Law”; KW XVI 99/SV XII 99; my italics.

¹⁵⁰ KW XVI 101/SV XII 100.

¹⁵¹ KW XVI 248/SV XII 238. See also KW XX 171/SV XVI 168; KW XV 221/SV XI 205-06; JP IV 4279, 4360/Pap. X³ A 253, XI² 279.

¹⁵² KW XVI 102-03, 111-12, 248/SV XII 102-03, 111-12, 238. Kierkegaard also explains elsewhere that, “to *follow* Christ means to take up one’s cross or, as it says in the text just read, carry one’s cross. To carry one’s cross means to deny oneself”; KW XV 221/SV XI 205-06.

¹⁵³ KW XVI 103/SV XII 103.

¹⁵⁴ KW XVI 113/SV XII 113.

condemned as sinful and those for whom God has suffered to atone. However, instead of seeing others as infinitely sinful, the person in Religiousness B encounters others as infinitely redeemable. The neighbour presents me with myself as an object—my ethical-religious self is reified in the face of the other as I with inwardness view the other, not as an object in my world to whom I have an obligation, but as a subject to whom I must give myself, as one with whom I am being redeemed by grace.¹⁵⁵ In this self-denying exchange I am constituted as a point actually existing in my world. Religiousness B is the paradoxical economy of faith in which one finds oneself by losing oneself, where giving oneself away means receiving oneself back by grace, and where the crucifixion of the self yields eternal blessedness.

Conclusion to Chapter Six

Kierkegaard constructs his grammar of the movements of human subjectivity towards a fulfilled, complete, and self-transparent subjectivity in terms of three basic existence-spheres: the esthetic, the ethical, and the religious. These are distinct and possible modes of being-in-the-world and being-towards-the-world of a human subjectivity and a self within an existence-sphere which carries with it that mode of apprehending and comprehending the world.

Let us review how this grammar developed through four seminal works. The two volumes of *Either/Or* present the basic structure of esthetic and ethical existence. An esthete lives in an atemporal world of sensual immediacy that is characterised by a lack of relation and expressed in a grammar of presence and distanciation. Esthetic existence is marked by a kind of abstract distance from the world, and the esthete objectively apprehends reality as a stage for self-gratification. The *aporia* of self in esthetic existence is that there is no self for the esthete. The ethical self transforms the sensual immediacy of the esthete into a temporal horizon of past, present, and future by choosing itself. In choosing oneself the world is viewed by the ethical

¹⁵⁵ In a draft copy of *Works of Love* Kierkegaard wrote: "But the neighbor is not the other *I*, the

person as a place of requirement. Reality and our sensual involvements in the world are now perceived as a place of commitment and self-evaluation expressed in a grammar of norm and law. *Fear and Trembling* clearly demonstrates that the *aporia* of the self in the ethical stems from the fact that the self cannot ground a grammar of norm and law within itself, as a finite and temporal creature. In this situation, the ethical self loses itself and the other. The grammar of norm and law therefore comes to be expressed in terms of Religiousness A, in which the self encounters a “teleological suspension of the ethical”. The ethical self finds it necessary to change its perception of its moral requirements so that these are grounded in eternity. Ultimately this remains within immanent categories and the self cannot achieve a genuine unity or transcendence (that is, transparency). The *aporia* of the self in Religiousness A concerns the inability of its immanent conception of eternity (as laying behind the subject) to ratify the self in time. What is required is a complete break with immanence and the resources for a fulfilled subjectivity must come from outside of it. The logic of this move is detailed in *Postscript* and embodied in *Works of Love*. This final movement of the self entails an identification with the eternal-in-time, the god who suffered in existence, so that one is able to unify one’s existence by transcribing it into and through Christ’s redemptive narrative. The life of Christ is the life of transparency and this transparency is continually achieved through the self-sacrifice of the life of love, lived through the works of love.

In the development of Climacus’s grammar of the existence-spheres it has become obvious that ontology begins to encroach on epistemology. The result of the grammar of subjectivity is a self that sees or knows itself transparently. Chapter Seven explores this theme further in Kierkegaard’s grammar of belief.

neighbor is the other *you* who is every other human being”; *KW XVI 431/Pap.* VIII² B 31:15.

CHAPTER SEVEN
THE GRAMMAR OF BELIEF

To you it shall be as you have believed . . . what is done for a man is always according to his faith.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*

What the skeptics really should be caught in is the ethical.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*

The law for the development of the self with respect to knowing, insofar as it is the case that the self becomes itself, is that the increase of knowledge corresponds to the increase of self-knowledge, that the more the self knows, the more it knows itself.

Anti-Climacus, *Sickness Unto Death*

Chapters Five and Six form a comprehensive grammar of Kierkegaardian subjectivity. There are really two complementary grammars of subjectivity we find in Kierkegaard's writings. One, discussed in Chapter Six, details the basic features of human subjectivity in its ontological coordinates. A human self is finite and situated temporally (and in other ways) and is such that we may fail to acquire one. In other words, a human self is *action*—a *becoming* [*Tilblivelse*] in time. There is a contrast between thin subjectivity that is able (just) to reflexively refer itself in the first-person, and a fully developed, multi-dimensional, and first-person perspective on the world—which may be termed a deep subjectivity. Kierkegaard describes the action of becoming a self as *repentance*. Chapter Six presented a grammar of the movements or actions of repentance as the self acquires its depth-dimensions. These are the existential coordinates of the self, understood in relation to time and others, and are detailed in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous theory of the existence-spheres. The end of the existence-spheres is the self-transparency, or deep subjectivity, described in the grammar of Chapter Five.

At this point in our study we finally are positioned to see how Kierkegaard's development of subjectivity is fundamentally epistemological. In his theory of stages

and his grammar of subjectivity Kierkegaard is mixing ontological and epistemological categories. What we find is that his phenomenology of subjectivity depends also upon a phenomenology of belief formation.

Before moving from Kierkegaard's grammar of the existence-spheres to his account of belief, we must first turn to the nature of the transitions between the existence-spheres. How are existential transitions made according to Kierkegaard; how does one move from one sphere of existence to another? And what does this have to do with belief? The aim in this closing chapter is to make good on the claim that Kierkegaard's theory of existence-spheres is deeply epistemological and has an essential cognitive element. This is evidenced, it will be argued, by the pivotal role that beliefs play in the transition between existence-spheres, as well as by the manner in which a person's belief-states are changed by these ontological transformations. On Kierkegaard's account, belief and subjectivity run together and one must always speak of one when speaking of the other. Kierkegaard's meta-epistemology requires an ethics of belief. Finally, upon examination, Kierkegaard's account of beliefs requires that we understand there to be different levels at which beliefs are formed, ranging from beliefs about specific states of affairs to an over-arching life-view. These belief levels are hierarchical in that the upper-levels of belief influence, or provide the context for, the levels of belief that fall under them.

Existence-Spheres and the Transition to Belief

To properly begin to articulate Kierkegaard's grammar of belief, we must return to his theory of the existence-spheres. This is because the theory of the stages presents the starting point of Kierkegaard's phenomenology of doxastic formation. Four important concepts converge in Kierkegaard's account of the existence-spheres and the transitions that occur in a movement from one sphere to the next: imagination, will, passion, and belief. As we shall see below, these four concepts combine to produce the conditions for the transitions between one existence-sphere to the another.

An existential “movement” between existence-spheres must not be thought of as a linear progression. We have already noted that a transition between existence-spheres takes the character of an *Aufhebung* in which the transition does not leave behind, but rather refigures, the former mode of being and its attending life-view. The terminology of “transition” and “movements” is therefore potentially misleading. Rather than thinking of these existential shifts as moves strictly from one domain to another, it is more accurate to view them as the gaining of a new set of ontological attributes. These new qualities then reconfigure and resituate the former ontological properties in a new context. In this case we may speak of a movement between two stages as the *addition* of a new existence-sphere in which the former sphere is immersed in a wider (or deeper) context and retains a relative identity and distinctness from the new sphere. As one “progresses” through the stages, one does not leave the “former” stage behind. So that, for example, one still engages one’s world esthetically and ethically (or acts within the esthetic sphere and the ethical sphere) after having attained a religious qualification of existence. The difference is that now these esthetic and ethical engagements have a wider frame of reference so that ultimately they mean something different for the religious person than for those persons whose lives are only qualified esthetically and ethically.

The terminology Kierkegaard uses to describe these transitions from one qualitative form of existence to another is “the leap” [*Spring*],¹ and sometimes he uses the Greek construction *meta-basis eis allo genos* [change or shift from one genus to another].² The category of the leap plays an important role in Kierkegaard’s thought as a reaction to Hegel’s speculative account of reality and coming-to-be. Kierkegaard finds that it is precisely the transitions between thought

¹ The term occurs first in Kierkegaard’s published authorship in Climacus’s *Fragments*, in *KW VII 43/SV VI 42*. This term also occurs copiously throughout Kierkegaard’s *Journals and Papers*. See *JP I 26, 385, 653, 808, 972/Pap. IV C 87, X² A 16, VIII² B 85, IV C 105, X¹ A 360; JP II 1248, 1603, 1607/Pap. V B 55:26, IV C 81, VI B 40:3; JP III 2704, 2807, 3247, 3598/Pap. II A 631, VII¹ A 182, I A 99, II A 763; JP IV 4421/Pap. IV C 94.*

² *KW VII 73/SV VI 67*; and *KW XII.1 98/SV IX 84*.

and actuality for which Hegel fails to account.³ In the Kierkegaardian literature “the leap” is a category that applies to all existential transitions between the existence-spheres as ontological shifts in a person’s being. Each shift to a new set of ontological determinants also constitutes a new way of perceiving reality and being in it. These transitions open up new existential possibilities for a person and one is afforded a different set of conceptual coordinates through which to view their world that formerly were unavailable. The concept of “the leap”, then, does not apply only to the transition to Christian religiousness, as the transition to faith (belief) *sensu eminentiori*. The transition to Christian religiousness is both the most dramatic and the most important for Kierkegaard, but it is not the only type of existential transaction that transforms one into a person of *Tro* (belief).

The category of leap, then, is one that inherently concerns our transitions to *belief*. Kierkegaard introduces the category of the leap through Climacus in *Fragments*, and Climacus uses it throughout both *Fragments* and *Postscript*. M. Jamie Ferreira makes the crucial observation that while the leap *to* faith is central in Kierkegaard’s thought, he never uses the Danish equivalent of the circular English phrase “leap of faith”, where it is implied that the leap to another mode of being is made by faith, in an overtly question begging fashion as some form of decisionism.⁴ Instead the leap is better characterised as a leap *to* faith in which the qualitative transition in a mode of being-in-the-world that results in a different quality of *Tro* in a person. In *Fragments* we read that whenever one is inquiring into the nature of existence one finds that belief is generated by “*meine Zuthat* [my contribution]” in

³ In *JP I 110/Pap. IV C 80*, Kierkegaard notes that, “Hegel has never done justice to the category of transition”, and in reference to this Climacus claims that “the leap is the most decisive protest against the inverse operation of the method [of Hegel’s speculative System]”, *KW XII.1 105/SV IX 107*. See also *KW XII.1 337-38/SV X 40-1*, for a detailed argument against Hegel’s treatment of transition. Jamie Ferreira makes a similar point in “Faith and the Kierkegaardian Leap”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, eds. Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 211-12; and Ferreira, *Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 8-9.

⁴ See M. Jamie Ferreira, “Faith and the Kierkegaardian Leap”, 207-08. Ferreira’s work on Kierkegaard’s category of the leap is arguably the most comprehensive and careful in the literature. See especially Ferreira, *Transforming Vision, passim*. The following analysis of Kierkegaard’s leap category is deeply indebted to Ferreira and draws heavily on her “Faith and the Kierkegaardian Leap”.

“letting go” of rational demonstrations.⁵ We are then told that this transition (to belief) is characterized as a *leap*. This transition to *Tro* is an archetypical instance of Kierkegaard’s category of “leap of faith”.

The issue of “the leap” is taken up extensively by Climacus in the chapter, “Possible and Actual Theses by Lessing”, of *Postscript*.⁶ The “leap” is not just a religious category (although it is certainly that). Rather, the category of the leap is explicated within the context of Climacus’s discussion of existence and the relationship of thought to existence (this is also, for example, the chapter where Climacus discusses Hegel’s presuppositionless beginning and states that an existential system is not possible). Climacus later explains his language of “the leap” as the category by which “[t]he transition from possibility to actuality” is to be explained.⁷ The transition to which Climacus is referring is exactly that transition in a person who moves from one (any) existence-sphere to another, and he indicates this by using the “leap” into “the ethical” as an example of the sort of transition he has in mind.⁸ Climacus certainly understands “the leap” as a category covering all that occurs in a shift between existence-spheres—like the one that takes place between the esthetic and the ethical. The caprice lies in the fact that Kierkegaard wants to speak simultaneously of belief and being, of epistemology and ontology. On his view these two domains can only be separated logically and even then the logic of one has implications for the other.⁹

Climacus clearly intends his category of the leap to refer more globally to transitions in general, beyond those involved simply in coming to religious faith. In *Journals and Papers* Kierkegaard writes that, “By analogy and induction the conclusion can only be reached by a leap”.¹⁰ The point of this comment is that the category of the leap is used to describe how it is that we humans come to accept conclusions, or come to *see* conclusions as true, in the case where they are not

⁵ *KW* VII 43/*SV* VI 42.

⁶ *KW* XII.1 72-126/*SV* IX 61-106.

⁷ *KW* XII.1 342/*SV* X 44-5.

⁸ *KW* XII.1 342/*SV* X 45.

⁹ This also recalls Climacus’s discussion of truth examined in Chapter Four.

tautological. With the category of the leap Kierkegaard is not *prescribing* a method of belief formation as much as he is observing how in fact humans do form beliefs, and he is making the point that human doxastic formation is bound by ontological constraints as well as rational ones. Part of this argument includes the further observation that forming beliefs in this manner is inescapable for humans, given their noetic capacities, and that as such it is wholly legitimate (epistemically) for humans to do so. Kierkegaard wants only that this feature of human cognitive life not be ignored or glossed over, and that the ontological and ethical (paradoxical) elements of human reason and belief are properly acknowledged.

Kierkegaard describes the existential transition to *Tro*, whether in the eminent or ordinary sense, as a passionate and decisive act of the will.¹¹ As Ferreira notes, this qualitative change is an exercise of freedom in that it is not compelled or forced on the believer.¹² For Kierkegaard, human freedom is never *liberium arbitrium* [freedom of indifference] and human choice is never “abstract freedom of choice”, “bare naked”, “contentless”, and achieved through the exercise of a “perfectly disinterested will”.¹³ In Ferreira’s words, “[For Kierkegaard], freedom is always interested, contextualized freedom”.¹⁴ The change of state in the believer is not prescribed by reason but is objectively *risqué*. In shifting from one existence-sphere to take on another, we do not do so by taking a purely cognitive or rational step, as one would do, for example, in deducing a geometric proof. Even in induction and analogical reasoning we have something more than what reason can positively produce on its own. The transition from one mode of being-in-the-world to another is instead a “letting go”, although this is by no means positively *ir-rational*—i.e., *against* reason. This kind of transition is a *qualitative transition*, a change involving a new set of possibilities and a break with former ones. In an attack on Hegelian speculative method, Climacus announces in *Postscript* that on the speculative

¹⁰ *JP* III 2341/*Pap.* V B 1:3. See also *JP* III 2350/*Pap.* V C 8; and *JP* I 258/*Pap.* IV C 48.

¹¹ *KW* VII 84, 92-94, 92/*SV* VI 76, 83-84. Cf. *KW* XII.1 136/*SV* IX 112.

¹² Ferreira, “Faith and the Kierkegaardian Leap”, 219.

¹³ *JP* II 1249, 1261, 1269, 1268, 1260, 1241/*Pap.* V B 56:2, X² A 428, X⁴ A 177, X⁴ A 175, X² A 243, IV C 39.

(Hegelian) account, “the method advances—by necessity”, so that “Whenever a transition must be made, the opposite continues so long until it switches over into its opposite—and then one proceeds further”, rendering the transition mute. Thus, asserts Climacus, “The spurious infinity is the hereditary enemy of the method; it is the nisse that accompanies every time there is a move (a transition) and prevents the transition. The spurious infinity is infinitely stubborn; if it is to be overcome, there must be a break, a *qualitative leap*, and that is the end of the method, of the dexterity of immanence and the necessity of transition”.¹⁵

The qualitative change brought about in the believer is a shift where what was once construed in one manner is now configured in an entirely different light. Jastrow’s popular “gestalt shift”, where one picture can be seen to be either a duck or a rabbit, in one sense exemplifies the kind of transition that Kierkegaard has in mind in moving from one belief state to another. However, this shift should not naively be understood too literally as a “simple gestalt”. The simple gestalt model suggests that the transition involves an in-principle symmetry and a sort of magical change that takes place, with no contiguity between the two poles of the shift. In order to correct and complement the simple gestalt model, Ferreira argues for an understanding of the leap in terms of a metaphorical reconceptualization.¹⁶ The model she privileges over the simple duck-rabbit model is the “critical threshold model” where “a new quality emerges at a critical threshold”, that was attained gradually by degrees—yet this new state/condition itself is devoid of degrees.¹⁷ Ferreira employs the metaphor of the transition involved in boiling water: water heats up by degrees and when it reaches a critical threshold it boils—but boiling itself is

¹⁴ Ferreira, “Faith and the Kierkegaardian Leap”, 219.

¹⁵ See *KW XII.1 337-38/SV X 40-1*; my italics.

¹⁶ Ferreira, *Transforming Vision*, 76-81.

¹⁷ Ferreira, “Faith and the Kierkegaardian Leap”, 207-08. There are three discernible reasons why Ferreira argues for the critical threshold model against the simple gestalt model: (1) it expresses the decisiveness of the transition better; (2) simple gestalt involves an in-principle symmetry, hence a reversible conclusion; and (3) simple gestalt does not retain a relation between the two states—i.e., there is no contiguity between what was (e.g., the duck) and what has become (e.g., the rabbit), and consequently this model remains agnostic on this point and the relationship may be arbitrary.

not something that happens by degrees and is at the same time a qualitative change from its former state:

The qualitative change at a critical threshold is decisive since any increases after that threshold are superfluous, but such change is a function of what precedes it; although the change is not just cumulative, it is integrally related to what goes before. . . . the transition is a qualitative one—that is, it is an all-or-nothing kind of movement, rather than a quantitative accumulation by degrees—it is nevertheless anchored in what precedes.¹⁸

The result is that we must be careful not to view “the leap” too prosaically. We must take care not to erase or divorce the developing aspect of *Tro* from these transitions. Neither should we ignore some of the important elements of existential transitions other than those expressed in the metaphor of leaping. In a very telling passage for this understanding of the leap, Kierkegaard states that, “what I call a transition of pathos, Aristotle called an enthymeme”.¹⁹ An enthymeme (for Aristotle) is a one-sentence rhetorical device that implies a syllogism for the sake of creating “a practical, concrete, nonnecessary transition in the audience”.²⁰ In other words, enthymemes depend upon a shared way of seeing the world and being in the world that is then manipulated so that a particular proposition becomes intelligible. This suggests many things about Kierkegaard’s leap category, but what is most important here is that the leap is not an *ungrounded* transition. Instead the leap appears to be rooted in something akin to a Wittgensteinian conception of forms of life, as grounded (*Grundlage*)²¹ in specific, public engagements or interactions with a given reality from which emerge social norms.

This further suggests that there is an implicit structure to our leaps—that is, they are teleological and have some sort of “retrospective justification” open to them. Climacus alludes to this in his discussion of the possibility of demonstrating

¹⁸ Ferreira, “Faith and the Kierkegaardian Leap”, 217-18.

¹⁹ *JP* III 2353/*Pap.* VI A 33.

²⁰ Ferreira, *ibid.*, 222.

²¹ This is Wittgenstein’s term to describe the foundation of one’s “world-picture [*Weltbild*]”, and literally refers to the “ground (*Grund*) - layer (*Lage*)” of something as its basis or foundation. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), 167. Cf. Wittgenstein’s discussion regarding forms of life throughout *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), especially 23, 241, and Wittgenstein’s discussion of “grounds” for belief in *Investigations*, especially 479-481.

something's existence, in *Fragments*,²² as does Kierkegaard in *Journals and Papers*, where he claims that, "The paradox presumably can be conquered and digested, as it were, for retrogressive thinking".²³ Ferreira draws our attention to another passage in *Postscript* that amply demonstrates that Kierkegaard does not think of existential transitions as operating in isolation from all normative constraints.²⁴

There are examples enough of a mistaken effort to assert the pathos-filled and earnestness in a ludicrous, superstitious sense as a beatifying universal . . . No, everything has its dialectic—not, please note, a dialectic by which it is made sophistically relative (this is mediation), but by which the absolute becomes distinguishable as the absolute by means of the dialectical. Therefore, it is just as questionable, precisely as questionable, to be pathos-filled and earnest in the wrong place as it is to laugh in the wrong place.²⁵

Once more Climacus's point with the leap category is that Hegel's attempt to prescribe the category of transition into logic, as part of a speculative "System", is a fundamental confusion. Climacus rejects Hegel's account, not because there is a problem in conceiving leaps as having a "structure", but because Hegel tries use his concept of a logical transition to bridge the gap between actuality and thought. Hegel's category of transition does this by making existential transitions into logical necessities that are premised on abstractions. There seems little room to question Ferreira's conclusion that Keirkgaard's "pathos-filled" existential transitions can be "critically assessed".²⁶ Ferreira also notes²⁷ a passage in *Journals and Papers* in which Kierkegaard states that the paradox has "a continuity only in reverse, that is, at the beginning it does not manifest itself as a continuity", but (presumably) does so *after* one has believed it.²⁸ While Kierkegaard clearly does not think we can epistemically justify beliefs in isolation from a context (or epistemic community) in which those beliefs are accepted, he does not think that this fact removes *all* rational

²² *KW* VII 40-42/*SV* VI 41-43.

²³ *JP* III 2345/*Pap.* V C 1. Cf. Ferreira, *ibid.*, 222, 233 n.13.

²⁴ Ferreira, *ibid.*, 222.

²⁵ *KW* XII.1 525/*SV* X 199.

²⁶ Ferreira, *ibid.*

²⁷ Ferreira, *ibid.*, 218.

²⁸ *JP* III 3073/*Pap.* IV C 29.

constraints on belief,²⁹ nor does it remove the possibility and need of justifying our beliefs epistemically. Beliefs, then, would be justified according to the *doxastic practices* that emerge from a community of people who participate in common forms of life, or (in more Kierkegaardian terms) engage the world with the same passions.

In a Wittgensteinian manner, we may define a *doxastic practice* as “a system or constellation of dispositions or habits, or, to use a currently fashionable term, mechanism, each of which yields a belief as output that is related in a certain way to an ‘input’”.³⁰ The concept of doxastic practices refers (roughly), then, to the fact that beliefs emerge out of our specific engagements with reality. This descriptive approach to epistemology is begins with a phenomenology of doxastic (or belief) formation that takes special care in observing how it is that we do in fact go about forming our beliefs and justifying them. William Alston outlines the basic contours of a “doxastic practice approach to epistemology” and gives four features of a doxastic practice, all of which are features of the Kierkegaardian account outlined here:³¹

1. There are many doxastic practices we engage in—from perceptual, memory, thought, fantasy, etc.—and each operates in relative isolation to each other with their own subject matter, conceptual frameworks, and standards.
2. A person engages in doxastic practices long before s/he is explicitly aware of them and is able to critically analyse them.

²⁹ Cf. Kierkegaard’s statements in *JP I 7/Pap. X² A 354*, where he claims: “not every absurdity is the absurd or the paradox. The activity of reason is to distinguish the paradox negatively . . . No, the concept of the absurd is precisely to grasp the fact that it cannot and not be grasped. This is a negatively determined concept but is just as dialectical as any positive one . . . reason has no power at all to dissolve it in nonsense and prove that it is nonsense . . . it is a symbol . . . about which reason must say: I cannot solve it, it cannot be understood, but it does not follow that it is nonsense”.

³⁰ William P. Alston, “A ‘Doxastic Practice’ Approach to Epistemology”, in *Knowledge and Skepticism*, ed. Marjorie Clay and Keith Lehrer (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1989), 5.

³¹ Alston, “A ‘Doxastic Practice’ Approach to Epistemology”, 5-9.

3. Practices of belief-formation occur in a wider context of other practices in which we engage, so that our practice of forming beliefs is dependent upon other interactions we have with things independent from ourselves.
4. Doxastic practices are *social* practices that are established through our shared activities and learning processes.

In recommending that we construe Kierkegaard's meta-epistemology as a doxastic practice approach two basic features of Kierkegaard's thought are preserved. First, Climacus speaks of beliefs as if they "happen" to human persons as they engage their world. In the formation of beliefs leaps are made that are strictly neither rational nor conscious. Second, this approach also fits well with Kierkegaard's grammatical (non-metaphysical and phenomenological) method of theorising and his psychologising of the human person.

There are two further lines of support that can be drawn for understanding Kierkegaard's account of belief this way. First, in *Fragments*, Climacus advances the position that beliefs are justified in a *posthoc* manner. A close look at the passage in which Climacus argues that one cannot justify belief in the existence of God, or even another person, by an appeal to the deeds of the being in question, reveals that he does not reject demonstrations (or arguments, or justifications) as legitimate *tout court*.³² What Climacus rejects is a phenomenology of belief in which one confuses the fact that a justification for a given belief *exists* for a believer, with the notion that this justification is then the basis on which the believer *accepts* (or accepted) the belief. Climacus concludes:

Therefore anyone who wants to demonstrate the existence of God (in any other sense than elucidating the God-concept and without the *reservatio finalis* [ultimate reservation] that we have pointed out—that the existence itself emerges from the demonstration by a leap) proves something else instead, at times something that perhaps did not even need demonstrating, and in any case never anything better.³³

The "God-concept" *is* elucidated in the demonstration, Climacus insists. The logic of the God-concept may in fact "need demonstrating" at times, only it must be done

³² See *KW VII 39-43/SV VI 40-43*.

³³ *KW VII 43/SV VI 43*.

with the understanding that belief in the existence of God comes about through a leap.

Next, in *Two Ages* Kierkegaard employs the concept of an epistemic community that is united on the basis of a common passionate pursuit of truth. He asserts that, “When individuals (each one individually) are essentially related to the same idea, the relation is optimal and normative”.³⁴ This comment indicates that Kierkegaard most certainly has a concept of community that is distinct from the category of “the crowd”, which he so often excoriates.³⁵ What is more, Kierkegaard’s view of community in *Two Ages* is one in which the members of the community are organised around a common set of passions and beliefs. Thus Kierkegaard operates with a rudimentary concept of epistemic communities formed by a common search for the truth—or “the Good”. In this case, justifications for beliefs happen within these communities, but these occur neither in isolation from a particular group of people who reflect the same basic view of the world, nor from a presuppositionless vantage-point. Given this view of beliefs and their justifications, Climacus’s denunciations of the use of theistic proofs (or any historical arguments) to “prove” or demonstrate metaphysical being may be seen in another light—one that affirms a place for such arguments or justifications for belief. What we have in *Fragments*, then, is another argument for the situatedness and contextualisation of human reason—especially in its role of justifying belief. Ambiguity on this point seems to stem from the fact that Kierkegaard is struggling (through Climacus) to articulate a *fallibilist* epistemology in which our beliefs do not have open to them universal and absolute justifications. The confusion is created by the fact that Kierkegaard must advance his discussion of epistemic fallibilism without a well-developed philosophical vocabulary in which to do so (such as exists today). Thus at many points his vocabulary is equivocal; one moment apparently sceptical about “knowledge” and denouncing epistemology, the next assuming we have a kind of knowledge and speaking as if we must move beyond scepticism.

³⁴ KW XIV 62/SV XIV 57.

One final aspect of this aspect of Kierkegaard's account of the leap to *Tro* as a *pathos*-filled transition remains to be addressed: the joint role of the will and imagination. As we saw earlier that the transition to belief is understood by Kierkegaard to be an exercise of the will.³⁶

It is important to understand that, for Kierkegaard, the concept of willing operates in concert with imagination. Imagination is an important concept for Kierkegaard and it functions in his thought to perform several functions. David Gouwens identifies the various roles of the imagination in Kierkegaard's thought as including its being a "medium, state, activity, capacity, disposition, and passion".³⁷ Our main interest in the concept of imagination with respect to Kierkegaard's category of "the leap" is the more general cognitive capacity of imagination and what role it plays in the transition between existence-spheres.

Imagination is referred to by Anti-Climacus as "the capacity *instar omnium* [for all capacities]", and he calls it "the medium for the process of infinitizing".³⁸ In *Journals and Papers* Kierkegaard expands on the general capacity of imagination in humans:

Imagination is what providence uses to take men captive in actuality [*Virkeligheden*], in existence [*Tilværelsen*], in order to get them far enough out, or within, or down into actuality. And when imagination has helped them get as far out as they could be—then actuality genuinely begins.³⁹

Kierkegaard clearly sees the imagination playing a vital role in the translation of thought and possibility into actuality. The imagination is understood by Kierkegaard to hold a much more important place in human affairs than simply providing the content of illusions, fantasies, and daydreams. It is, he assures us, an important capacity for existential concretion, for humans to move from the realm of thought-possibility or the world of ideas, to *actual* existence in time and the domain of action. Ultimately the human imagination is what provides us with the capacity for

³⁵ See, for example, *KW* XXII/SV XVIII *passim*; but especially 106-12/152-157.

³⁶ *KW* VII 84/SV VI 76. Cf. *KW* XII.1 136/SV IX 112.

³⁷ David J. Gouwens, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of the Imagination* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 141. Gouwens's treatment of imagination in Kierkegaard's thought is extremely rigorous and helpful.

³⁸ *KW* XIX 31/SV XV 88.

logic, knowledge and just abstract thought in general.⁴⁰ Anti-Climacus's analysis gives the imagination a central place in both the human process of knowing and all the ingredients we have identified as essential to an existential transition (or "leap"), as well as the process of becoming a self:

As a rule, imagination is the medium for the process of infinitizing; it is not a capacity, as are others—if one wishes to speak in those terms, it is the capacity *instar omnium*. When all is said and done, *whatever of feeling, knowing, and willing a person has depends upon what imagination [s/]he has*, upon how a person reflects [her/]himself—that is, upon imagination. . . . *even in relation to knowledge the categories derive from the imagination*. The self is a reflection, and *the imagination is reflection, is the rendition of the self as the self's possibility*. The imagination is possibility of any and all reflection, and the intensity of this medium is the possibility of the intensity of the self.⁴¹

In this passage Anti-Climacus makes the role of the imagination in the transitions between the spheres of existence explicit. Imagination plays a critical role in this aspect of doxastic practice because it is the vehicle by which we perform the process of translating actuality into possibility (what Anti-Climacus calls "infinitizing"), and *vice versa*.

Imagination, then, is the creative capacity of a human subject that provides the content and elements of thought. Imagination is *engaged* imagination, and there is no neutral, disinterested exercise of human imagination.⁴² By placing elements of thought into relation with each other human imagination holds concepts together or alongside each other in a tension so that they may be compared or explored or fancifully enjoyed.⁴³ Imagination therefore gives expression to the act of willing in the form of "interested appropriation".⁴⁴ This link of imagination and will is what Evans calls the "intentionality of passion".⁴⁵ By this he means that for Kierkegaard (*via* Climacus) it is by way of imagining that one translates existential actuality into

³⁹ JP II 1832/Pap. XI¹ A 288.

⁴⁰ Gouwens, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of the Imagination*, 142. The concept of imagination is not employed in Kierkegaard's writings as a monolithic entity that is an entirely positive asset, or even relatively benign. In *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of the Imagination*, 2-3, *passim*, Gouwens demonstrates that Kierkegaard's concept of imagination is multifaceted and may be used for evil as well as good. See also Jaime Ferreira, *Transforming Vision*, 1-2; and Murray A. Rae, *Kierkegaard's Vision of the Incarnation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 35-39.

⁴¹ KW XIX 30-31/SV XV 88; my italics.

⁴² KW VII 121/Pap. IV B 1 107-08.

⁴³ Recall that Johannes Climacus thinks of reflection as "the *possibility of the relation*", that is "disinterested"; KW VII 169-70/Pap. IV B 1 147-48, his italics.

⁴⁴ Ferreira, *Transforming Vision*, 126.

conceptual possibilities, and these imagined possibilities are the catalyst for and object of our passions. After this initial translation process, imagination again enables us to project a nonactual horizon of possibilities and on that basis we may passionately unify our existence by acting on and actualising a specific set of those possibilities. Without the vital capacity of imagination we would be unable to think, reach conclusions, have beliefs, and we would furthermore be unable to move [Spring] from one sphere or stage of existence to the next. The possibilities presented to us by our imaginations provide for us a goal and context for our actions.⁴⁶ Note, however, that imagination provides only the *context* and the *possibilities* for transitions, and cannot bring one about of itself. What is imagined still exists in possibility, not actuality, as something outside oneself.⁴⁷ Passionate resolve to act on these possibilities actualises a transition.

To summarise, the transitions between existence-spheres are presented in the Kierkegaardian literature as existential movements that include a cognitive transformation. The term “transition” is used here because it concerns the process of translating actuality into possibility in any conceptualising act, and then also of turning possibility to actuality by deliberately acting in order to realise some goal. These transitions are described in Kierkegaard’s writings (especially by Climacus) as “the leap”. Central to Kierkegaard’s account of the leap, we noted, are the concepts of imagination, will, passion, and belief. Transitions of this kind are referred to as “pathos-filled” and to some degree are products of human will that require resolve. As we passionately engage our imaginations and bring it into relation with our own concrete actualities an aperture for personal transformation is opened. We may, then, in Kierkegaardian terms, speak of the *self of belief*, for the self is both formed by believing a set of imaginatively constructed range of

⁴⁵ Evans, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Postscript"*, 70.

⁴⁶ Thus Kierkegaard rejects the Cartesian-Enlightenment contention that philosophy begins with doubt and returns to the ancient Greek contention that philosophy always begins with wonder—adding that beginning philosophical reflection requires a resolution of the will; *JP II 2292/Pap. VII¹ A 34. De Omnibus* is dedicated exclusively to this thesis and is Kierkegaard’s most lengthy treatment of the nature and source of philosophical reflection. See *KW VII 160-72/Pap. IV B 1 141-150*.

possibilities and results in a definite range of possibilities as the self's present stock of beliefs. In other words, the self for Kierkegaard is both defined and shaped by its beliefs.

In the next section we examine more closely how Kierkegaard develops this concept of belief through the Climacus pseudonym.

Climacus on Belief

Kierkegaard begins to develop his grammar of belief through the pseudonymous writings of Johannes Climacus. In the "Interlude" of *Fragments* Climacus offers a detailed phenomenological analysis of the nature of belief—one that consistently runs throughout the Kierkegaardian authorship and is adopted by Kierkegaard and pseudonyms alike.⁴⁸ The focus of the "Interlude" of *Fragments* is on the issue of historical knowledge and the possibility of knowing something historical, which Climacus uses as the point of departure for his exploration of the concept of belief [*Tro*].

Climacus first defines the historical as anything that "has come into existence".⁴⁹ All human beliefs, then, are included here as "historical"—in fact doubly so for they all enter into existence themselves as well as being about things that enter into existence (with the possible exception of mathematical and logical beliefs for the latter category). Climacus next makes it clear that anything that is historical has gone (and is going) through the process of "coming into existence", which indicates its radical contingency as a possibility (versus necessity). Non-human things have, of course, temporal and spatial duration but in a strict sense they

⁴⁷ George Pattison, "Kierkegaard and Imagination", *Theology* 87 (1984), 11.

⁴⁸ Anthony Rudd, "'Believing All Things': Kierkegaard on Knowledge, Doubt, and Love", in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Volume 16, Works of Love*, ed. Robert L. Perkins, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 125-26, claims that *Postscript* and *Fragments* "work out the epistemology used as a premise in works of love" and that "it should be apparent to any attentive reader of the *Fragments* and *Postscript* that the epistemology employed in *Works of Love* is precisely that worked out by Climacus in these works" (128). Rudd also points to Marilyn Gaye Piety's "Kierkegaard On Knowledge" (Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 1994), in which she draws on the whole of Kierkegaard's authorship to construct a coherent view of his epistemology and in so doing convincingly demonstrates the unity of Kierkegaard's authorship on this point.

⁴⁹ KW VII 75/SV VI 69.

only exist *historically* for humans, who are able to understand objects in terms of their past as well as their present (or future). All finite objects and events are contingent, non-necessary things and are ontologically qualified under the concept of possibility. “But”, Kierkegaard asks hypothetically, “is not the historical the actual [i.e., having had real existence]”? “Certainly”, he responds. “But what is history? Six thousand years of the world’s history is certainly actuality, but a traversed actuality; it is and can exist [*være til*] for me only as thought-actuality, i.e., as possibility”.⁵⁰

Climacus therefore talks about two kinds of history. First, there is “the coming into existence of nature”, which is “historical” in that it enters and then persists through time—i.e., *has* a history. There is also, secondly, “[t]he more special coming into existence” which is “dialectical with respect to time” that can “redouble” existence (i.e., think about it) and bring it into existence again as “possibility”, which is what the historical is for human thought.⁵¹ The first type of history refers to the contingent (possible) nature of things in the universe and acknowledges that in the sense that things (the world) *are* contingently in time and space they may be referred to as historical for they can be said to have existed. However, these “historical” things do not exist *for themselves* as historical, because they have no conception of their temporal duration. That is, things in the universe (objects, animals, etc.) exist in a constant “now”, in the present tense, and have no ability to relate themselves to their past. Only humans are “dialectical” with respect to time in that they alone are able consciously to relate the present temporal-spatial duration, the continuous coming in and going out of existence that comprises the contingent “now”, to the past (or future) as that which came (or will come) into

⁵⁰ JP I 1059/Pap. X² A 439.

⁵¹ Climacus’s awkward way of putting it is that, “coming into existence [as contingent human existence] can contain within itself a redoubling [*Fordobling*], that is, a possibility of a coming into existence [as a thought-possibility] within its own existence”, KW VII 76/SV VI 69-70. Climacus is simply discussing the logic of his previously stated position that all thoughts about actuality are possibility (not actuality) and he is merely saying here that humans have thoughts about historical things and can thereby bring things into a kind of existence (as possibilities). On the idea of history redoubling in thought compare Anti-Climacus’s discussion of truth redoubling in thought in *Practice in Christianity*, KW XX 205/SV XVI 182.

existence. Therefore (for human consciousness) even the awareness of the “present” is dialectical and is “historical”. The present is always that which is arriving and slipping away.

The constant dialectical oscillation of this process, combined with the very fact of contingent temporal extension, causes the historical as it is for humans (the second sense of history) to have an intrinsic illusiveness [*Svigagtiged*] about it so that “it cannot be sensed directly and immediately. [Therefore t]he impression of a natural phenomenon or of an event is not the impression of the historical”.⁵² In a move that is very important for our discussion of belief, the logic of Climacus’s position forces him to distinguish between a *perception* of a historical, contingent thing, and the historical as it is in the beliefs we have *about* those contingent things. The latter is what Climacus designates as “the historical” (versus the immediate sensation of a thing’s presence) because it is the way in which the past exists in the present as history. Therefore Climacus writes that, “*Immediate sensation and cognition cannot deceive. This alone indicates that the historical cannot become the object of sense perception or of immediate cognition*”, and then later repeats himself saying, “*Immediate sensation and cognition cannot deceive. It is important to understand this in order to understand doubt and in order to assign belief its place. However strange it may seem, this thought underlies Greek skepticism*”.⁵³ The Greek sceptics of antiquity, Climacus observes, “doubted not by virtue of knowledge but by virtue of will”.⁵⁴ Anthony Rudd argues that Climacus’s distinction between classical scepticism and a “modern, post-Cartesian” scepticism contrasts a scepticism motivated by ethical concerns, aimed at *ataraxia* (peace of mind) in the

⁵² KW VII 81/SV VI 73.

⁵³ KW VII 81, 82/SV VI 73, 74; my emphasis. This is manifestly Kierkegaard’s personal view, and not just an intellectual exercise he engages in through one of his pseudonyms. See, for example, *JP II 1243/Pap. IV C 56*; *JP II 1244/Pap. IV C 60*; *JP I 774/Pap. IV A 72*; *JP I 776/Pap. IV B 5:13*.

⁵⁴ KW VII 82/SV VI 74. We find a similar phenomenological account of belief presented in *Works of Love*, where Kierkegaard argues that, “there is no decision in knowledge; the decision, the determination, and the firmness of the personality are first in the ‘ergo,’ in belief”; KW XVI 231/SV XII 222. In this section Kierkegaard continues on to argue that, on the basis of the same knowledge, love and mistrust come to opposite conclusions.

former case, against the latter, modern scepticism that was purely intellectual in nature.⁵⁵

Climacus wants to discuss things under their appropriate categories and thereby avoid the category mistakes he finds in modern philosophy. He therefore separates the conceptual sphere of knowledge from that of belief in its proper sense. Knowledge is assigned to the sphere of perception and sensate immediacy, while belief falls under the categories of cognition and will. The former concerns appearances or sensations (immediacy), and perceptual states or something like a perceptual mode of consciousness; while the latter involves concepts, propositions, volitions, and, as we shall see, passions as well.

In Chapter Three we argued that in this section Climacus uses the term “immediacy” to refer to the perceptual state of a human person who is perceptually appeared to in any of the human sensory modes (in the case of the discussion in *Fragments* it is “when the perceiver sees a star”). These perceptual states appear to have, for Climacus, as attending features, mental states. Climacus has no technical name for these states but we may describe them as *doxastic states*. A doxastic state is defined as a subclass of mental states of human persons and refers to the mental state(s) or event(s) a person is in or has when s/he believes something, or withholds belief, or prefers to believe something. *Believing p* (in the case that *p* is any state of affairs), *withholding* a believing *p*, and *preferring* to believe *p* are all examples of doxastic states.⁵⁶ A more concrete example would be the state one is in of *believing the ball to be blue* when appeared to by a blue ball. Doxastic states can be characterised as a kind of “seeing”, or an inclination to view *p* as such-and-such, or even a tendency to be cognitively disposed in a certain manner toward *p*. This sort of distinction may be made only if we do not beg the question and assume that all mental states *are* propositional states—a common assumption in Anglo-American

⁵⁵ See Rudd’s excellent treatment of Kierkegaard’s relationship to scepticism in, “Kierkegaard and the Sceptics”, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 6: (1998), 71-88, especially 72-3. See also Rudd, ““Believing All Things””, 126-27; and Rudd, *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical*, 36-7.

philosophy. If mental states are propositional states then all belief states must be characterised as *propositional states*, or *beliefs that p*. This is what Kierkegaard rejects.⁵⁷ Note that doxastic states, as defined above, are psychological or mental states of persons regarding some person or object *p*, or any other state of affairs *p*. They express a fundamental relationship that obtains between some person and another person, object, or state of affairs, and are not propositional states. They cannot be construed as abstract relations between propositions, as expressed in terms of some person's *belief that p*, where *p* is some proposition. A person may therefore have a doxastic state *believing p* and no conscious awareness or propositional attitude toward that object *p*—which is yet another, different kind of mental state.

As shown in the above example, some subject (*S*), in a particular doxastic state (e.g., believing) regarding some person, object, or proposition (*p*), in which s/he takes *p* a certain way (*x*), is expressed linguistically (in English) in the following grammatical form: “*S* believes *p* to be *x*”. Doxastic states could not be characterised (at least by Climacus) as being attending features of one's consciousness because in that case they would be reducible to our beliefs *that p* (our propositional states) as consciousness is always linguistically structured. Instead doxastic states are a kind of *seeing* of the world, a taking of the world to be *x*. Doxastic states relate to propositional states as *dispositions* to believe corresponding propositional characterisations of the world that express *p*. A doxastic state, then, is not a state of consciousness, and when it becomes such is expressed as a propositional state. Thus Climacus explains that, “Greek skepticism was a withdrawing skepticism (εποχή [suspension of judgment]); they doubted not by virtue of knowledge but by virtue of will”.⁵⁸ Climacus clearly believes that the ancient sceptics had cognitive capacities

⁵⁶ Roderick M. Chisholm, “Firth and the Ethics of Belief” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 51/1 (March 1999): 123.

⁵⁷ Interestingly, it is the lack of just such a distinction, where he really ought to have made such a discernment, that Stephen Priest finds Hegel failing to make, in at least one place. See Stephen Priest, “Subjectivity and Objectivity in Kant”, in *Hegel's Critique of Kant*, ed. Stephen Priest (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 104.

⁵⁸ *KW* VII 82/SV VI 74-5.

(perceptual mechanisms, credulity dispositions, deductive and inductive powers, etc.) that yielded for them a general picture of the world so that they were inclined to take the world to be a certain way—in like manner to what we have identified as doxastic states. Later Climacus continues his exposition of Greek scepticism saying, “The Greek skeptic did not deny the correctness of *sensation* and *immediate cognition*, but, said he, error has an utterly different basis—it comes from the conclusion I draw”.⁵⁹ So the Greek skeptic *chose* to doubt the veracity or proper functioning of her/his cognitive faculties and opted for denying the truthfulness of her/his belief as the appropriate response to one’s natural doxastic inclinations.⁶⁰ The sceptic doubted, then, “not by virtue of knowledge, but by virtue of will (deny assent--μετριοπαθειν [moderate feeling]”.⁶¹

Perception is for Climacus, then, a matter of being appeared to by contingent, historical things and this produces a doxastic state in the perceiver appropriate to the perceptual mode of the appearing (in *Fragments* the mode is visual—*seeing* a star). Climacus then links this to belief proper and explains that,

the star becomes dubious for [the perceiver] the moment he seeks to become aware of its existence. It is just as if the reflection removed the star from [her/] his senses. It is clear, then, that *the organ of the historical* must be formed in likeness to this, must have within itself the corresponding something by which in its certitude it continually annuls the incertitude that corresponds to the uncertainty of coming into existence . . . *This is precisely the nature of belief [Tro]*, for continually present as the nullified in the certitude of belief is the incertitude that in every way corresponds to the uncertainty of coming into existence. Thus *belief believes what it did not see; it does not believe that the star exists, for that it sees, but it believes that the star has come into existence*. The same is true of an event.⁶²

Climacus uses the term belief, here, to express the conjunction of a doxastic state, as a disposition to see things as such-and-such, with an acceptance of this state as true.⁶³ This is a definite departure from the view of belief typical in modern philosophy, particularly Kant, who insisted that certain *a priori* concepts were the

⁵⁹ KW VII 82/SV VI 75; my emphasis.

⁶⁰ See Rudd, “Believing All Things”, 126-27.

⁶¹ KW VII 82/SV VI 75.

⁶² KW VII 81/SV VI 74.

⁶³ This adds support to Marilyn Gaye Piety’s claim that, “knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, is more properly characterized as a justified true mental representation than as a justified true belief”. See Piety, “Kierkegaard On Knowledge”, 121. One could argue that the content of a doxastic state is what Piety calls a “mental representation”.

condition for the possibility of human experience. Climacus distinguishes, first, the pre-conceptual mental (doxastic) state of a human, regarding states of affairs and brought about through an attending perceptual state (or similar mental state arising from some doxastic practice). Secondly, Climacus points to the conceptual judgments we make about those mental states—e.g., “My *believing p*” (or “inclination to take the world to be a certain way with respect to *p*”) is epistemically appropriate”, or even simply, “I believe that *p*”.

Note that there is crucial ambiguity in Kierkegaard’s use of the term belief at this point, for he wants to discuss knowledge as if it did not include beliefs. On the other hand, he clearly thinks that knowledge is also knowledge for some person *S*. In that sense there must be something that makes knowledge of some *p*, *S*’s knowledge of *p*. The standard way of attaching a veridical mental state to *S* so that it is knowledge for *S* is to say that *S believes* the relevant veridical mental state. In this way we are able to identify what is generally a true fact as *knowledge* that is had by human persons. We have called these mental states doxastic states and they may now legitimately be referred to as beliefs in some relevant sense, because they perform for Kierkegaard the copulative function that beliefs play on the traditional schema. We must recognise, of course, that in assigning the term “belief” to Kierkegaardian doxastic states that we are not dealing with Kierkegaard’s full sense of *Tro*, but some minimal level of belief. This will be discussed more in the next section “Passion and Belief”.

One could say that in *Fragments* Climacus is parsing the phenomena of perceptual experience for us so that we have a phenomenology of perceptual doxastic formation. On this account, our interactions with the world produce in us doxastic states, or a view of the way things are with respect to a person, object, or state of affairs. When this state of “immediacy” is brought to our conscious awareness, acceptance (or rejection) of these doxastic states becomes directly a matter of volition. Clearly for Climacus these doxastic states function epistemically something very much like the traditional concept of belief—only he refers to this as

“sensation”, “immediate sensation”, or “immediate cognition”, and denies it propositional content. Belief-states regarding states of affairs in the world, considered as our beliefs “*that p*”, involve then a sensual element and a conscious element—both of which may be viewed as aspects of our cognitive, temporal-spatial embodiment in the world.⁶⁴ It is Kierkegaard’s rejection of the Cartesian view of human persons and his insistence upon an existential and embodied subject that make this insight possible. Kierkegaard is no longer compelled to view scientific or factual knowledge as propositional knowledge⁶⁵ because mental states, instead of being disembodied ahistorical entities with a disjuncted, rational subsistence, are fused together with our temporal-spatial situations. Kierkegaard is thus free to view mental states—including propositional states—as essentially cognitive dispositions that reflect a relationship between a person (*S*) and some other person(s), or objects, or states of affairs (*p*).

⁶⁴ Thus, if Kierkegaard’s *Notes of Schelling’s Berlin Lectures*, “Philosophie der Offenbarung [Philosophy of Revelation]”, at the University of Berlin, 15 November 1841 - 4 February 1842, may be regarded as expressing Kierkegaard’s personal opinion, the contrast between this “immediate cognition”, of which Climacus speaks in *Fragments*, is very different from cognition proper: “Everything actual has a double aspect: *quid sit* (what it is), *quod sit* (that it is). . . . one can have a concept without cognition* [*in margin*: *a concept is expressed by *quid sit*, but from this it does not follow that I know *quod sit*,] but not cognition without the concept. In cognition there is a doubleness whereby it is memory. In seeing a plant, I remember it and convert it to the universal by recognizing it as plant. This was also seen in the doubleness implicit in the Latin *cognitio* [knowledge] and in the Hebrew [word for knowledge]” *KW I 335/Pap. C 27*. Note that this discussion is of *cognition* and not *perception* as such, and therefore it is entirely consistent with my above analysis of Climacus’s statements in *Fragments*. The above quote from Kierkegaard’s lecture notes of Schelling’s Berlin lectures are from the second lecture, of which Kierkegaard wrote, “I am so happy to have heard Schelling’s second lecture—indescribably. . . . The embryonic child of thought leapt for joy within me . . . when he mentioned the word ‘actuality’ in connection with the relation of philosophy to actuality. I remember almost every word after that”, *JP V 5535/Pap. III A 179*. Although Kierkegaard quickly became disillusioned with Schelling’s lectures, it seems that there is some plausibility in thinking that Kierkegaard generally agrees, at this early stage of the lectures, with the above account of cognition. See Howard V. and Edna H. Hong’s, “Historical Introduction”, in *The Concept of Irony: With Continual Reference to Socrates, and Notes of Schelling’s Berlin Lectures*, in *KW II vii-xxv*, for a discussion of these issues.

⁶⁵ Of the five Danish words for the English word “knowledge”, the one Climacus uses in the discussion of belief in *Fragments* is in fact the Danish word *Viden*, which corresponds to the German word *Wissen*, and is one of the two Danish words normally used to denote propositional knowledge. The other word for propositional knowledge is *Erkendelsen*, although Kierkegaard is not consistent in his differentiation between the two. This is also the same word translated as “knowledge” in the previous referenced discussion of knowledge in *Works of Love*; *KW XVI*

Passion and Belief

The distinction between perception and belief or cognition allows Climacus to view belief as an aspect of our volition, because it opens up the concept of belief to function in a dual capacity. So belief may now refer either to our beliefs *that p*, or to our dispositions that cause us to accept our beliefs *that p*. Climacus elaborates, saying that, “Belief is the opposite of doubt. *Belief and doubt are not two kinds of knowledge* that can be defined in continuity with each other, for neither of them is a cognitive act, and *they are opposite passions*. Belief is a sense for coming into existence, and doubt is a protest against wanting to go beyond immediate sensation and immediate knowledge”.⁶⁶ Climacus seems to be playing upon a distinction between (what we have called) doxastic states, as a minimum level of belief, and something like full-fledged belief.

Given our previous analysis of the relationship of imagination to will in transitions between existence-spheres, it should be no surprise now that the dispositions to form beliefs to which we are passionately moved are inherently teleological in nature. Beliefs are formed as we passionately engage ourselves in reality with specific intentions in mind. It is the task of the human thinker *qua* subject to adopt, or will, the appropriate passion and position themselves in a corresponding way to that which they desire to know—or form felicitous beliefs with respect to. Vigilius Haufniensis argues that all intellectual inquiries (as the deliberate positioning of ourselves in order to acquire certain kinds of beliefs) presuppose a *mood* that corresponds both to the mode of inquiry in which we are engaged and the object of that inquiry.⁶⁷ Thus the error of adopting an inappropriate mood for an inquiry of some sort is as serious an error as committing a logical blunder and jeopardises the reliability of the conclusions reached in that inquiry. In *Postscript* Climacus further argues for the principle, “*quicquid cognoscitur per modum cognoscentis cognoscitur* [whatever is known is known in the mode of the

231/SV XII 222. See Piety, “Kierkegaard On Knowledge”, (Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 1994), 18-25, for an excellent discussion of the Danish terms for knowledge used by Kierkegaard.

⁶⁶ KW VII 84/SV VI 76; my emphasis.

knower]”, and rhetorically asks, “Consequently, what if objective indifference cannot come to know anything at all?”.⁶⁸ The point is that all human knowing involves subjectivity, or passion, and therefore human knowledge requires that “the observer be in a definite state” corresponding to the object known.⁶⁹ “[I]t holds true”, then, “that when [a human knower] is not in that state [s/]he does not know anything whatever”, even when “given the same objective data”.⁷⁰

The knife of subjectivity cuts in two directions epistemically, according to Climacus. Without subjectivity we have no beliefs, and therefore know nothing; that is, subjectivity is the formal condition of our belief-formation and an essential element in belief-formation. But the things we believe and know also are products of, or depend upon, or even happen according to, the qualification of our subjective modes of being, so that by exercising a certain type of subjectivity we come to accept or form beliefs correlative to that mode. So subjectivity is both the mode of belief formation, and at the same time the means of belief assessment.

Belief, for Kierkegaard, is not a purely objective, cognitive (and ahistorical) entity. There is a sense in which Kierkegaard believes it is nonsense to inquire into the universal (objective) validity of a belief of some person—as if we could actually isolate a belief of some person and legitimately consider it apart from its context as a unique, passionate (existential) aspect of that particular person’s existence. (Keeping in mind that, on the other hand, he does believe there is a legitimate way to speak of beliefs as expressing objective, “accidental” truths.) The nature of belief for Kierkegaard is a feature of our subjectivity—of our humanity—that consolidates our rational and non-rational modes of being-in-the-world.

In the dominant Western tradition and certainly in modern philosophy, “belief” typically refers to some person’s rational (cognitive) acceptance of some specific proposition so that they express the propositional attitude “I believe that *p*” (where *p* is any proposition, and a proposition is that which is expressed by a declarative

⁶⁷ *KW VIII 14n/SV VI 113n.*

⁶⁸ *KW XII.1 52/SV IX 48.*

⁶⁹ *KW XII.1 52/SV IX 48.*

sentence in any language).⁷¹ A propositional attitude may be described as a mental (cognitive) state of any person in which that person's psychological relation to an abstract object is expressed in the form of a sentence of some language—i.e., a proposition. In this case “propositional attitude” denotes a mental state that is propositional in nature and the relation expressed is that of some person to a particular propositional construal of a state of affairs.⁷² A propositional attitude is identified simply as our psychological relationship to the possibility of the truth of any proposition of which we are cognizant. (Belief, then, is only one propositional attitude we may have. We may, of course, also “disbelieve”, “hope”, “fear”, “think”, “deny”, “wish”, etc., that *p* is true.) But Kierkegaard does not primarily use “belief” to designate a particular type of propositional attitude, and this has contributed to confusion regarding his account of and statements about faith and belief. The majority of the time when we read the word “belief” [*Tro*] in Kierkegaard's writings it refers to the inclination or disposition to accept propositions, and not belief *simpliciter* (as propositional belief *that p*). Climacus calls belief “a *sense* for coming into existence”. Belief *that p*, as a feature of our subjectivity, is not simply a disembodied rational entity, but is instead the expression of a passionate disposition that is the product of the ways we act in the world. David Gouwens argues that the way to understand Kierkegaard is to see that his account here is a virtue theory.⁷³ For Kierkegaard, a belief is not a Cartesian (or Kantian, or

⁷⁰ KW XII.1 52/SV IX 48.

⁷¹ Although it is true that the Western analytic tradition understands “belief” to designate either the psychological state of believing, or the intentional content of a belief (i.e., a proposition which is believed), it is unclear that the former is ever treated seriously as different from the latter. In other words, my claim is that, while recognising a logical distinction, in the Western analytic tradition most often our believings are understood to be our beliefs that *p*.

⁷² This account of propositional attitudes departs from the more standard version—as given, for example, in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, s.v., “Proposition”, by Steven J. Wagner. Wagner defines a propositional attitude as a psychological state that expresses in language the relationship of an abstract object to a person. As will become clearer in subsequent discussion, Wagner's analysis is not adequately nuanced. This account passes over the troublesome connection of “abstract objects” to the propositions that express them, so that it is assumed that the relationship between a person and a proposition just is the relationship between that person and the object picked out by the proposition. The ambiguity caused by this sort of analysis creates confusion in understanding human belief and belief acceptance.

⁷³ David J. Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 94.

Hegelian) transcendental entity that exists *sub specie aeternis*. A belief is an embodied cognitive act, immanent within historical time and space.

Kierkegaard is interested in cognitive dispositions, which may be called virtues and include emotions and moods. The dispositions and capacities Kierkegaard is interested in are not only emotions but non-emotional too—e.g., earnestness, inwardness, and passion.⁷⁴ As we proactively engage ourselves in certain kinds of activities we adopt and develop corresponding “passions” or dispositions (capacities or virtues). In *Concept of Anxiety*, for example, Vigilius Haufniensis argues that one of the central problems with the Hegelian “System” is that it approaches all intellectual inquiries alike by collapsing each mode of inquiry into a “scientific” mood of objective distanciation, and thereby ignores the mood which is appropriate to each.⁷⁵ This indicates that Kierkegaard believes it is possible to improve both our cognitive equipment (and thereby influence our doxastic states), and our “sense” for believing (and thereby be disposed to accept/reject proper beliefs).

For Kierkegaard, then, *beliefs are passions*. In *Fragments Climacus* argues that, when we are presented with events and form the belief, “X exists”,

The conclusion of belief is no conclusion [*Slutning*] at all but a resolution [*Beslutning*]. . . It might seem to be an inference from effect to cause when belief concludes: this exists, *ergo* it came into existence.⁷⁶ But this is not entirely true . . . because I cannot immediately sense or know what I immediately sense or know is an effect, for immediately it simply is. That it is an effect is something I believe, because in order to predicate that it is an effect, I must have already made it dubious in the uncertainty of coming into existence. But if belief decides on this, then the doubt is terminated . . . not knowledge but by will. Belief is the opposite of doubt . . . neither of them is a cognitive act, and they are opposite passions. Belief is a sense for coming into existence, and doubt is a protest against any conclusion that wants to go beyond immediate sensation and immediate knowledge.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ KW VIII 148-151/SV VI 228-30.

⁷⁵ KW VIII 9, 14, 14n/SV VI 109, 112-13; KW XII.1 109-125/KW IX 93-106.

⁷⁶ This is awkward and puzzling phraseology. In this phrase, “this exists *ergo* it came into existence”, Kierkegaard should be understood to be deploying two different *concepts* of existence. (Although there is no difference in the Danish; both words for “existence” are forms of *være til*.) In the first instance he means “exists” in a non-technical, ordinary usage to denote a sensory experience of something. In the second instance he is using the concept of existence in his technical sense to denote something becoming in time. Taken this way, the above statement is read to be saying something like, “when belief concludes: I have been appeared to in an X-like way, *ergo* X is in existence [metaphysically] . . .” The practice to which Kierkegaard refers is that of inferring the existence of ‘things’ upon having experience of them.

⁷⁷ KW VII 84/SV VI 76; his italics.

Belief *sui generis* is not simply being in a certain propositional state, nor is it something to which we must of necessity consciously reason. It is something altogether different. The crux of this dense passage is that belief and nonbelief (of any kind of proposition) are states of an individual's volition and that this is so because belief is concerned with existing things and is itself a transition in the (non)believer. That is, it is a cognitive *disposition* that is activated by (in the case of perception) sense experience, not a process of ratiocination (i.e., not "a cognitive act"). It is of utmost significance that Climacus argues that "*belief concludes*" and "*decides*" that what is immediate in our sense experience came into existence, and that "*doubt is a protest*" against forming conclusions, and that he does not say that it is the person doing the cognising who concludes and protests. Belief and doubt are the intentional activities of some (human) subject, to be sure, but they are not necessarily *conscious* activities. In Climacus's grammar of belief, our everyday kinds of beliefs are themselves "paradoxical" in the sense noted earlier in so far as they go beyond reason to make actual claims (in the indicative mood) about existence (in Kierkegaard's sense of coming into existence), not merely possible claims (in the subjunctive mood). Belief is an intentional feature of human consciousness and concerns itself with the flux, the kinesis, of reality and is therefore by (Kierkegaard's) definition, operating beyond pure reason and in the sphere of subjectivity: "Thus belief believes what it does not see".

Recall that for Climacus human existence is the conjunction of eternity and time and as such is always becoming. What is decisive for existence is a person's momentary unity of self in a decisive expression. This unity is not possible in an Hegelian (or otherwise) conception of sheer objectivity, but only in and through subjective self-expression in time and space. Climacus writes, "The [Hegelian] *I-I* is a mathematical point that does not exist . . . Only momentarily can a particular individual, existing, be in a unity of the infinite and finite that transcends existing. This instant is a moment of passion".⁷⁸

⁷⁸ KW XII.1 197/SV IX 163.

In *Two Ages*, passion is put forward as an essential and necessary ingredient in an individual's development of character.⁷⁹ Harvie Ferguson notes that Kierkegaard's concept of passion is distinct from both the British Empiricist notion of passion as "a disturbing element within a rationally conceived and intentional ego", and the continental metaphysical tradition for whom "passion was conceived in terms of an 'absence' within the ego—and this as a stimulating desire to possess something that would 'complete' and thus express the self".⁸⁰ Against these conceptions Kierkegaard views passion as the force which brings structure and form to human experience. The expression of passion that shapes and molds the human person and gives it permanency over time is *character*:

If the essential passion [*væsentielle Lidenskab*] is taken away, the one motivation, and everything becomes meaningless externality, devoid of character, then the spring of ideality stops flowing and life together becomes stagnant water . . . Morality is character [*Charakteer*]; character is something engraved (*χαράσσω*); but the sea has no character, nor does the sand, nor abstract common sense, either, for character is inwardness.⁸¹

It is in passionate formation of character that a person's life is held together in a unified perspective and presents the cognitive subject its collocation in the midst of the motion of reality. Passion is able to do this because it is in fact the context and substance of motion itself.⁸² To be an existing subject is to be in motion and motion is inherently agent-ful. Thus it is in passion-as-agency (i.e., subjectivity) that one achieves the genuine motion of existence as a unified self. Kierkegaard reminds us, "Here one is again reminded of my thesis that subjectivity is truth".⁸³ To act

⁷⁹ See *KW* XIV 62, 64, 68/*SV* XIV 57, 58-60, 62-63. For discussions of Kierkegaard's concept of character, compare Roberts, "Classical Themes in Kierkegaard", 180-182; and Gouwens, *Kierkegaard As Religious Thinker*, 94-96.

⁸⁰ Harvie Ferguson, *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity: Søren Kierkegaard's Religious Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1995), 77.

⁸¹ *KW* XIV 62, 77-8/*SV* XIV 57, 71.

⁸² Climacus writes, "Inasmuch as existence is motion, it holds true that *there is indeed a continuity that holds motion together, because otherwise there is no motion*. Just as the statement that everything is true means that nothing is true, in the same way the statement that everything is in motion means that there is no motion. The motionless belongs to motion as motion's goal, both in the sense the *τέλος* [end, goal] and *μέτρον* [measure, criterion] . . . *the difficulty for the existing person is to give existence the continuity without which everything just disappears* . . . *passion is the momentary continuity that simultaneously has a constraining effect and is the impetus of motion* . . . passion is an anticipation of the eternal in existence in order for an existing person to exist"; *KW* XII.1 312/*SV* X 19; my emphasis.

⁸³ *KW* XII.1 313/*SV* X 19.

passionately is to exist. Thus inwardness is so important, for one must act assiduously in existence if one to be the genuine self one is called to become.⁸⁴

Kierkegaard sees both doubt and belief as expressions of the will and identifies them as activities that cannot be determined by the intellect alone. Westphal takes Kierkegaard to mean by this that the will has a vital impact on what we believe, but that this is neither direct nor total. In other words, the role of our will in belief formation is of such a nature that our doxic responsibilities can be countenanced and assessed so that we may develop our perceptual and cognitive perspective on the world.⁸⁵ The question remains as to the *degree* to which the will functions as a doxic feature in the transitions to belief that occur as we shift from one existence-sphere to another. In so far as belief is, for Climacus, a passion it is also linked to the will. “Belief”, he tells us, “is not a knowledge but an act of freedom, an expression of the will”.⁸⁶ It is difficult, then, to understand the position Kierkegaard works out in the Climacus writings, as anything other than some form of volitionalism—the idea that we, in some significant way, choose our beliefs. Climacus clearly understands human volition to function in a significant way in the forming of our beliefs. The pertinent question is whether he sees beliefs as being *directly* willed, or if the will is functioning in some other doxastic capacity. Should we as esthetes, for instance, will to believe propositions that the ethicist believes—to *see* the world through the ethicist’s conceptual coordinates—in order to make the transition to the ethical and acquire an ethical life-view, even though these propositions contradict our present esthetic evaluation of the world?

⁸⁴ Climacus says that in order to illustrate this point, “if Pegasus and an old nag were hitched to a carriage for a driver not usually disposed to passion and he was told: Now drive—I think it would be successful. And this is what existing is like if one is to be conscious of it. Eternity is quick like that winged steed, temporality is an old nag, and the existing person is the driver, that is, if existing is not to be what people usually call existing, because then the existing person is no driver but a drunken peasant who lies in the wagon and sleeps and lets the horses shift for themselves. Of course, he also drives, he is also a driver, and likewise there are many who—also exist”; *KW XII.1 311-12/SV X 18*.

⁸⁵ Westphal, *Becoming A Self*, 77.

⁸⁶ *KW VII 83/SV VI 75*.

Perhaps the most thorough and fastidious analysis of Kierkegaard on this point is to be found in Louis Pojman's *The Logic of Subjectivity*.⁸⁷ From Pojman we learn that there are several kinds of volitionalism.⁸⁸ In his estimation Kierkegaard is a *direct volitionalist* who thinks that all our beliefs are acquired by direct acts of the will.⁸⁹ In Kierkegaard's volitionalism (according to Pojman), the object of our willing is the specific belief itself.

C. Stephen Evans makes two very good points against this reading of Kierkegaard as a direct volitionalist. First, he points out that Kierkegaard does not think that we are necessarily (or even very often) conscious of our choices.⁹⁰ In *The Sickness Unto Death* Anti-Climacus endorses this view when he argues that most people are unconscious of their willing complicity in their own despair and sinfulness.⁹¹ If Kierkegaard is, on the one hand, claiming that one is directly willing these states, as Pojman would have to claim, it seems odd that Kierkegaard would also maintain that it is even *possible* to be unaware of willing their own despair—let alone make the claim that as a matter of fact people generally are not aware of so doing. The second point Evans makes is that Climacus nowhere claims that specific belief states or propositions are the direct objects of our will.⁹² Climacus understands belief and doubt to be passions.⁹³ Passions are things that are cultivated and this is accomplished by willing to do *other things*, which our imagination is able to present to our consciousness as possibilities for actualisation.

⁸⁷ Pojman, *The Logic of Subjectivity* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1984). For a critical discussion of Pojman on Kierkegaard's volitionalism see C. Stephen Evans, "Does Kierkegaard Think That Beliefs Can Be Directly Willed?", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 26: (1989) 173-184.

⁸⁸ Pojman, *The Logic of Subjectivity*, 143-148.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 146. David Law also seems to see Kierkegaard as something of a direct volitionalist when he writes that, "For Kierkegaard knowledge *is* belief. . . . [Belief] does not come about by the cultivation of an objective and impersonal cognitive attitude but **by a passionate act of the will to accept something as true** despite all who might argue against it". Law, *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian*, 88 (his italics, my bold). It seems clear that Law agrees with Pojman regarding Kierkegaard's volitionalism and thinks that the object of the act of volition is the specific belief itself.

⁹⁰ Evans, "Does Kierkegaard Think That Beliefs Can Be Directly Willed?", 178ff.

⁹¹ KW XIX 45/SV XV 100. See whole section, "The Despair That Is Ignorant of Being Despair, or the Despairing Ignorance of Having a Self and an Eternal Self", KW XIX 42-47/SV XV 98-101.

⁹² Evans, "Does Kierkegaard Think That Beliefs Can Be Directly Willed?", 178.

⁹³ KW VIII 84/SV VI 76.

There is a third reason, in addition to Evans's two arguments, to reject the idea that Kierkegaard was a direct volitionalist. Climacus in *Postscript* explicitly rejects the idea that Christianity is to be believed against the understanding.⁹⁴ The Christian, Climacus believes, possesses reason and must use it to identify which object of faith is truly beyond reason from those that are just confused "nonsense". Assigning to reason a regulative role in faith militates against the idea that Kierkegaard thinks we can and must will ourselves into specific belief states. On his view we always are limited in our selection of legitimate candidates for belief to those propositions that express the range of possibilities which cohere with our general picture of the world. We simply cannot will to accept as true a proposition that according to our present understanding of the world counts as utter nonsense. Nonsensical propositions (in the trivial sense) are understood to be so precisely because they cannot be imagined to be true. A proposition of this sort may become an acceptable candidate for belief only if our mode of being-in-the-world is altered so that the proposition in question becomes imaginable (as true).

In light of these points, Kierkegaard is to be read as an *indirect* volitionalist, who thinks that we make choices to be certain kinds of people, who in turn value certain kinds of things. Kierkegaard is simply claiming, "that what we want to believe and think ultimately plays a decisive role in what we do believe and think".⁹⁵ By projecting for ourselves a range of possibilities *via* imagination, and then choosing to pursue a particular range of those, we cultivate specific and correlative kinds of passions⁹⁶—which in turn influence our belief dispositions. It is in this sense that our beliefs are products of our volition and are resolutions. We will or choose to believe or disbelieve certain propositions in the same way we will or choose to find certain character qualities in other people morally laudable or repugnant. We do not

⁹⁴ KW XII.1 568/SV X 235.

⁹⁵ C. Stephen Evans, *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's "Philosophical Fragments"* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1992), 136.

⁹⁶ See Evans comment, "Passions are things that must be slowly cultivated and constantly renewed. Acts of willing play a role in this cultivation and Kierkegaard regards the higher ethical and religious passions as things we are responsible to achieve. However, by and large our passions

perform these actions as direct acts of the will, nor do we do them (usually) through conscious deliberation. We just find ourselves drawn to or repulsed by certain qualities in people. These judgments, or states of our persons, arise out of a complex constellation of choices and decisions we have made over a period of time—choices that have shaped and influenced our character and sensibilities prior to any act of judgment.

Passion, then, is Kierkegaard's term for the constitutive force of the human subject which enables the human person to achieve the existential concretion (subjectivity) of her/his abstract "eternality" (thought, consciousness, that which is not subject to temporal flux) with her/his temporality (existence). The term passion implies a link with human emotions, and for Kierkegaard it is a particular kind of nonrational (emotional) inward possession that is an essential force in directing and shaping a person's life. This concept of passion is correlative to our everyday use of the terms "values" and "ideals", which are not strictly rational entities but are inner capacities that find expression through emotions.⁹⁷ These are *dispositions* that must be slowly cultivated, and this is accomplished by willing to do other things, which our imagination is able to present to our consciousness as possibilities.

As a type of passion *belief is a nexus of possibility and actuality in the individual and is the site of existential concretion.*⁹⁸ Belief, for Kierkegaard, is literally, "an anticipation of the eternal in existence".⁹⁹ Belief is the point at which propositions (as thought) and actuality (as historical presence) converge in a human person. Belief operates as a sort of copula, a conjoining of the temporal and the eternal, the actual and the possible, what is thought with the existence of the subject, as the existential expression or concretion of a thought possibility. Our acts of

are formed on a long-term basis, and are not simply willed into existence, but formed indirectly through a process of willing to do other things". Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 134.

⁹⁷ Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript*, 69.

⁹⁸ Emmanuel Levinas eloquently makes a similar point regarding this juxtaposition of belief when, in "Existence and Ethics", in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, edited by Jonathan Reé and Jane Chamberlain (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 29, he comments that: "[For Kierkegaard,] [b]elief stands in the midst of this conflict between presence and absence—a conflict which remains for ever irreconcilable, an open wound, unstaunchable bleeding".

⁹⁹ KW XII.1 313/SV X 19.

knowledge are an attempt to reproduce reality but these attempts, because of the ontological difference between propositions (as thought) and reality (as actuality), are at their best mere “approximations” of reality.¹⁰⁰ Propositions do not exist either in the sense that material objects or humans exist, but have thought-existence.¹⁰¹ They are ideal objects that exist as possibilities in the minds of human subjects who entertain them, and in the linguistic matrix in which they have a function. Propositions are “visible”, or made actual, in the acts in which they are believed by existing beings (humans). Beliefs in this sense are the cognitive acceptance of entertained propositions thereby constituting a nexus between the possibility (thought) and the actuality or subjectivity of the thinker.

The next section explores the logic of *Salighed* as the constitutive passion that brings together Kierkegaard’s grammar of subjectivity with his grammar of belief.

Existence-Spheres and Kierkegaard’s Ethics of Belief

We may further conclude that for Kierkegaard beliefs are necessary states of human persons if they are to attain a fully developed subjectivity. On Kierkegaard’s account, belief is an ontological force that places us in reality in a particular way so that we actually perceive reality in a way that is different than if we did not believe as we do. The beliefs that we have are engagements with reality and are understood to be ethical, temporal, entanglements of our being, not disengaged esthetic abstractions.

Throughout the grammar of existence presented in the previous two chapters, concern over or passion for eternal blessedness or happiness (*en evig Salighed*) emerged as the central concept in the logic of the existence-spheres. Two further features about *Salighed* are now evident. First, *Salighed* is the primary motivating force (as a passion) behind the transitions between existence-spheres. Second, and

¹⁰⁰ See *KW* VII 92-3/*SV* VI 83-4; and *KW* XII.1 23-5, 30-1, 81, 212/*SV* IX 23-5, 29-30, 69-70, 177. Cf. *KW* VII 141, 199/*Pap.* IV B 1:124, V B 12:8; and *KW* XII.1 38, 200-01/*SV* IX 37, 166-67; *KW* XII.2 52/*Pap.* VI B 42.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *JP* I 2, 1057/*Pap.* II A 496, X² A 328. See also C. Stephen Evans’s brief discussion in, “Realism and Antirealism in Kierkegaard”, 172.

more importantly, *Salighed* is what unites Kierkegaard's grammar of subjectivity with epistemic concerns so that the existence-spheres have immense epistemological import.

Eternal blessedness is the central theme of the Climacean writings, beginning with the focus of *Fragments* on the possibility of achieving eternal blessedness as an historical feature of a temporal existence.¹⁰² Climacus, we learned, treats the concept of *Salighed* as a parallel concept to the Socratic and Platonic idea of being virtuous or possessing the truth. Climacus therefore understands *Salighed* to function in an epistemic manner analogous to the Socratic-Platonic account of virtue. Although it is often overlooked, Climacus continues with *Salighed* as a primary concept in *Postscript* in his elucidation of subjectivity. In Chapter IV of Part Two, "The Issue in Fragments: How Can an Eternal Happiness Be Built on Historical Knowledge?", Climacus presents his emphasis on subjectivity and the grammar of life's stages in *Postscript* as another way of getting at the centrality of *Salighed* in *Fragments*. Climacus describes the "existential *pathos*" that is "the transforming relation of the idea to the individual's existence" as a person's passionate quest for eternal happiness.¹⁰³ The *end* or *telos* of the existence-spheres as a grammar of human subjectivity is achieved through the *pathos* of eternal happiness and is in fact described by Climacus as the necessary condition for an existential transition.¹⁰⁴ David Law therefore states that, "As an initial definition, then, eternal happiness is the highest good and the goal of human existence".¹⁰⁵ Climacus describes the task each individual has of realising eternal blessedness and becoming the self s/he has

¹⁰² It is worthy of our notice that the upbuilding discourse, "The Expectancy Of An Eternal Salvation", published veronymously by "S. Kierkegaard" on 8 June 1844, just a few days before *Fragments* was published, explores the logic of the concept of *Salighed*. The title literally is, "*Forventningen af en evig Salighed*", and so it is clear that while "salvation" is a better translation of *Salighed* in this context, Kierkegaard is nevertheless referring to the same concept discussed by Climacus. KW V 253-273/SV IV 237-243. In this discourse Kierkegaard explores the logic of the concept of *Salighed* in relation to human existence. There are numerous direct parallels between Climacus's use of *Salighed* and Kierkegaard's treatment of it in the discourse.

¹⁰³ KW XII.1 387/SV X 81.

¹⁰⁴ Climacus states: "If the absolute *telos* [to which an individual relates] does not absolutely transform the individual's existence by relating to it, then the individual does not relate [her/]himself with existential *pathos* but with esthetic *pathos*". KW XII.1 387/SV X 81-2.

¹⁰⁵ David R. Law, *Kierkegaard As Negative Theologian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 102.

been given as having “Simultaneously to Relate Oneself Absolutely to One’s Absolute τέλος and Relatively to Relative Ends”.¹⁰⁶ Climacus elaborates:

Therefore eternal happiness, as the absolute good, has the remarkable quality that *it can only be defined by the mode in which it is acquired*, whereas other goods, just because the mode of acquisition is accidental or at any rate relatively dialectical, must be defined by the good itself. . . . eternal happiness . . . is the good that is attained by absolutely venturing everything. . . . [Therefore] the discourse [about eternal happiness] is long indeed, the longest of all discourses, because to venture everything demands a **transparency** of consciousness that is only acquired slowly.¹⁰⁷

Note two points that Climacus is making in this passage. First, a person’s eternal happiness cannot be an objective feature of a person’s life. Eternal happiness is only for subjectivity (only subjects receive it), and therefore is only possessed by those who exercise their subjectivity. In other words, Climacus believes that eternal happiness corresponds directly to the exact nature of truth when defined as subjectivity: in each the mode of apprehension defines what is obtained. Abraham Kahn takes this to mean that for Climacus, “[*Salighed*] is not an object of assessment but a criterion for one’s life”.¹⁰⁸ As a criterion for one’s life, Kahn notes that *Salighed* may be reflected upon, but it is not an objective cognitive assessment: “By the sharpest passion possible for *Salighed* a person succeeds in knitting the concept to the structure of [her/]his own being, in reconstituting [her/]himself, or in stimulating capacities within [her/]himself to engender an authentic existence”.¹⁰⁹ Thus, the proper conclusion to draw regarding the treatment of subjectivity in *Postscript* is that it actually is a phenomenological description of how the passion of *Salighed* is executed in an individual human existence.¹¹⁰

For Climacus *Salighed* has as its goal the unified self and to that degree is coterminous with his concept of subjectivity—in both its constitutive and reflexive sense. *Salighed* is both the end of human subjectivity as its *terminus ad quem* and is the context (as a passion, an existential *pathos*) in which subjectivity flourishes.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted from the title of Part Two, Chapter IV, Section A, “PATHOS”, §1. KW XII.1 387/SV X 81. See also KW XII.1 407, 414, 422, 431/SV X 98, 105, 111, 119.

¹⁰⁷ KW XII.1 426-27/SV X 115-16; his italics, my bold.

¹⁰⁸ Abraham H. Kahn, *Salighed as Happiness? Kierkegaard on the Concept Salighed* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1985), 84.

¹⁰⁹ Kahn, *Salighed as Happiness? Kierkegaard on the Concept*, 84.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Constitutional subjectivity is the term we employed to express Climacus's concept of human subjectivity as a realised state. *Salighed* is the final goal of human subjectivity and thus coincides with Climacus's constitutive subjectivity. Thus *Salighed* is also quite literally the constituting factor in the development of the human self. To have as one's essential passion one's eternal happiness is to perform the tasks Climacus has already (early in *Postscript*) assigned to the "subjective thinker" who exercises "inwardness" or "double reflection" in order to "understand oneself in existence" by "understanding the abstract concretely".¹¹¹ It is this element of Climacean subjectivity we have designated as reflexive subjectivity.

Implicit in the first assertion in the above excerpt from *Postscript*, Climacus secondly posits a direct link between the concepts of *Salighed* and transparency. *Salighed* is realised in a person's temporal existence as transparency. The passion for *Salighed* is a passion for wholeness or unity in one's existence and one achieves this, Climacus tells us, through inwardness (reflexive subjectivity), or when in Anti-Climacus's terms one "rests transparently in the power that establishes" one's selfhood. At this point it becomes clearer how *Salighed* connects Kierkegaard's discussion of existence-spheres to epistemology. The existence-spheres are "stages on life's way", and the *terminus ad quem* of a human life is being-in-truth—that is, *eternal blessedness* and *self-transparency*. Kierkegaard explains the link between inwardness and transparency in *Works of Love*:

When a person thinks only one thought the direction is inward. . . . It is one thing to think in such a way that one's attention is continually and only outward, in the direction of the object that is something external; it is something else to be so turned in thought that continually, every moment, one is conscious, conscious of one's own state during the thinking or of what is happening in oneself during the thinking. But only the latter is essential thinking—it is namely, *transparency*, the former is unclear thinking, which suffers from the contradiction that that which, thinking, clarifies something is itself basically unclear. Such a thinker explains something else by [her/]his thinking.¹¹²

Once more the idea is that a detached, "objective" approach to life—and oneself in particular—does not yield the kind of certainty and self-knowledge that Descartes

¹¹¹ KW XII.1 73, 353, 352/SV IX 63, X 53, 54.

¹¹² KW XVI 361/SV XII 343; my italics.

sought. Transparent self-apprehension (as the getting of oneself) comes by the inward action of reflexive subjectivity, and this cannot come through the disinterested contemplation of self. To achieve transparency and for inwardness to have content, the self must *act* and must have its action as its object of reflection. Through this exercise of reflexive subjectivity one achieves a “deeper seeing” that is “as much a vision of the world as it is of the self”.¹¹³ In the attainment of transparency human persons are changed by coming to see themselves in a certain way, which in turn entails construing the world in a manner in which this new conception of self fits.

Transparency is thus the attainment of a kind of unity of the self. This self-unity, however, is best described as a *transversal* unity—one that depends not upon a transcendence-within-immanence, such as Kant’s exercise of transcendental reason, but upon a radically transcendent ground that is not available to humans from within their own rational resources. The passion, or desire for, or concern [*Bekymring*] over, *Salighed* is synonymous with a passion for transparency. Here we have Kierkegaard’s capricious conjugation of ontology with epistemology. The ontological dimensions of the *pathos* of *Salighed* is a passion for self-unity, the grammar of which is detailed in the theory of existence-spheres. Epistemologically the passion of *Salighed* is a passion for self-knowledge. In either case *Salighed* amounts to a passion for transparency—which, as a self-unity in which one truly knows oneself, expresses the unity of both the epistemic and ontic features of *Salighed*. For this reason we find across the entire Kierkegaardian authorship (veronymous and pseudonymous) that epistemic issues are discussed under ethical-religious categories such as “earnestness”, “salvation”, “repentance”, “guilt”, “sin”, “interest”, “concern”, and “upbuilding”. These all are united as expressions of Climacus’s central thesis that “Truth is Subjectivity”, which, as the axiom of his subjectivity principle, is therefore an expression that captures what we may call the logic of *Salighed*. The grammar of the existence-spheres displays this

¹¹³ Ferreira, *Transforming Vision*, 64, 67.

logic through its phenomenology of *Salighed*. Marilyn Piety observes that, “Kierkegaard maintains that we have an essential interest in determining or choosing the proper interpretation of existence. Our eternal blessedness, or eternal damnation is, according to Kierkegaard, ultimately dependent upon this choice”.¹¹⁴ The Kierkegaardian focus on *Salighed* subverts the Hegelian-Enlightenment flight from subjectivity in epistemology.

The main issue is that Kierkegaard does not think that the *telos* of human cognitive powers lies in the attainment of a collection of the maximal number of true propositions regarding the universe. This is precisely his quarrel with the Enlightenment emphasis on scientific rationality as the final court of appeal for human belief:

The main objection, the whole objection to the natural sciences [*Naturvidenskaberne*] can be expressed formally, simply, and unconditionally in this way: It is incredible that a human being who has infinitely reflected about [her/]himself as spirit could then think of choosing the natural sciences (with empirical material) as the task for [her/]his striving.¹¹⁵

If scientific knowledge [*Naturvidenskab*]¹¹⁶ is the end of human intelligence it would, first of all, be a purely esthetic existence, lacking a self (subjectivity)—that is, a “unifying point” or “transparency”. Such an esthetic existence draws a better analogy with a computer than with a human person. Moreover, the kind of objectivity required for acquiring the maximal set of true propositions precludes such a state from being available to humans. Humans *are* subjects, and as such know in and through their subjectivity. There is a kind of objectivity that is available to, and appropriate for, humans, and to that degree the sciences play a legitimate role in human life. This objectivity, however, is not the sort that can yield the maximal true set of propositions about the universe because it is a situated and provisional objectivity. Instead Kierkegaard thinks that propositional truths and the human

¹¹⁴ Marilyn Gaye Piety, “Kierkegaard On Rationality”, *Faith and Philosophy* 10: (July 1993), 370.

¹¹⁵ *JP* III 2820/*Pap.* VII¹ A 200. Cf. Vigilius Haufniensis’s critique of “science” in *KW* VIII 9-10/*SV* VI 109, in which he argues that while science has its place, its main shortcoming is it “forgets itself” and treats that which is not fundamentally objective (actuality) as if it were.

¹¹⁶ The term *Naturvidenskab* is a compound of *Natur* (nature) and *Videnskab* (science, or scholarship—cf. German *wissenschaft*) and translates literally as “natural science”. For discussion see Piety, *Kierkegaard on Knowledge*, 23. The term *Videnskab*, or “science”, comes from the word

capacity to possess them is valuable as part of the whole person—i.e., the being-in-truth of the person and the attainment of a unified and deep subjectivity. This being-in-truth is in turn conditioned by the manner in which we position ourselves in reality—i.e., propositions ultimately are features of and dependent upon our involvements in the world as subjects. For this reason Kierkegaard believes that *all* human endeavours to attain truth exhibit a teleological structure and actually amount to a concern over *Salighed*. Pursuits of truth must ultimately be evaluated in terms of their ability to achieve *Salighed*.

As a feature of our subjectivity, the propositional content of belief is given to us by our actual ways of being in the world. The passions or dispositions that move us to give cognitive assent to specific propositions are generated as we position ourselves in specific ways in reality. We believe certain things because we are positioned in the world in such a way that we are inclined to believe, or “see”, some propositions as true over others. Part of this positioning may include very refined pieces of rational argumentation, but Kierkegaard reminds us that we only believe those propositions which we *accept*, and this acceptance involves the entire human subject with her concerns and passions, and is not, therefore, a simple matter of rational inquiry. Even our reasoning is situated in our subjectivity and is temporally and spatially embodied. Kierkegaard cordons subjectivity off as a separate conceptual sphere of existence from the sphere of possibility. As thought, reason is limited in a quasi-Kantian way and deals in possibility, not actuality, and has the ability only to inform conceptual existence (what Kierkegaard calls “essence”). The human act of believing, however, is an involvement in the world that stakes a claim about what is actual—not just possible.

A belief, as a feature of one’s subjectivity, is not an abstract entity that exists as a piece of pure thought whose only legitimate relations to the believing person are logical ones. In so far as belief-formation occurs as the product of our passions or dispositions, beliefs are not exclusively to be regulated through the exercise of

Viden, which, as we have already noted earlier, is one of the Danish terms for propositional

reason—that is, by way of abductive, deductive, or inductive arguments. As we engage the world we form beliefs *simpliciter*. These beliefs are “paradoxical” to reason in that they are neither completely rationally determined (that is, produced only as the product of the exercise of rational capacities), nor are they rationally determinable (that is, absolutely certain in Descartes’ sense). The consequence of all this for Kierkegaard’s thought is that epistemic issues of doxastic regulation are now open to a form of evaluation that exceeds purely rational or formal, logical procedures. What must now be accounted for in doxastic regulation—and this is precisely what is lacking in a purely rational evaluation of belief—is an account of the believing person’s comportment in reality, or how such-and-such a belief figures as part of a life. In other words, Kierkegaard has articulated a meta-epistemology in which the *science* of belief gives way to an *ethics* of belief. The Climacean subjectivity principle sets forth a meta-epistemological position that situates the rational evaluation of beliefs within the larger context of a human life.

Levels of Belief

A final feature of the Kierkegaardian account of the nature of belief that emerges from our discussion is that there several distinguishable levels of belief in his thought. As a result of the duplex situation of human existence and the resulting gap between our experience and ideas, our beliefs are fallible and do not have open to them metaphysical-epistemological justification. Thus they are best approached descriptively and “grammatically”. Beliefs (in one sense) *happen* to us “in the stream of life” as we engage reality and correspondingly formulate and use concepts, which enable us to talk about and describe reality ostensibly. This is in keeping with the earlier observation that Kierkegaard adopts what Alston terms a “doxastic practice approach” to epistemology. Kierkegaard analyses beliefs in terms of the manner in which they are formed in us, according to the cognitive dispositions and habits that cause us to form beliefs. This doxastic practice approach

knowledge.

to epistemology derives from two features of Kierkegaard's thought.¹¹⁷ First, it is a function of Kierkegaard's commitment to the view that the source of a belief is of vital importance in assessing its epistemic status. Secondly, his rejection of the Hegelian-Enlightenment "universalist" epistemology, with its single unified system of justification for all beliefs, entails that the epistemic status of a belief be determined in isolation, according to its unique mode of formation. As a result, Kierkegaard's doxastic approach will ultimately be sensitive to the social nature of justification, but also it acknowledges the fact that there are different levels and categories of beliefs.

Believing is a complex activity—one that involves a voluntaristic element. One cannot think of beliefs in isolation to the overall cognitive and passional context in which they occur. What we think and believe about the world, as well as how we *want* to believe about and correspondingly *engage* the world, plays a role in informing any particular act of believing. The language of "levels" of belief has been chosen to indicate that, on Kierkegaard's view, beliefs cannot be evaluated simply as beliefs *simpliciter*—as straightforwardly about matters of fact. These beliefs about matters of fact are part of a wider context of believing. We shall identify three levels in this wider context of believing, all of which are genuine instances of belief for an individual under Kierkegaard's construal of belief.¹¹⁸

There is, first, belief in the typical sense of believing something in the world to be a particular way that involves a cognitive commitment to the relevant fact about the universe being just so and is usually conjoined to a propositional attitude expressing this. We may (after the contemporary trend) refer to these sorts of beliefs, where one entertains a proposition and judges it to be true, as *occurrent beliefs*.¹¹⁹ This, we have noted, is a mental state that we often just find ourselves in as we variously

¹¹⁷ Cf. Alston's discussion of why it is his epistemology "does and does not carry commitments in substantive epistemology", in "A 'Doxastic Practice' Approach to Epistemology", 24-5.

¹¹⁸ This is not to say that Kierkegaard uses these terms or even that he understood or developed his thought in this way. What is claimed here is that this is a compelling way to understand what Kierkegaard has to say about believing.

¹¹⁹ Louis Pojman, *What Can We Know? An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (London: Wadsworth, 1995), 246-259.

engage the world through our miscellaneous modes of being. Thus Kierkegaard often refers to our beliefs as propositions about some fact. Though he does not mean by this that these beliefs are (Cartesian) disembodied propositions existing separately from our praxial engagements with the world.

A second level of belief pertains more generally to the kinds of passions or dispositions that produce our propositional beliefs. These passions are in a significant sense products of our wills and therefore are selected in an indirect fashion. It will be recalled that Climacus refers to belief and doubt as “opposite passions”. In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard likewise speaks (as himself) about love and mistrust as that which ultimately gives rise to our cognitive acceptance of propositions.¹²⁰ Belief at this level, as the means by which we form our propositional attitudes, has a functional similarity to Paul Helm’s concept of a belief policy, in so far as he defines this as “a strategy or project for accepting, rejecting or suspending judgement as to the truth of propositions in accordance with a set of norms”.¹²¹ Helm’s concept of belief policies and Kierkegaard’s concept of passions that generate propositional attitudes both share the realisation that accepting a proposition as a matter of fact cannot be done as an evidential concern only. This is because we must first be able to “see” that the evidence demonstrates or “shows” us or counts as evidence in favour of a proposition. Belief policies function as the *de facto* sources of evidential criteria. While there can be reasons why one belief policy is superior to others, there can be no *purely* rational evaluation of them. This is an intermediate level of belief and, as Helm notes, one’s noetic structure may accommodate many belief policies;¹²² or, to re-phrase in Kierkegaardian terminology, there are multiple passions that characterise a human person’s life at any point.

There may be layers of belief-forming passions at this level, which Nicholas Wolterstorff calls “second-order beliefs”, or beliefs we have about our “first-order

¹²⁰ KW XVI 233-34/SV .

¹²¹ Paul Helm, *Belief Policies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 58.

¹²² *Ibid.*

beliefs” (beliefs about the facts of the universe). These second-order beliefs give us the ability to evaluate the manner in which we are forming beliefs.¹²³ Kierkegaard’s discussion of passions as dispositions toward belief *simpliciter* allows us to see families of passions that subsume various passionate genera under them. That is, we have belief policies about our belief policies, and our passions give rise to other passions, as a teleological development of their inner logic.

There is a third level of belief in Kierkegaard’s thought. Belief at this level is, in Helm’s vocabulary, a *global* belief policy about the kind of belief policies we employ--that is, a belief policy by which we adopt other intermediate (level 2) belief policies. Kierkegaard refers to belief at this level as a *life-view*, or uses the related concept of an *Archimedean point*. Murray Rae carefully traces the concept the Archimedean point through Kierkegaard’s thought,¹²⁴ and argues that it is related to the quest for a “hermeneutical principle for understanding the whole world”.¹²⁵ In this regard Rae explains that Kierkegaard’s notion of an Archimedean point refers to the organisational point for one’s thinking: “Thought [for Kierkegaard] requires an orientation point. It cannot be detached. [For this reason I]t cannot begin from nothing as Hegel would have it but must be grounded in that which is ‘true for me’”.¹²⁶ More importantly, Rae demonstrates that each existence-sphere entails its own Archimedean point, its own way of construing the world, so that in the pseudonyms there is that which may be referred to as an esthetic understanding, an ethical understanding, and a religious understanding.¹²⁷ The Archimedean point is,

¹²³ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 269.

¹²⁴ Rae, *Kierkegaard's Vision of the Incarnation*, 150-57. See also Winfield E. Nagley, “Kierkegaard’s Archimedean Point”, in *Perspectives in Education, Religion, and the Arts*, eds. H.E. Kiefer and M.K. Munitz (Albany: State University of New York, 1970), 163-80; and Harvey Smit, *Kierkegaard's Pilgrimage of Man* (Amsterdam: W.D. Meinema, 1965), 14.

¹²⁵ Rae, *Kierkegaard's Vision of the Incarnation*, 150-51. Archimedes was an ancient Greek mathematician in the 3rd century B.C. who is reputed to have said that he could move the whole world with a lever and fulcrum if he was given a point on another world from which to do so.

¹²⁶ Rae, *Kierkegaard's Vision of the Incarnation*, 152. Rae lifts the last phrase in this quote from the closing words of *Either/Or, Volume II*, stated by Judge William’s pastor-friend from Jylland in the “Ultimatum”; KW IV 354/SV III 324.

¹²⁷ In *Either/Or, Volume I*, A argues that for the esthete, “the artistically achieved identity is the Archimedean point with which one lifts the whole world”; KW III 195/SV II 271. On the other hand, in *Either/Or, Volume IV*, Judge William argues that as he sees things, “When the

then, closely connected to the manner in which one conceives the world—what we could also call a life-view. Judge William argues that, “Every human being, no matter how slightly gifted [s/]he is, however subordinate [her/]his position in life may be, has a natural need to formulate a life-view, a conception of the meaning of life and its purposes”.¹²⁸ Whatever our place in existence, however differently our lives unfold, all of us, Kierkegaard thinks, develop a conception of life that depends upon a central point of view through which we understand the world. We find, then, that talk of Archimedean points and life-views are different ways of saying the same things. As there are different Archimedean points, there are also different life-views.¹²⁹

Kierkegaard further explains the concept of a life-view this way:

A life-view is more than a quintessence or a sum of propositions maintained in its abstract neutrality; it is more than experience [*Erfaring*], which as such is always fragmentary. It is, namely, the transubstantiation of experience [*Erfaringens Transubstantiation*]; it is an unshakeable certainty in itself won from all lived experience [*Empirie*].¹³⁰

Kierkegaard believes, in other words, the way we *are* in the world, or the kinds of passions in which we invest ourselves, or even the manner in which we act in the world and process the everyday experiences we have, is a product of our life-view. Life-views transform our empirical experiences and place them in the context of all the other experiences we have had, along with a structure through which we make sense of them all. This is a pre-reflective framework (which nonetheless may be reflected upon) through which we make existential sense of experience. A life-view is not a specific set of propositions, nor simply an aggregate of one’s experiences to date, but is an overall orientation to experience, a means of determining (that is, of providing a determination for) legitimate belief policies. Life-views give a teleological structure to our cognitive processes that ultimately dictates what counts

personality is absolute, then it is itself the Archimedean point from which one can lift the world”; *KW IV 265/SV III 245*. Climacus also employs this language and refers to the “Archimedean point of religiousness”; *KW XII.1 65/SV IX 56*.

¹²⁸ *KW IV 179/SV III 169*.

¹²⁹ For example, Kierkegaard speaks of the “Archimedean point” of science “which is nowhere in the world and from that point [scientists] have surveyed the whole and seen the details in their proper light”; *JP V 5092/Pap. I A 72*.

as evidence or reasons to believe a given proposition. This concept of a life-view has a striking resemblance to Wittgenstein's concept of a world-picture, which serves as the basis or foundation (*Grundlage*)¹³¹ for, or "point of departure"¹³² of a community's looking at the world.¹³³ Life-views and world pictures are the *de facto* source of both certainties and knowledge-claims.

The suggestion here is that Kierkegaard's concept of "belief" as *Tro* is most basically about our personal commitments and involve the whole of our temporally and spatially embodied persons. These commitments, projected in our above distinction between differing levels of belief, operate along a continuum. Therefore, Kierkegaard does not recognise a strict dichotomy between our dispositions to believe and the propositions we do in fact believe; that is, between the object of belief (the objective "What"), and the subject of belief (the "How" of subjectivity). Kierkegaard's subjectivity principle effectively does away with the subject/object dichotomy with respect to belief. Belief is construed belief as operating along a continuum of minimal to maximal commitment. There is thus a need for Kierkegaard to speak of belief in terms of our doxastic states *and* our propositional attitudes as the objects of verbal expressions. At the same time he must continue to speak of belief in terms of passions, or virtues, or dispositions to accept certain kinds of propositions or form specific propositional attitudes.

At one end of the continuum we have *Tro* as belief in the ordinary sense of entertaining some proposition as true. At the furthest extreme this involves a minimal level of commitment consisting of mere cognitive commitment to propositions to which intellectual assent does not place much of one's person is at stake. This level of commitment would involve at most a commitment to accommodate our noetic structures to the piece of information in order to maintain its logical integrity. (It

¹³⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Early Polemical Writings*, trans. and ed. Julia Watkins (Princeton:Princeton University Press, 1990), 76.

¹³¹ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 167.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 105.

¹³³ Michael Kober, "Certainties of a World-Picture. The Epistemological Investigations in *On Certainty*", in eds. H. Sluga and D. G. Stern, *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 418ff.

may also involve some other low-level commitments such as verbal acknowledgement, etc.) An attempt to isolate belief at this end of the spectrum and to consider it in these terms, removed from its temporal and spatial embodiments by merely analysing the conditions of a subject's belief "that p" is what Kierkegaard refers to as an attempt at "sheer objectivity". Most of contemporary (and indeed modern) epistemology is concerned with beliefs only at this end of the commitment scale—even in the case that historical embodiment is acknowledged and accounted for. Kierkegaard does not find much value at all in analysing belief solely in these terms and, when (approximately) veridical, refers to the propositional attitudes corresponding to these as "accidental" truths.

A maximal level of existential commitment is at the other end of the belief-commitment continuum and consists of *Tro* as religious faith. These commitments involve our ultimate concerns about salvation, or what Kierkegaard calls *Salighed* or "eternal happiness",¹³⁴ that arise from our interest [*Interesse*] as historical subjects, who think, act, reason, value, and feel as temporally qualified persons with spatially situated bodies. Propositional expressions of these beliefs (when veridical) Kierkegaard refers to as "essential" truths.¹³⁵ These essential truths are "related essentially to the existing person by pertaining essentially to what it means to exist",¹³⁶ and therefore are the beliefs which give shape and character to our passionate, praxial engagements in the world. Because beliefs at this end of the spectrum are the means to personal transformation Kierkegaard finds them more interesting and therefore spends the bulk of his analysis discussing these.

In conclusion, we have distinguished three levels of belief in Kierkegaard's thought. These range from (something very close to) a minimal sense of belief, in which there is a characterisation of the way things are, to the passionate dispositions that move us to accept these characterisations, ending with an overarching life-view, or general belief about how the world is. These are arranged hierarchically according

¹³⁴ KW XII.1 94-5/SV IX 80, *passim*; KW VII/SV VI 7-100; and, "The Expectancy of an Eternal Salvation [*Salighed*]", KW V 253-273/SV IV 229-43 .

¹³⁵ KW XII.1 205/SV IX 170.

to the level of existential commitment in which each level involves the believer. The first level, “ordinary” or *occurrent* belief, taken by itself, entails a minimum level of commitment and actually flows from the second, dispositional level of belief. Here the believer is passionately engaged in her/his world and develops passions and dispositions that cause her/him to “see” the world in a certain manner. In turn, these passions and dispositions we cultivate and which move us to have specific beliefs about the world are a product of a life-view. A life-view may be restated as the total commitment of a person in her/his over-all existential comportment, from which an Archimedean point is formed. This Archimedean point shapes our entire view of the world and organises our perceptions of it—it is the point from which we move the world.

¹³⁶ KW XII.1 205/SV IX 170.

Conclusion to Chapter Seven

Belief has emerged in this chapter as a central force in the establishment of subjectivity as articulated in the grammar of subjectivity traced in Chapter Five and Chapter Six. In turn, it has been shown here that the establishment of subjectivity brings to belief a sub-structure for the warranting and regulation of belief. For Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms the concept of the existence-spheres are deeply epistemological in that they provide a phenomenology of, and grammar for, the movements of human subjectivity towards the attainment of a transversal unity of self (transparency). In this way the spheres of existence provide the structure or depth-dimensions of existential out-workings of the passion for *Salighed*. Having one's existence qualified under a particular sphere is both a product of cognitive processes and transformative of them. Kierkegaard's concept of the leap of faith is best rendered as a leap to faith. The movements between the existence-spheres are intimately connected with the beliefs a person has, so that they result from beliefs a person has as well as change the overall cognitive orientation, or belief policies, of that person.

We noted, then, Jaime Ferreira's observation that this implies a structure to Kierkegaard's "leaps", so that they have open to them retrospective justification. The logic of the concept of *Salighed* entails that the transitions from one stage to the next are epistemological to the extent that they intermix ontological and doxastic concerns. In other words, in the process of detailing the existential movements of subjectivity, Kierkegaard is at the same time discussing constraints on beliefs. Therefore, to the degree that Kierkegaard thinks there is a better mode of being-in-and-toward-the-world, to that degree he also believes that the attending cognitive stance of that mode is superior. Kierkegaard, then, understands human belief and cognition to occur as aspects of human temporal and spatial embodiment and refuses to grant human reason the right to claim to operate *sub specie aeternis*. Beliefs are historical (temporal) and actual features of human subjectivity and are

expressions of personal human commitments. They are not just disembodied propositions. Beliefs are the conjunction of actuality and possibility in human persons and are interwoven with our praxial engagements with the world. In this way Kierkegaard undermines the belief/action and theory/practice dichotomies of modernity and opens the door for what Calvin Schrag calls a “praxial critique” that is systematic without “the System”, and takes our beliefs and epistemic commitments seriously.¹³⁷

Kierkegaard’s broad approach to epistemology is a *doxastic practice approach* to epistemology, because it focuses on *how* a belief is formed as the central element in the evaluation of the epistemic appropriateness of belief. An ethics of belief replaces a science of belief. Kierkegaard’s understanding of belief may be described as having levels of belief that are organised according to the level of existential commitment each involves. Belief, for Kierkegaard, is always a passion, and there are three types (or levels) of passions we have identified in his thought that may be legitimately referred to as beliefs.

¹³⁷ See Schrag, *The Resources of Rationality*, 9, 57-67. For a different account of how Kierkegaard’s subjectivity functions as critique see Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard’s Critique of Reason and Society* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), especially the chapter, “Inwardness and Ideology Critique in Kierkegaard’s *Fragments and Postscript*”.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION:

IMPLICATIONS FOR A KIERKEGAARDIAN EPISTEMOLOGY

Just to make the celebrated distinction between what one understands and what one does not understand requires passion.

Johannes De Silentio, *Fear and Trembling*

Knowledge is like an auctioneer who puts existence [*Tilværelse*] on the block. The auctioneer then says: Ten dollars (the value of the property)—but it means nothing; only when someone makes a bid, only then is the bid ten dollars.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*

The task of this dissertation has been to inquire into the epistemological implications of Søren Kierkegaard's pseudonymous maxim, "truth is subjectivity". The point of departure for our study was Kierkegaard's claim in his journals that this statement expresses the "subjectivity principle". Kierkegaard states that his subjectivity principle is not bald subjectivism and that it is presented throughout his authorship in such a way that subjectivity, properly developed, becomes a kind of objectivity. The thesis of this dissertation is that Kierkegaard's subjectivity principle is epistemologically normative, not for ethical and religious beliefs only, but that it establishes a basic orientation to general epistemological issues as well. The introduction identified two questions essential to developing this thesis. First, the subjectivity principle must be explained and its relationship to modern epistemology drawn up. The primary question here is, "Does Kierkegaard actually get beyond modern epistemology with the subjectivity principle?" The epistemological dimensions of the subjectivity principle must, secondly, be elucidated.

Kierkegaard's Subjectivity Principle

We have argued that "Truth is Subjectivity" is a meta-epistemological principle that outlines Kierkegaard's broad approach to re-dressing the errors of modern epistemology. We noted that Kierkegaard does not attempt a substantive epistemology. In other words, Kierkegaard does not (for the most part) engage in

the task of analysing the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge. We have shown that there are four good reasons why we should understand Kierkegaard's subjectivity principle as an epistemological thesis. First, Kierkegaard develops his subjectivity thesis as a response to the misdirection that modern philosophy took in following the Cartesian notion of a radically autonomous epistemological subject. In so far as Kierkegaard redresses the wrongs of modernity and its epistemological emphases he is epistemological. The subjectivity principle recommends an approach to epistemological issues that takes the subject's finitude and situated embodiment seriously. Second, the subjectivity principle is deliberately recommending an approach to belief-acceptance—what we have called doxastic formation.

Third, Kierkegaard is explicitly shifting the grounds of belief from metaphysics to ethics. The grammar of subjectivity runs into a grammar of belief as Kierkegaard accounts for the existential transitions that take place in the development of a deep human subjectivity. Beliefs that we have regarding any proposition or set of propositions (i.e., our beliefs that *p*) are a product of our dispositions to accept these propositions. These dispositions to form beliefs are called doxastic practices. Thus the mode of being of a person is an important feature of doxastic regulation as the general context of a specific belief. And lastly, the end or *telos* of subjectivity, for Kierkegaard, is *Tro* [belief or faith]. We know ourselves and achieve transparency in and through our subjective involvements in the world. This, in turn, entails that beliefs be evaluated according to the life-context in which they occur, and further, that we think of beliefs as operating on different levels.

Towards a Kierkegaardian Substantive Epistemology

Kierkegaard's meta-epistemology raises interesting questions for a substantive epistemology. The rest of this section will focus on sketching the commitments a substantive epistemology that takes the Kierkegaardian subjectivity principle seriously both has and does not have. We must keep in mind that for Kierkegaard

there are two kinds of knowledge: accidental (objective) knowledge and essential (subjective) knowledge. The first, objective sort of knowledge is that kind for which we can have no complete warrants, or justifications. This, however, does not limit them from being epistemically appropriate. What this does mean is that such objective knowledge can at best be “approximation knowledge”. Accidental knowledge is approximation knowledge because it involves subjective passions (will, resolution) and therefore cannot completely ground itself (in “objective reason”). Thus, the second type of knowledge, subjective knowledge, is really the source of warrant for the first type. Essential (subjective) knowledge is that knowledge I have that pertains essentially to my existence. It is tantamount to Socratic self-knowledge and is the knowledge I have of myself in and through my praxial engagements with reality. Thus there are two poles to any human act of propositional belief that include, first, the objective, “impersonal”, elements of that piece of information as thought-possibility that may be considered in isolation of, second, the subjective context in which that belief as an actual feature of a human life is ultimately warranted.

In general, a substantive epistemology that takes the Kierkegaardian subjectivity principle seriously will be a virtue epistemology. It will, in other words, take epistemic virtue to be central to the understanding of both justification or warrant for beliefs and the nature of knowledge. The concept of epistemic virtue is used here to refer to Kierkegaard’s insistence that we view belief (and doubt) as passions that produce our inclinations to accept certain propositional construals of states of affairs. Recall that Kierkegaard also employs the language of cognitive “dispositions”, and “organs” of cognition, and other terms that denote that humans are endowed (by virtue of being human) with cognitive faculties that process the world in ways that dispose us to see the world in specific ways. An *epistemic virtue* is thus (in our Kierkegaardian sense) going to refer to any quality of a human person that disposes that person towards epistemically appropriate belief (true, warranted, etc.). In one of his most explicit passages on substantive epistemology

Kierkegaard details different aspects of human subjectivity, such as love, mistrust, naiveté, light-mindedness, vanity, etc., that, as doxastic practices, are epistemic vices and hinder one from seeing truth.¹ But note as well that this would include biological features of a person, such as natural capacities to process cognitive inputs, and not just those personal qualities we normally associate with an ethics of belief. It is interesting and important to note that Kierkegaard often speaks of our disposition to belief as something that may be a “gift”, almost as if it were a natural capacity. In his theology, however, this belief-forming capacity is impaired in our post-Adamic (sinful) situation, so that our natural efforts end in an *aporia*, and require regeneration or renewal of this capacity by God.

An obvious result of the concern with doxastic practice is that the source of a belief is vital for its epistemic status. There are therefore some features of a substantive epistemology that are eliminated as possible candidates for a Kierkegaardian approach. Kierkegaard’s subjectivity principle rules out any approach that takes rationality or justification to be determined by universally binding and infallible cognitive procedures, such as the evidence a person has for her/his belief.

Like Wittgenstein (and Thomas Reid)² our Kierkegaardian position will be more amenable to those approaches to substantive epistemology that see a close connection between a psychology of belief-formation and epistemology. To use the current jargon, the Kierkegaardian approach outlined here will be both externalist and fallibilist. It is *externalist* in so far as the epistemic appropriateness (or warrant or justification) for a belief is primarily dependent upon a state of affairs that obtain outside a person’s conscious activities with respect to the belief in question—namely, the manner in which it is produced and the general context of the person’s life. A Kierkegaardian epistemology will be fallibilist because it rules out “universalism” in epistemology. That is, it rejects any view that supposes that our

¹ KW XVI 226/SV XII 218.

beliefs form a single, unified, rational structure so that any belief may be epistemically assessed by reference to this one structure. Kierkegaard does not believe that there is one common measure for all beliefs. The epistemic status of any one particular belief will depend in large part upon the doxastic practice(s) that produced it, and these will each carry with them their own standards of assessment. Furthermore, in a broad sense, a Kierkegaardian substantive epistemology will also be foundationalist, in that there will be a contingent, material basis or ground for belief within the epistemic community in which our doxastic practices arise and from which they derive their standards for justification. These foundations are, to repeat, fallible because they lack the metaphysical guarantee of modernity's infallibilist foundationalism. They are merely the place at which our attempts at justification end. This type of justification is never absolute and its truth-claims are always open to revision.

In closing, there are three notable issues in substantive epistemology that Kierkegaard's subjectivity principle leaves open. First, our Kierkegaardian analysis does not entail any particular analysis of the major epistemic concepts such as nature of knowledge, justification, or rationality (although it does, as we have seen, place some constraints on these concepts). Second, Kierkegaard's subjectivity principle does not dictate how doxastic practices are understood. It does not assume, for instance, that all belief-forming mechanisms are the same. And lastly it leaves open the question of what it takes for a ground of belief to be adequate. The working out of these details provide the material for further research projects.

² See William P. Alston, "A 'Doxastic Practice' Approach to Epistemology", in *Knowledge and Skepticism*, ed. Marjorie Clay and Keith Lehrer (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1989), 2-29, for this observation. Alston's analysis heavily informs the approach taken here.

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